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Pope Francis greets new English Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Wo

Pope Francis greets new English Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, during a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Rome — February 21, 2023
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Pope Francis on Feb. 21 reaffirmed that the Vatican's worship office has been given full authority to limit the celebration of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, in what may be seen as a major blow to some U.S. bishops seeking to circumvent the office's decisions on the matter.

In a brief rescript published in the daily bulletin, the Vatican reiterated that the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was first given the authority to reimpose restrictions on the Latin Mass in the pope's July 2021 law, *Traditionis Custodes*, which was later reconfirmed in December 2021, when the Vatican published a response (or *dubia*) on how the new law was to be implemented.

In his original July 2021 law, Francis declared that approved groups who use the traditional Latin Mass can no longer use regular parishes for their Masses and that, instead, bishops must find an alternate location for them, subject to the Vatican's approval.

In recent months, however, a number of U.S. bishops have cited a provision from the church's Code of Canon Law, arguing that it allows for local bishops to offer a dispensation when deemed necessary for the good of their diocese. The pope's latest clarification reiterates that such decisions must be approved by the Vatican's worship office.

Among the U.S. bishops who have offered such dispensations to *Traditionis Custodes* are Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver; Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Oregon; and Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, who is also chairman-elect of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance.

Some canon lawyers, notably the editors of the website The Pillar, have also claimed that Cardinal Arthur Roche, head of the Vatican's worship office, had overstepped his authority in reining in bishops seeking to offer dispensations.

In response to those claims, Roche told the Catholic website Where Peter Is that such claims were an attack on the pope's authority, which, he added, "for Catholics is an astonishing act full of hubris."

The new rescript, which comes after the pope met with Roche on Feb. 20, underscores not only that Roche's office has full authority in such cases but that if a diocesan bishop has granted dispensations for a parish church to be used for the Latin Mass or for priests ordained after July 2021 to celebrate it, that they are obliged to inform Roche's office, which will assess those matters on a case by case basis.

Since restrictions were first imposed on the celebration of the Latin Mass in 2021, Roche has argued that the new norms have the "sole purpose of preserving the gift of ecclesial communion" with the pope.

In an August 2022 interview with NCR, Roche said he believes much of the resistance to Francis, as has been expressed by a number of Latin Mass adherents, is rooted in opposition to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which included the approval of the translation of the liturgy into the vernacular, in an effort to make

the Mass more accessible and involve greater participation of the laity.

"Reform of the liturgy was an enormous, long preparation prior to the council and the council is the highest legislation that exists in the church," Roche said. "Once that legislation comes into effect, it's a very serious matter."

"You disregard that and you're really putting yourself sideways toward the edges of the church," he added.

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A version of this story appeared in the **March 17-30, 2023** print issue under the headline: Authority reaffirmed for Vatican's worship office to limit Latin Mass.