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Rhina Guidos

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Georgetown University in Washington is the latest institution to announce it is rescinding an honorary degree it gave to former U.S. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick in 2004.

The Feb. 19 announcement comes days after the Vatican said Feb. 16 it had found the former prelate guilty of abuses against minors and adults, stripping him of his clerical status.

In a letter addressing the Georgetown community, John DeGioia, the institution's president, said it is the first time an honorary degree given by the Jesuit-run university has been revoked.

"After troubling allegations about his conduct became public in the summer of 2018, I shared a message with our community, reflecting on the responsibilities of our

university in this moment and our role, as a Catholic and Jesuit institution, in promoting 'a culture of safeguarding vulnerable people,' " DeGioia writes in the letter, explaining the decision taken in conjunction with the school's board of directors.

Last summer, abuse accusations against the retired cardinal surfaced in U.S. newspapers from accusers who said he had exposed himself and sexually molested at least two boys in his early years as a priest – accusations that spanned almost five decades and were too old to legally prosecute.

McCarrick, 88, denied the accusations but stepped down from the College of Cardinals in June. Other accusations that he had abused young seminarians at a beach house in New Jersey later surfaced. The Archdiocese of New York, where some of the early incidents allegedly took place, said it had found that the accusations against the prelate were "credible."

A Feb. 20 story from Georgetown's student newspaper, The Hoya, said a group of students had been pressuring the university to withdraw McCarrick's honorary degree since June 2018, as well as a degree conferred on Cardinal Donald Wuerl, then archbishop of Washington, who received an honorary degree from the institution in 2014 for his "extraordinary example of faith and service."

"A group of students delivered a petition to the university in September 2018 urging the university to rescind the honorary degrees given to both McCarrick and Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who was accused of covering up abuse in an August 2018 Pennsylvania grand jury report. The petition had 1,376 signatures at the time of delivery," the story in The Hoya said.

The grand jury report detailed accusations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and other church workers and claims of cover-up in six Pennsylvania dioceses over a 70-year period starting in 1947. It painted a mixed picture of how then-Bishop Wuerl handled some of the cases when he headed the Diocese of Pittsburgh from 1988 until 2006.

Wuerl has said that as Pittsburgh's bishop, he "established strong policies that addressed the needs of abuse survivors, removed priests from ministry and protected the most vulnerable in the community."

After the report, he faced pressure to resign as Washington's archbishop. On Oct. 12, 2018, Pope Francis accepted his resignation, but appointed him to serve as the archdiocese's apostolic administrator until a successor is announced. The cardinal, now 78, had submitted his resignation to the pope when he turned 75, as canon law requires.

Earlier this year, questions arose about what the cardinal knew or didn't know regarding abuse allegations against his predecessor, McCarrick. Wuerl apologized Jan. 15 for what he called a "lapse of memory," clarifying that in 2004 he became aware of at least one abuse allegation against the former prelate after receiving a report about a different allegation, but he had "forgotten" about it.

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