

E-MAIL SCAM

Local priest falls victim to hacker

◆ *E-mail messages sent to friends, asking for money*

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Special to the Monitor

Last week a local priest was the victim of an e-mail fraud crime that almost cost him and his closest friends thousands of dollars.

Ronald Hennies (Fr. John) first found out that someone had hacked into his Gmail account on Monday morning when his granddaughter called him from college. Fr. John said, "She asked me where I was and I said, 'in bed'. She said, 'where?' and I said 'Los Alamos.'"

She and everyone else on Fr. John's contact list, just received an e-mail with, "Help Please!!!" as the subject line. The e-mail said that he was in England for a seminar and lost his wallet on the way to the hotel. He needed, "\$2,800 to sort-

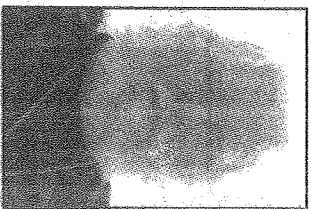
out my hotel bills and get myself back home."

Fr.

John's granddaughter was immediately suspicious. She told him, "If you needed money I thought you would ask someone rich."

Since the e-mail went out, at least 50 people called his house asking where he was. Some people were suspicious because the e-mail had grammatical mistakes that Fr. John wouldn't make in an email. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to send out a denial because the person who did it changed the password, so he can't access his own account. At least one of Fr. John's

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FR. HENNIES

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friends sent \$2,800 to England via Western Union. He tried to call Fr. John first, but couldn't get through, and only hours later saw him walking his dogs by Ashley Pond.

Luckily, when he sent the money, he said the person who picked it up had to identify his church (St. Dimitri's). Since the person couldn't say the name of the church, he or she couldn't get the money.

Using Fr. John's e-mails, the hacker was able to access his financial information and use it. Fr. John received a phone call from a California Western Union office asking if he has authorized \$800 to be sent to California from his credit card. He said no, and canceled all of his credit cards.

In addition, since the hacker may have found his social security number, he set up a secret code at his bank, so that only he can access his accounts.

Fr. John called the N.M. Attorney General, and spoke to the Department of Fraud.

"I had to speak to the supervisor, because the first person just wanted me to fill out a bunch of forms," Fr. John said. "The supervisor gave me numbers for the secret service and the FBI, but since the money was sent outside of the country, they couldn't do anything."

Fr. John said, "The bright side is this. Think of all the people who would have sent the money if it was real. The downside is that the email went out to families who I've baptized, married and buried. They would all be inclined to respond."