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Pope Francis appoints Franciscan to lead religious congregation

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 6, 2013 NCR Today

In his first appointment to the Vatican's central bureaucracy, Pope Francis has named the head of the main group of Franciscans as the Vatican's second-in-command for religious life.

The pope named Franciscan Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo as secretary for the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Vatican announced Saturday.

Rodríguez -- a Spaniard who was serving in Rome as the minister general of the Orders of Friars Minor, which traces its roots directly to St. Francis of Assisi and represents 15,000 friars in 113 countries -- replaces U.S. Archbishop Joseph Tobin. Tobin was named archbishop of Indianapolis in the fall.

The Vatican announced Rodríguez's appointment in a press release Saturday and said he would also be made an archbishop.

Rodríguez's appointment to the congregation for religious is unusual: It is not always the head of a religious order who takes the post.

Additionally, Rodríguez had been serving as president of the Union of Superiors General, an international group based in Rome that represents male members of religious orders around the world.

The new prelate's appointment could have particular significance in the U.S., where his new congregation had launched an investigation, known as an "apostolic visitation," of individual orders of U.S. Catholic sisters in 2009.

That investigation began under Cardinal Franc Rode, the former leader of the congregation, who has since been replaced by Brazilian Cardinal João Braz de Aviz.

Braz de Aviz and Tobin took a more conciliatory tone toward the sisters. Following his appointment in 2011, Braz de Aviz told *NCR* [1]he wanted to "learn from" and "walk with" U.S. sisters.

A final report on the visitation, which saw teams of visitors go to about 90 U.S. religious congregations for interviews and discussions, was submitted [2] to the Vatican in January 2012. It is unknown what action the Vatican has taken on that matter.

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertook a separate investigation of the main representative body of U.S. sisters, known as a "doctrinal assessment," in 2009.

In April 2012, that congregation sparked protests in the U.S. when it concluded [3] the assessment by ordering the group, known as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, to revise and place itself under the authority of three U.S. bishops.

LCWR, which represents about 80 percent of the approximately 57,000 sisters in the United States, repeatedly

disputed the claims made in the report making the order, saying they came from a flawed process [4].

Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain was designated by the Vatican as the group's "archbishop-delegate" and given a five-year mandate to oversee its functions.

Rodríguez holds degrees in biblical theology and sacred Scripture from Jerusalem's *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, respectively.

According the Friars' website, he speaks Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French and English, and was ordained a priest in 1977 by Pope Paul VI.

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. Follow him on Twitter at **twitter.com/joshjmac** [5].]

Update: Franciscan Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo, the new secretary for the Vatican's congregation for religious, has released a letter to his fellow Franciscans, asking for prayers and forgiveness [6] as he undertakes his new role.

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