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Auxiliary Bishop Lee Piche of St. Paul and Minneapolis concelebrates Mass with U.S. bishops from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota at the tomb of Blessed John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 6, 2012. The bishops were making their "ad limina" visits to report on the status of their dioceses to the pope and Vatican officials. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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Bishop Lee A. Piché, who eight years ago resigned from the office of auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis amid charges that the archdiocese had ignored warning signs of a priest abusing minors, will return to service in the archdiocese as the archbishop's representative to retired priests beginning July 1.

In his time away, Piché, 65, "has embraced a life of prayer and penance for the intention of victims of abuse in the archdiocese, and for efforts to bring healing into the lives of those who have been impacted in any way by clergy abuse," the archdiocese said in a statement June 22 announcing the assignment.

On the same day, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda announced to the priests of the archdiocese that Piché had accepted his invitation to return to the archdiocese as the vicar for retired priests, the statement said.

At Hebda's request, Piché also will continue to be available for restorative justice efforts related to abuse, according to the archdiocese. At a meeting of retired priests in May, the clergy gathered had "unanimously supported an invitation to Bishop Piché to serve as Vicar for Retired Priests," the statement said.

"Prior to extending the invitation, Archbishop Hebda consulted as well with a number of individuals who had been personally impacted by the abuse crisis and other members of the community who have been involved in assisting the Archdiocese in its ongoing outreach to survivors and in its work to provide safe environments in our schools and churches," the statement said. "Bishop Piché will be assuming his new role July 1."

In June 2015, Piché resigned alongside Archbishop John C. Nienstedt 10 days after the Ramsey County Attorney's Office filed criminal and civil charges against the archdiocese as a corporation, without citing individuals, alleging it failed to protect three boys who were sexually abused from 2008 to 2010 by Curtis Wehmeyer, a former priest of the archdiocese, while he was pastor of Blessed Sacrament in St. Paul.

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At the time the charges were filed, Wehmeyer had already been convicted of the abuse and sentenced to five years in prison. He was dismissed from the priesthood in March 2015.

Criminal charges against the archdiocese were dropped in 2016 as Hebda acknowledged the archdiocese's failure in handling Wehmeyer's case and Ramsey County officials cited the archdiocese's collaboration in child protection efforts.

At the time of his resignation, Piché issued a statement saying that "the people of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis need healing and hope. I was getting in the way of that, and so I had to resign."

While there were never restrictions on his ministry, Piché withdrew from public ministry to embrace a life of simplicity, prayer and penance. In recent years, he has provided some sacramental care to a community of cloistered nuns.

In his new position, Piché will be available to provide pastoral care and accompaniment to the retired priests of the archdiocese, who number more than 100. He will collaborate with Deacon Phil Stewart, director of the Leo C. Byrne Residence, a home for retired clergy in St. Paul, and Mary Beth Sullivan, the archdiocesan social worker for clergy.