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LA's Gomez: Mahony, other bishops 'moving forward'

Joshua J. McElwee | Feb. 8, 2013 NCR Today
LA abuse cases

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, who last week publicly criticized predecessor Cardinal Roger Mahony over his shielding of sexually abusive clergy members, has written that he and Mahony "are committed to moving forward in our ministries with hope and confidence in God's grace."

In a rare public spat between Catholic bishops, Gomez and Mahony released competing statements last week after the archdiocese released about 15,000 church files under court order.

Saying the files evinced a failure to protect young people from sexually abusive priests, Gomez announced Jan. 31 that the cardinal would "no longer have any administrative or public duties" in the archdiocese.

Mahony replied Feb. 1 in an open letter [1] to Gomez that Gomez had "not once" before raised questions about his handling of abuse cases.

Referencing the spat in a column [2] in the Los Angeles archdiocesan newspaper Friday, Gomez writes that he has been "talking and reflecting" with Mahony and the archdiocese's auxiliary bishops over the issue.

"We need to keep praying for those who are hurting," writes Gomez in the column, headlined "A time for holiness" in *The Tidings*.

"We need to ask again for forgiveness for the sins of the past and for our own failings. And we need to match our prayers for grace with concrete actions of healing and renewal."

Mentioning the beginning of Lent Feb. 13, Gomez writes that "recent events should inform our prayer, penance and charity in this season of Lent, which begins next week with Ash Wednesday."

"All of us need the grace of a new conversion," Gomez writes. "This is what Lent is for."

The archdiocesan documents released in recent weeks are part of two caches of church files released by the archdiocese under court order.

Gomez released one cache of about 12,000 documents Jan. 31 as part of a $660 million 2007 settlement between the archdiocese and victims in 508 clergy abuse cases. Following years of failure of exhaustive legal appeals, Gomez posted [3] the files online, calling them "brutal and painful reading" in a letter also announcing the restrictions against Mahony.

Gomez also announced he had relieved Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Curry of his duties as regional bishop of Santa Barbara.

Curry, who had served as one of Mahony's vicars of clergy during the 1980s, had an active role in hiding priest offenders, according to some of the 3,000 files released [4] Jan. 21 as part of a separate civil suit against the

diocese.

The two sets of documents focus mainly on Mahony, Curry and other Los Angeles church officials' responses to accusations of abuse during the 1980s.

Taken together, they paint a picture of the church administrators' frequently moving accused priests to shield them from prosecution, even at times suggesting they should leave the state of California as legal protection.

In his column Friday, Gomez states that "the way forward for our Church" is "to rediscover this universal call to holiness."

"During these challenging times for our Church, we have to resist the desire to turn inward or to withdraw from our involvement with our culture and society," Gomez writes.

"We still have a mission as a Church -- to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to redeem us from our sins and to show us the way to a new life of holiness. We need to carry his message of salvation, conversion and forgiveness to every person."

"We can only change this world if we allow God to change us first," Gomez writes. "The lives we lead will always be the most credible witness we can give to the Gospel we believe in. People should be able to see 'the Catholic difference' -- the difference that our Catholic faith makes in our lives."

"Our world today needs *saints*. Not 'other-worldly' saints -- but saints in our cities, our families, our parishes and schools, our media, our businesses, legislatures and courts."

"This week," Gomez continues, "let's pray for one another and for our Church. Let's keep praying for everyone who has ever been hurt by members of the Church. And let's continue the process of healing their wounds and restoring the trust that was broken."

Mahony, who serves as a voting member of three Vatican departments, served as archbishop of Los Angeles from 1985 to 2011 and has been a cardinal since 1991.

One issue the archdiocese could face with continuing its ministries is funding. Numerous reports have indicated the archdiocese seeks to raise $200 million [5], possibly to erase debts brought on in its legal battles.

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