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Vatican City — March 19, 2018
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Publicly apologizing on behalf of the whole archdiocese for the "grave harm" caused by former Archbishop Anthony Apuron of Agana, Archbishop Michael Byrnes said a new chapter of humility, repentance and healing has opened for the Catholic Church in Guam following a Vatican verdict against his predecessor.

"I called and still call upon all Catholics on Guam to intensify their prayers and with great humility, offer sacrifice for the grave harm and sins which we have experienced or have enabled in our church," Byrnes said during a news conference in Guam March 18.

"We hang our heads in shame for the grave evil one member inflicted upon others, in this case the most vulnerable," he said in remarks, which were later released in a written statement.

"Our prayers for the victims of child abuse by Bishop Apuron and all victims of abuse here and worldwide continue; so shall our efforts to bring healing and restoration to all victims of clergy sexual abuse and to ensure this never happens again," he said.

Byrnes, who has been leading the archdiocese since 2016, made his comments after a Vatican tribunal announced March 16 it found Agana guilty of some of the accusations made against him, including the sexual abuse of minors.

After a canonical trial conducted by the apostolic tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican judges imposed the following sanctions on the 72-year-old archbishop: the removal from office and a prohibition from residing in Guam. The archbishop can and will appeal.

During the news conference, Byrnes said he did not know on what charges the former archbishop had been found guilty and which ones had been dismissed. In fact, he told local reporters, he had received no communication about the trial's findings other than "I got a phone call saying to go to this site" to read the Vatican's public announcement.

He said there had been no follow-up from the Vatican either as of March 17 and he assumed the former archbishop was now to be called Apuron, since losing the office of archbishop meant also losing the title associated with it.

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"We'll see with the appeal" what the final situation will be, he added.

Apuron released a statement March 17 through his lawyer,
Jacqueline Taitano Terlaje: "While I am relieved that the tribunal dismissed the majority of the accusations against me, I have appealed the verdict. ... God is my witness; I am innocent and I look forward to proving my innocence in the appeals process."

Supporters of the archbishop, conversing anonymously with journalists, claimed the archbishop was found guilty on only two of six charges and that the sentence implies those charges were not the most serious ones. Generally, clerics found guilty of sexually abusing minors face either removal from the priesthood or are sentenced to a life of prayer and penance and banned from any public ministry.

Byrnes said while there is much work and consultation to do in regard to local legal issues, he felt "a sense of relief" when the Vatican verdict had been announced.

He said his reaction upon hearing the news was, "OK, good. Something's happened and they're not just stringing us along." The announcement of the verdict from the Vatican investigation, which began in February 2017, had been expected last year, the archbishop had said.

A version of this story appeared in the **April 6-19, 2018** print issue under the headline: Vatican tribunal finds archbishop guilty of 'certain' accusations.