

Archdiocese says Neocatechumenal Way interferes with Guam church

Haidee V Eugenio, Pacific Daily News Published 10:28 p.m. ChT Sept. 20, 2016 | Updated 12:00 a.m. ChT Sept. 21, 2016



(Photo: Rick Cruz/PDN)

A top official of Guam's Catholic church said the leadership of the Neocatechumenal Way, both here and internationally, has been advancing the group's interests to the detriment of other Catholics on Guam.

"A personal plea to Cardinal (Fernando) Filoni and those leaders in the Neocatechumenal Way who are seeking to advance the agenda and interest of the Neocatechumenal Way — Please be merciful. Have mercy on the people of Guam," the Rev. Jeffrey San Nicolas said Tuesday during a press conference in Hagåtña.

The archdiocese called the press conference to discuss its objections to [a bill that would allow victims of child sex abuse to sue the perpetrators and the institutions they work for](http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/09/12/lawmakers-lift-limitations-victims-sex-abuse/90252572/) ([/story/news/2016/09/12/lawmakers-lift-limitations-victims-sex-abuse/90252572/](http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/09/12/lawmakers-lift-limitations-victims-sex-abuse/90252572/)), including the church.

Lawmakers lift limitations for victims of sex abuse

(<http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/09/12/lawmakers-lift-limitations-victims-sex-abuse/90252572/>)

But San Nicolas talked mostly about the Neocatechumenal Way — a movement within the Catholic church whose practices sometimes are at odds with those of Guam's traditional Catholic community. Guam Archbishop Anthony Apuron, who has been temporarily replaced as a result of sex abuse allegations, belongs to the group, sometimes referred to as "The Way."

San Nicolas currently is the delegate for Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai, who temporarily is in charge of the local archdiocese, by order of the Vatican.

San Nicolas said the lines of authority in the Guam archdiocese are not clear because Cardinal Filoni, in Rome, and other leaders of the Neocatechumenal Way are interfering in Guam church matters.

As an example, he said, Filoni earlier this month stepped in to deny a request by a Guam Catholic women's group — the Laity Forward Movement — to visit the church seminary in Yona.

"Neither I nor Archbishop Hon is the church authority over decision-making regarding the Redemptoris Mater Seminary, even over simple matters such as who can visit. Cardinal Filoni is in charge," San Nicolas said.

Filoni is prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in the Roman Curia at the Vatican and is a widely known ally of the Neocatechumenal Way.

San Nicolas said he was instructed not to share information about the seminary visit, but he shared copies of church correspondence related to the failed visit.

"I realize that I'm taking a stand against my superiors but I must because the vast majority of the people on Guam, who have suffered from a leadership gap over the past several years, have not been kept informed about issues that directly concern them," San Nicolas said.

"I am hopeful that the strings disproportionately empowering the national and international leadership of the Neocatechumenal Way to interfere with our local affairs will be cut," San Nicolas said. "Opposing this are other Vatican officials pursuing the Neocatechumenal Way's agenda and interests to the detriment of those who are not in this group. If the Neocatechumenal Way is to minister to the faithful, let it happen organically, not through force or manipulation."

Dr. Ricardo B. Eusebio, president of a newly formed group of Catholics defending Apuron — I Familian Mangatoliku Siha Pari Si Apuron or Catholic Families for Apuron— said San Nicolas' statement Tuesday was merely a recitation of the same demands by another group of Catholics who want Apuron removed as archbishop, and therefore deserves no comment.

"I am appalled however at the fact that he was able to obtain an opportunity in this forum to speak about child abuse and failed to take advantage of it. My organization's focus is to expose all forms of child abuse and begin the dialogue to healing. Let us not merely concentrate on the few altar boys but also speak about those who have suffered incest, the girls who have been molested by individuals with authority, etc. These are the issues Archbishop Apuron has fought for 30 years," Eusebio said.

'Deep pain'

San Nicolas said even before Apuron was publicly accused of child sexual abuse by several former altar boys, Apuron's actions and decision-making had caused a deep pain in the community.

San Nicolas said those actions include making unfounded charges and the removal and public disgrace of two beloved priests "because they failed to cooperate with the agenda of the Neocatechumenate." Apuron had removed Rev. Paul Gofigan and Monsignor James Benavente.

San Nicolas said Apuron's decision to fire members of the Archdiocese Finance Council was "scandalous to the faithful." He also cited Apuron's controversial decision to deed use of church property in Yona for use as a seminary.

"As these issues have come to light, rather than apologizing and seeking to create avenues of reconciliation, Archbishop Apuron has been supported by the Neocatechumenal Way locally, nationally and internationally to deny all charges and obfuscate the issue. This arrogant attitude of denial and obfuscation continued when he was faced with a credible accusations of child sexual abuse against him. This is sad," San Nicolas said.

Joe Santos, founder of Silent No More which has been pushing for the passage and signing of the child sex abuse bill, said San Nicolas shed light on things that been kept in the dark for a very long time.

Andrew Camacho, vice president of the Concerned Catholics of Guam, said he's happy that the current hierarchy of the church is aware of the concerns involving the Neocatechumenal Way.

"They know that it's a problem and they're gonna do something about it and we will support them absolutely on that," he said.

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