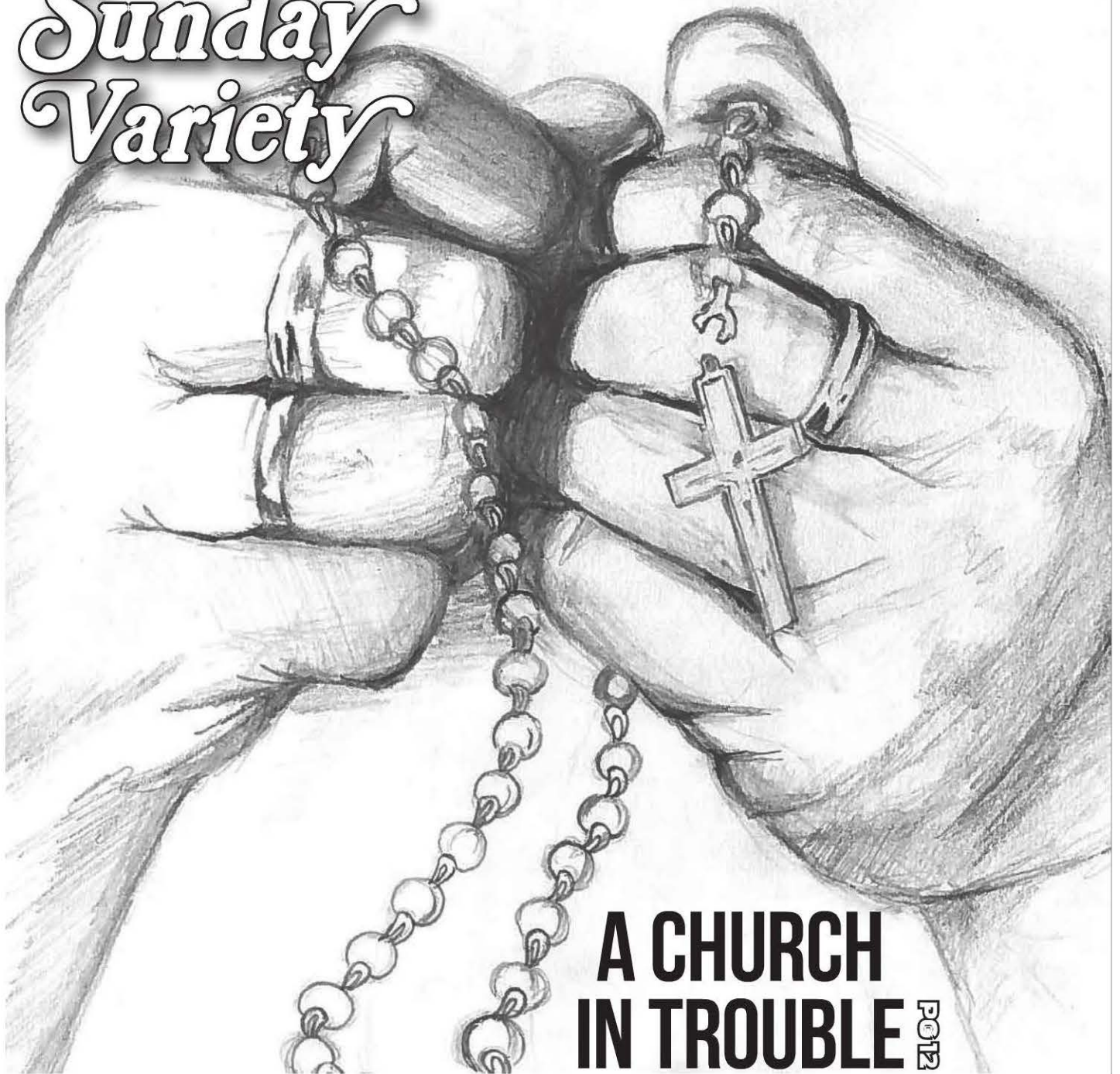


Sunday Variety



A CHURCH IN TROUBLE PC12

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9 things you must not miss if you take a trip to Rota.

Outside the classroom

Educating the youth on water source conservation.

Crispy-licious

Check out Robert Tupaz's latest edition of food finds.

Molinos

Q&A with a local veteran in the island's weightlifting community.

Philiscenes

Finding creative inspiration in Manila.

Royal visit

Japan's Imperial Couple make a historic two-day trip to Palau.

Not her style

There are some trends Janela Carrera won't try.

Literary

Read a poem by Jacelyn Cosby.



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// RAMBLINGS FROM THE EDITOR

By Mar-Vic Cagurangan



The pulpit disgraced

As in any typical Catholic community, the betoken partition between the church and the state is, to quote Jasmine Stole in our cover story, "less of a boundary as much as it is a suggestion." This holds true for Guam, a predominantly Catholic island, where the Church is a way of life and an influential force.

"The testimony of prominent church officials thwarted initiatives for gambling and same-sex marriages," Stole writes. "When the Church is in the news, most of the island will pay attention. So when men of the cloth are publicly questioned, the faiths of many are stirred."

In the past three decades, the Catholic faithful all over the world have been "stirred" by a host of scandals - mostly involving sex abuses - that have bedeviled the church and its clergy almost without lull.

On Guam, however, scrutinizing and disgracing the Church was, for the longest time, almost heresy. In a community where everyone is intermeshed with everyone, disgraceful tales behind the altar were either bleeped or simply spoken in whispers. Until recently.

And by now, stories about wayward clerics have been amply familiar, competing with political shenanigans for the day's main headline. With the local archdiocese knocked back on its heels,

Archbishop Anthony Apuron has found himself needing PR crisis managers. Over the last three years, controversies involving priests engaged in financial, moral and sexual impropriety have cropped up in crescendo.

On Guam, however, scrutinizing and disgracing the Church was, for the longest time, almost heresy. In a community where everyone is intermeshed with everyone, disgraceful tales behind the altar were either bleeped or simply spoken in whispers. Until recently.

There was Fr. John Wadeson, whose alleged sexual misconduct in the 1970s had surfaced and became the talk of the town. Then there was Monsignor James Benavente, whom Archbishop Apuron accused of financial misappropriation - an allegation that divided Guam's faithful. And very recently, Fr. Luis Camacho's arrest and purported sexual contact with a minor was the staple at coffee shop talk.

The pulpit stilted church leaders, making them more conspicuous to their congregation. In the same breath, it makes their human imperfections transparent.

"People have an idea that the preacher is an actor on a stage and they are the critics, blaming or praising him," the Danish

philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard. "What they don't know is that they are the actors on the stage; he (the preacher) is merely the prompter standing in the wings, reminding them of their lost lines."

And when they lost their lines, the faiths of the faithful are wont to be shaken.

See story on page 12.

Send feedback to managingeditor@mvguam.com or Sunday@mvguam.com.

ABOUT THE COVER



KRISTINE CHANG ZEPEDA

The cover art, titled "Fallen from Grace," is a pencil drawing by Kristine Chang Zepeda, an art teacher at the Bishop Baumgartner Memorial Catholic School. Kristine, the daughter of artists Tina and Rolly Zepeda, grew up with a keen eye for art. She spent most of her life on Guam and Saipan, learning and loving the island life. Kristine is passionate about teaching. Her parents, being art teachers, inspired her to become one. The greatest part of teaching, according to Kristine, is seeing her students appreciate the history and the people who make up the beautiful world of art. Kristine is pursuing her master's in Special Education at the University of Guam, hoping that one day she will be able to conduct art therapy classes for children with disabilities.





SIN

IN THE PULPIT

CAN THE EMBATTLED CHURCH SAVE ITSELF?

Guam's Catholic community has taken a sizable hit as news of priests engaging in unpriest-like behavior has made the media rounds.



Story by Jasmine Stole



SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2015



*Around here the church
is a way of life and an
influential force.*

Photo by Jonathan Abella

For Guam, the Catholic Church is a major part of island's culture. Since the Spanish occupation in the mid-1600s through the late 1800s, Guam's largely Catholic base has withstood centuries, evolving with the culture and the times, embedding Catholic practices into the way of life.

The most obvious example of which are the widespread celebrations of Catholic saints, complete with processions, prayers and parties. Fiestas honoring each village's patron saint are held almost every month, with hundreds participating in the celebration.

There are also minor details that convey the island's strong ties to Catholicism. Mayors' offices are often in the center of the village, most often near that village's parish grounds. Despite having only two seasons on Guam, local public schools always take a "spring break" during Holy Week – the week during which Catholics honor Jesus' death and resurrection. It is arguably the basis for the Catholic faith, which Christians of all denominations point to as the defining miracle of their religion.

During Lent, most restaurants offer Lenten specials, doing away



◀ *Tim Rohr,*
photographed by
Matt Weiss

with beef and pork entrees to play up their seafood specials for the Catholics who give up eating meat. Many government construction projects are a blessed by a priest before and after they are completed. If there is no formal benediction scheduled at the end or beginning of islandwide address or other social event, at the very least someone nudges someone else to bless the table of food – and there is always food – by way of saying grace before the meal.

Around here, the separation between church and state is less of

a boundary as much as it is a suggestion. The Church is a way of life and an influential force. The testimony of prominent church officials thwarted initiatives for gambling and same-sex marriages.

When the Church is in the news, most of the island will pay attention. So when men of the cloth are publicly questioned, the faiths of many are stirred.

Over the last three years allegations of priests engaged in financial, moral and sexual

impropriety have surfaced, a slew of proverbial stones launched at the walls of Guam's Catholic foundation.

"There is no doubt that scandals in the local church have shaken the Catholic faithful. And there is no doubt that without the media coverage these scandals may not have been as well known," said Tim Rohr, Catholic blogger and author of *Junglewatch*.

Prior to the 2014 series of reports focused on Fr. John Wadeson's alleged sexual misconduct in the 1970s, Monsignor James Benavente reported financial misconduct and Fr. Luis Camacho's arrest and purported sexual contact with a minor, was the clash between Fr. Paul Gofigan and Archbishop Anthony Apuron.

According to Gofigan, Apuron accused him of having a homosexual relationship with Joseph Lastimoza, a married father who helped at Santa Barbara parish in Dededo where Gofigan was assigned to minister. In 2013, Apuron removed Gofigan as pastor of Santa Barbara and has not reinstated him.

In December 2014, Gofigan wrote to Apuron directly questioning him over the accusation. Gofigan's letter cited an incident from November 2013, during which the archbishop reportedly insinuated Gofigan and Lastimoza were "intimate." Gofigan wrote that the arch- ➔



bishop reportedly said Gofigan had a stairway built to his room on the second floor of the parish. Gofigan wrote that the archbishop said, Lastimoza would "come in the middle of the night with cases of beer and whatnot and stay there until the early morning." The accusations were "slandorous and defamatory," Gofigan said.

To date, the archbishop has not reinstated Gofigan to the Santa Barbara parish and nor has he made any public mention of possible reinstatement.

When Gofigan's dispute with Apuron died down, Apuron was faced with another scandal.

Last summer, Fr. John Wadeson was publicly ousted by national organization, Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) after he was found out to be one of dozens of priests banned from ministering in the California area.

Wadeson had been serving with the Agana Archdiocese since 2000, when SNAP reported he was involved in a possible abuse case involving two children that occurred in the 1970s. The archbishop acted quickly. Within a week, Apuron announced Wadeson's "removal."

Wadeson bought an advertisement space in the U Matuna Si Yu'os, the island's Catholic newspaper, and explained his disappointment. Wadeson's advertisement was published within days of his departure to San Francisco, California.

Wadeson's departure was soon followed by the removal of Monsignor James Benavente as rector for the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica and Hagatna. Days after Benavente celebrated 20 years as monsignor on Guam and 20 years as a rector for the Cathedral-Basilica, Apuron served him a letter informing him of his removal.

If Gofigan's dispute raised some eyebrows and Wadeson's past shook some heads, Benavente's abrupt removal had the people up in arms.

In a display of solidarity, dozens of Catholics gathered at the steps of the Cathedral last July to pray for the monsignor.

Benavente's removal as rector has left Catholics on Guam bereft, said Jon Calvo, secretary of the parish council, at the start of the prayer service held last July. "Make no mistake - while we respect the authority of Archbishop Anthony Apuron by virtue of his position of leadership, we feel compelled to speak out over this," Calvo said.



◀ Archbishop Anthony Apuron, photographed by Matt Weiss

Calvo encouraged the crowd to reach out to at least one person who had not attended the service. "We can amass a legion of followers of Christ, bridge builders, who are willing to take up the cause of healing wounds of division and be agents of peace and change," Calvo said.

He encouraged the group to write to Archbishop Martin Krebs, the apostolic nuncio to Guam and Oceania with their concerns. Calvo added that the same concerns be voiced to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, a prefect with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome.

Apuron said the financial misconduct with church finances occurred under Benavente's watch. Disputing Apuron's allegation, financial professionals came to Benavente's defense, saying the former rector was actually trying to help the archdiocese's finances.

In the end, Benavente was assigned to serve at a local Catholic private school and a new rector was reinstated. Later last year a group of Concerned Catholics openly challenged Apuron to be more transparent and called on him to unveil the church's finances, unedited.

With two priests scrutinized publicly and a group challenging Apuron's intentions, the string of public disagreements between members of the church and the church's leader did not go unnoticed by higher ups in Rome. Archbishop Krebs visited the island in July, but a second visit in January of this year was much anticipated, especially because Krebs was accompanied by Archbishop Savio HON Tai-Fai, secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The Rome delegation came, met

with church members and left, without fanfare and the archdiocese did not disclose what was said behind those closed door talks.

Three months after the Rome delegation left, another controversy came up, as Fr. Luis Camacho was arrested after police found him with a minor parked at the beach.

Police confirmed Camacho was arrested and charged him jurisdiction over a minor last month. The next week after Camacho's arrest Deacon Steve Martinez, who Apuron threatened at one point last year was threatened with censure, reported that Camacho had sexual contact with the girl police found him with.

Camacho, like Gofigan and Wadeson, was removed from his assignment as pastor of parishes in Umatac and Merizo. Camacho's faculties were restricted.

Apuron, as the leader of the local archdiocese, will always be at the center of any scandal and he operates methodically, with deliberation in the face of controversy. A sit-down interview with the archdiocese is rare. For this article, a request for an interview was not entertained.

Official word sent to the press about a priest's wayward actions is brief and always spelled out in a statement. Further follow-up statements almost never surface, except in the case of Monsignor Benavente, when the archdiocese issued more than one statement with Apuron's signature affixed to it.

"In the cases of the Fr. Wadeson and Msgr. James Benavente, the press was made aware by statements to the press made directly by the archdiocese, so it really

was the Archbishop himself who initiated the news," Rohr said. "In the case of Fr. Camacho, there was an arrest, so the archdiocese could hardly hide it so the archdiocese issued a statement on that case as well."

Rohr said the public account of reported misconduct among church leaders has turned some Catholics against the church.

"Attendance is definitely down in some parishes, especially the Cathedral-Basilica, but up in others. The faithful who care about these matters are protesting with their feet. They also seem to be protesting with their checkbooks," Rohr said. "The tallies from the annual appeal (a special Lenten collection to support seminarians and certain ministries) are normally published in the archdiocesan newspaper. However, there has yet to be any public notice of those collections. So we can assume the amount is so low that it would be an embarrassment to publish."

There is no indication that disagreements among church members have been resolved. As of late, the Concerned Catholics of Guam, a group that has called for transparency from the archdiocese leadership, have been holding village meetings.

They've noted a distinct divide within the church and are calling on the leader of the archdiocese to mend this divide. "If I was to commit the sin of stealing and then confess the sin, the confessor would be wrong to absolve the sin and not direct me to provide restitution insofar as possible," Rohr said.

Rohr listed a host of ways by which the archbishop could help begin the process of healing the church, including reinstating Gofigan to Santa Barbara, reinstating Benavente as rector, retracting statements made against Benavente and publishing information related to church property and finances.

Most of Rohr's lengthy list, however, requests that the archbishop "publicly apologize."

For many people in the archdiocese, healing begins with an apology. "How can the church find true healing? By doing exactly what the church teaches about healing," Rohr said.

Or, as the Bible said in Luke 17:3-4, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."