

Cardinal Ouellet denounces Viganó's call for Pope's resignation

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The Vatican has publicly denounced accusations that Pope Francis was complicit in hiding the offences of now-disgraced former cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington.

The word came Oct. 7 from Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, in an open letter to Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, the former Vatican nuncio to the United States.

“I tell you frankly that to accuse Pope Francis of having covered-up knowingly the case of an alleged sexual predator and, therefore, of being an accomplice to the corruption that afflicts the Church, to the point that he could no longer continue to carry out his reform as the first shepherd of the Church, appears to me from all viewpoints unbelievable and without any foundation,” Ouellet wrote. “I cannot understand how could you have allowed yourself to be convinced of this monstrous and unsubstantiated accusation. Francis had nothing to do with McCarrick’s promotions to New York, Metuchen, Newark and Washington. He stripped him of his Cardinal’s dignity as soon as there was a credible accusation of abuse of a minor.”

Archbishop Viganó had issued an open letter to Cardinal Ouellet in late September, urging him to tell what he knew about McCarrick. It followed his massive statement in mid-August calling on Pope Francis to resign because, he alleged, Pope Francis had known there were sanctions on McCarrick and not only did he lift them, he allegedly made him a trusted confidante and adviser on bishops’ appointments in the United States.

Indications are that allegations of sexual misconduct by McCarrick had reached the Vatican as early as 2000. However, wrote Ouellet, because there were only rumours and insufficient proof, then-Pope Benedict XVI never imposed formal sanctions on the retired Washington archbishop, and therefore Pope Francis could not have lifted them.

In late June, then-Cardinal McCarrick, the 88-year-old retired archbishop of Washington, said he would no longer exercise any public ministry “in obedience” to the Vatican after an allegation he abused a teenager 47 years ago in the Archdiocese of New York was found credible. Since then, several former seminarians have alleged that the cardinal would invite groups of them to a beach house and insist individual members of the group share a bed with him. Pope Francis accepted McCarrick’s resignation from the College of Cardinals on July 28 and ordered him to maintain “a life of prayer and penance” until a canonical trial examines accusations that he sexually abused minors.

Cardinal Ouellet’s letter, written with the approval of Pope Francis, was

published the day after the Vatican said the pope had ordered a "[thorough study of the entire documentation present in the archives](#)" of the dicasteries and offices of the Holy See regarding the former Cardinal McCarrick in order to ascertain all the relevant facts, to place them in their historical context and to evaluate them objectively."

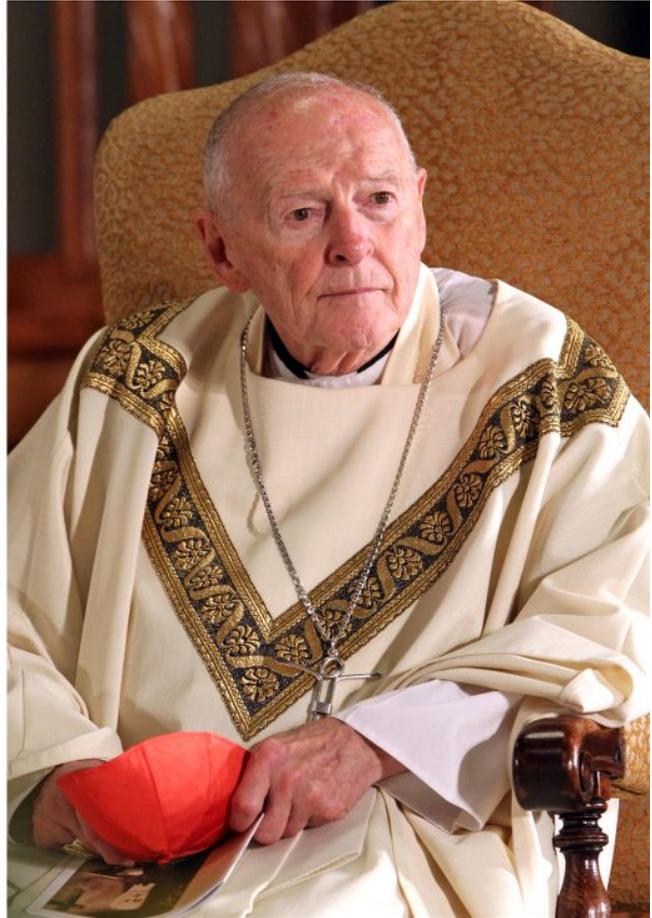
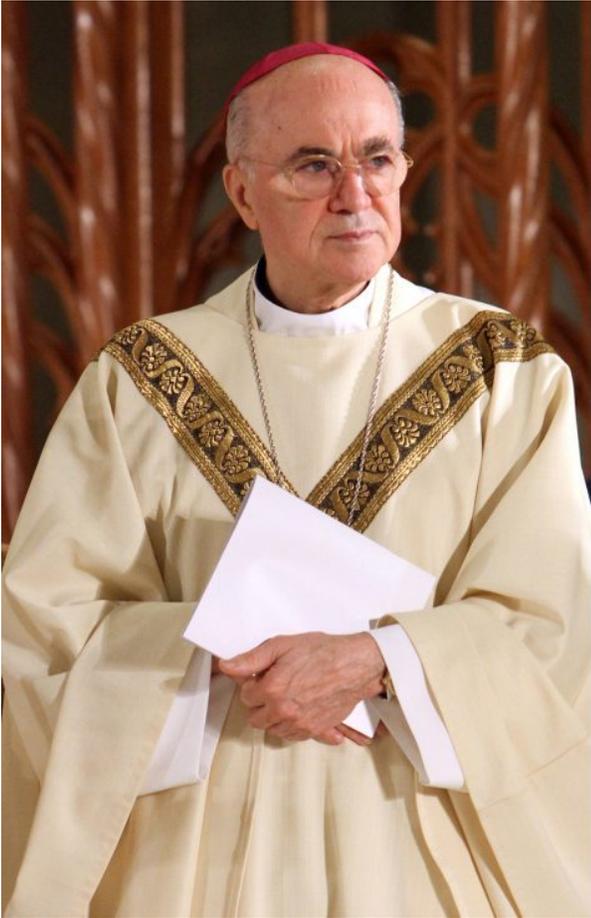
The letter did not defend the original handling of the allegations, stating "the Holy See is conscious that, from the examination of the facts and of the circumstances, it may emerge that choices were taken that would not be consonant with a contemporary approach to such issues."

Archbishop Viganó had said he personally informed Pope Francis in June 2013 that in "2009 or 2010," after Cardinal McCarrick had retired, Pope Benedict imposed sanctions on him because of allegations of sexual misconduct with and sexual harassment of seminarians. Archbishop Viganó later explained that Pope Benedict issued the sanctions "privately" perhaps "due to the fact that he (Archbishop McCarrick) was already retired, maybe due to the fact that he (Pope Benedict) was thinking he was ready to obey."

In his open letter Archbishop Viganó, Cardinal Ouellet said, "You say you informed Pope Francis on June 23, 2013, of the McCarrick case in an audience he granted to you like many other papal representatives he met for the first time that day."

"Imagine the enormous quantity of verbal and written information he received that day regarding many people and situations," the cardinal wrote. "I strongly doubt that McCarrick interested him as much as you would like us to believe, given the fact that he was an 82-year-old archbishop emeritus who had been without a post for seven years."

As for the written instructions the Congregation for Bishops prepared for Archbishop Viganó in 2011 when he was to begin his service as nuncio to the United States, "they say nothing at all about McCarrick." However, the cardinal added, "I told you verbally of the situation of the bishop emeritus who was to observe certain conditions and restrictions because of rumours about his behaviour in the past."



Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, then nuncio to the United States, and then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, are seen in a 2014 combination photo. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Cardinal McCarrick “was strongly exhorted not to travel and not to appear in public so as not to provoke further rumours,” Cardinal Ouellet said, but “it is false to present these measures taken in his regard as ‘sanctions’ decreed by Pope Benedict XVI and annulled by Pope Francis. After re-examining the archives, I certify that there are no such documents signed by either pope.”

And, unlike what Archbishop Viganó alleged, there are no documents from Cardinal Ouellet’s predecessor, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, saying that then-Cardinal McCarrick was ordered to live a life of withdrawal and silence under the threat of canonical penalties.

The reason such measures were not taken then and were only taken in June by Pope Francis, Cardinal Ouellet said, was because there was not “sufficient proof of his presumed guilt.”

“His case would have been the object of new disciplinary measures if the nunciature in Washington or any other source would have furnished us with recent and decisive information about his behaviour,” the cardinal wrote.

Archbishop Viganó left Rome as soon as his mid-August missive was published,

claiming that it was for his own safety. Cardinal Ouellet urged him to “come out of hiding” and “repent of your revolt,” and asked him, “How can you celebrate the holy Eucharist and pronounce his (the pope’s) name in the canon of the Mass?”

In closing, Cardinal Ouellet wrote: “Dear Viganò, in response to your unjust and unjustified attack, I can only conclude that the accusation is a political plot that lacks any real basis that could incriminate the Pope and that profoundly harms the communion of the Church. May God allow a prompt reparation of this flagrant injustice so that Pope Francis can continue to be recognized for who he is: a true shepherd, a resolute and compassionate father, a prophetic grace for the Church and for the World.”