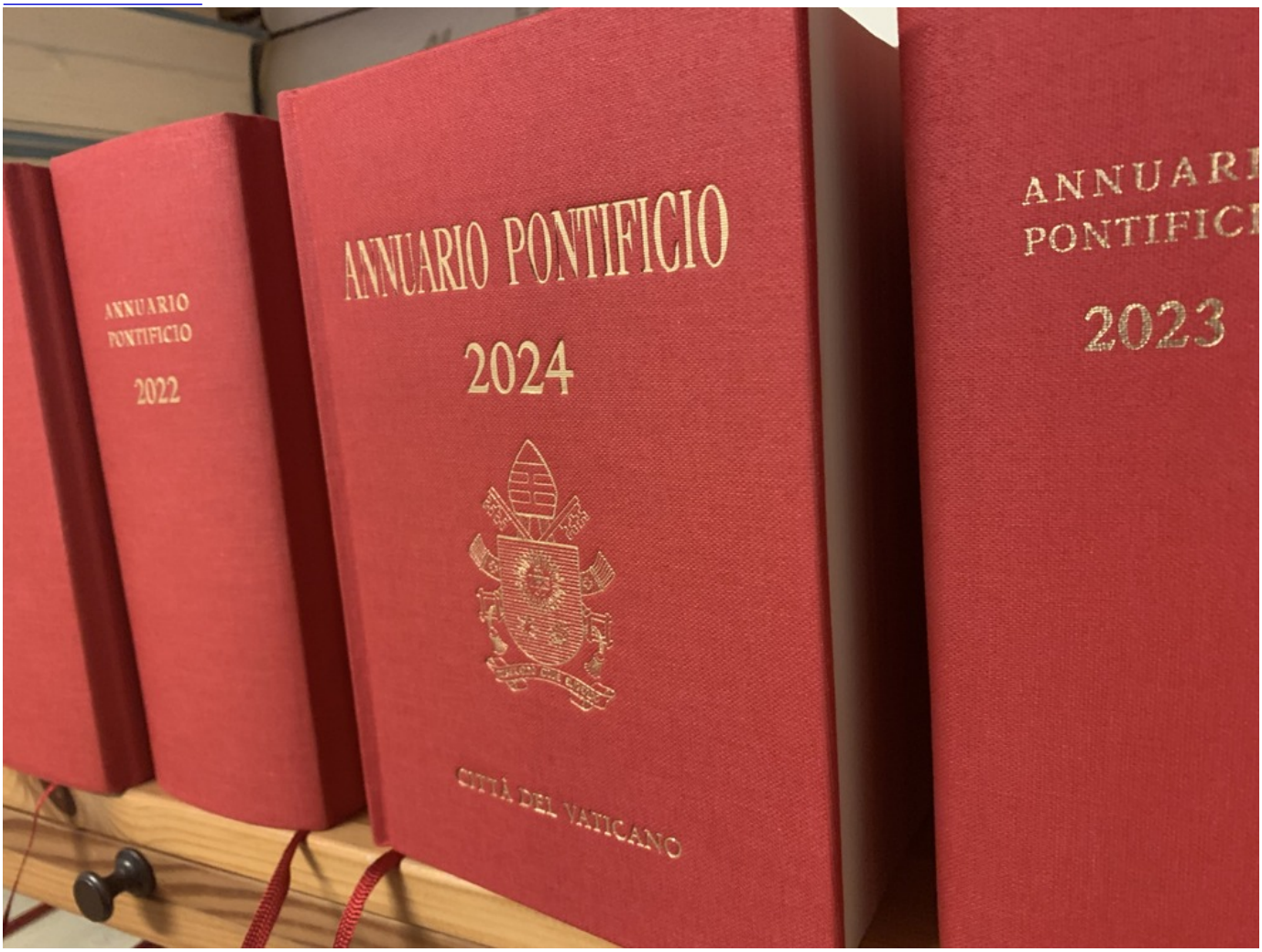
Vatican
Vatican News



The 2024 Annuario Pontificio, the Vatican yearbook, went on sale in early April. The edition inserts "Patriarch of the West" as one of the historic titles of the pope, a title that had been dropped by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006. (CNS/Cindy Wooden)

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The 2024 edition of the Vatican yearbook has inserted "Patriarch of the West" as one of the historical titles of the pope.

In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI dropped "Patriarch of the West" from his official titles listed in the Annuario Pontificio, the Vatican yearbook. Vatican officials at the time said the title was removed because it was theologically imprecise and historically obsolete.

In 2019, Pope Francis had all the remaining titles, except for "Bishop of Rome," moved to another page, and in the 2020 edition of the Annuario they were listed as "historic titles."

The titles labeled historic were: "Vicar of Jesus Christ. Successor of the Prince of the Apostles. Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. Primate of Italy. Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Province of Rome. Sovereign of Vatican City State. Servant of the Servants of God."

The 2024 Annuario, which went on sale in early April, inserted "Patriarch of the West" after "Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church."

As of April 11, the Vatican press office said it had no explanation for the change.

Last year Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, told officials of the Roman Curia that he noted "with joy" that only one title is listed under the pope's name: Bishop of Rome.

"It seems right to me, especially with regard to 'Vicar of Jesus Christ,'" the cardinal said. "Vicar is one who takes the place of the boss in his absence, but Jesus Christ never made himself absent and will never be absent from his church."

When Pope Francis had the titles re-labeled, Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, told Catholic News Service that unlike in 2006 when Pope Benedict XVI had the title "Patriarch of the West" removed from the list, this time "there has been no suppression" of a title.

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"The definition of 'historic' in relation to the titles attributed to the pope on one of the pages dedicated to him in the Annuario Pontificio of 2020 seems to me to indicate the bond with the history of the papacy," Bruni said. All of the other titles "are understood to be tied historically to the title of bishop of Rome because at the moment he is designated by the conclave to guide the church of Rome, the one elected acquires the titles tied to this nomination."

Before Pope Benedict dropped "Patriarch of the West," the last time the list of titles was changed was with St. Paul VI's 1969 edition of the Annuario, which added the title "servant of the servants of God" and deleted the phrase "gloriously reigning."

Pope Francis' first words to the public after his election March 13, 2013, were: "Brothers and sisters, good evening. You all know that the duty of the conclave was to give a bishop to Rome. It seems that my brother cardinals have gone almost to the ends of the earth to get him ... but here we are."

The pope has said in interviews that he has not considered resigning, but if he ever did, he would be known as the "bishop of Rome emeritus" and not "pope emeritus" as Pope Benedict was.

When Pope Benedict dropped the title "Patriarch of the West," the then-Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued a statement, which said, "The title "Patriarch of the West" was adopted in the year 642 by Pope Theodore. Thereafter it appeared only occasionally and did not have a clear meaning. It flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries in the context of a general increase in the pope's titles and appeared for the first time in the Annuario Pontificio in 1863.

While patriarchates have always been tied to a specific location and jurisdiction over it, "the term West currently refers to a cultural context not limited only to Western Europe but including North America, Australia and New Zealand, thus differentiating itself from other cultural contexts," the pontifical council said. "If we wished to give

the term West a meaning applicable to ecclesiastical juridical language, it could be understood only in reference to the Latin Church. In this way, the title 'Patriarch of the West' would describe the bishop of Rome's special relationship with the Latin Church and could express the special jurisdiction he has over her."

Members of the synod of bishops of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople expressed concern over the decision, however. In a June 2006 statement, the chief secretary of the synod said dropping "Patriarch of the West" while retaining the titles "Vicar of Jesus Christ" and "Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church" is "perceived as implying a universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over the entire church, which is something the Orthodox have never accepted."