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Bishop resigns after disclosing he is father of two children

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Bishop Gabino Zavala (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

VATICAN CITY -- Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Gabino Zavala has resigned after disclosing to superiors that he is the father of two children.

The Vatican announced the bishop's resignation Jan. 4 in a one-line statement that cited church law on resignation for illness or other serious reasons.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez announced the "sad and difficult" news in a letter to Catholics in the archdiocese. He said Bishop Zavala, who was auxiliary bishop for the San Gabriel Pastoral Region, had informed him in early December that he was the father of two minor teenage children who live with their mother in another state.

Bishop Zavala told Archbishop Gomez that he had submitted his resignation to Pope Benedict XVI. Since that time, Bishop Zavala has not been in ministry and "will be living privately," Archbishop Gomez said.

"The archdiocese has reached out to the mother and children to provide spiritual care as well as funding to assist the children with college costs. The family's identity is not known to the public, and I wish to respect their right to privacy," Archbishop Gomez said. He asked prayers for all those affected by the situation.

Zavala has also served as the bishop-president of Pax Christi USA, the national arm of the international peace group, since 2003.

John Zokovitch, the communications director for Pax Christi USA, said in an email to *NCR* that the organization had learned of Zavala's resignation this morning, and would like to "offer our prayers for all those involved and all those who are affected by this news during this difficult time."

Zokovitch also said in a brief phone call that while the news of Zavala's resignation was unexpected, it comes as the organization was already preparing to replace the bishop as its president as his third, three-year term was set to expire.

Bishop Zavala's resignation leaves a vacancy in the chairman's position of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Communications. Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, had no immediate announcement about who would assume the chairmanship.

"There won't be anything here for a day or two," she said.

Tod Tamberg, Los Angeles archdiocesan spokesman, said the archdiocese had received questions about the

possible usage of archdiocesan funds by the bishop to support his children and their mother. He said a financial audit of the San Gabriel pastoral region budget found everything in order.

"There's been no indication of mismanagement or misuses of archdiocesan funds," Tamberg told Catholic News Service.

"This is unexpected, sad and disorienting news for many who know and like him," he said.

Here is the text of Archbishop Gomez' letter, dated Jan. 4:

> *Dear Brothers and Sisters:*
>
> *I have some sad and difficult information to share with you. Bishop Gabino Zavala, auxiliary bishop for the San Gabriel Pastoral Region, informed me in early December that he is the father of two minor teenage children, who live with their mother in another state.*
>
> *Bishop Zavala also told me that he submitted his resignation to the Holy Father in Rome, which was accepted. Since that time, he has not been in ministry and will be living privately.*
>
> *The archdiocese has reached out to the mother and children to provide spiritual care as well as funding to assist the children with college costs. The family's identity is not known to the public, and I wish to respect their right to privacy.*
>
> *Let us pray for all those impacted by this situation and for each other as we reflect on this letter.*
>
> *May the Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, grant you peace.*
>
> *Most Reverend Jose H. Gomez*
>
> *Archbishop of Los Angeles*

Biographical information about Zavala from the Los Angeles archdiocese's website says that Zavala is a native of Guerrero, Mexico, but grew up in Los Angeles. After attending St. John?s Seminary, he was ordained a priest in 1977 by Cardinal Timothy Manning and was assigned to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in East Los Angeles.

He earned a degree in canon law from The Catholic University of America, worked in the tribunal and was named rector of St. John?s Seminary in 1992.

Two years later, Cardinal Roger Mahony ordained him as Auxiliary Bishop for the San Gabriel Region.

This news report is being updated throughout the day.

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