

Catholic bishop admits fathering teens, resigns

by [David Gibson](#) in the [February 8, 2012](#) issue

A Catholic bishop in the Los Angeles archdiocese has resigned after admitting that he is the father of two children, both now teenagers. The Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI had accepted the resignation of Auxiliary Bishop Gabino Zavala, 60, who was born in Mexico and grew up in Los Angeles.

Ordained in 1977 and named a bishop in 1994, Zavala had a reputation for fighting on behalf of immigrants and the poor and against the death penalty. Most recently, Zavala had overseen the bishops' communications office and media outreach.

Observers say his scandal could hamper the bishops' high-profile public campaign against gay marriage and could affect efforts by the American bishops to develop Hispanic leaders to minister to the burgeoning U.S. population of Hispanic Catholics.

Hispanics account for most of the growth in U.S. Catholicism, and within a generation they are projected to be the majority ethnic group in the church. But out of nearly 300 active bishops in the United States, just 26 are Hispanic. There are 13 retired Latino bishops, including Zavala.

Neither the Vatican nor the archdiocese provided an explanation for Zavala's resignation, saying only that it had been accepted under the canon law requiring a bishop to step down "because of illness or some other grave reason."

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez said in a letter released January 4 that

Zavala told him in early December that he is the father of two teenage children, both still minors, who live with their mother in another state.

Assuming that the two children are 17 or younger, they would have been born after Zavala had been appointed a bishop. Calling the news "sad and difficult," Gomez said that Zavala has been out of ministry and "living privately." He 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."

Gomez did not identify the family out of respect for their privacy. —RNS