Vatican
Vatican News
A cardinal leans down to greet a seated Pope Francis in a Vatican reception hall

Pope Francis greets Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, during a meeting with representatives of most of Italy's 227 dioceses and their programs to encourage the financial support of church activities during an audience in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Feb. 16. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Vatican City — May 22, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis has asked Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna to lead a mission "to help ease tensions in the conflict in Ukraine," the Vatican press office said.

The appointment of the cardinal, who is president of the Italian bishops' conference and a longtime member of the Sant'Egidio Community, was confirmed May 20 by Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office.

While Bruni said "the timing of such a mission and its modalities are currently being studied," he said Francis has never lost hope that some kind of dialogue could "initiate paths of peace."

By referring to Zuppi's task as a "mission," Bruni appeared to affirm that it was the same peace mission Francis was referring to April 30 when he told reporters returning to Rome with him from Budapest, Hungary, that he had a plan underway.

Spokesmen for the Ukrainian and Russian governments denied knowing anything about the pope's plan, although Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, insisted they had been informed.

Francis met May 13 at the Vatican with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who tweeted that he asked the pope "to condemn Russian crimes in Ukraine. Because there can be no equality between the victim and the aggressor." The Ukrainian leader also said he reiterated his insistence on a "just peace" that involves Russia leaving all the Ukrainian territory it occupies.

Advertisement

Il Sismografo, an Italian blog that closely follows the Vatican, had reported May 18 that Zelenskyy and President Vladimir Putin of Russia "each agreed to talks with the Holy Father's two special envoys to discuss and achieve a truce."

The blog had said there were "preliminary agreements" from the Vatican, Kyiv and Moscow that Zuppi would go to Ukraine and Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the Russian-speaking prefect of the Dicastery for Eastern Churches, would serve as papal envoy to Moscow. However, the archbishop's office on May 19 denied that he was involved.

Zuppi, 67, has been involved with the lay Community of Sant'Egidio for almost 50 years. The community serves the poor, the elderly and has served as a mediator and hosted several formal peace talks, including the talks that in 1992 led to the end of the civil war in Mozambique. Zuppi, a parish priest at the time, was involved in the negotiations.

At the Sant'Egidio Community's annual religions for peace meeting in October, Russia's war on Ukraine was the key focus.

Zuppi told the gathering that "without dialogue only weapons remain."

However, "dialogue by no means treats all motives as equal, it does not avoid the question of responsibility, and it never confuses the aggressor and the victim," he

said. Stopping the exponential spiral of war is possible only by recognizing the truth.