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The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will oversee the activity of Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican-based confederation of Catholic aid agencies, said a new Vatican decree.

The confederation had been entrusted to the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," which ceased to exist when the council's work became part of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in 2016.

The general decree — signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and approved by Pope Francis — was dated May 22 and published by the Vatican May 31.

"Caritas Internationalis very much welcomes the new decree from the Holy Father. It reflects a simplification of our legal standing" and was the result of working with the secretary of state, said Patrick Nicholson, director of communications for the confederation.

The five-page decree reiterates the different roles Vatican offices and the pope play in working with the charity confederation, including naming and approving new board members and approving its texts, contracts with foreign governments and financial transactions. It clarifies the role the dicastery for development plays regarding the Caritas headquarters and its regional members.

The decree restates many of the rules and provisions already established by earlier decrees, and reaffirms the organization must follow previous norms, canon law and the laws of Vatican City State concerning the procurement and distribution of aid, employment of workers and regulatory and financial oversight.

Caritas Internationalis, whose original statutes were approved by the Vatican in 1951, is made up of more than 160 Catholic relief, development and social service agencies working in almost 200 countries. Most of the member agencies are Caritas or relief and development agencies sponsored by national bishops' conferences, such as the U.S.-based Catholic Relief Services or the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

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