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Cardinal tainted by abuse scandals steps down as dean, pope sets term limit

Elise Harris Dec 21, 2019
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT



Pope Francis, right, greets Cardinal Angelo Sodano at the Vatican, Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017. (Credit: L'Osservatore Romano/Pool Photo via AP.)

ROME - Pope Francis on Saturday announced the resignation of Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano as the Dean of the College of Cardinals. Sodano has long faced criticism for his role in several clerical sexual abuse scandals. The pope also decreed a fixed term for the dean going forward.

Francis made the change in a Dec. 21 *motu proprio*, meaning a modification to a law issued on the pope's own authority, in which he thanked the 92-year-old Sodano for "high service rendered" to the college in his 15 years as dean, and



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amended the policy that had been that whomever was elected to the position of dean essentially stayed there for life.

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Going forward, a dean of the College of Cardinals will be elected to a five-year renewable term, after which he will be referred to as the “dean emeritus.”

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A former Secretary of State under St. John Paul II, Sodano has long been a lightning-rod, emerging as one of the most controversial figures under both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and in many ways, this reputation has followed him even in Francis's papacy.

In part, that profile is due to abuse scandals with which he's become associated.

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From the Chilean sexual abuse crisis in 2018 back to the scandals of the 1990s and 2000s surrounding Legionaries of Christ founder Father Marcial Maciel and even abuse allegations in Germany, Sodano's name has emerged in each case, typically attached to accusations that he either defended the abuser or tried to cushion their fall.

He also factored into one of the biggest abuse scandals to hit the United States when, in August 2018, Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a former Vatican ambassador to the U.S., published a statement making allegations against some 32 Vatican officials, including Sodano, who was accused of covering up the sexual misconduct of ex-cardinal and ex-priest Theodore McCarrick.

Sodano was charged by Viganò with ignoring complaints sent to the Vatican about McCarrick, as well as appointing officials he believed would assist in covering up Maciel's abuse.

Francis did not specify any reasons for accepting Sodano's resignation in his announcement Saturday. The effect of the pope's imposition of a fixed term, however, is that in the future, no one will serve a span of time as long as Sodano did in the post.

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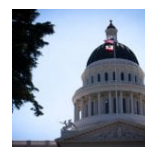
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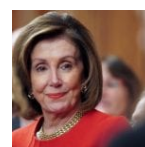


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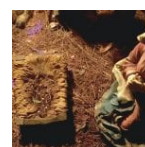
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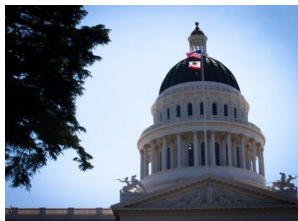
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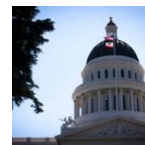
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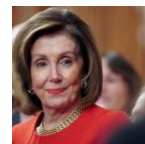


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