News



Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, responds to a question during a conference on "Healing the Breach of Trust: The Role of the Laity in Responding to the Crisis" Feb. 6, 2019, at The Catholic University of America in Washington. (CNS/Bob Roller)

by Catholic News Service

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The Vatican's removal from the priesthood of Theodore McCarrick "is a clear signal that abuse will not be tolerated," said the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Feb. 16.

"No bishop, no matter how influential, is above the law of the church," said Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston. "For all those McCarrick abused, I pray this judgment will be one small step, among many, toward healing."

"For us bishops, it strengthens our resolve to hold ourselves accountable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," the cardinal said. "I am grateful to Pope Francis for the determined way he has led the church’s response."

DiNardo's statement followed the Vatican's early morning announcement that Pope Francis has confirmed the removal from the priesthood of McCarrick, the 88-year-old former cardinal and archbishop of Washington.

The Vatican said he was found guilty of "solicitation in the sacrament of confession and sins against the Sixth Commandment with minors and with adults, with the aggravating factor of the abuse of power."

A panel of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith found him guilty Jan. 11, the Vatican said. McCarrick appealed the decision, but the appeal was rejected Feb. 13 by the congregation itself. McCarrick was informed of the decision Feb. 15 and Francis "recognized the definitive nature of this decision made in accord with law," making a further appeal impossible.

By ordering McCarrick's "dismissal from the clerical state," the decision means that McCarrick loses all rights and duties associated with being a priest, cannot present himself as a priest and is forbidden to celebrate the sacraments, except to grant absolution for sins to a person in imminent danger of death.

The Vatican decision comes after months of mounting accusations that he abused children and seminarians decades ago. The accusations surrounding the former cardinal have prompted many to ask USCCB leaders and the heads of the archdioceses and dioceses he has served how he could have risen up the ranks of the church to become a cardinal.

Ordained a priest of the New York Archdiocese, he was the founding bishop of the Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, then served as archbishop of Newark, New Jersey. His last assignment was as archbishop of Washington. During his tenure there, he was named a cardinal.

McCarrick's punishment is the toughest meted out to a cardinal by the Vatican in modern times.

Last July, Francis accepted his resignation from the College of Cardinals, after U.S. newspapers reported detailed accounts that he exposed himself and sexually molested two boys in his early years as a priest – accusations that spanned almost five decades and were too old to legally prosecute.

In a June 20 statement, he said he had "absolutely no recollection" of the abuse "and (I) believe in my innocence" but said he was stepping down out of obedience. In December he went to live at a friary in Kansas to await the outcome of the Vatican's decision on his status.

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