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Francis creates central Vatican office for economy, appoints Pell head

by Joshua J. McElwee

Vatican City — Pope Francis has approved a set of sweeping moves to reorganize the financial and administrative structures of the Catholic church's central bureaucracy, creating a new central office with wide control particularly of economic issues, the Vatican announced Monday.

Sydney Cardinal George Pell will head the new office, known as the Secretariat for the Economy. Announcing the news in a statement, the Vatican said Pell would have "authority of all the economic and administrative activity within the Holy See and the Vatican City State."

Francis' decision to reorganize the Vatican's economic and administrative structures comes after criticism in recent years that its operations, especially in financial matters, occur in secret and with little public accountability.

Last week, Francis and the Council of Cardinals met with three separate groups appointed by Francis to investigate the Vatican's various financial operations.

Monday's release states that Francis decided to create the new secretariat following a meeting with one of those groups and at the suggestion of the Council of Cardinals.

"The modifications allow more explicit involvement of high-level experts of experience in financial management, planning and reporting," the Vatican statement reads.

"They will ensure a better use of resources, improving the support available for various programs, particularly those aimed at working with the poor and marginalized," it continues.

The statement says that as the new head of the secretariat, Pell will be responsible for preparation of an annual budget for the Vatican and the Holy See, financial planning, and various support functions.

Pell is also to put into operation a new Vatican "Council for the Economy," composed of eight cardinals or bishops "that reflect the universality of the church" and seven lay experts.

The statement also says Francis will be appointing a new auditor-general for the Vatican, who will be "empowered to conduct audits of any agency of the Holy See and Vatican City State at any time."

The statement does not specifically mention the Institute for the Works of Religion, one of the Vatican institutions that has attracted the most controversy, known commonly as the Vatican bank.

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The bank, which is a private entity and does not control the Vatican budget, is, however, part of the economic activity of the Vatican and covered by the pope's moves.

In a short briefing with reporters Monday, Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi said Pell, who has been Sydney's archbishop since 2001, will remain so, at least for the time being.

Asked if Pell would be moving full-time to Rome for the appointment, Lombardi said he didn't know, but added: "Probably."

Pell also serves on the Council of Cardinals. Since 2001, he has been the chair of Vox Clara, the committee of English-speaking bishops who advise the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship on English-language translations.

Francis formalized the new Vatican office Monday in a decree known as a *motu proprio*. He gave the decree the Latin title *Fidelis dispensator et prudens*, "A faithful and wise manager."

The title is taken from a passage in the Gospel according to Luke, where Jesus tells a parable of a servants who are put in charge of their masters' goods and one is disciplined after he puts the goods to bad use.

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