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Legionaries of Christ withdraw from California parish

by NCR Staff

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Citing its need to restructure in the United States after a series of sex abuse scandals involving its founder and several prominent members, the Legionaries of Christ are withdrawing from the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here, effective July 1. The order has administered the large Hispanic parish in the state capital for the last 12 years.

Their departure follows the closure last year of their two local schools, the University of Sacramento and the Immaculate Conception Apostolic School, because of diminishing enrollment.

"Our religious congregation has suffered a crisis in the past few years and we must restructure ourselves in the United States," said Fr. Lino Otero, pastor, in a message to parishioners. "In these difficult moments, we have enjoyed the support and trust of Pope Benedict XVI, who accompanies us in these times. We view our future with hope and enthusiasm, forming a more solid congregation of religious and priests."

Otero will move to New York and the other Legionaries at the parish will be assigned by the order to ministries outside of the Diocese of Sacramento. The diocese has named Fr. Rodolfo Llamas as the new pastor.

Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto said he was "extremely grateful" for the Legionaries' service in the diocese, noting in a statement on the diocesan website that they had established a permanent exhibit of the Shroud of Turin at the parish, "strengthened faith formation and education, inspired family events and pro-life efforts, and solidified dozens of parish ministries."

Elena Gutierrez, a longtime parishioner, told the *Sacramento Bee* that the Legionaries brought peace to the parish, which had been experiencing internal conflict.

"They worked terribly hard," she said.

To mark their departure, Legionaries of Christ priests will celebrate Mass at 6 p.m. June 8 at the church, followed by a potluck dinner hosted by parishioners.

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