



Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Honduras attends a Mass for Latin America in St. Peter's Basilica in 2011.

VATICAN

## Honduran Seminarians Allege Widespread Homosexual Misconduct

But to date, Cardinal Maradiaga has not responded publicly to the allegations regarding his archdiocesan seminary.

By Edward Pentin – Posted 7/25/18 at 4:09 PM

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras — Nearly 50 seminarians in Honduras have protested against what they say is a widespread and entrenched pattern of homosexual practice in Tegucigalpa's major seminary.

In a letter written to the seminary's formators that was subsequently circulated in June to the country's Catholic bishops, the seminarians asserted "irrefutable evidence" exists that a homosexual network pervades the institution and is being protected by its rector.

"Heterosexual seminarians are scandalized and really depressed," one of the seminarians who drafted the letter told the Register.

"Many are thinking about leaving the seminary," the seminarian said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of a fear of reprisals. "I fear that many will leave."

The disturbing Honduran allegations have particular resonance in the United States because they echo some key aspects of the current scandal in the Church in the United States, surrounding alleged sexual abuse by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the archbishop emeritus of Washington.

Similar to the charges surrounding Cardinal McCarrick, who reportedly engaged in a long-standing practice of pressuring seminarians into sexual activity with him while he was serving as bishop in two New Jersey dioceses during the 1980s and 1990s, Auxiliary Bishop Jose Juan Pineda Fasquelle of Tegucigalpa has been accused of engaging in homosexual interactions with Tegucigalpa seminarians.

And, just as the revelations regarding Cardinal McCarrick have provoked troubling questions about what his brother U.S. bishops and the Vatican knew about his interactions with seminarians and about why nothing was disclosed publicly for so long, the Honduran allegations call into question the actions of Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa.

While Cardinal Maradiaga — a key confidante of Pope Francis who is coordinator of the “C9” group of cardinals advising him on reforming Church governance and the Roman Curia — is not himself the subject of allegations of sexual misconduct, he is now under fire for appearing to have disregarded a wealth of evidence of homosexual misconduct by Bishop Pineda, whose [resignation](#) as auxiliary bishop was accepted by Pope Francis July 20.

The Honduran seminarians’ letter reportedly was not met with praise for having come forward in June; Cardinal Maradiaga instead accused the seminarians of being “gossipers” who wish to portray their fellow seminarians in a bad light, according to sources in Honduras.

## The Letter

The Register has obtained the text of the unsigned letter, which was a joint effort undertaken by 48 seminarians (of the 180 who are enrolled there) who stated they could not “hide any more the magnitude of this problem in the seminary.”

“We are living and experiencing a time of tension in our house because of gravely immoral situations, above all of an active homosexuality inside the seminary that has been a taboo all this time,” the seminarians wrote, “and by covering up and penalizing this situation, the problem has grown in strength, turning into, as one priest said not so long ago, an ‘epidemic in the seminary.’”

The letter called on seminary formators to follow what the Church teaches about such conduct and requested a new “formative process” that is more up to date and represents a “holistic” and “prophetic” vision. And it asserted that any seminarian who engages in homosexual activity should be removed from the seminary, even if he is a friend of the formators, because such a person clearly is “not suitable for pastoral ministry” and will “cause pain to the Church sooner or later.”

“Not everyone who wants to can be a priest!” the letter stated. “The ministry is a gift that should be lived and received from the conviction of the Gospel and radical and jealous love.”

The seminarians insisted their letter was not carrying out a “persecution” or exemplifying “homophobia,” accusations that some local Church leaders have leveled when seminarians raised similar concerns on earlier occasions. “Neither is it gossip or a lack of manliness,” they said.

And, the seminarians noted in the letter’s concluding paragraph, their submission was not the product of merely a single concerned party, but instead was written “by a group of seminarians” who had been urged by spiritual directors and other priests at the seminary to make their concerns known.

“We humbly ask forgiveness if our words offend you or make you uncomfortable, but we are convinced it was necessary to express with freedom, respect and charity this reality,” the seminarians told their formators. “We express our brotherly affection and pray for you who are the head of this house and who also have a difficult mission. We put you in the hands of Our Lady of Suyapa, patroness of this seminary, and St. Joseph, patron of all the seminarians of the world in the universal Church.”

Part of the impetus for the letter to bishops was that a seminarian from the Honduran Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán tried but failed to take his own life in April, after he had discovered his male lover in the seminary was in another relationship.

The Register has obtained a copy of the seminarian's suicide note. "I am going to my Father's house," the handwritten letter reads. "I never believed that my friend, my brother, the one that I trusted everything and which I gave too many things," would have "betrayed me that way."

The Register also obtained graphic photographic evidence of homosexual pornography, exchanged on WhatsApp between seminarians who did not sign the letter, as well as other obscene messages. The exchanges have been verified as authentic by computer specialists at the Catholic University of Honduras who searched computer memory and handed the exchanges to the country's bishops.

### The Bishops' Response

In early June, during the permanent assembly of the Honduran bishops' conference, Bishop Hector David Garcia Osorio of Yoro, who is in charge of vocations and seminaries, asked that the matter of homosexuality in the major seminary be discussed. The seminarians' letter was then circulated among the bishops at the meeting.

According to sources, when the letter was read out at the assembly, Cardinal Maradiaga and Bishop Angel Garachana Pérez of San Pedro Sula, the president of the bishops' conference of Honduras, immediately started attacking the letter's authors.

Bishop Guy Charbonneau of Choluteca confirmed to the Register June 29 that the permanent assembly received the letter. He said the bishops' conference is carrying out an investigation to see if the allegations are true. "We are currently in this process," said Bishop Charbonneau. "Each bishop has to deal with it by interviewing the seminarians from their own diocese."

"This is a new problem," he added. "Perhaps it happened in other years, but not like the dimension that is being talked about now."

The Honduran bishops met again July 23 to discuss the seminarians' protests. A source close to the discussions told the Register it is likely no immediate action will be taken to respond to the alleged problems within the seminary.

The Register contacted the offices of Cardinal Maradiaga, the Honduran bishops' conference and each of the country's individual bishops, requesting further comment about the matter. None of the bishops had replied to the Register's queries at the time this article was published.

"Homosexuality in the seminary is a problem which has proliferated in the past few years," said the seminarian who spoke with the Register under condition of anonymity.

"Another big problem is that when someone speaks differently than what the bishops or cardinal are saying, they are censured and expelled," he added.

“The bishops have been meeting and speaking about this,” he said. “When the problem was discovered, people at first said ‘No’ and denied it. The problem is that this problem [of homosexuality] has appeared, and it is denied. The cardinal, sadly, has denied it. But the problem is here.”

Added the seminarian, “If people come and investigate here, they will find worse things than were found in Chile.”

## Bishop Pineda’s Resignation

The news of the seminarians’ protest came after months of allegations involving homosexual abuse and financial misconduct by Bishop Pineda.

Since last December, Cardinal Maradiaga has been accused of allowing Bishop Pineda to continue to serve in his post, and even placing him in charge of the archdiocese during the cardinal’s absence to receive medical treatments for prostate cancer in Houston, despite a body of allegations against Bishop Pineda of homosexual relationships — including with seminarians.

Bishop Pineda was also accused of financial [impropriety](#), which came to light in a papal investigation last year. The findings of that investigation reportedly were submitted to Pope Francis in May 2017, but have not been publicly disclosed.

In March, the Register obtained the [text](#) of two testimonies from seminarians submitted to the investigation, detailing allegations of serious sexual misconduct by Bishop Pineda.

The Vatican did not disclose the specific reason Bishop Pineda had resigned. In a statement released immediately after his resignation was announced July 20, the bishop also provided no explanation and expressed little contrition. In his statement, he said he had tried “with all my heart to serve ... the archbishop, clergy, seminarians and People of God” of the Archdiocese of Tegucigalpa.

“If I succeeded, blessed be God,” Bishop Pineda said. “If I failed you, I apologize.”

While the Vatican did not disclose whether the allegations of sexual misconduct with seminarians were decisive in the Pope’s acceptance of Bishop Pineda’s resignation, both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have emphasized that men who engage in homosexual activity or who have “deep-seated” homosexual inclinations should not be admitted to seminaries.

In 2005, shortly after Pope Benedict’s election, the Congregation for Catholic Education released its “[Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations With Regard to Persons With Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders.](#)”

That Vatican document affirmed the Church “cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called ‘gay culture.’”

Stated the document, “Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. One must in no way overlook the negative

consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies.”

Speaking to Italy’s bishops at an audience in late May, Pope Francis unequivocally reaffirmed that men with “deep-seated tendencies” or who engage in “homosexual acts” are not suitable candidates for seminary admission.

Regarding such men, “If you have even the slightest doubt, it’s better not to let them enter,” Francis said, [according to Vatican Insider](#), because their admission can lead to scandals and compromise the community life of the seminary.

## Cardinal Maradiaga

Cardinal Maradiaga had not responded to questions submitted by the Register regarding the allegations of widespread homosexual misconduct at the Tegucigalpa archdiocesan seminary by the time this article was published. But an informed source said he views them as inventions.

“He looks out for the guilty but doesn’t realize that over half the seminarians are homosexuals,” the source said, adding that some formators recently refused to participate in priestly ordinations because of the candidates’ alleged homosexuality. “The cardinal ordained them himself,” the source said.

To date, Pope Francis has declined to accept Cardinal Rodriguez Maradiaga’s resignation, which the cardinal was obliged to submit last December, upon turning 75, the mandatory retirement age for bishops.

But in light of the Pope’s [action taken](#) in Chile over clerical sex abuse, and Vatican involvement in the restrictions placed on Cardinal McCarrick following a [“credible” allegation](#) of sexual abuse of a minor in the early 1970s in the Archdiocese of New York, observers are suggesting Cardinal Maradiaga now could be held more accountable for the problems that have surfaced in his own archdiocese.

[A July 20 Associated Press article](#) specifically linked the situation in Tegucigalpa with the question of how Pope Francis might respond to the Cardinal McCarrick revelations.

Noted the article, “Auxiliary Bishop Juan José Pineda Fasquelle, 57, was accused of sexual misconduct with seminarians and lavish spending on his lovers that was so obvious to Honduras’ poverty-wracked faithful that Maradiaga is now under pressure to reveal what he knew of Pineda’s misdeeds and why he tolerated a sexually active gay bishop in his ranks.”

*[Edward Pentin](#) is the Register’s Rome correspondent.*

*Register correspondent [Sabrina Arena Ferrisi](#) contributed to this report.*