

## Vatican canon lawyer to head Legionaries

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Jul. 9, 2010

**VATICAN CITY** -- Pope Benedict XVI named Italian Archbishop Velasio De Paolis, an expert in church law who specializes in religious institutes, to be his personal delegate with authority over the Legionaries of Christ.

The 74-year-old canon lawyer will act as an interim leader while the Vatican investigation of the Legionaries proceeds.

The Vatican announced the appointment July 9 but provided no specifics of Archbishop De Paolis' role. The Legion said it expected the practical details on how the archbishop will fulfill his duties would be defined in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the Legionaries said they welcomed the appointment "with gratitude" and that they looked forward to receiving the archbishop's guidance.

"As they welcome the pontifical delegate, the Legionaries of Christ once again express their deep gratitude to the Holy Father for his fatherly solicitude and put themselves completely at the disposal of Archbishop De Paolis," the order said on its website.

The Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, told journalists July 9 that the papal delegate would be meeting with the Legionaries' current superiors "very soon" to spell out the nature and extent of his mandate as well as any changes to the status of the order's current leaders.

He also will inform them of the terms and nature of the commission that will study the order's constitution, Father Lombardi said.

The pope's intention in assigning a papal delegate and setting up the commission is to "accompany and help" the Legionaries on the "challenging path of purification and renewal that awaits the order," said the papal spokesman.

The papal appointment was one of a number of steps Pope Benedict has taken in the reform of the Legionaries of Christ after revelations that their founder, the late Mexican Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, had fathered children and sexually abused seminarians.

Last year the pope ordered a visitation of the Legionaries' institutions. Five bishops appointed by the pope visited almost all the order's religious houses and most of its pastoral institutions, meeting with more than 1,000 Legionaries.

The pope received the bishops' report at the end of April and on May 1 the Vatican said the pope would name a papal delegate and a commission to study the order's constitutions. He was to also name a visitor for the Regnum Christi movement, at their request.

The Vatican's May statement also said that the Legionaries would need to undergo very deep changes, including a redefinition of the order's religious charism and a revision of the way authority is exercised among its members. The pope will have the final word on whatever changes are eventually imposed.

Archbishop De Paolis is expected to work closely with the Vatican as it continues its investigation of the order.

He is president of the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See and is a member of the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature. Father Lombardi said Archbishop De Paolis will continue to serve as head of the prefecture for the time being.

The archbishop also serves as a consultant to the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Congregation for Eastern Churches, and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.

He was born in Sonnino, Italy, in 1935. He was ordained a Scalabrinian priest in 1961 and named a bishop in 2003. He was made an archbishop in 2008.

Archbishop De Paolis received his doctorate in canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, his licentiate in theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, and his law degree from Rome's La Sapienza University.

He has taught moral theology and canon law for many years in Rome.

He has also served on the governing body of his religious order and held the positions of counselor and procurator general for the institute.

After investigating allegations that Father Maciel had sexually abused young seminarians, in May 2006 the Vatican ordered him to stop practicing his ministry in public and to live a life of prayer and penitence. Father Maciel died in January 2008 at age 87.

In early 2009, the Legionaries said that Father Maciel had fathered a daughter; more recently, the order's officials acknowledged that he had sexually abused seminarians, and they asked forgiveness for failing to listen to his accusers.

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