

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

December 19, 2012 at 1:21pm

Iraqi cardinal retires; pope calls Chaldean synod to elect successor

by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of 85-year-old Cardinal Emmanuel-Karim Delly of Baghdad and has called for a late January meeting of the Chaldean synod of bishops to elect a new patriarch for the Chaldean Catholic Church.

The cardinal was a retired auxiliary bishop of Baghdad when, in December 2003, he was elected patriarch just eight months after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. He became one of the most notable voices of suffering Iraqi Christians and repeatedly pleaded with countries to take pity on Iraqi refugees and not send them back home.

Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches are not required to submit their resignations to the pope at age 75 like bishops in the Latin-rite church are.

Announcing the cardinal's resignation Wednesday, the Vatican said Chaldean Archbishop Jacques Ishaq, secretary of the Chaldean synod, will serve as apostolic administrator of the church until a new patriarch is elected.

Pope Benedict also decided that Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches, will preside over the election at the Vatican.

Sandri told Catholic News Service on Wednesday that Delly resigned for health reasons.

Delly was born in Telkaif, near Mosul, in 1927, and was ordained to the priesthood in Rome in 1952. He received a master's degree in philosophy from the Pontifical Urbanian University and a doctorate in theology and another in canon law from the Pontifical Lateran University.

He was ordained a bishop in 1963 and named an archbishop in 1967. From 1963 until his retirement in October 2002, he served as an auxiliary bishop and member of the patriarchal curia in Baghdad, where the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate is based.

The Chaldean Catholic Church has almost 420,000 members, not only in Iraq, but also in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, France and the United States.

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