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Pope Francis has appointed Lorenzo Fazzini, an Italian journalist, author and father of four, to be managing director of the Vatican Publishing House. Fazzini is pictured in Rome in this July 3, 2006, file photo. (CNS/courtesy Romano Siciliani)

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Vatican City — August 24, 2021
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Pope Francis has appointed Lorenzo Fazzini, an Italian journalist, author and father of four, to be managing director of the Vatican Publishing House.

The 43-year-old is the first layman to head the office, which is now operated by the Vatican Dicastery for Communication. He replaces Conventual Franciscan Fr. Giulio Cesareo, who had been appointed in 2017.

The Vatican made the announcement Aug. 23.

Fazzini has degrees in modern literature and religious studies, has authored eight books and has written for several newspapers, including the Vatican's L'Osservatore Romano and the Italian bishops' conference's daily, Avvenire.

Since 2012, he has been director of EMI, a publishing house for 15 Italian missionary institutes that work all over the world.

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Under his direction, EMI became a "media company," producing events with authors, theater, catechetical exhibitions, webinars, formation workshops for teachers, merchandise as well as books written by authors with a focus on people and places "on the peripheries," according to its website.

In line with the merger and reform of the Vatican's various communication outlets, the publishing house will be collaborating with the dicastery's other media sections, which include Vatican News, Vatican Media and television and the Vatican newspaper.

Fazzini told Vatican News Aug. 23 that he was looking forward to the job as being part of a team that puts its talents together for the one aim of proclaiming the Gospel.

He said his work leading EMI was similar by bringing together the different charisms of 15 missionary institutes under one publisher with the one goal of evangelization. He was also the first layman to head that publishing house, too, he added.

Putting a layperson in charge of a major Vatican office, he said, seems part of Francis' desire to have a church that ventures out into the world and is "in dialogue with today's world."

"My wife is a doctor, so when we talk in the evening it is very often about the vulnerability and suffering experienced by people, the challenges, everyday life, even the wounded world we touch and that she touches every day; this all can be an added benefit" for the job, he said.

When asked what he will seek to do given the slumping market for publishing and other cultural sectors, he said, based on what he has seen from clients and readers, people are looking for and value a religious point of view.

"In my opinion, the job of a Catholic publisher, a religious publisher," he said, "is to bring the religious viewpoint into the public arena, into public debate" and to

present it "with the conviction that this point of view has something to say to the world," but without trying to make people feel guilty or inferior, and without hubris or arrogance.

By simply seeking to be actively part of the dialogue and "the common search for truth," he said, "a religious publishing house can make a positive contribution."

The Vatican Publishing House owns the rights to the pope's written works and publishes official Vatican documents, and offers many publications that cover many aspects of Catholic culture.