

Jail chaplain arrested in escape attempt

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The chaplain of the Dade County jail has been arrested after admitting that he helped a prisoner try to escape, jail officials said Saturday.

The Rev. Roberto Perez, 37, is charged with escape, conspiracy to commit escape, and petty larceny. After his arrest Friday evening, he was released on \$3,150 bond.

Perez, jail chaplain since 1972 and a pastor at the Riverside United Methodist Church, is accused of stealing a prisoner-release pass for inmate Luis Medina.

Jail officials said Medina, 36, was awaiting transfer to Florida State Prison at Raiford. They said he was sentenced to 15 years for kidnaping, aggravated battery, using a gun to commit a crime and at-

tempting to solicit to commit a capital felony.

He tried to slip out of the Dade County jail March 6 by presenting the stolen pass to jailers.

"They wouldn't let him out because somebody recognized him," said jail Lt. Ernest J. Stirrup.

He said he didn't know how Perez got the "red pass," the release pass he is accused of stealing.

Red passes are kept locked under 24-hour guard at the jail's release desk. Only the jailer working at the release desk is supposed to have access to the numbered passes.

Any inmate who is being released must get a red pass from the release-desk officer. The pass number is recorded on a log

and on the inmate's jail card before the inmate is handed the pass.

The inmate must give the pass to the jailer at the security booth, about 40 feet from the release desk, before he can leave the jail. All passes are returned to the release desk officer, who is held accountable for them.

Jail officials were aware that a red pass was missing before Medina's attempted escape. A notice was posted on a bulletin board at the security booth.

When Medina presented a pass to the security booth officer, the jailer realized it was the stolen pass.

Medina was put in an isolation cell, and jail officials began to investigate how Medina got the pass.

One of the people Medina saw frequently was Rev. Perez. Perez, who jail officials

said earns about \$20,000 to arrange religious services and provide counseling, spent an unusual amount of time with Medina.

Medina "was always up in the chaplain's office, practically every day for the past six to eight weeks," the jail source said. "He was called out [to Perez's office] four to five times a week, sometimes two and three times a day."

A lie-detector test was arranged for Perez. While at the office of polygraph expert Joseph Harper, Perez admitted helping in the escape attempt, sources said.

Harper called Dade State Attorney's investigators, who arrested Perez.

Perez also works with Church World Service, a social service agency of the National Council of Churches, in arranging

freedom flights for Cuban prisoners. Perez raised funds to bring to the United States a group of 593 Cubans who were stranded in Cuba after the Mariel boatlift.

Last week, Perez said he would accompany three other Miami clergymen to Costa Rica Monday. They hope to persuade Costa Rican officials to continue issuing visas to Cubans who want to leave Cuba.

Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo, with whom Perez was to meet, said a temporary ban was placed on visas to Cubans when talk of a visa fraud scam surfaced several weeks ago.

Perez could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Medina is now at a processing center for new prisoners before being sent to Raiford, according to a state prison spokesman.