Pope Francis stands at the casket of Italian Cardinal Agostino Cacciavillan after leading the rit

Pope Francis stands at the casket of Italian Cardinal Agostino Cacciavillan after leading the rite of final commendation during the cardinal's funeral Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 7, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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VATICAN CITY — Italian Cardinal Agostino Cacciavillan, a former nuncio to the United States and the retired head of the Vatican investment office, died March 5 at the age of 95.

The longtime Vatican diplomat served in Washington as nuncio to the United States and Vatican representative to the Organization of American States from 1990 to 1998.

Returning to the Vatican after his assignment in the United States, he was named president of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See by St. John Paul II and made a cardinal in 2001. He retired the following year.

In a message of condolence sent to the cardinal's sister, Pope Francis remembered how, with "exemplary dedication and sharpness of thought," the cardinal had generously used "the many talents he received for the good of the church."

Cardinal Cacciavillan carried out his service to the Vatican with "great competence, untiring self-sacrifice and jovial openness of spirit," the pope said.

Born in the northern Italian town of Novale in 1926, Agostino Cacciavillan was ordained to the priesthood in 1949. After three years of parish ministry, he was sent to Rome, where he earned a degree in social sciences from the Pontifical Gregorian University, a degree in canon law from the Pontifical Lateran University and a degree in civil law from the University of Rome.

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His first assignment as a Vatican diplomat was in the Secretariat of State in 1959. Later postings took him to Vatican nunciatures in the Philippines, Spain and Portugal before he returned to the secretariat in 1968. While working at the Vatican, he also taught at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the school in Rome for Vatican diplomats.

In early 1976, he was named an archbishop and left the Vatican again to serve as ambassador to Kenya. After five years in Africa, he was named ambassador to India and in 1985 he was given a concurrent assignment as ambassador to Nepal.

While in India, he was praised for his delicate handling of rivalry among the church's Latin-rite, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara communities. The disputes were solved amicably in 1987 after a final intervention by Pope John Paul.

During his tenure in Washington, then-Archbishop Cacciavillan's greatest visibility came from announcing the appointments of bishops and attending episcopal ordinations and installations. He joined celebrations marking many milestones in U.S. church life, such as diocesan jubilees and the ordination anniversaries of bishops. Repeatedly, he appealed in the pope's name for clemency for prisoners scheduled to be executed.

His death leaves the College of Cardinals with 212 members, 119 of whom are under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave.