

Archdiocese takes back Yona seminary



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(Photo: PDN file photo)

The Archdiocese of Agana regained full control of its seminary property in Yona after Coadjutor Archbishop Michael Jude Byrnes used his authority to cancel deeds signed several years ago by Archbishop Anthony Apuron, according to the church.

Byrnes on Nov. 9 signed a decree, canceling, repealing and rescinding a five-year-old declaration of deed restriction that allowed a seminary and theological institute controlled by the Neocatechumenal Way to use the Yona property indefinitely.

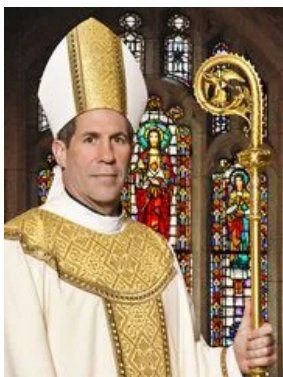
The seminary will continue to operate, church officials said.

The Concerned Catholics of Guam, a group that has been pushing for Apuron's removal, was poised to file a lawsuit to ensure the archdiocese doesn't lose ownership and control of the Yona property.

Byrnes, who was appointed by the Vatican as Apuron's successor, also used his authority to sign documents to replace the Redemptoris Mater Seminary's board of directors, abolish the RMS Corporation's board of governors, take personal control of the seminary, and sign all rights to the property back to the archdiocese. These include amending the RMS Corporation's by-laws.

The RMS Corporation now has only one board instead of two, and the only member of the new board of directors is Byrnes as the sole director, chairman, president and secretary, said the Rev. Jeff San Nicolas, now delegate general for Byrnes.

San Nicolas made the announcement during a news conference Tuesday afternoon at the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica in Hagåtña.



Monsignor Michael Jude Byrnes (Photo: Courtesy of Archdiocese of Detroit)

Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai concurred with all of Byrnes' actions, in Hon's capacity as the pope's authoritative representative. The Vatican on June 6 placed Hon temporarily in charge of the Catholic church on Guam while Apuron, who was accused of sexually assaulting altar boys in the 1970s, was placed on leave.

As coadjutor archbishop, Byrnes, 58, has the right to succeed Apuron if Apuron, 71, resigns, retires or is removed.

Hon, the secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome, said in previous statements that the pope instructed Apuron more than once since 2015 to remove the unusual deed restriction on the Yona property, but Apuron never did so.

Hon: Archdiocese's position unchanged despite Apuron's message
(<http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/08/26/hon-archdioceses-position-unchanged-despite-apurons-message/89388974/>).

Apuron is now facing a canonical trial at the Vatican over multiple allegations of sex abuse of minors in Agat in the 1970s.

The archdiocese, however, is not privy to information as of Tuesday, whether Apuron's questionable actions regarding the Yona property were among the reasons he's facing a canonical trial.

Hon said Tuesday that Apuron's canonical trial process has already started, with the formulation of procedures to be followed, among other things. He said he is waiting for further information.

Byrnes' authority

Byrnes, who will arrive on Guam on Nov. 28, has the same authority of the archbishop of Agana civilly and ecclesiastically, without exception. Land documents state they were signed and notarized in Michigan, which is where Byrnes currently lives.

The Rev. Pius Sammut, former rector of the Redemptoris Mater Seminary, was sought for comment on the archdiocese's actions, but no statement was obtained as of press time. Sammut is an itinerant catechist, part of the team responsible for the Neocatechumenal Way on Guam.

The archdiocese's news briefing also came a few hours after Mother Superior Dawn Marie, of the Carmelite Monastery on Guam, held a press conference to share information about how the archdiocese acquired the Yona property using \$2 million donated by Carmelite nuns. She said the donors were disappointed that the property was not used for its intended purpose because of the influence of the Neocatechumenal Way, through Sammut, Apuron and others.

But she said the donors are supportive of the archdiocese's efforts to take back full control of the property.

Nun: We did not want to lie for Apuron, Sammut over Yona seminary property
(<http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/11/14/2m-donor-broker-we-did-not-want-lie-apuron-sammut-over-yona-property/93844028/>).

Consensus

Byrnes' actions, with Hon's signed concurrence, also have the advice and support of the newly reconstituted Archdiocesan Finance Council and the Presbyteral Council, which is comprised of archdiocesan priests, San Nicolas said.



Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai
(Photo: PDN file)

San Nicolas said the archdiocese decided against suing for control of the property.

The Yona property, now valued at \$40 million to \$75 million, is one of the Guam Catholic church's biggest assets.

San Nicolas said the documents that Byrnes signed were filed and recorded with appropriate government agencies such as the Division of Revenue and Taxation and the Department of Land Management, "to effectuate the reversion of the Yona property back to the full control and governance of the Archdiocese of Agana."

"Archbishop Byrnes also signed documents canceling, rescinding and annulling the 2011 Declaration of Deed Restriction. He also executed a Grant Deed transferring the property back to the Archdiocese of Agana, to the extent that the RMS had any interest, all in accordance with the instructions of the Holy See under the authority of the pope," San Nicolas said.

San Nicolas said Byrnes, through his actions, wants to regain greater freedom and flexibility to restore church unity by undoing the deed which he said was "the source of division and conflict in the archdiocese."

"For the unity of the church, as Catholics, let us follow the guidance of the legitimate authority of the church, namely Archbishop Hon, authoritative representative of the Holy See, and in particular Archbishop Byrnes appointed by the Holy Father to exercise the authority of the Archbishop of Agana," San Nicolas said.

Seminary program

Hon and San Nicolas, along with the Rev. James Benavente, made it clear Tuesday afternoon that while the leadership of the RMS Corp. board has changed, the administration of the RMS seminary program for the formation of priests remains unchanged at this time.

“We live in very sensitive times. I really can’t speculate just right now on what that future might hold but I can understand that there is going to be speculation about that but I just want to emphasize that we’re moving one step at a time and this was something that the Holy See had desired to happen ever since 2015 so this is the measure that we took without legal action,” San Nicolas said.

[Hon: Archdiocese’s position unchanged despite Apuron’s message](http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/08/26/hon-archdioceses-position-unchanged-despite-apurons-message/89388974/)
(<http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2016/08/26/hon-archdioceses-position-unchanged-despite-apurons-message/89388974/>).

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