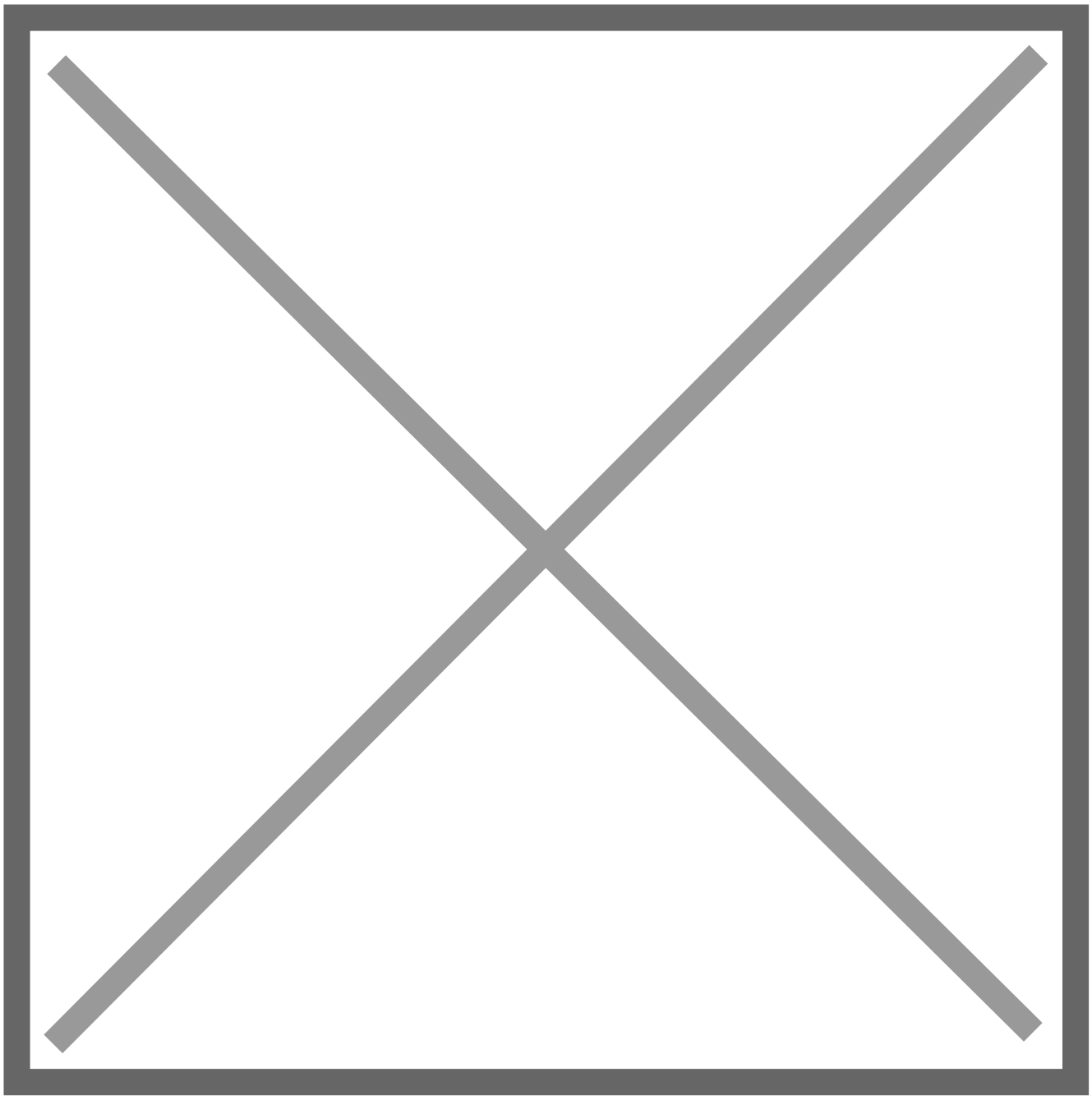
News



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, was sentenced to life in prison on June 2, after being found guilty of felony sexual assault, according to local prosecutors and representatives of the 19th District Court in Waco, Texas.. (OSV News/Waco Police via Facebook)

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Austin, Texas — June 4, 2026
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A Catholic priest from Nigeria has been sentenced in a Texas court to life in prison, as well as to two 20-year prison terms plus $30,000 in fines, for 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, who had once served in the Diocese of Austin and other dioceses in the U.S., 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.

After deliberating for 90 minutes June 1, the jury recommended its sentence to presiding Judge Thomas West.

Odiong — who had pleaded not guilty on May 27 — will serve the two 20-year prison terms concurrently.

Judge West gave the priest credit for time served in the McLennan County Jail, where Odiong had been incarcerated since 2024 in lieu of a $5.5 million bond, after

rejecting a proposed 20-year plea deal in December of that year. He cannot seek parole until he has been credited with at least 30 years of his sentence.

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.

Although Odiong was not charged with crimes connected to fathering that child and one other, both of them minors, 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 — who had served at a student Catholic center at Baylor University in Waco — had also been arrested in southwest Florida in 2024 for possession of child pornography, while living near a Catholic university at which he hoped to gain employment.

Local KWTX reported emotional scenes in the courtroom at Odiong's sentencing.

"Tell that man sitting there, in a voice loud enough to be heard in Rome, that he is done," prosecutor Ryan Calvert said. "He is done. That he doesn't get to do this anymore."

The local news outlet reported that one of Odoing's victims had sharp words for the Diocese of Austin and for Baylor University. She said the lives of her and her children are now "indelibly marked by evil," and accused both entities of victim-shaming her and showing more concern to avoid their own embarrassment. She quoted Luke 8:17: "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."

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Odiong's legal counsel, Gerald Villarrial, who had asked the priest receive probation for his crimes, indicated he intends to appeal.

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.

Texas is among 15 other U.S. states and the District of Columbia with laws on the books, similar to those regarding doctors and therapists, that criminalize clergy extramarital sexual conduct with adults under their care, who are presumed to not be capable of consenting to such encounters.

But on the side of the Catholic Church, many Church jurisdictions have yet to adopt the clear standard set for the Maltese Ecclesiastical Province by Archbishop Charles Scicluna, the adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and a key figure in the Church's fight against clergy sexual abuse.

Those 2014 directives make clear that sexual contact or sexualized behavior between a "pastoral functionary" — including any bishop, cleric, religious or layperson — and adults in a pastoral relationship "is considered to be always abusive, whether with or without consent." They also recognize clergy are responsible for maintaining boundaries in their pastoral relationships, and prohibit a defense alleging the sexual relationship was consensual.

OSV News is awaiting a response to its request for comment on the sentencing from the Diocese of Austin, Texas, in which Waco is located.

The diocese had previously 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 multiple requests placed with the Diocese of Uyo for such clarification.

The Diocese of Austin had also previously noted Odoing "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.

In November 2024, then-Austin Bishop Joe Vásquez, who is now archbishop of Galveston-Houston, said he was "deeply saddened" as news of the allegations

emerged about Odiong and that he remained "committed to cooperating with and supporting law enforcement in their efforts."

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."

In a June 3 statement to OSV News, the Archdiocese of New Orleans said, "What Odiong is convicted of is reprehensible."

The archdiocese reaffirmed its previous statement that both Checchio and the Archdiocese of New Orleans are "disgusted by the behavior revealed" by the trial, and their prayers for those affected.

In its June 3 statement, the Archdiocese of New Orleans noted that "the Bishop of Uyo offered Anthony Odiong for service in the Diocese of Austin. After he passed all background checks and with appropriate letters of suitability, Archbishop Aymond, then Bishop of Austin, accepted Odiong for ministry there and received no such complaints about Odiong during his tenure."

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 possession 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.