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A man wearing a mitre, a mask, and purple robes sprinkles ashes over the head of a woman w

Archbishop Michael J. Byrnes of Agaña, Guam, sprinkles ashes on a parishioner during Mass at the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica in Hagåtña, Guam, March 2, 2022. (CNS photo/Frankie Casil, courtesy Archdiocese of Agaña)



by Catholic News Service

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Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of 64-year-old Archbishop Michael J. Byrnes of Agaña, Guam, who, the archdiocese said, has been "on extended leave due to illness."

Announcing the archbishop's resignation March 28, the Vatican provided no explanation.

A statement from the archdiocese noted that "the Vatican has announced that Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of ailing Archbishop Michael Byrnes as archbishop of Agana while concurrently appointing vicar general Father Romeo Convocar as the apostolic administrator of the archdiocese."

In the statement, Convocar thanked Byrnes "for the tremendous courage, faith and obedience he demonstrated seven years ago when he answered the call from the Holy Father to travel many miles away to lead the faithful in a place he knew little about."

"We have much sadness about his departure but our prayers continue to be with him as he contends with his life-changing illness," the statement said.

The statement did not provide details about the archbishop's health, although it said further information would be provided in the coming days.

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Byrnes, it said, "is being taken care of by close friends and associates in his original home of Detroit, Michigan."

The archbishop was an auxiliary bishop of Detroit in 2016 when Francis named him coadjutor archbishop of Agaña and gave him special faculties to administer the archdiocese while Archbishop Anthony S. Apuron was under Vatican investigation on charges of the sexual abuse of minors.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in March 2018 found Apuron guilty of several accusations against him, including the sexual abuse of minors. The dicastery, however, did not specify the number of charges the bishop faced, how many of them he was found guilty of or even the nature of the offenses for which he was convicted.

Apuron appealed, but in 2019 the doctrinal office denied the appeal, removing Apuron from office, banning him from living in or visiting Guam and forbidding him to wear a bishop's ring or miter.

Once Apuron was removed from office, Byrnes automatically succeeded him and began the process of apologizing to victims and ensuring they received the help they requested. Meeting those needs required the archdiocese to file for bankruptcy and begin a process of selling off property, including the proposed sale of the chancery building, which is pending.