

San Antonio Archdiocese Removes Two Priests from Ministry Amid Allegations

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The Archdiocese of San Antonio, Texas, has taken decisive action by removing two priests from ministry after receiving substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse. The accused priests, Father Alejandro Ortega of St. Monica Catholic Church in Converse, and Father Jesus Eduardo Lalo" Martinez-Solis of St. Joseph-Honey Creek church in Spring Branch, face serious accusations of sexually abusing minors. The allegations have been forwarded to law enforcement agencies, as stated by the archdiocese.

In response to the allegations, both priests have been stripped of their ecclesiastical faculties, and they are prohibited from identifying themselves as priests. Additionally, they are not allowed to wear clerical attire or use clerical titles, a significant measure to ensure their separation

from the clergy community.

The allegations against Father Ortega were brought to light when a minor reported the abuse during a retreat. The parish promptly informed the teen's parents and escalated the issue to the archdiocese. The allegations were subsequently referred to the Bexar County District Attorney's Special Crimes Division, as confirmed by a statement from San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSpS.

An investigation into the accusations against Father Ortega was conducted by an independent private investigator and reviewed by the archdiocesan review board, an advisory body responsible for offering counsel on clergy sexual abuse allegations. The review board deemed there was substantial evidence of inappropriate physical contact with a minor. Consequently, the matter was forwarded to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican department responsible for addressing matters of grave ecclesiastical offenses. The review board also emphasized that Father Ortega might pose a continuing risk to minors and recommended notifying the affected communities about the situation.

Archbishop Garcia-Siller expressed gratitude for the survivor's courage in coming forward and shedding light on a painful experience. He expressed hope that this act of speaking out would not only aid the healing process for the survivor but also inspire other victims of sexual abuse to report such incidents to the relevant authorities.

Father Ortega, previously affiliated with the Legionaries of Christ, was officially incardinated into the Archdiocese of San Antonio on February 22, 2021, according to information

released by the archdiocese.

Father Martinez-Solis, who had previously served in the Archdiocese of Chicago, was formally incardinated into the San Antonio archdiocese on February 24, 2021.

In a separate instance, Archbishop Garcia-Siller revealed that an allegation was made against Father Martinez-Solis through the archdiocesan misconduct hotline on July 25. Swift action was taken, leading to the priest's immediate removal from ministry, and the allegation was referred to the Comal County Sheriff's Department for further investigation.

Similar to the case of Father Ortega, an independent investigator examined the allegations against Father Martinez-Solis. The archdiocesan review board found the accusations to be substantiated, prompting them to advise Archbishop Garcia-Siller to forward the case to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The archbishop emphasized the significance of their Code of Conduct and guidelines for ministry with minors, along with the importance of Virtus training, which facilitated the prompt addressing of these misconduct cases and helped prevent more severe abuses.

Archbishop Garcia-Siller underscored the archdiocese's commitment to addressing allegations of sexual misconduct involving children, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the safety and wellbeing of all individuals. He encouraged any victims of sexual abuse to report to law enforcement and offered support for those within the archdiocese to contact the Office for Victim Assistance and Safe Environment.

To maintain a transparent reporting process, the Archdiocesan Misconduct Hotline can be utilized by third parties to report violations. Archbishop Garcia-Siller concluded by expressing his dedication to fostering safe environments within Catholic institutions and called for collective prayer as they extend support to all victims of sexual abuse.