

Top officials at Vatican press office submit their resignations

Pope Francis has accepted the resignations of Press Office Director Greg Burke and Vice Director Paloma Garcia Ovejero, who have served at the head of the Holy See's press office as the pope's spokespersons since August 2016.

Alessandro Gisotti, currently coordinator of social media for the Dicastery for Communication and past deputy editor-in-chief of Vatican Radio (now called Vatican News), was named director of the press office on an interim basis.

In a series of Tweets Dec. 31, Burke said that he and Ovejero have resigned, "effective Jan. 1. At this time of transition in Vatican communications, we think it's best the Holy Father is completely free to assemble a new team."

"I joined the Vatican in 2012. The experience has been fascinating, to say the least," he continued. "Thank you, Pope Francis. Un abrazo muy fuerte."

Ovejero wrote on Twitter that it is the end of a stage, saying in Spanish, "Thank you, Holy Father, for these two and a half years! Thank you, Greg, for your confidence, your patience and your example."

The resignations follow shortly after new appointments in the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication.

Earlier in December Pope Francis named veteran Vatican journalist Andrea Tornielli editorial director of Vatican communications after appointing in July Italian layman Paolo Ruffini to head up the department.

In a statement Dec. 31, Ruffini said that he respects the "autonomous and free choice" of Burke and Ovejero.

"In these few months of work together I could appreciate their professionalism, their humanity, their faith," he said. "I therefore thank them for the dedication with which they have done their work thus far."

Ruffini noted that the two began their service at the start of the pope's communications reforms and that "this significant commitment has contributed to the path of reform that today – according to them – requires a quick passage of witness, in the spirit of service to the Church that we all share."

About the coming year, Ruffini stated that he has full confidence in the abilities of Gisotti to guide the press office on an interim basis.

In his own statement Gisotti expressed his gratitude for the pope's trust in him and thanked Burke and Ovejero for their friendship and for their work over the past two and a half years.

"I will try to fulfill the task entrusted to me in the best of my ability," he said, adding that he intends to serve with the spirit he learned from the previous director of the press office, Rev. Federico Lombardi, whom he learned from for nearly 20 years.

"I know that my job, as far as it is interim, is particularly challenging, but I am comforted by knowing the great value of my colleagues in the press office," he said. "On many occasions I have appreciated their professionalism and dedication."

A native of St. Louis, Mo., Burke was a senior communications advisor to the Vatican Secretary of State from 2012 until his appointment as vice director of the press office in February 2016. He served as vice director under Lombardi until taking over as director Aug. 1, 2016.

Ovejero, who is from Madrid, had worked as a correspondent in Italy and the Vatican since 2012 for the Spanish radio station Cadena COPE. She was the first woman to serve as vice director of the Vatican press office.