News
Vatican
Catalan leader Jordi Cuixart holds a banner in front of the Lledoners prison after the Spanish g

Catalan leader Jordi Cuixart holds a banner in front of the Lledoners prison after the Spanish government announced a pardon for those who participated in Catalonia's failed 2017 independence bid, in this photo taken June 23 in Sant Joan de Vilatorrada, near Barcelona, Spain. Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Spanish Bishop Xavier Novell Gomà of Solsona, who has made statements in support of Catalan independence. (CNS/Reuters/Albert Gea)

Junno Arocho

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — August 23, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis accepted the resignation of a Spanish bishop who had made controversial statements in favor of Catalan independence.

The Vatican announced the resignation Aug. 23 of Bishop Xavier Novell Gomà of Solsona. At 52, Bishop Novell was one of Spain's youngest bishops.

Pope Francis appointed Bishop Romà Casanova Casanova of Vic apostolic administrator of the diocese, the Vatican said.

In a statement published shortly after the announcement, the Spanish bishops' conference said Bishop Gomà "freely presented" his resignation to the pope "for strictly personal reasons" in conformity with canon 401, paragraph 2 of the Code of Canon Law.

According to the canon, a diocesan bishop "who has become less able to fulfill his office because of ill health or some other grave cause is earnestly requested to present his resignation from office."

"Bishop Novell took the decision after a time of reflection, discernment and prayer, at the end of which he spontaneously presented to the Holy Father his situation and his resignation of the pastoral governance of the Diocese of Solsona," the Spanish bishops' conference said.

The Spanish bishop made headlines in 2017 for comments he made after the Catalonia region's Parliament voted to unilaterally declare independence from Spain.

The declaration prompted former Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to invoke an article of Spain's constitution and dissolve Catalonia's government.

Advertisement

According to Spanish news site, El Confidencial, Bishop Novell wrote in his weekly column on the diocesan website that if Catalonian independence gets on the ballot, "I'll go vote."

"It is not fair that we be denied and impeded the exercise of self-determination," he wrote in the October 2017 column. Self-determination, he added, "is an inalienable right of every nation; a great social majority wants to exercise it, and it was the first point of the electoral programs of the political parties that won the last regional elections."

The bishop's statement supporting Catalonian independence directly contradicted the opinion of most Spanish bishops, including Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera of Valencia.

In a November 2017 commentary for the Madrid-based La Razón daily, Cardinal Cañizares, who served as prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the

Sacraments from 2008 to 2014, said it was "morally unacceptable" for nations to "claim independence unilaterally by their own will."

In a separate Nov. 26 interview with La Razón, Cardinal Cañizares said he was "hurt" that many Catalan clergy had backed independence, allowing referendum boxes to be hidden in their churches. He also said he believed Bishop Novell's support for independence had been confused and untruthful.

"No one can claim a church basis for secessionism," the Spanish cardinal said. "The independence movement has aroused a hatred which didn't exist, whereas the church will always work for unity, coexistence and harmony."