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Pope names Boston priest to be Vatican's abuse investigator

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Pope Benedict XVI has named a canon lawyer from the Archdiocese of Boston to be the new promoter of justice in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a position that includes monitoring and investigating cases of priests accused of sex abuse.

The Vatican announced the appointment Dec. 22 of Fr. Robert W. Oliver, an assistant to the moderator for canonical affairs of the Boston Archdiocese and a visiting professor of canon law at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

The 52-year-old priest, who is a member of the Brotherhood of Hope, had served as a judge and promoter of justice in Boston tribunals and as a consultant to the Boston archdiocesan review board, a body that advises Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley in assessing accusations of child sexual abuse by members of the clergy and in determining the suitability of an accused priest for ministry.

At the Vatican, Oliver will succeed Auxiliary Bishop Charles Scicluna of Malta who, from 2002 until his appointment as a bishop in October, served as the Vatican's first doctrinal congregation promoter of justice, a position similar to a prosecuting attorney in a civil court. The position also involves monitoring the procedures that national bishops' conferences have in place for dealing with abuse accusations and handling the dismissal from the priesthood of those guilty of sex abuse.

In a statement issued by the Archdiocese of Boston, Oliver said he was humbled at being entrusted with the position.

"Receiving this assignment during the Year of Faith is inspirational and it is challenging. The congregation's role is to promote and safeguard the doctrine of the faith and morals in the universal

church," he said.

O'Malley said, "Father Oliver is a distinguished canon lawyer who brings the requisite experience and an understanding of the importance of this office within the life of the church."

Bishop-designate Robert P. Deeley, Boston archdiocesan vicar general, said Oliver "is an experienced canon lawyer who has served as a judge, taught, developed policy and offered counsel as a canonical adviser."

In an archdiocese that was rocked by the clerical sexual abuse scandal, particularly in 2002, Deeley said Oliver "has had an important voice in many of the major decisions we have faced as an archdiocese and in the national church. His experience, intelligence, understanding, compassion and respect for all of God's people have prepared him well for this important ministry of justice."

Born in New York in 1960, he was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Boston in 2000. He earned his doctorate in canon law from The Catholic University of America and a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

According to the Archdiocese of Boston, Oliver's late father served as justice of the New York State Supreme Court, and one of his grandfathers was chief justice of the U.S. Customs Court.

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