

Statement from Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, on the formation of the Lay Commission on Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors in the Archdiocese of San Antonio

As I have shared with many of you in conversations and interviews, I have been embarrassed and angry about the clergy sexual abuse that has come to light and the sometimes devastating ways that church leaders have responded to it in these last decades. I now speak of something even more personal: clergy sexual abuse of minors here in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. I am committed to increase accountability and transparency in how our Church here addresses the scourge of sexual abuse of minors. It is very important to me that we look at this question, at our history over the last 75 years, with honesty. Honesty and transparency will be painful and at times deeply troubling, but I believe that it is the best path to healing for survivors and the only path to transformation for our Church.

In unity with Pope Francis, the bishops of Texas – as well as nationally – are working to further healing and restore trust; to take new actions to protect the vulnerable and offer support to survivors of clergy sexual abuse of minors. The Holy Father has spoken strongly and acted forcefully regarding these terrible sins and crimes, and we are called to do the same in our words and actions as well. I have met with survivors of clergy sexual abuse and am deeply humbled by their courage and depth of their faith. Praying and meeting with them has been some of the most powerful and emotional moments of my ministry.

Therefore, today I am announcing the formation of the Lay Commission on Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Recently, I met with Tom Mengler, president of St. Mary's University, and we discussed ways to foster an atmosphere of more healing. He brought forward the concept of establishing a lay commission to review archdiocesan efforts to address clergy sexual abuse of minors and to advise me on ways to improve these efforts. I am grateful to him for this. These types of groups are being formed in other dioceses also, as the laity have come forward to offer their knowledge and expertise to the Church as it seeks to rebuild trust with the faithful.

In our dialogue, we proposed to invite Judge Catherine M. Stone, retired Chief Justice of the Texas Fourth District Court of Appeals, to form and lead this commission.

She has graciously accepted my invitation and is working to identify and invite other members to join the team.

I am also working with my team to prepare a report examining our handling of clergy sexual abuse of minors since 1940. It will include a list of names of all clergy against whom there has been an accusation of abuse of a minor which seems to be true. It will also examine our current procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors, in place since 2002, from the perspectives both of care for survivors and investigation of the priest or deacon. The Lay Commission on Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors will fully audit this report and offer recommendations to improve our procedures.

The Commission builds on the meaningful work of our Archdiocesan Review Board, which was established following the adoption of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002. The *Charter* is a comprehensive set of procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. That document includes guidelines for reconciliation, accountability, and prevention of future acts of abuse.

Actions such as these which we are currently undertaking in the archdiocese will be discussed at the November General Assembly of the U.S. bishops, and at the Vatican in February when the presidents of all bishops' conferences throughout the world will meet with the Pope to address this issue internationally.

Our people love their Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, and, led by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, it is a Church that will deal justly with this painful past as it looks to a hope-filled future. I ask the faithful to pray for the victims of clergy sexual abuse of minors, to pray for their priests and bishops, to pray for their Pope; to call upon our loving and merciful God for guidance at these difficult times.

At the forefront of all of our efforts is our concern for the survivors of sexual abuse and their pastoral needs. We have to address this horrible sin of sexual abuse of minors and provide victims with an opportunity to reach out for help. I cannot adequately express my sorrow to these survivors of clergy sexual abuse; there are no words that can undo the wrong that was perpetrated upon them. But I believe that by releasing these names that it will contribute to healing. If these actions prevent even a single occurrence of sexual abuse, it is all worth it.

I pray that the Spirit of the Lord, the Paraclete, will lead these critical actions and deliberations in the coming months. Ven, Holy Spirit, Ven!