Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Francis presents gifts to Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong and First Lady Phan Thi Thanh Tam during a meeting at the Vatican July 27, 2023. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Carol Glatz

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Vatican City — July 23, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis expressed his condolences for the death of Nguyen Phu Trong, the general secretary of the Communist Party, and his appreciation for his role in fostering improved relations with the Vatican.

Francis "sends condolences to all who mourn his loss, especially his family, together with the assurance of his prayers for their consolation and peace," said a telegram published by the Vatican July 23.

The telegram, written on the pope's behalf, was signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and sent to To Lam, the president of Vietnam.

"With particular appreciation for his role in fostering and promoting the positive development of relations between Vietnam and the Holy See, Pope Francis willingly sends the pledge of his spiritual closeness to your excellency and all your fellow citizens at this time of sorrow for the nation," the telegram said.

Trong died at the age of 80 in Hanoi July 19 after months of illness. He had served as general secretary of the country's Communist Party since 2011 until his death; that role, which sets the general direction of the nation's policies, was one of two top leadership posts in Vietnam, the other being prime minister. He also served as president of Vietnam from 2018 to 2021.

While there are no full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Vietnam, an official Vietnam-Holy See joint working group has long been working to pave the way for full relations between the Vatican and the communist government.

Advertisement

Vietnam first agreed to let the Vatican name a non-resident papal representative to the country in 2011, a gesture which was seen as a major step in the ongoing process to normalize relations.

After further negotiations, an agreement was reached in July 2023 allowing for a papal representative to reside in Vietnam and the establishment of an office there to support Vietnam's estimated 6.5 million Catholics.

Talks and relations between the two nations were significantly strengthened when Pope Benedict XVI met Trong and top party and government officials in 2013; it was the first time a pope had met with the general secretary of the nation's Communist Party.

Benedict had met then-President Nguyen Minh Triet in 2009 and, two years earlier, with then-Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. The meetings came after decades of sometimes tense relations and protracted negotiations over the nomination of bishops.

After Francis met with then-President Vo Van Thuong at the Vatican in 2023, the president sent a letter to the Vatican officially inviting the pope to visit the South-east Asian country.

The pope had later told reporters that if he does not go, his successor "certainly will! There will indeed be a visit, because it is a land that deserves to progress and that has my affection."