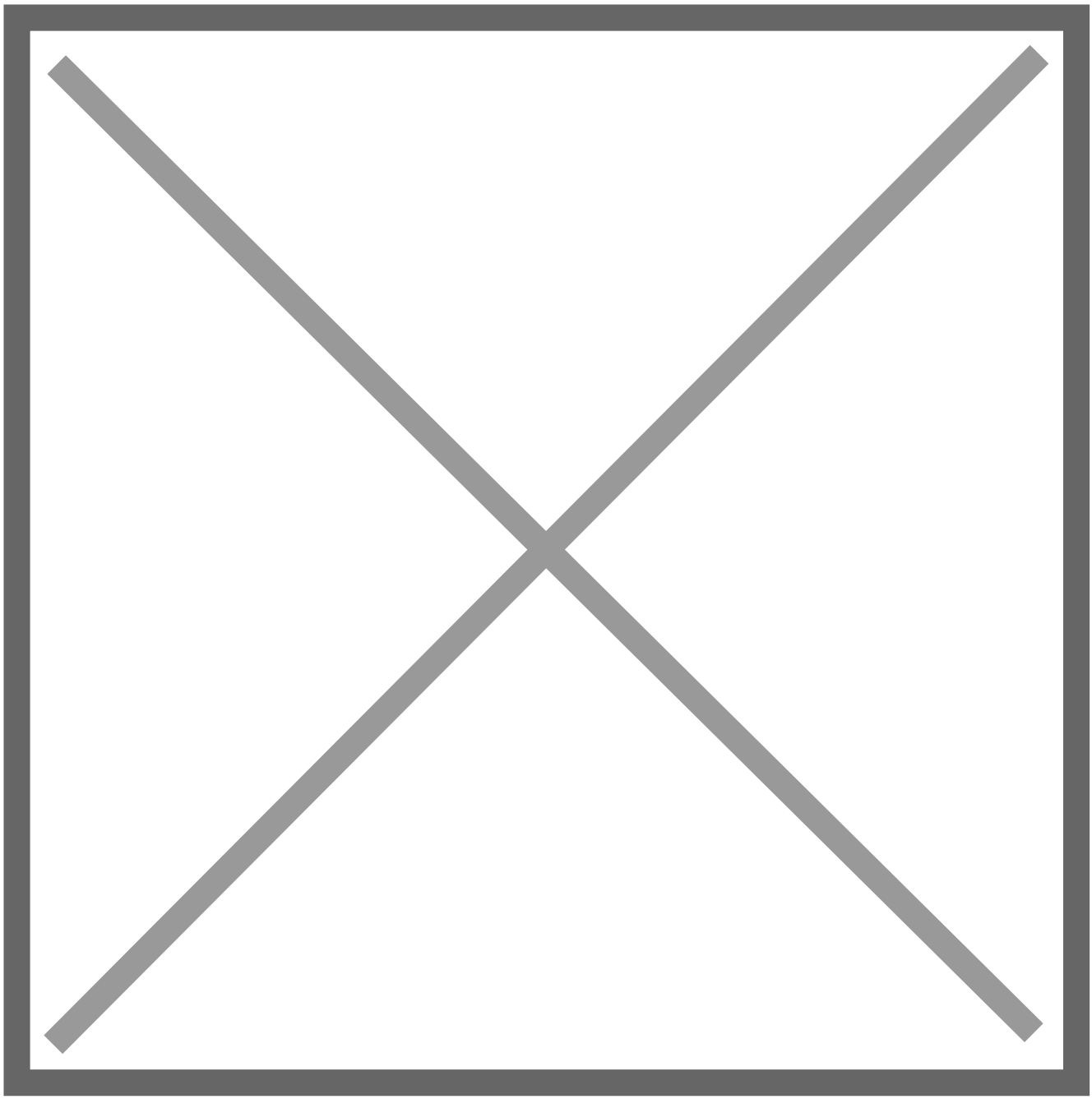
News



Worshippers holding candles pray during a Mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua, Oct. 28, 2018, in support of Nicaraguan Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Jose Báez Ortega and to call for the release of political prisoners. Báez, who faced death threats and harassment from the Ortega regime, forced into exile in 2019. (OSV News/Reuters/Jorge Cabrera)



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Managua, Nicaragua — March 18, 2026

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Ordinations of priests and deacons have been halted in four Nicaraguan dioceses, aggravating a shortage of priests as the Sandinista regime continues its suffocation of the Catholic Church.

No ordinations have occurred recently in the dioceses of Jinotega, Siuna, Matagalpa and Estelí, according to researcher Martha Patricia Molina, an exiled lawyer who tracks church persecution in Nicaragua.

The four dioceses are led by bishops in exile: Bishop Carlos Enrique Herrera of Jinotega, president of the Nicaraguan bishops' conference; Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna; and Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa. Alvárez is also apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Estelí.

The relentless persecution of the Catholic Church has decimated the priesthood in the dioceses where bishops are absent. Molina estimated barely 30% of the priests in the Diocese of Matagalpa remain in place compared to 2018, when the ruling

Sandinistas cracked down on the Catholic Church and society at large after mass demonstrations. She estimated 30% of the remaining priests in Matagalpa are elderly.

"Several of those priests were already retired with illnesses but have to return to service until they die," Molina told OSV News. "And what happens when these priests die and no one can be ordained?"

At least 304 prelates, priests, nuns and seminarians have been exiled, forced to flee Nicaragua or denied reentry after traveling abroad, according to Molina.

Molina said Co-Presidents Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, who is Ortega's wife, are likely seeking a renewal in Catholic leadership, with clergy supportive of the regime populating the hierarchy. But she noted the four exiled prelates have been publicly backed by Pope Leo XIV.

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The Sandinista regime has actively thwarted attempts at ordaining priests and deacons. Herrera was exiled in 2024 after criticizing a local public official for playing loud music outside Sunday Mass, which was part of the regime's ongoing harassment. But he had previously traveled to Matagalpa to ordain a priest and deacons, according to Molina.

Father Frutos Constantino Valle Salmerón, an octogenarian serving as an ad omnia administrator in the Diocese of Estelí remains confined to a diocesan seminary and unable to publicly perform ministry. Valle was detained in July 2024, after being told by police that the ordination of three priests scheduled for the next day were prohibited.

Dioceses in Nicaragua continue to have strong interest in vocations, according to Molina. But she said sources have told her, "The young men are asking themselves: Why study here if we're not going to be ordained?"

The regime's impeding of ordinations deepens church repression in the deeply Catholic country. Processions and Holy Week celebrations must be kept to church property. Priests report police and paramilitaries spying on Mass and tracking their activities. Religious orders have been forced to leave the country, while church

charitable projects and Catholic schools and universities have lost their legal status.

The Central American country has come under U.S. pressure to release political prisoners in 2026, following the Trump administration's Jan. 3 ouster of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro — a close ally of the Sandinista regime.

A source familiar with the country's politics told OSV News the co-presidents have a strategy of staying ahead of Cuba and Venezuela — which a Trump administration official said in 2018 formed "a troika of tyranny," along with Nicaragua — in which they placated the U.S. government enough to keep attention on other regimes in the Western Hemisphere at odds with the United States.