Vatican



Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta attends a news conference to discuss the Synod of Bishops on young people, the faith and vocational discernment at the Vatican Oct. 8. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Pope Francis named Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, arguably the Catholic Church's most respected abuse investigator, to be adjunct secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Announcing the appointment Nov. 13, the Vatican press office said the archbishop would continue to serve simultaneously as head of the Malta Archdiocese. "To fulfill the duties entrusted to him by Pope Francis, Archbishop Scicluna will travel to Rome on a regular basis," said a note on the archdiocese's website.

Scicluna is expected to have a key role in the organization of a meeting in February on child protection that Pope Francis has asked all presidents of national bishops' conferences to attend.

The 59-year-old archbishop, who holds a doctorate in canon law, worked at the doctrinal congregation for 10 years as the "promoter of justice" — a position similar to prosecuting attorney — dealing with cases of alleged clerical sexual abuse.

But even after being named auxiliary bishop of Malta in 2012, he continued to be the person the pope would call on to investigate high-profile cases of abuse, consolidating a reputation for treating victims with compassion and respect, and for insisting church officials respond to allegations clearly.

He generally is credited with consolidating the cases against Legionaries of Christ founder Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado and Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien and, most recently, for convincing Pope Francis to take measures against several bishops in Chile.

Scicluna also serves as president of the doctrinal congregation board that reviews appeals filed by priests laicized or otherwise disciplined in sexual abuse or other serious cases.

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Although born in Toronto, he has lived in Malta since he was a year old. He did his university and seminary studies in Malta and was ordained to the priesthood in 1986.

During the Synod of Bishops in October, reporters asked Scicluna about the state of discussions regarding the need for greater accountability of bishops in handling abuse cases. He said accountability would be a topic at the world meeting on abuse prevention the pope called for Feb. 21-24.

"We know there is a great expectation for more accountability," he said. "Now how is that going to develop? I think we need to trust Pope Francis to develop a system whereby there is more accountability."

"We bishops realize that we are accountable not only to God but also to our people," and accountable not only for what they do, but what they fail to do when it comes to "stewardship" and protection, he said.

The crisis caused by ongoing revelations and allegations "is a very important moment" for everyone in the church because "it is going to make us really, really humble," the archbishop told reporters. "There is no other way to humility except through humiliation, and it is a big humiliation, and it is going to make us humble, I hope."

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