



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC LETTER  
ISSUED «MOTU PROPRIO»

OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF  
FRANCIS

“LEARN TO TAKE YOUR LEAVE”

GOVERNING THE RESIGNATION, FOR REASONS OF AGE, OF HOLDERS OF CERTAIN  
OFFICES  
SUBJECT TO PAPAL APPOINTMENT

“Learn to take your leave” is what I asked, in commenting on a reading of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 20:17-27), in a prayer for pastors (cf. *Homily in the Mass at Santa Marta*, 30 May 2017). The conclusion of an ecclesial office must be considered an integral part of the service itself, since it calls for a new form of amenability.

This interior attitude is necessary when, for reasons of age, one must prepare to leave his position, or when one is called to continue that service for a longer period, even though the age of 75 has been reached (cf. *Address to rectors and students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residents of Rome*, 12 May 2014).

One who prepares to submit his resignation needs to prepare himself appropriately before God, stripping himself of any aspiration to power and of the claim of being indispensable. This will allow him to calmly and trustingly take this step, which would otherwise be painful and discordant. At the same time, one who truly realizes the need to step down must discern in prayer how to experience the stage that is about to begin, by making a new plan of life, marked as much as possible by austerity, humility, prayers of intercession, time dedicated to reading, and willingness to provide simple pastoral services.

On the other hand, if exceptionally one is asked to continue to serve for a longer period, this entails generously giving up one's new personal project. This situation, however, must not be considered a privilege or a personal triumph, or a favour due to presumed obligations deriving from friendship or closeness, nor as gratitude for the effectiveness of services rendered. Every eventual deferment can only be understood in line with certain reasons that are always linked to the common good of the Church. This pontifical decision is not an automatic act but an act of governance; consequently it entails the virtue of prudence which will help one, through appropriate discernment, to take the suitable decision.

I cite only as examples some of the possible reasons: the importance of appropriately completing a very fruitful project for the Church; interest in ensuring the continuity of important works; difficulties related to the composition of the Dicastery in a period of transition; the importance of this person's contribution may lead to the application of directives recently issued by the Holy See or to the implementation of new magisterial directions.

With the provisions for the resignation of diocesan Bishops and holders of offices subject to papal appointment, contained in the *Rescriptum ex audientia* of 3 November 2014, granted to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, I wished to integrate the canonical legislation and introduce several modifications, which I confirm entirely, with the exception of the sections that are explicitly reformulated by the following provisions.

Given the generous commitment demonstrated and the valuable experience accumulated by those who have for many years played several roles of particular responsibility, whether in the particular Churches or in the Roman Curia or as Pontifical Representatives, I recognize the need to update the norms regarding the times and methods of resignation from office for having reached the age limit. After having held the necessary consultations, I think it necessary to proceed as follows:

a. to further clarify art. 2 of the aforementioned *Rescriptum* relative to diocesan Bishops, Coadjutor and Auxiliary Bishops (cf. cc. [401-402](#), [411](#) *cic*, and 210-211, 218, 213 *cceo*);

b. to modify the canonical norms regarding the resignation from office, for reasons of age, of non-Cardinal Dicastery Heads and of Superior Prelates of the Roman Curia (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 28 June 1980, art. 5 § 2: *aas* 80 [1988], 860; General Regulations of the Roman Curia, 1999 art. 3; *Rescriptum ex audientia*, 3 November 2014, art. 7), of Bishops holding other offices subject to papal appointment (cf. *Rescriptum ex audientia*, 3 November 2014, art. 7) and of Pontifical Representatives (cf. c. 367 *cic*; General Regulations of the Roman Curia, 1999, art. 8, § 2.; Regulations for Pontifical Representatives, 2003, art 20, § 1).

With this Motu Proprio I establish:

Art. 1. Upon reaching 75 years of age, diocesan and eparchial Bishops, and those deemed equivalent to them according to canons 381 § 2 *cic* and 313 *cceo*, as well as Coadjutor and Auxiliary Bishops or holders of special pastoral responsibilities, are invited to present to the Supreme Pontiff their resignation from pastoral office.

Art. 2. Upon reaching 75 years of age, non-Cardinal Dicastery Heads of the Roman Curia, Superior Prelates of the Roman Curia and Bishops holding other offices of the Holy See, do not *ipso facto* cede their office, but must present their resignation to the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 3. Likewise, Pontifical Representatives do not *ipso facto* cede their office upon reaching seventy-five years of age, but in this circumstance must present their resignation to the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 4. To be effective, resignation pursuant to articles 1-3 must be accepted by the Supreme Pontiff, who will decide by evaluating the concrete circumstances.

Art. 5. Once the resignation is presented, the office relative to articles 1-3 will be extended until acceptance of the resignation is communicated to the interested party, for a fixed or unspecified time, contrary to the general terms established by canons 189 § 3 *cic* and 970 § 1 *cceo*.

All that I have deliberated with this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* I order be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of particular mention; and I establish that it be promulgated by way of publication in the daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, entering into force on the same day of promulgation and that, subsequently, it be published in the official Commentary *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

*Given in Rome at Saint Peter's, on 12 February 2018, fifth of my Pontificate*

**Francis**