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Pope Leo XIV greets faithful as he arrives in St. Peter's Square for the weekly general audience at the Vatican, Wednesday, March 25, 2026. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

by Associated Press

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Pope Leo XIV filled one of the most important Vatican vacancies on Wednesday by tapping an Australian church lawyer to serve as the Holy See's chief legal expert.

Bishop Anthony Randazzo, bishop of Broken Bay, was named prefect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts. The office is responsible for writing and interpreting the Catholic Church's in-house canon law, and also provides legal advice on other matters, including for the Vatican City State.

Randazzo, 59, succeeds Archbishop Filippo Iannone, whom Leo named in September to take over his old job at the Vatican office that vets bishop nominations.

Before being named a bishop, Randazzo studied canon law at the Jesuit Pontifical Gregorian University and worked for five years in the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Among other things, the office processes clergy sexual abuse cases worldwide.

The Australian Catholic Church has a wretched legacy of clergy abuse and cover-up.

As a young bishop working at the Congregation's office, Randazzo was in a position to deal with the fallout of the crisis, including during the period in which Australia's Royal Commission conducted an in-depth investigation into decades of cases of priests raping children and bishops covering it up. The commission ultimately found 7% of Australian Catholic priests were accused of abuse between 1950-2010, with 4,444 people saying they were victims.

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Leo is also a canon lawyer, and the appointment of an Anglophone legal expert familiar with the grave shortcomings of the way the church mishandled the abuse crisis is perhaps telling. While Leo has given no indication that he intends to make changes, canon lawyers, victims and outside experts have faulted the canonical system and the way it has been used as part of the problem.

Closer to home, the recent Vatican financial trial involving a cardinal has also revealed the limitations of the city state's outdated criminal and procedural codes.

In a statement on his Facebook page Wednesday, Randazzo said he was grateful for Leo's trust. He said he would remain in Australia for the next three months before

moving to Rome.