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Hospital halts removal of remains; Bones had been going to UTSA for analysis

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The removal of 70 human remains discovered during recent renovations on the grounds of the Children's Hospital of San Antonio has been halted temporarily, the hospital announced Wednesday, to give it "time to explore other options."

About a dozen descendants of the early 19th-century San Antonians buried in the cemetery on which the Catholic hospital was built had met earlier in the day with representatives of the hospital and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

The gathering was "promising and positive," said Melissa Krause, director of marketing and strategic communications for Christus Santa Rosa Health System, in a prepared statement. It included a dozen descendants, including elders of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation and three Catholic nuns, one of whom opened the meeting with a prayer.

Descendants called the meeting hopeful, even spiritual, but they remain concerned about the hospital's initial lack of outreach and transparency when construction of a planned prayer garden turned up human bones in September. They said they want the remains to be reinterred where they were found.

"That was our collective understanding, that by covering them back up, it will be the most blessed prayer garden there ever was," said **Ramon Vasquez**, president of the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, a nonprofit agency run by Tap Pilam.

Archaeologists have been removing the bones, most of them fragments, to the University of Texas at San Antonio for analysis. The campo santo, Spanish for holy ground, was part of a larger Catholic cemetery, now beneath the hospital, and adjacent to a city-run Protestant cemetery in what is now Milam Park.

"The sisters said their mission is about healing, and that this is an opportunity to showcase how much of that healing can happen," said Anthony Delgado, a descendant of one of the city's earliest alcaldes buried at the site.

"I'm not wearing any rose-colored glasses, but at least they were open to hearing the story of the (interred) individuals," added Mari Tamez, president of the Canary Islands Descendants Association. "Sometimes I think people don't connect the dots to the folks that were buried in the campo santo, and that these were people who created the city of San Antonio."

A spokeswoman for the Sisters of Charity said the religious order looks "forward to continuing this dialogue."

Descendants said the episode reinforced ill feelings stemming from being told for years that those buried there were removed in the 1920s and reinterred at San Fernando Cemetery No. 1. The Archdiocese of San Antonio has nothing in its archives to back the exhumation story, but its records indicate as many as 3,000 individuals were buried there.

"There were some hard questions put on the table," **Vasquez** said. "We didn't walk out of there as friends, but no one walked out as adversaries."

Texas A&M University archaeology professor Alston Thoms, an adviser to the American Indians in Texas, drove in from College Station to attend the meeting. The strength of interest by the descendants was an "eye-opener," he said.

"The undercurrent was that they wished they would have been included earlier," Thoms said. "That's been the problem (elsewhere) for many years. It's been the elephant in the room, understanding the inequality with moving cemeteries without involving the descendants."

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