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Agana, Guam — March 27, 2018
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The Archdiocese of Agana will sell its chancery property in Hagatna and relocate its offices in September.

"The move is part of archdiocesan-wide efforts related to the liquidation and sale of church property on Guam in the midst of challenging financial times and settlement of clergy sexual abuse cases," the archdiocese said in a statement.

Church offices will be moved to the Cathedral Basilica of the Sweet Name of Mary in Hagatna, the Guam capital.

"Now that the mediation process related to the sexual abuse lawsuits has been set for September, the archdiocese is in the process of evaluating these claims on an individual basis," the March 21 statement said. "This necessitates the selling of certain properties owned by the archdiocese."

The chancery property, a gift to the archdiocese from estate of Henry Flores Nelson in 1950, is tied to St. John Paul II's historic visit to Guam Feb. 22-23, 1981. The pontiff stayed overnight at the residence of then-Bishop Felixberto Flores at the chancery.

"It was the first and still the only visit to Guam by a pope," the archdiocese said.

The chancery houses the offices of Archbishop Michael Byrnes, the vicar general, chancellor and the vicar for church patrimony. It also includes offices for Catholic education, archives and records, the marriage tribunal, finance, human resources, safe environment, communication and the archdiocesan newspaper, Umatuna Si Yu'os.

Byrnes' residence is located across from the chancery offices. The site of its relocation is still being evaluated, the archdiocese said.

Mediation will take place to settle more than 150 cases of alleged clergy sex abuse; some cases date back decades ago. In September 2016, a new law went into effect in Guam to allow victims of child sex abuse to sue their abusers, and the institutions with which they are or were associated, at any time.

Some days prior to the archdiocese's announcement about the selling of its property, a Vatican tribunal announced it found Archbishop Anthony Apuron, former head of the Agana Archdiocese, guilty of some of the accusations made against him, including the sexual abuse of minors.

Apuron had been accused of sexually abusing several boys in the 1970s, and, in early January, one of the archbishop's nephews publicly claimed the archbishop had sexually abused him in 1990. Apuron continually has denied the abuse allegations.

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.

Publicly apologizing on behalf of the whole archdiocese for the "grave harm" caused by Apuron, Byrnes said a new chapter of humility, repentance and healing has opened for the Catholic Church in Guam following the Vatican verdict. Byrnes has been leading the archdiocese since 2016.

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"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.

"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," Byrnes said.