Vatican



Greg Burke and Paloma Garcia Ovejero in 2016. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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Greg Burke and Paloma Garcia Ovejero in 2016. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

The director and vice-director of the Vatican's press office have resigned together, in a move that appears to indicate sharp tensions at the top of the city-state's complicated communications structure.

The resignations of American Greg Burke and Spaniard Paloma García Ovejero seemed to catch their supervisor, Italian Paolo Ruffini, by surprise. In a statement, Ruffini said he had "learned" of the decision, and called it a "free and autonomous choice."

"I cannot but respect the decision they have taken," said Ruffini, head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication.

Burke and García's resignations were announced with a short note in the Vatican's daily bulletin Dec. 31. Pope Francis appointed Alessandro Gisotti, an Italian who had been serving as the head of social media for the communications dicastery, as new interim director of the press office.

No reasons were given for the shake-up. In a tweet, Burke said he and García would be leaving Jan. 1. "At this time of transition in Vatican communications, we think it's best the Holy Father is completely free to assemble a new team," he said.

The surprise resignations come two weeks after Francis appointed a personal friend, Italian Andrea Tornielli, to fill an open high-level position in the communications dicastery.

Tornielli, who previously ran the news website Vatican Insider and in 2016 released a book-length interview with the pope, is now in charge of coordinating the editorial line of all the Vatican's media outlets.

Francis has made reforming the Vatican's communications structure one of the priorities of his nearly six-year papacy. He created the new dicastery in 2015, giving it authority over all of the city-state's various media entities, including the press office, which had previously been semi-autonomous.

Ruffini, a lay journalist who previously led the Italian bishops' TV and radio network, has headed the dicastery since July.

Before being assumed into the communications dicastery, Gisotti had served as the deputy editor of the former Vatican Radio. In a statement, the new interim press office director thanked Burke and García, expressing his "esteem and friendship" for them.

Burke had previously worked in Rome for Fox News. He joined the Vatican as an advisor to the Secretariat of State in 2012, before being appointed to replace Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi as director of the press office in 2016.

García had been a reporter for the Spanish radio network Cadena COPE before her appointment as press office vice director at the same time.

At the time of their appointments, Burke and García were hailed as the first team of two lay, professional journalists to lead the press office. García was the first female vice director, and one of a handful of women in managerial roles at the overwhelmingly clerical and male Vatican.

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