



SINS OF OMISSION

Dozens of Catholic Priests Credibly Accused of Abuse Found Work Abroad, Some With the Church's Blessing

The Catholic Church allowed more than 50 U.S.-based clergy to move abroad after facing credible accusations of sexual abuse. Some continued to work with children.

by Katie Zavadski, Topher Sanders, ProPublica, and Nicole Hensley, Houston Chronicle, March 6, 6 a.m. EST

Above: The Rev. Jeffrey David Newell blesses children at Our Lady of the Incarnation in Tijuana, Mexico, in November 2019. Newell has continued to serve as a priest despite being accused of sexually abusing a teenager in the U.S. (Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle)

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The Rev. [Jose Antonio Pinal](#), a young priest from Mexico, arrived at his first parish in rural Northern California in 1980, fresh out of seminary. The priest befriended the Torres family, helping the parents, also immigrants from Mexico, to fill out an application for food stamps. Pinal became an occasional dinner guest and took the children to theme parks and on road trips along the Pacific coast. He encouraged 15-year-old Ricardo Torres to become an altar boy.

But in the priest's quarters at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the small city of Gridley, Torres said, Pinal, then 30, gave him alcohol, showed him movies with sex and nudity, and groped and raped him. The teenager told another priest in 1989 and the family was assured by lawyers for the diocese that Pinal would not be allowed around children, Torres said.

Thirty years later, in the spring of 2019, the [Diocese of Sacramento](#) put Pinal's name on its list of credibly accused priests. The list had five allegations of sexual abuse against Pinal dating to the late 1980s.

Pinal had "fled to Mexico," according to the list, and the diocese had prohibited him from performing priestly work in public in the 20 counties that make up the diocese. But an investigation by ProPublica and the Houston Chronicle shows the Catholic Church allowed or aided dozens of priests — including Pinal — to serve abroad as priests after being credibly accused of abuse in the United States.

ProPublica and the Chronicle analyzed lists published by 52 U.S. dioceses — encompassing the top 30 in terms of the number of credibly accused living clergy and those located in states along the U.S.-Mexico border. Reporters found 51 clergy who after allegations of abuse in the U.S. were able to work as priests or religious brothers in a host of countries, from Ireland to Nigeria to the Philippines. At least 40 had worked in U.S. states along the southern border, including 11 in Texas. No country was a more common destination than Mexico, where at least 21 credibly accused clergy found refuge.

Using social media, a reporter easily located Pinal, who lives in Cuernavaca, about 55 miles south of Mexico City.

In an interview at his home and in a subsequent series of email exchanges, Pinal repeatedly denied sexually abusing Torres or that he “fled” California. But in some of the emails, he referred to what “happened” between him and Torres, and in an email sent Wednesday night, about a trip he took with Torres, Pinal said, “It was screwed up, but whatever happened was consensual.”

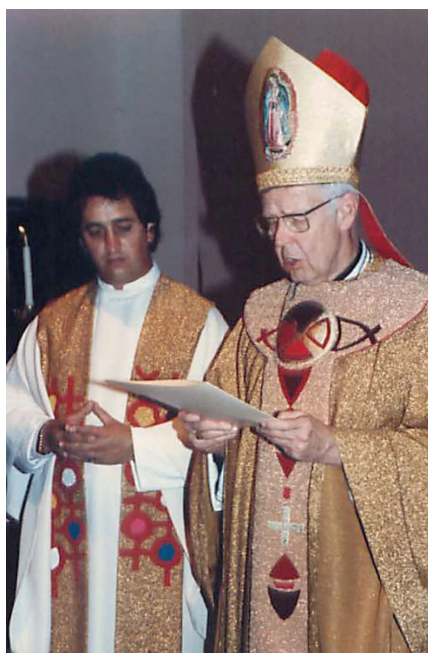
Just months after the allegations in California, Pinal resumed priestly work, ministering in indigenous villages in and around Tepoztlán, a small town near Mexico City known for archaeological sites, and he went on to serve for decades in parishes in the Diocese of Cuernavaca.

Now 68, he ministers from his home, where he has letters showing the church in Sacramento kept him on the payroll as it helped him find a new assignment. Pinal enjoyed a warm correspondence with the then-Sacramento bishop and officials in charge of Hispanic ministry, who in the months after the allegations advised him to work in Mexico for a “long period (5-6 years)” before returning to the U.S. Letters from the bishop were signed “con cariño,” or with affection.

“This was a grave failure of judgment and a betrayal of trust,” the current Sacramento bishop, Jaime Soto, said after correspondence between his predecessor and Pinal was released to Torres’ attorney through litigation. “The safety of children is our highest priority. In 1989, those in leadership failed to do so. I must own and atone for this.”

After being contacted by reporters, the Diocese of Sacramento acknowledged that the characterization that Pinal “fled” to Mexico is incorrect, and in recent days, the diocese revised the list to “more accurately reflect the circumstances of his 1989 departure.”

Since 2018, many Catholic dioceses and religious orders in the U.S., including Sacramento, have released lists of clergy deemed credibly accused of abusing children. Others updated and expanded lists they had already made public. For the church, the wave of disclosures has been a belated reckoning with the extent of the sexual abuse crisis that was exposed two



The Rev. Jose Antonio Pinal, left, with Bishop Francis Quinn of Sacramento, who aided Pinal in continuing his ministry in Mexico after Pinal was accused of sexual abuse. (Courtesy of Law Offices of Joseph C. George)

decades ago.

But the 178 lists made public as of January and compiled into a searchable database by ProPublica revealed a web of incomplete and often inconsistent information.

Often the lists didn't specify clergy's current status and location. And while dioceses frequently claim to know nothing about a priest's whereabouts, reporters with ProPublica and the Chronicle found them on church websites, in religious publications and on social media. Church leaders often failed to report allegations to police, to pursue permanent restrictions within the church, or to heed or offer warnings about priests facing allegations. In at least four cases, church leaders facilitated priests' moving abroad.

The omissions, inconsistencies and other shortcomings undercut the church's professed desire to repair its relationship with millions of disaffected Catholics, said Anthony M. DeMarco, a California lawyer who has handled hundreds of child sex abuse cases. "Every bit of hedging that they do to protect a pedophile just undermines completely any level of trust they're trying to build," he said.

Pinal keeps stacks of photo albums and papers documenting the nearly 10 years he spent at the Diocese of Sacramento, which covers the capital city and large swaths of rural Northern California.

"It was a nice time," Pinal recalled wistfully.

In one letter Pinal has saved, Bishop Francis Quinn told Pinal he "will be of whatever assistance is necessary in supporting your efforts to seek a new diocese." The letter was written in 1990, the year after Pinal's alleged abuse was reported to the church.

When the bishop for Cuernavaca offered Pinal a permanent appointment, Quinn (who died last year) was enthusiastic. "I am happy to hear that you have found such a fulfilling ministry," the bishop wrote.

The prior year, Pinal had assailed his accuser in a letter to officials in charge of Hispanic ministry, Torres bore responsibility for what happened. "With this boy, what happened happened because he brought it about; and, if I am worried about his recovery, it's not because I feel at fault for his trauma but because of the friendship I had with his family," Pinal wrote.

Pinal said Torres was reluctant to talk to clergy about this because he was at fault. "If he refuses to talk with any priest, I don't think it's because he is rejecting me but because he knows that he is not innocent of the situation he wants to blame me for completely. His only advantage over me is that when this happened, he was a minor; so, legally, I am screwed. Because of this I had to leave the diocese and the United States, as you mentioned, for a long period of time (5-6 years)."



Ricardo Torres in Sacramento, California. Torres says he was abused by Pinal beginning at the age of 15. (Rachel Bujalski for ProPublica)

Last October, Torres filed suit against the diocese again, this time under California's new Child Victims Act, which provides a three-year window for victims of child abuse to bring lawsuits that otherwise would have been outside the statute of limitations. The lawsuit alleges, among other counts, that the diocese's negligence enabled Pinal to molest Torres and that the diocese failed to report the abuse to relevant authorities.

Torres said the church mollified his family by misleading them about the steps taken to curtail Pinal's ability to minister. "This was supposed to be the most trustworthy person," Torres said of Pinal. "He was supposed to be next to God."

"The Past Is the Past"

For decades, the Catholic Church in the United States concealed abuse by clergy, transferring priests from parish to parish, sometimes cloaking reasons for moves in code, such as "family and health reasons." The demand for Spanish-speaking clergy in the U.S. — driven by an increase of about 45 million Catholics since the 1950s, with the largest growth among Latino faithful — made it easier for priests to cross international lines, experts said, but harder to hold them accountable.

It is "all that much harder to track them when they're in another country," said Erin Gallagher, an investigator for the International Criminal Court in The Hague, who helped track down fugitive priests in the early 2000s when she was working in the San Francisco District Attorney's Office. "They are pariahs here and they can go live someplace else anonymously."

The ProPublica-Chronicle investigation found that the church's ability to track abusive priests was even more limited internationally than within U.S. borders. Because the Vatican does not dictate what bishops must disclose about accused clergy, either within the church or to the public, bishops in many countries have released even less information than those in the U.S.

No diocese in Mexico, which is home to about 90 million Catholics, has published a list of credibly accused priests, though Mexican church officials reported in January that 271 priests have been investigated in the past decade in connection with sexual abuse allegations. An advocacy group for abuse victims in Mexico compiled a list of accused priests in 2010.

In the U.S., some offenders were laicized — stripped of the power to be a priest. But others left their dioceses and resumed priestly work in Mexico, ProPublica and the Chronicle found. Some crisscrossed the border with ease after being accused of sexual abuse, securing new posts even after being sent for treatment by the church. Others settled into parishes south of the border decades ago, delivering sermons and blessing babies as the statute of limitations for prosecution in the U.S. expired.

The Rev. Jose Luis Urbina is still wanted on a three-decade-old warrant issued in California, Yuba County Deputy District Attorney Shiloh Sorbello said. Urbina, after pleading guilty to sexual abuse of a child in 1989, fled the country before he could be sentenced and then served as a priest in his hometown of Navojoa, Mexico, where The Dallas Morning News tracked him down in 2005. The paper said that in a phone interview, the priest admitted his guilt. Authorities in the U.S. sought to extradite Urbina that year, but the Mexican government declined to send him back, Sorbello said. The warrant was renewed in 2019 in case Urbina tried to return to the U.S., Sorbello said.

“Murder cases usually get top billing for extradition,” Sorbello said. “We don't have any resources to have people go to Mexico to locate this man. And the Mexican authorities probably don't have much incentive to do our work for us.”

Urbina was removed from the priesthood by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008, according to the Diocese of Sacramento's list.

One of the most notorious cases of an accused priest moving across international borders was the Rev. Nicolas Aguilar Rivera. After abuse allegations first surfaced in 1987 in the southern Mexican city of Tehuacán, he was attacked by parishioners and then sent by church leaders to Los Angeles. Less than a year after arriving in California, he faced similar allegations, which eventually led to charges that he molested 10 boys. Church leaders confronted Aguilar before notifying police and he returned

to Mexico, where he continued to abuse minors, according to lawsuits and criminal complaints filed in Mexico.

Years later, lawyers suing the Archdiocese of Los Angeles on behalf of abuse victims questioned Cardinal Norberto Rivera, then the Mexico City archbishop, about whether church leaders used code words — “family and health reasons” — to cloak the true reason for the transfers abroad. As the bishop of Tehuacán, Rivera had helped transfer Aguilar to the U.S. Aguilar needed “to attend to the problem I suspected he had, which was a health problem,” the cardinal explained in a deposition. “To be specific, homosexuality.”

The Archdiocese of Mexico City said Aguilar is believed to be deceased and that it is not aware of any complaints against him; the archdiocese did not respond to Rivera's statements.

Some priests served for decades in Mexico and retired or died before being named on any list.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio included the Rev. Jose Luis Contreras on its list of credibly accused priests released in 2019 — more than 30 years after he was accused of inappropriately touching a 17-year-old male patient while serving as a chaplain at a San Antonio hospital, according to the archdiocese.

Contreras was sent for treatment in 1987 and barred from working in San Antonio-area churches again, according to the list, which stated that Contreras returned to Mexico to be with his sister in Guadalajara.

But Contreras was able to work as priest in both the U.S. and Mexico after the allegation.

Robert F. Vasa, the current bishop in Santa Rosa, California, said Contreras served in parishes there between 1995 and 2000, providing the Diocese of Santa Rosa with a letter of recommendation from the Diocese of Tepic, located in the western state of Nayarit, Mexico.

Vasa said he found no indication of the Texas abuse allegation in Contreras' paperwork, copies of which he declined to share. But there was also a letter of support from a Santa Rosa priest that mentioned the five years Contreras spent in San Antonio — work history that was missing from Contreras' resume.

“Should that have been spotted?” Vasa said of the five-year gap. “Now looking back, sure.”

Nothing in the file, Vasa said, reveals whether the prior bishop or his staff noticed the discrepancy.

“To spot that discrepancy would entail a prior suspicion, and unfortunately in those days they were not suspicious enough about many things,” he said. Even had the bishop or his staff noticed the inconsistency, Vasa said he isn’t sure it would have prevented Contreras from gaining a position in Santa Rosa.

“I can’t say what would raise red flags in 1994 and what wouldn’t,” he said. “We’re much more suspicious now.”

Contreras retired shortly after celebrating the 50th anniversary of his ordination in a ceremony at a parish in Colima, a small state in western Mexico, in 2017.

After reporters sent the diocese a copy of the list and specific questions about Contreras, officials responded with a statement declining comment, citing “the distrust and danger that unfortunately prevails throughout Mexico.” The Rev. Jesús Ramos Hueso, vicar general in Colima, said recently that no one in his diocese was aware of the allegations lodged against Contreras in San Antonio.

Contreras faces little risk of legal repercussions in the U.S. A reporter found no record that the allegation against him was reported to law enforcement. Regardless, prosecuting Contreras would be impossible now as the Texas statute of limitations on the allegation ran out decades ago, officials said.

Contreras, reached by phone, declined to hear the specific allegation against him and later blocked a reporter from contacting him. “I’ve already delivered myself to the Lord,” Contreras said. “For me, the past is a blessing from God and nothing else. For me, the past is the past.”

“I Wasn’t a Saint”

On a balmy Sunday morning in early November in Tijuana, Mexico, worshippers at Our Lady of the Incarnation greeted one another with hugs, handshakes and smiles. The church, on the west side of Tijuana’s Camino Verde neighborhood, was abuzz before Mass. Taxis lined the streets letting out customers: merchants laid out religious material as norteña music blared from speakers.

In the church courtyard, where dozens of children laughed and played, a reporter found Rev. Jeffrey David Newell, the church’s pastor.

According to the credibly accused list published in 2018 by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Newell is “inactive” — suggesting he no longer serves as a priest. But a Google search by reporters revealed Newell’s name on the Archdiocese of Tijuana’s website, listing him as the pastor at Our Lady of the Incarnation.



Newell holds a chalice for the blessing of the Eucharist during Mass at Our Lady of the Incarnation, the Catholic church in Tijuana where he is the pastor. (Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle)

Newell, 58, was accused nearly 30 years ago of sexually abusing a teenager in Los Angeles, according to interviews and a lawsuit filed a decade ago. (The lawsuit has since been dismissed because it wasn't filed within the statute of limitations.) The boy met Newell in 1984 when he was a lay youth minister at St. Catherine of Siena School.

The teenager said the abuse started in 1986, when he was 15, and went on for years. In 1991, he told officials in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles about the abuse and was promised Newell "would be removed from the priesthood and no longer able to sexually abuse children," according to the lawsuit.

Newell, interviewed briefly at the church in Tijuana, said he confessed to church leaders decades ago and had multiple rounds of treatment and therapy.

"It happened," he said. "I admitted it. I made a mistake."

He disputed only the age of the victim at the time of the encounters: Newell said the victim was 17, not 15.

In response to questions from ProPublica and the Chronicle, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles said Newell admitted in 1991 to the "relationship" with a 17-year-old.

"After an adult made a report of sexual misconduct against Fr. Newell in May 1991, he was sent for evaluation and treatment from May to November 1991," the Archdiocese of Los Angeles said. "He admitted to having an inappropriate relationship which began before he was ordained (when the

alleged victim was 17 years old) and continued while he was priest (when the alleged victim was an adult).”

The archdiocese said Newell's status is listed as “inactive” on its list because the status descriptions are intended to pertain only to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Newell said he's not the same person he was back then.

“I don't know how you were when you were 23 years old,” Newell said. “I wasn't a saint; I don't know how many people are. That's my job, working with sinners of all levels, and yet people expect something of us that is superhuman.”

In response to questions from ProPublica and the Chronicle, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles said Newell went to Tijuana for a retreat in 1993 and has remained there without permission. The archdiocese said it has repeatedly asked the Archdiocese of Tijuana to not allow Newell to minister. The response does not explain why the archdiocese didn't seek to have the Vatican strip Newell of the power to be a priest.

The archdiocese also provided two letters it sent to the police, in 2008 and 2014, reporting the allegations against Newell. Asked why the allegation was not reported to the police in 1991, a spokesman for the archdiocese, Adrian Alarcon, said the victim was an adult in 1991 and that the diocese reported it to the police only after the victim came forward again, in 2008, and indicated that he had been a minor at the time of the alleged abuse. The 2008 letter to the police suggests one reason the police may not have been contacted. “Our records indicate that” the victim “contacted the Diocese in 1991, prior to clergy becoming mandated reporters,” the letter said. “Our records do not indicate whether or not he reported the matter to law enforcement at that time.”

A man whose allegations match those detailed in the 2010 lawsuit reported Newell to law enforcement in 2014, according to a case summary from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. Newell was interviewed by police in 2015, the archdiocese said. Police presented the case to prosecutors the same year, but they said they could not pursue charges against Newell because the statute of limitations had run out.



Inside Our Lady of the Incarnation. (Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle)

Newell told ProPublica and the Chronicle in November that he would rather leave the priesthood than continue to be a distraction.

“There’s nothing I could say,” he said. “There’s just no defense ... it’s better not to talk about it.”

Newell said he hasn’t abused any other children.

But in February, another man filed a lawsuit in California against the archdiocese, saying Newell sexually abused him. The man said the abuse began in 1993.

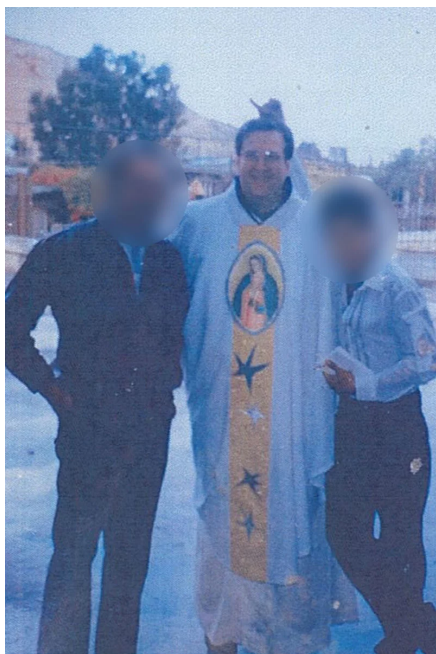
The archdiocese said it has yet to be served with the lawsuit.

Newell had been removed from his assignment and sent to a Maryland treatment center after the 1991 abuse allegation, according to the lawsuit. In 1993, the lawsuit says, the church allowed Newell to “perform parish ministry” in Tijuana, an assertion the archdiocese denies.

The plaintiff, who filed the lawsuit as a John Doe, spoke to ProPublica on the condition that he not be identified. He said he was 13 or 14 when he met Newell in Tijuana. The priest soon began asking him to stay after Mass to help him, he said, and to assist with religious education programs. The boy’s mother, who was ill, encouraged him to listen to Newell, he said.

“That’s when he started getting closer to me,” the man said. “Let’s go here, let’s go there,” the man recalled Newell saying. Newell asked him what he and his family needed financially and started buying him clothes.

“He was always talking about God and the missions that God had for me,” he said.



Newell with a boy and the boy's father, whose faces are blurred to protect their identities, in the early 1990s in Tijuana. The boy, who was 13 or 14 at the time, accused Newell in a February lawsuit of sexually abusing him for years. Newell denies the allegations. (Courtesy of Law Office of Anthony M. DeMarco)

One night, the man said, Newell asked for help at his home, where Newell had the teen perform oral sex on him.

The man said Newell also took him on trips from Tijuana to the Los Angeles area, where he continued to abuse him.

Newell denied the abuse allegations and that he took any trips to the Los Angeles area. The priest says he didn't leave Tijuana once he moved there in the early 1990s.

In a follow-up interview last month, a reporter showed the priest a photo taken in the 1990s of Newell with the boy who later accused him of abuse.

Newell said he sees thousands of people and that he didn't know the child.

"That is totally absurd," he said.

"Everyone who knows me will tell you it's absurd. Totally ridiculous. That is simply a way to get money from the church."

In 2004, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles named 211 priests who were credibly accused of sexual abuse. Newell was not on that list. He also did not appear on the next list, released a year later.

It wasn't until 2008 that Newell's name was included. The archdiocese would only say Newell was added "when additional information revealed that the misconduct may have occurred when the victim was a minor."

The archdiocese said that church officials in Rome are determining whether Newell is still part of the Los Angeles Archdiocese and that if they find that he is, the archdiocese will pursue his removal from the priesthood.

The man who filed the lawsuit in February sobbed as he recounted his allegations against Newell.

He had one request for the Catholic Church: "for him to no longer have access, the power and the influence he has over kids to do this in the name of God."

"It's Never Gonna Go Away"

For Torres, who said he was abused by Pinal, the priest who befriended his parents, the breaking point came after Pinal invited him on a trip to Mexico in the summer of 1983 or 1984. Torres said he didn't want to go, but his parents were won over by Pinal's persistence. Eventually, he gave in.

The priest raped him on the monthlong trip, Torres said. In one photo, snapped some 30 years ago on a hillside in Mexico, the priest leans on a rock, looking away from the camera, his expression inscrutable. Torres, tall but boyish, appears to frown.



A photograph of Torres, left, and Pinal on vacation in Mexico from a photo album at Pinal's home shown to and photographed by a reporter.

During the trip, Torres, who was in high school, said he started wearing a swimsuit even when he wasn't planning on getting into the water. That way, he said, he could tie it tight at the waist so the priest could not pull it down.

On a stop in Acapulco, Torres stopped talking to Pinal. "What's going on, why aren't you talking to me, don't you know that I love you?" Torres recalled Pinal saying.

He said the priest stopped paying for his food and he had to stretch his own money for the rest of the trip.

In an email responding to a reporter's questions about the trip, Pinal denied Torres' claims that he stopped paying for his food or that he provided the teenager with alcohol. But pressed about his references to "what happened" between them, Pinal sent the email on Wednesday night in which he said, "It was screwed up, but whatever happened was consensual," and in which he added that it was "only in Acapulco."

Back in California, Torres says he began to avoid Pinal, attending church with his family but no longer serving as an altar boy. He was consumed with angst and blamed himself for the abuse. "I was just like a walking zombie," Torres said.

Everything started falling apart when he started college, Torres said. He went to see Pinal in Winters, California, another rural town with a large Latino population where the priest was ministering. Torres said he meant to confront Pinal, to hurt him. But instead, after a brief visit, Torres left.

Soon after, Torres went to his home parish, Sacred Heart in Gridley, to report the abuse to another priest. A therapist hired by the diocese diagnosed Torres with post-traumatic stress disorder, and a psychiatrist said he had an adjustment disorder with anxiety and depression, according to church documents.

Church officials in Sacramento told Pinal they would not impose canonical penalties if he saw a therapist and kept them posted on his progress, according to letters reviewed by reporters. And they supported his work at a Mexican diocese, so long as its leaders "protect the diocese of Sacramento against any financial liability for any acts committed by you while working in that diocese."

Correspondence contained in his personnel file does not mention the possibility of laicization. The documents were released to Torres' attorney during a lawsuit. It also omits many of the documents a reporter reviewed in Pinal's home, which show suggestions and guidance from top diocesan officials.

Torres said he knew little about what happened to Pinal until 2002, when local police contacted him. The diocese had finally reported Pinal to police, and they were pursuing a case. They told Torres they needed his help.

He agreed to cooperate and prosecutors filed charges against the priest in California. The Diocese of Sacramento contacted the diocese in Cuernavaca, this time urging it to have Pinal return to the United States to face the charges.

Officials in Cuernavaca demurred. "With documentation, Father Antonio has shown that the case is not as you are presenting it," Bishop Florencio Olvera Ochoa wrote in a letter to the Sacramento diocese.

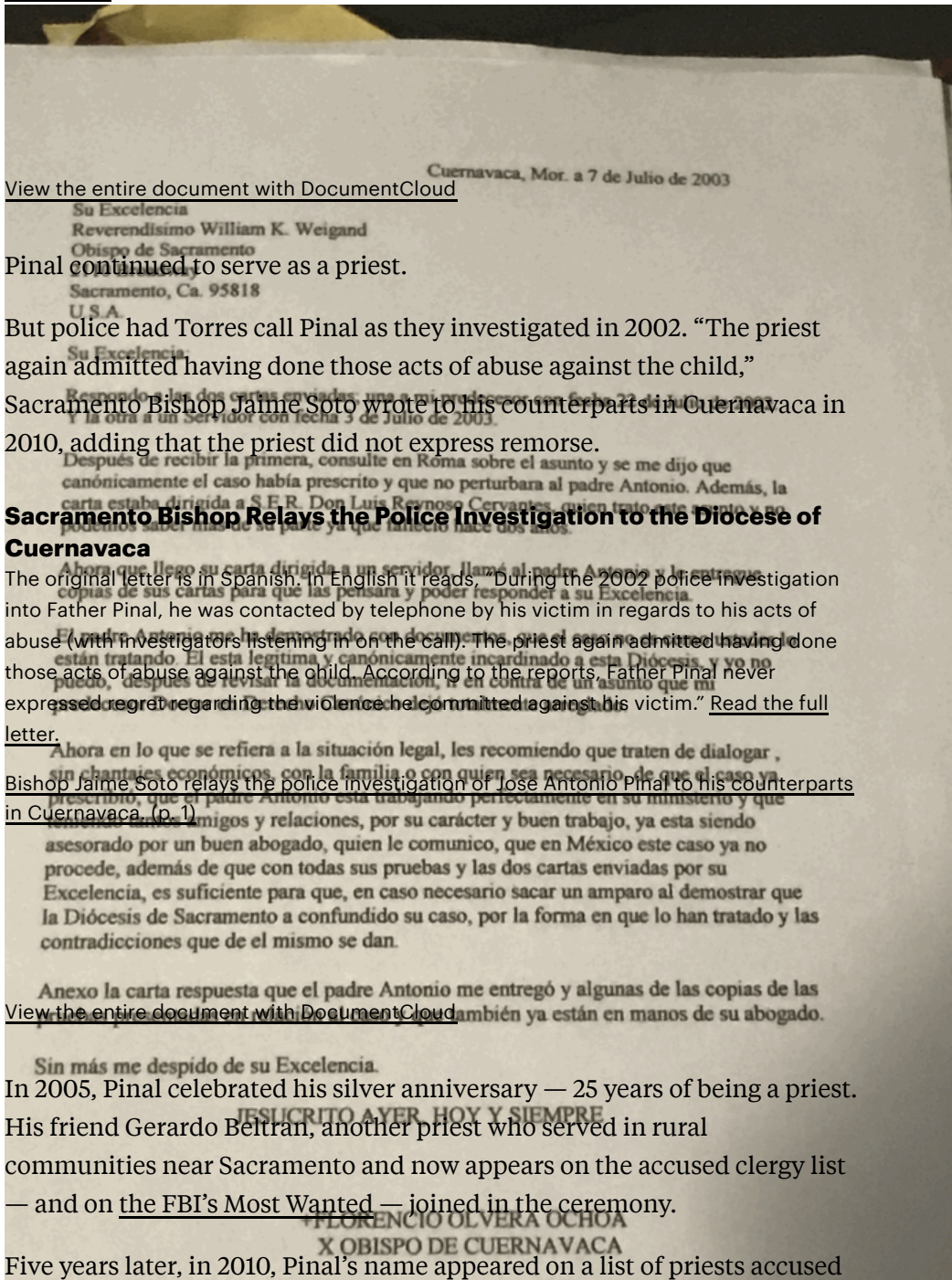
In a statement, the Diocese of Cuernavaca reiterated that the matter was concluded with Pinal joining the diocese in 1991.

Pinal had marshaled Sacramento's own letters to support his claims of innocence. He never returned to the U.S. in connection with the charges, which were later dismissed when the United States Supreme Court overturned California's retroactive extension of statutes of limitations.

Cuernavaca Bishop Responds to the Diocese of Sacramento

The original letter is in Spanish. In English it reads, "With documentation, Father Antonio has shown that the case is not as you are presenting it. He is legitimately and canonically assigned to this Diocese, and I cannot, after reviewing said documents, go against a matter that my predecessor, a Doctor in Cannon Law, left completely sorted out." [Read the full letter.](#)

[Cuernavaca Bishop Florencio Olvera Ochoa responds to the Diocese of Sacramento in 2003. \(p. 1\)](#)



[View the entire document with DocumentCloud](#)

Pinal continued to serve as a priest.

But police had Torres call Pinal as they investigated in 2002. "The priest again admitted having done those acts of abuse against the child,"

Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto wrote to his counterparts in Cuernavaca in 2010, adding that the priest did not express remorse.

Sacramento Bishop Relays the Police Investigation to the Diocese of Cuernavaca

The original letter is in Spanish. In English it reads, "During the 2002 police investigation into Father Pinal, he was contacted by telephone by his victim in regards to his acts of abuse (with investigators listening in on the call). The priest again admitted having done those acts of abuse against the child. According to the reports, Father Pinal never expressed regret regarding the violence he committed against his victim." [Read the full letter.](#)

[Bishop Jaime Soto relays the police investigation of Jose Antonio Pinal to his counterparts in Cuernavaca. \(p. 1\)](#)

[View the entire document with DocumentCloud](#)

In 2005, Pinal celebrated his silver anniversary — 25 years of being a priest. His friend Gerardo Beltran, another priest who served in rural communities near Sacramento and now appears on the accused clergy list — and on the [FBI's Most Wanted](#) — joined in the ceremony.

Five years later, in 2010, Pinal's name appeared on a list of priests accused of sexually abusing children released by SNAP Mexico, a now-independent offshoot of the U.S.-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. And in 2019, the Diocese of Sacramento put him on its own [list](#), saying that it had five credible allegations against the priest — three of them from the same year Torres came forward.

Accusation No. 1, reported in 1989: "sexual touching and fondling, masturbation, sodomy/penetration." The next three accusations on the list involving mere teenage boys are all identical: "Admitted to abuse of minor; details unknown." A woman accused Pinal of "oral copulation" in 2016, reporting that it occurred when she was under 14 years old, according to the list.



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"I never admitted what they say," Pinal told ProPublica. "And what happened was never an abuse."

26 de abril de 2010

Correspondence between the Dioceses of Sacramento and Cuernavaca reviewed by reporters, does not mention the additional abuse accusations.

Excmo. Mons. Alfonso Cortés Contreras
Diócesis de Cuernavaca
Hidalgo #17
Zona Centro, 62000
Cuernavaca, Morelia
México

Su Excelencia:

Por medio de la presente, le saludo con la paz de nuestro Señor Jesús, cuya resurrección celebramos gozosamente en esta temporada Pascual.

Pinal said he was swept up in

allegations by people looking for payouts. "There were cases in various parts of the U.S. who

Me dijo a usted para avisarle de unos hechos graves cometidos por un sacerdote que según los informes, todavía funciona como sacerdote en su diócesis. El Reverendo Presbítero José Torres, en 1983 contra un niño de 14 años. El Padre Pinal admitió haber cometido estos graves delitos. Mi sinceridad expresó ningún remordimiento por haber cometido estos hechos.

were being attacked," he said in an

En 1989 o 1990, el Monseñor Francis Quinn, obispo de Sacramento en aquel entonces, avisó al Monseñor Luis Reynoso Cervantes, obispo actual de Cuernavaca, lo que había hecho el Padre Pinal y le aconsejó que era muy riesgoso dejarlo funcionar como sacerdote.

interview in his home in

En Noviembre de 1990, el Monseñor Alphonse Gallegos, obispo auxiliar de Sacramento en aquel entonces, viajó hasta Cuernavaca a entrevistarse con el Mons. Reynoso para avisarle de la amenaza grave que existía al dejar al Padre Pinal funcionar como sacerdote en la Diócesis de Cuernavaca.

September. "Everyone who

worked with me in the United

States and knew me knew I would

never do anything bad."

En 2002, las autoridades policíacas en Sacramento, California, informaron al Monseñor William Weigand, obispo de Sacramento en aquel entonces, que el Padre Pinal estaba funcionando como sacerdote en una parroquia de la Diócesis de Cuernavaca. El Mons. Weigand volvió a escribirle al Mons. Reynoso para expresar su preocupación referente al hecho que el Padre Pinal todavía funcionaba en su diócesis.

But Torres said the effects of the

abuse followed him to this day.

When he lost his job during the

En el curso de la investigación del Padre Pinal por las autoridades policíacas en 2002, él fue víctima de un robo de dinero por su víctima (con los investigadores escuchando la llamada) sobre sus actos de abuso. El Padre volvió a admitir el haber cometido esos actos de abuso contra el niño. Según los informes, el Padre nunca expresó ningún remordimiento por la violencia que había cometido sobre su víctima.

Great Recession, Torres decided to tackle his trauma. He dipped into his

retirement plan and spent seven months in residential treatment in

Mississippi and Florida. Getting help became a full-time job, said Torres,

who now works for the state government in Sacramento.

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For the first time, Torres was able to really talk about what happened. And for the first time, he said, he began to believe that it wasn't his fault.

"It's never gonna go away," he said, "but at least now I have some tools to cope with the stress."

Around the same time, his marriage ended in divorce. Torres has fallen out of touch with his kids, now teens and young adults. After the divorce, he didn't speak to them for two or three years. More recently, they've come to visit.

His relationship with his parents has never fully recovered. After spending time in the Bay Area and in rehab, he moved back to Gridley, where he says the abuse began. But he and his parents don't talk about what happened.

“My mom was probably the closest. She says, ‘I love you, I’m sorry,’” he said.

One day, Torres said, he wants to tell his parents he doesn’t blame them, that it’s not their fault.

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