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Fr. Anthony Odiong, a priest of the Diocese of Uyo, Nigeria, is pictured in an undated photo. The priest, whose assignments have spanned several U.S. dioceses, including in Texas, was found guilty May 29, 2026, by a Texas court of sexually abusing several women under his spiritual care. (OSV News/Waco Police via Facebook)

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A Catholic priest from Nigeria has been found guilty by a Texas court of sexually abusing several women under his spiritual care, a felony crime in that state.

Fr. Anthony Odiong, a priest of the Diocese of Uyo, Nigeria, had been charged under Texas state law with several felony counts of sexual assault.

After listening to graphic testimony from several witnesses, the jury found the 57-year-old priest guilty of one charge of sexual assault in the first degree and two in the second degree, in a May 29 verdict delivered at the 19th State District Court in Waco, Texas.

The priest had also fathered at least one child with another woman in Louisiana who had been under his spiritual direction, according to DNA evidence cited by prosecutors.

In addition, Odiong — who had served at a student Catholic center at Baylor University in Waco — was arrested in southwest Florida in 2024 for possession of child pornography, while living near a Catholic university at which he hoped to gain employment.

The case — which has been extensively covered since 2023 by investigative journalist Ramon Antonio Vargas for The Guardian — highlights the Catholic Church's ongoing challenges in addressing clergy sexual predation of adults in situations where they are vulnerable, particularly in relationships of pastoral care or spiritual guidance, while states such as Texas and Georgia have passed laws to criminalize such acts.

With the accused priest's assignments and travels spanning several U.S. dioceses, as well as his home diocese in Nigeria, the matter also underscores the difficulties of tracking and investigating clergy abuse across episcopal jurisdictions under the U.S. Church's current framework.

The priest was not charged with crimes connected to fathering at least two minor children; however, prosecutors sought to show his alleged sexual advances as a member of the clergy — a felony in Texas — demonstrated a pattern of targeting vulnerable women.

Odiong had entered a plea of not guilty on May 27. He had been in prison since 2024 in lieu of a $5.5 million bond, after rejecting a proposed 20-year plea deal in December of that year.

In April, Judge Thomas West allowed prosecutors to consolidate three separate indictments — which represented seven charges brought by three victims — into one trial.

The Diocese of Austin, Texas, in which Waco is located, declined to comment to OSV News earlier on May 29, saying the trial was "now underway."

However, the diocese confirmed that Odiong is incardinated in the Diocese of Uyo — where he was ordained in 1993 — and referred OSV News to that diocese "for any

clarification about his clerical status." OSV News is awaiting a response to a request placed with the Diocese of Uyo for such clarification.

The Diocese of Austin said that the priest "is present in the geographical boundaries of the Diocese and is residing in detention in Waco," adding that "he does not have permission from the Diocese of Austin to engage in priestly ministry."

In response to a separate request from OSV News, before the verdict was issued, the Diocese of Austin declined to provide a full timeline of Odiong's diocesan pastoral assignments, which included duties at St. Peter Catholic Student Center at Baylor University in Waco.

According to The Guardian, one of the witnesses in the priest's trial, an adult female named only as "Mary Doe," testified May 27 that Odiong had preyed on her sexually after she met him in 2008 until 2011. She was going through a divorce after an abusive marriage while raising her seven children under 12. According to her testimony, the priest had offered to be her spiritual adviser after he saw her weeping during Mass at the center, which she attended while working at the university. She testified that she entered into spiritual direction under him at his urging, but in the ensuing weeks, Odiong began to sexualize the relationship which escalated eventually into intercourse.

She told the court their sexual encounters — discovered by at least one of her children in 2011 — took place at her home as well as at the center, with Father Odiong's office and the confessional among the locations.

In November 2024, Bishop Joe Vásquez, then bishop of Austin and now archbishop of Galveston-Houston, said he was "deeply saddened" as news of the allegations emerged about Odiong.

Noting that the priest was from the Diocese of Uyo and had previously served in Austin, Vásquez said at the time that he remained "committed to cooperating with and supporting law enforcement in their efforts."

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Criminal proceedings against Odiong, initiated by a victim contacting Waco police in March 2024, developed after Vargas and The Guardian began extensively

investigating complaints he had preyed on vulnerable women who were under his pastoral care and spiritual direction.

In December 2023, The Guardian — as part of its long-running coverage of abuse allegations in the Archdiocese of New Orleans — highlighted the priest's dismissal as pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Luling, Louisiana, about 25 miles from New Orleans. A sexual relationship with a parishioner under his spiritual direction there resulted in the birth of a child in 2023.

DNA evidence presented in court May 28 confirmed the paternity of the child. Previously, The Guardian reported that another minor child by the priest was believed to be living in Nigeria.

In a December 2023 article for The Guardian, Vargas noted that Odiong had been allowed to minister in the Diocese of Austin in 2006, led at the time by then-Bishop Gregory Aymond, who was appointed archbishop of New Orleans in 2009. (Aymond's canonically required retirement was accepted in 2026, with Archbishop James Checchio, who had been appointed coadjutor in 2025, succeeding him.)

In a May 29 statement provided to OSV News shortly after the trial verdict was announced, the Archdiocese of New Orleans confirmed the priest arrived in that archdiocese "in 2015 at the request of the Bishop of Uyo in Nigeria as he continued the studies he began in Rome."

"While Bishop of Austin, Archbishop Aymond received no complaints against Odiong. Upon vetting his suitability for ministry in this archdiocese, no issues were reported," said the Archdiocese of New Orleans. "He was named pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Luling, LA, where he served until his removal in 2023."

However, the archdiocese added, "a review of the Archdiocese of New Orleans's records regarding Anthony Odiong show that the concerns reported from the Diocese of Austin involved adults."

The archdiocese said it had been "alerted to the allegation that had already been recanted to the Diocese of Austin and additional concerns about imprudent behaviors with adults. At that time, archdiocesan officials chose to address the report directly with Odiong."

In addition, the archdiocese said, "To date, we have received no complaints involving minors."

The statement said that "archdiocesan officials first learned of the allegation he fathered a child through media coverage of his criminal trial in Texas."

The Archdiocese of New Orleans said its "records from the time period show Odiong was removed from ministry in 2023 following a series of inflammatory comments made from the altar and additional information reported to the archdiocese."

The statement continued, "At that time, as this additional information came to light, the archdiocese made a report to law enforcement who had already investigated the allegation."

"Archbishop Checchio and the Archdiocese of New Orleans are disgusted by the behavior revealed in this trial," said the archdiocese. "Our prayers are with those who have been hurt by his actions."

Odiong was suspended from serving in the Diocese of Austin by no later than 2019, according to The Guardian.

The Guardian's reporting also stated that sometime in late 2023 or early 2024, Odiong had returned to Birome, Texas, just outside the Austin Diocese, to rally support for his "plan to run chapels at a Catholic university in Florida."

He was arrested in July 2024 for posession of child pornography, and as a fugitive from sexual assault charges in Texas, while living near Ave Maria University in Florida. U.S. marshals returned him to Texas to face charges.

Odiong, according to The Guardian, is a naturalized U.S. citizen and has argued that he cannot be returned to Nigeria. He has also pointed to violence against Christians in that nation as another obstacle to his return.

The Guardian reported that the priest, when he was arrested, rallied some supporters around him by claiming that it was his preaching against same-sex attraction and transgender interventions that drew the ire of Church officials, leading to his removal from pastoral assignments.

Sentencing is expected to take place June 1, according to local media.