

# Chief adviser to pope announces retirement

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In a major change of church leadership, Pope John Paul II accepted the resignation of his chief adviser, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli — architect of the church's policies toward Eastern European communism — and replaced him with veteran diplomat Archbishop Angelo Sodano.

The pope praised the cardinal in a Dec. 1 announcement of the changes as a "wise and expert collaborator."

Pope John Paul also promoted French Monsignor Jean-Louis Tauran, 47, to replace Italian Archbishop Sodano, 63, as secretary of the Secretariat of State's Section for Relations with States. Monsignor Tauran had been the section's undersecretary.

Vatican officials said the changes signal continuity in the church's overall international policies. They noted Archbishop Sodano has been Cardinal Casaroli's chief assistant since 1988 in dealing with foreign governments.

Cardinal Casaroli, a 76-year-old Italian, had been secretary of state since 1979. He had also been the Vatican's point man in negotiations with Eastern Europe's communist states for more than a quarter century.

Vatican officials said the changes following the resignation puts new people in charge of the Vatican's international affairs at a time of rapid political and social transformations — especially in Eastern Europe, where the collapse of communist-

rule has changed church priorities.

The emphasis now is no longer on keeping the church alive in an atmosphere of oppression, but building a strong church capable of once again becoming a major influence in Eastern European life.

Vatican officials said the return of religious freedom in Eastern Europe also will allow the church to put more emphasis on Third World problems, especially the relationship between underdeveloped and developed countries.

The secretary of state is the church's most powerful policy-making official after the pope and functions as a prime minister. He is in charge of relations with foreign governments and national hierarchies. He also coordinates the work of the Roman Curia, the church's central administrative agencies.

No Vatican document is made public without first passing through the hands of the secretary of state.

The secretary of the Section for Relations with States functions as the Vatican's foreign minister. Monsignor Tauran, the new secretary, was also named an archbishop by the pope.

The pope announced the changes exactly a year after his historic first meeting with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev which opened the door to greater religious freedom for Soviet Catholics.

Cardinal Casaroli was the chief architect of the meeting as he was of the Vatican policy of "small steps" — slow, painstaking negotiations with communist governments to keep the church alive and give it



File photo  
Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, chief adviser to Pope John Paul II, tendered his resignation on Dec. 1 in Rome.

some breathing room behind the Iron Curtain.

Cardinal Casaroli had submitted his resignation a year ago when he turned 75, the normal retirement age for cardinals heading Curia departments.

At the ceremony announcing the cardinal's retirement, the pope said he refused to accept the resignation immediately last year because "I did not want to deny myself so soon of such a wise and expert collaborator."

Cardinal Casaroli, then an archbishop, was named to head the Secretariat of State on April 28, 1979, six months after the current pope was elected to the papacy. Pope John Paul made him a cardinal two months later.

The two men, however, have worked together on church Eastern European policies for over 20 years. Their collaboration started when the cardinal was the roving Vatican diplomat responsible for opening contacts with communist governments and negotiating church-state accords. Dur-

ing this time the pope was a bishop and then a cardinal in Poland.

Pope John Paul said Dec. 1 he first met his future secretary of state when the Vatican diplomat "was taking significant steps to improve the situation of the church behind the so-called Iron Curtain."

"In Poland these efforts produced important fruit, allowing for the normalization of church life in the west and north of the country," said the pope.

He called Cardinal Casaroli "the closest collaborator of my ministry and my primary adviser."

The cardinal was praised for "the great help" he provided the pope during "these years in which the church and the world have seen events and transformations of such vast content."

Cardinal Casaroli retires after 50 years in the Vatican's diplomatic service.

More than half the service has been as a negotiator with communist governments. It started in 1963, when Pope John XXIII

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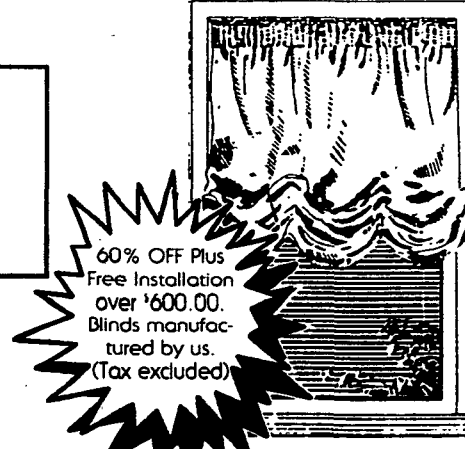
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