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Retired Argentine Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta, formerly a close colleague of Pope Francis, was sentenced March 4 in a sexual abuse case.

Zanchetta, retired bishop of Orán, was given a 4 1/2-year sentence for abusing students at St. John XXIII Seminary. The judges ordered that his DNA be included in a national sex offender database.

Zanchetta remained silent during the sentencing, but had denied the allegations when the trial began Feb. 21. He was detained in the courtroom.

The day prior to the sentencing, Marcio Tornina, one of former seminarians in the case, used social media to demand justice.

"All I ask for is justice," he posted on Facebook. "I feel sorry for the priests who were complicit in their silence. They know why they did it, but they should know that there were young people who put their trust in them."

The case dates back to 2016, when seminarians accused the bishop a series of crimes, from abuses to financial mismanagement. While case was reviewed by the church and Argentine authorities, it did not impede Zanchetta's appointment in 2017 as an adviser to the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See after he stepped down as bishop for "health reasons."

In January 2019, Alessandro Gisotti, then-interim director of the Vatican press office, told reporters that accusations of sexual abuse against Zanchetta emerged in the autumn of 2018.

"On the basis of these accusations and from news appearing recently in the media," another bishop in Argentina was asked to begin collecting information and testimony for an eventual Vatican investigation.

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"During the preliminary investigation, Zanchetta will abstain from working" at the Vatican office, Gisotti said. However, Zanchetta was listed as assessor of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See until the Vatican's 2022 yearbook, the Annuario Pontificio, was published.

The new Annuario, released in February, lists him as the "former assessor."

Francis told a reporter in May 2019 that he personally requested the bishop be investigated by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; the outcome of that investigation has not been made public, but often the congregation will pause its investigation while criminal proceedings are ongoing.