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The exterior of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome is seen in a file photo from July 28, 2020. (CNS/Robert Duncan)

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At the request of Pope Francis, three Jesuit-run institutions of higher learning in Rome — the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Oriental Institute — will formally become one university in May.

Jesuit Father Arturo Sosa, superior general of the Jesuits, informed the three March 15 that "the new general statutes of the university, which permanently incorporate the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, will come into effect on 19 May 2024, which is Pentecost Sunday," said a press release March 18 from the Gregorian University.

Francis had told a group of students from Jerusalem in January, "There are too many ecclesiastical universities in Rome. You should agree to make some form of unity: unity in study plans. Come to an agreement, talk."

And, in fact, in December 2019 he had ordered the Biblicum and the Oriental Institute to formally become part of the Gregorian University while keeping their names and their areas of expertise. With the new statutes they become academic units of the university, the press release said.

With the students and faculties combined, the new Pontifical Gregorian University should have close to 3,500 students from more than 125 countries and more than 450 professors, based on 2021-22 figures released by the association of rectors of pontifical universities and institutions in Rome.

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The Gregorian, the oldest and largest of the pontifical universities in Rome, traces its foundation back to the "Roman College" established in 1551 by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Today it offers degrees in theology, philosophy, canon law, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, safeguarding, spirituality, psychology and communications, among other programs.

The Pontifical Biblical Institute was founded in 1909 and serves as a center for advanced studies of sacred Scripture and ancient Near Eastern studies. The Pontifical Oriental Institute, established in 1917, is focused on the theology, liturgy, spirituality, traditions and canon law of the Eastern Christian churches.

U.S. Jesuit Father Mark Lewis, rector of the Gregorian, will continue in that role with presidents appointed for the Biblical Institute, the Oriental Institute and the "Collegium Maximum," which includes the faculties and institutes that previously had comprised the Gregorian University.

Canadian Jesuit Father David Nazar, rector of the Oriental Institute since 2015, will be administrative director of the university, the press statement said. Jesuit Father Giuseppe Di Luccio, vice rector for academics at the Gregorian, will become president of the Collegium Maximum. Jesuit Father Sunny Thomas Kokkaravakyil, a member of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and professor of canon law at the Oriental Institute, will serve as the institute's president. Slovakian Jesuit Father Peter Dubovský, current rector of the Biblical Institute, will be its president.