Vatican



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Pope Francis has changed Catholic Church law to allow non-cardinal bishops serving in the Vatican's bureaucracy to continue to hold their offices past the age of 75, when they had previously lost their positions automatically.

In a document issued *motu proprio* (on his own initiative) Feb. 15, the pontiff stipulates that bishops serving in the Roman Curia now must submit their resignations once they reach the traditional retirement age but that it will be up to him whether to accept them.

"If an exception is made and you are called to continue your service for a longer period, this means you must abandon with generosity your own personal projects," the pope says in a note accompanying the document, which is given the title *Imparare a congedarsi* ("Learning to say goodbye").

"This situation ... must not be considered a privilege or a personal triumph," Francis states.

With the new *motu proprio,* the pope is essentially harmonizing the process of resignation for bishops serving at the Vatican with that for diocesan bishops, who are required to submit resignations at age 75 but can stay in office at the pope's discretion.

The new law does not affect cardinals serving at the Vatican, who are already treated like diocesan bishops in the resignation process and can hold office past the retirement age.

In his note, Francis lists a few reasons that prelates serving at the Vatican might be asked to continue on, among them: "importance of adequately completing a very fruitful project for the church" or "the importance of the contribution that the person can bring to the application of directives recently given by the Holy See."

The *motu proprio*, released in Italian and going into effect the day of its publication, consists of five very brief articles.

The second article states: "At reaching 75 years of age, non-cardinal heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia, prelate-superiors of the Roman Curia, and bishops who hold other offices tied to the Holy See, do not cease to hold their office *ipso facto*, but must present their resignation to the Supreme Pontiff."

The fourth article specifies: "To take effect, the resignation ... must be accepted by the Supreme Pontiff, who will decide after he has examined all the circumstances."

In the fifth article, Francis clarifies that there will be no time limit for the pope to decide whether to accept a bishop's resignation or to let him continue serving in his post.

In his note, the pontiff says that ending a term of office "must be considered an integral part of service, in that it requires a new form of availability."

"This interior attitude is necessary whether, for reasons of age, you must prepare to leave your charge or you are requested to continue that service for a longer time, even after reaching the age of 75," the pope continues.

"Whoever is preparing to present their resignation has to prepare adequately before God, stripping themselves of desire for power and of the pretension of being indispensible," he states.

[Joshua J. McElwee is NCR Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]

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