Vatican



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Pope Francis has created a new department in the Vatican's Secretariat of State to handle matters relating to the Catholic Church's various diplomatic representatives around the world, elevating the new structure to the same level as those that serve as the church's internal and foreign ministries.

The new department takes the form of a "Third Section" of the Secretariat of State and will be known formally as the Section for the Holy See's Diplomatic Personnel. It is to be led by Polish Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawlowski, who is currently the Secretariat's Delegate for Pontifical Representatives.

The Vatican announced creation of the new section in a Nov. 21 press release, which said the move was undertaken to demonstrate "the attention and closeness" of the Secretariat of State and the pope to the church's diplomatic personnel.

The Vatican's Secretariat of State is led by Cardinal Pietro Parolin. It has previously had two main departments, or sections: one devoted to the general affairs of the church and one devoted to the church's relations with other countries.

The Section for General Affairs is led by Italian Archbishop Giovanni Becciu. The Section for Relations with States is led by English Archbishop Paul Gallagher. The Delegate for Pontifical Representatives had previously served under Becciu and the

Section for General Affairs.

One church historian and theologian said creation of a new Third Section indicative of Francis' desire to have a more active diplomatic service in Catholic Church.

Massimo Faggioli, a professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University, said in a brief interview that the pope is centralizing some authority in order to "have a church that is diplomatically more active, locally and on the global scene."

On Twitter, Faggioli also called the move a "major reversal" of how Vatican diplomats had been treated under retired Pope Benedict XVI.

The Nov. 21 release specified that the new Third Section will "exclusively deal with questions pertinent to the persons that work in the diplomatic service of the Holy See or are preparing for such service."

It specified further that such questions include how those in the diplomatic service are chosen, what formation they are given, what conditions they face in their various postings, and matters pertaining to career advancement and requests for vacation time or other types of leave.

"In the exercise of these functions, the Section will enjoy a just autonomy and, at the same time, will see to stabilizing a close collaboration with the Section for General Affairs … and with the Section for the Relations with the States," said the statement.

The Vatican, which is recognized as a permanent observer state at the United Nations, maintains a diplomatic presence in nearly every country in the world. Its ambassadors, typically known as apostolic nuncios, are charged with maintaining relations in their host country.

The nuncios also help the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops in identifying possible candidates to serve as bishops for dioceses in their countries of service.

News of the creation of a new section at the Secretariat of State had been anticipated in recent weeks. Several Italian language news outlets recently reported on a letter Francis reportedly sent to Parolin in October, in which the pontiff told the cardinal he wanted to "assure more fraternal attention and prompter human, priestly, spiritual and professional accompaniment" to the Vatican's diplomatic

personnel.

Pawlowski, who turns 57 on Nov. 23, took up his current role at the Secretariat of State in 2015 after serving as apostolic nuncio to the Republic of Congo and to Gabon from 2009-15.

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