News



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A group of Brazilian missionaries announced July 3 they've left their post in Nicaragua, becoming the latest community of women religious to leave the country, where some Catholics are facing increasing persecution by the government.

The Sisters Poor of Jesus Christ posted their statement on Facebook, announcing the community's departure from Nicaragua and its arrival in El Salvador, along with photos showing sisters getting off a bus carrying a crucifix and then posing for a photo with a statue of Michael the Archangel, one of the group's patron saints.

"We want through this statement to express our gratitude for the seven years of mission in the lands of Nicaragua, we appreciate the welcome of the church and its people during that time in which our charism remained in the country serving the poor in their multiple facets," says the statement posted in Spanish and Portuguese on the Fraternidade O Caminho page.



The Sisters Poor of Jesus Christ posted a statement on Facebook July 3 announcing the community's departure from Nicaragua and its arrival in El Salvador. (Courtesy of the Sisters Poor of Jesus Christ via Facebook)

A July 3 article by the EFE news agency published in La Prensa Gráfica, one of El Salvador's national newspapers, said the community had expected to leave Nicaragua the week of July 9 following the fate of other religious communities with foreign missionaries who have not been allowed by the government to renew their legal residency.

The sisters do not say in the statement what hastened their departure or even mention that they were expelled, but thank "consecrated women, laypeople, young people, benefactors and friends who built the mission with us making it possible to bring Christ to the poor" in Nicaragua.

They added, "With these sentiments, we inform that our sisters were sent to the mission of El Salvador to continue their mission."

In late June 2022, a group of 18 Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by St. Teresa of Kolkata, was expelled from the country and took refuge in nearby Costa Rica. Many of them are originally from India, but at least one was a Nicaraguan national.

In March 2023, a group of Trappist sisters from Argentina, who had been in Nicaragua for 22 years, announced they were leaving Nicaragua because of a lack of vocations. Shortly after the sisters' departure, the government confiscated their property, something that almost all expelled communities later reported.

After their departure, two elderly members of the Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata returned to their native Costa Rica in mid-April after being expelled, said officials from the Tilarán-Liberia Diocese, which took them in.

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Catholic sisters are not the only members of the Catholic Church suffering persecution from the government of president Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, who's also the country's vice president.

One of the country's bishops is in exile in Miami and another, Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, was sentenced in February to 26 years after being accused of treason. Reuters reported July 5 that he was freed late July 4, but Managua's Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Báez, who's in exile, tweeted July 5 that he has received no information about Álvarez's reported liberation. Other news stories say Cardinal Leopoldo José Brenes, archbishop of Managua, Nicaragua, denied July 5 that the bishop had been released.

The present tension between the Catholic Church and the government began in April 2018 after churches opened their doors to people injured during clashes with government forces and pro-government groups. But by then the relationship between the country's bishops and the government had been on the downslide.

Representatives of Nicaragua's consecrated life did not attend a recent board meeting of the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Religious, or CLAR, in Lima, Peru, in early June, fearing they would not be allowed to return to the country,

the organization said.

Holy Week celebrations, which largely take place outdoors, were greatly limited and celebrated mostly inside churches in the country this year.