Vatican



Pope Francis greets Msgr. Dario Vigano at the Vatican in 2017. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano)



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Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of the head of the Vatican's new streamlined communications office, Italian Msgr. Dario Vigano, a week after his mishandling of a letter from retired Pope Benedict XVI provoked a global outcry.

The Vatican announced Vigano's resignation March 21, marking a stunning downfall for a 55-year-old prelate who less than three years ago was given the charge to consolidate and restructure the city-state's various media entities.

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In an unusual move, the Vatican also provided the letters exchanged between Vigano and Francis, in which the monsignor asks "to be set aside" from his now former role as head of the Secretariat for Communications and the pontiff accepts the request.

Francis however asks Vigano to take up a new and undefined role at the Secretariat as an "Assessor" to advise the new prefect, once that person is named.

"In recent days many controversies have arisen regarding my work, which beyond my intentions, has destabilized the complex and great work of reform that you entrusted to me in 2015," Vigano told Francis in a March 19 letter.

"For the loved of the church and of you, Holy Father, I ask you to welcome my desire to be set aside, leaving myself, if you desire, to be available to collaborate in other ways," he asked.

Francis responded March 21: "Following our most recent encounters and after having reflected at length and attentively considered the motivations of your request to make ‘make a step backwards' from direct responsibility for the Dicastery for Communications, I respect your decision and I welcome, not without some struggle, your resignation."

Vigano had been criticized in recent days for choosing to withhold portions of a letter he had solicited from Benedict about Francis on the occasion of the launch of a new book series exploring Francis' theology.

While Vigano read aloud from the letter at the series' launch in Rome March 12, images of it sent to the media obscured two lines at the bottom of the letter's first page. Days letter, the Vatican released the full text of the letter, making clear that while Benedict had praised Francis he had also expressed concern about one of the authors in the book series.

The withholding of material led some Catholics to charge that the Vatican was inappropriately misusing the words of the retired pope. Others questioned why Vigano thought it necessary to solicit Benedict's approval, given the former pontiff's promise at his retirement to withdraw from public life.

In a statement, the Vatican press office said that until Francis names a new prefect for the communications office it will be led by its current second-in-command, Msgr. Lucio Ruiz.

Vigano had been serving as the director of the Vatican Television Center when he was appointed the prefect of the new communications office in June 2015. In the new role, he was charged with unifying under one umbrella nine separate media entities, including the press office, Vatican Radio, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and the Vatican publishing house.

The prefect had been a divisive figure among his staff. Some have quietly expressed disagreement with a number of his initiatives, including the decision to let go of the globally known Vatican Radio brand in favor of a new central clearinghouse called Vatican News, and to stop the city-state's radio broadcasts everywhere but in Italy.

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