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Archbishop Paolo Rudelli (Vatican Media)

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Pope Leo XIV announced a significant reshuffling of top Vatican posts on Monday, March 30, consolidating his leadership over the church and the Roman Curia almost one year into his pontificate.

Leo tapped Archbishop Paolo Rudelli, 55, formerly the papal representative in Colombia, to be substitute for general affairs at the Vatican Secretariat of State, the third highest ranking position at the Vatican, equivalent to the president's chief of staff in the United States.

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Rudelli will replace Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, a Venezuelan who was appointed by Pope Francis in 2018 and who will now serve as papal nuncio to Italy and the Republic of San Marino. The current nuncio, or papal representative, to Italy, Archbishop Petar Rajič, who was born in Canada to Croatian immigrants, will now serve Leo at the Vatican as prefect of the Papal Household, overseeing all the pope's private and public meetings.

With these appointments, Leo is elevating career Vatican diplomats known for their quiet efficiency and low public profiles. Peña Parra became closely associated with the fallout from financial and governance crises that clouded Francis' pontificate.

Born in northern Italy in 1970, Rudelli, an expert in moral theology and in canon law, studied at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Like other Leo appointments, Rudelli spent much of his career at the Vatican Secretariat of State and its foreign service, and spent time in Ecuador and Poland for the church before being employed at the Secretariat's Section for General Affairs.

In 2014, Francis chose him to be the Vatican's permanent observer at the Council of Europe and personally consecrated him as bishop in 2019. Rudelli was papal nuncio to Zimbabwe from 2020 to 2023 and in Colombia until his appointment on Monday.

His experience at the powerful Secretariat of State made him a natural candidate for a position associated with complex political and economic decisions. In Zimbabwe and Colombia he acted as a liaison between religious and political institutions and navigated political unrest.

In a statement, Rudelli thanked the pope for the appointment and said he is preparing "to take up this office in the spirit outlined in the apostolic constitution Praedicate Evangelium," referring to Francis' 2022 reform of the Vatican Curia, which laid out a decentralized, more missionary approach to governing.

Rudelli becomes the substitute after years of deep turmoil inside the Vatican walls. Peña Parra had to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of Pope Benedict XVI, but the defining event of his tenure was a controversial investment of Secretariat of State funds in a London real estate deal. The deal came to cost the institution $400 million and resulted in a highly publicized trial of 10 defendants who worked at or had ties to the Vatican.

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Parra inherited the scandal from his predecessor, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who will be retried by a Vatican court this year after his conviction on charges of fraud and embezzlement was thrown out earlier this year. Parra approved the hiring of Gianluigi Torzi, an Italian businessman who was expected to broker the Vatican's assumption of full ownership in the London property. According to Vatican prosecutors, Torzi instead arranged to receive voting shares of the fund that owned the property and subsequently demanded $17 million to hand them over.

In a farewell address published Monday, Parra referred to "moments of institutional suffering, such as the legal proceedings related to the London Palace affair, which exposed the Holy See — and in particular our Secretariat of State — to unprecedented media and judicial scrutiny, requiring rigor, transparency, and a sense of responsibility on our part."

He described the role of substitute as "quiet, often invisible, yet essential to the life of the universal Church." He views his new position as nuncio to Italy and San Marino, he said, "as a renewed call to service, in communion and obedience."

Rajič, the new prefect of the papal household, entered the Vatican's diplomatic service in 1993 and served both in the secretariat and in nunciatures across Europe. In 2009 he was nuncio in Kuwait and apostolic delegate to the Arabian Peninsula, and between 2015 and 2019 he represented the pope in Angola and São Tomé. His work in Angola, a country that Leo will visit in April, paved the way to the official

recognition of the Catholic Church in the country, according to local reports.

In 2019 he was nuncio to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia before being appointed by Francis as his representative to Italy and San Marino in 2024.