

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF AGANA

CHANCERY OFFICE

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Archbishop Byrnes message on Rome's final guilty verdict against Bishop Apuron

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Rome has provided finality for the Catholic Church on Guam on the matter of now Bishop Anthony S. Apuron.

Regarding the canonical trial of Bishop Apuron, the Holy See's Press Office last night announced that Rome has rejected Bishop Apuron's appeal last year and upheld its initial verdict of guilty announced on March of 2018

The news release issued April 4, 2019 by the Apostolic Tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states:

"As was announced on 16 March 2018, the Apostolic Tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concluded a First Instance canonical penal trial in the case of the Most Reverend Anthony Sablan Apuron, O.F.M.Cap. (Agaña, Guam).

As was noted at the time, an appeal was possible and was in fact lodged. That appeal has been concluded. On 7 February 2019, the Tribunal of Second Instance upheld the sentence of First Instance finding the Archbishop guilty of delicts against the Sixth Commandment with minors.

The penalties imposed are as follows: the privation of office; the perpetual prohibition from dwelling, even temporarily, in the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Agaña; and the perpetual prohibition from using the insignia attached to the rank of Bishop. This decision represents the definitive conclusion in this case. No further appeals are possible."

As stated in the Vatican's initial announcement of findings on March 16, 2018, one of the penalties imposed upon Bishop Apuron is the "privation of office". This means he no longer holds the title of Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Agaña and correspondingly, no longer has a title of archbishop. Neither can he use the insignia of a bishop, including ring and mitre.

The Church does not rejoice when members plummet from grace and are found guilty of grave wrong – in this case, the grievous sin of child abuse. It is a deep and sorrowful shame.

What our Church can and must do in all cases of clergy abuse, is to forthrightly acknowledge the sin, and mete out punishment and penance to the sinner for the sake of his own salvation. As well, we do everything in our power to ensure that the horrible harm inflicted to the innocent, is never repeated.

Once more, on behalf of the entire Archdiocese of Agaña, I extend our deepest apologies to the local men and their families who suffered irreparable harm by Tony Apuron in the past. To Mr. Roy Quintanilla, Mr. Walter Denton, Mr. Roland Paul Sondia, and the late Joseph “Sonny” Quinata, represented by his mom Doris Concepcion, I am truly sorry for the betrayal and severe anguish that you suffered and continue to suffer.

We extend our prayers too, to the following: Mark M. Apuron, who also came forward to say he was sexually abused by his uncle; a former Father Duenas student and seminarian identified by the initials D.M. who claims abuse by Tony Apuron as well; and C.C.C. who also claimed he was abused by Father Apuron. We will continue to keep all of you in our prayers.

I will pray for my brother, Anthony too, as I do for his victims. With humility, as before, I ask for the Faithful to also assist Bishop Apuron in prayer and penance, that he may find grace in repentance and mercy for his soul.

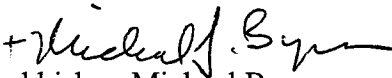
I ask all Catholics to welcome this newest announcement from Rome as another major stepping stone toward healing in our Church. It alone will not bring closure to the tremendous hurt, sins and crimes of the past committed by many members of our Church. However, it is a significant step.

Though I had already been given pastoral and administrative authority over the archdiocese by Pope Francis during my appointment on Oct. 31, 2016, I am now fully and officially the Archbishop of Agaña. I ask for your continued support and I sincerely appreciate your prayers. Please continue building the bridges that will move us forward in our journey to make amends and create a better archdiocese.

Being a better archdiocese means practicing utmost vigilance in safeguarding youngsters in our care. “Protecting God’s Children” training in the national VIRTUS program is an important part of our commitment to fight child abuse. I remind every clergyman, employee or volunteer in our archdiocese to ensure you fulfill mandatory training in the VIRTUS program coordinated by our Safe Environment office.

There are many steps we need to take to correct the wrongs of the past. We continue the journey. Our focus shall remain on making penance and reparation in our Church on Guam, attending to justice for the numerous victims of clergy sexual abuse on Guam and continuing our mission to proclaim the love of God to the people of Guam and the Marianas.

Sincerely,


Archbishop Michael Byrnes
Metropolitan Archbishop of Agaña