

# 14 Priests Suspended Over 'Improper Conduct'

Catholic church authorities in the Chilean city of Rancagua on Tuesday suspended 14 priests while they are investigated for "improper conduct," a development that could deepen the crisis the church is facing over sexual abuse charges.

The suspensions were announced after a meeting of 68 priests of the diocese of Rancagua, which is located to the south of capital city Santiago.

"Precautionary measures have been adopted," Gabriel Becerra, vicar general of Rancagua, told reporters.

Earlier on Tuesday the Vatican said Pope Francis would host a second group of victims of priestly sexual abuse in Chile, days after the country's bishops all offered to resign over the scandal.

Earlier this month, the pope met three men who were victims of a priest accused of abusing boys in Santiago in the 1970s and 1980s. The second group includes priests who also fell foul of the same disgraced churchman, the Vatican said.

The five men, accompanied by two other priests who have helped them and two lay people, will see the pope from June 1-3.

In a subsequent statement, the Diocese of Rancagua reported that the information was given to a prosecutor's office and that, from the canonical point of view, the antecedents were sent to the Vatican.

"We deeply regret any act or situation that violates the values and principles that underpin our Catholic Church and we want to express our solidarity with the victims," said a statement later issued by the diocese. {eoa}

