

U.S. priest serving at doctrinal congregation is new nuncio to Ireland

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Msgr. Charles J. Brown, new nuncio to Ireland. (bbc.co.uk)

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI has named U.S. Msgr. Charles J. Brown, a longtime official of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as the new apostolic nuncio to Ireland. With the appointment, he was named archbishop of the titular see of Aquileia.

The appointment, announced by the Vatican Nov. 26, comes at a delicate moment in Vatican-Irish relations. In July, the Vatican recalled its previous nuncio, Archbishop Giuseppe Leanza, after Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny and others sharply criticized the Vatican's handling of clerical abuse.

In early November, the Irish government announced it was closing its embassy to the Holy See for economic reasons, although keeping diplomatic relations open.

Archbishop-designate Brown, a 52-year-old priest of the Archdiocese of New York, has worked since 1994 in the doctrinal congregation, which was headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger until his election as pope in 2005. As nuncio, he will act as the Holy See's ambassador to Ireland and will also serve as a liaison with the Catholic Church community there.

Vatican officials said it was unusual to appoint a non-diplomat to such a position. Some observers pointed to the fact that the doctrinal congregation has overall responsibility over cases of clerical sex abuse of minors, and said the Vatican appears to expect the nuncio to play a key role in the healing of the scandal.

Reaction to the appointment was generally favorable in the Irish media. The Irish Times said in an editorial that the new nuncio would arrive with two major advantages over his predecessors.

"As an Irish American he will have an intuitive understanding of the Catholic people of this state and of this island. As a man who has served at the (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) for 17 years he will be deeply familiar with the issue that has plagued the Irish Catholic Church for almost two decades," it said.

Born Oct. 13, 1959, in New York, Archbishop-designate Brown graduated from the

University of Notre Dame in 1981, where he majored in history. He holds graduate degrees in theology from Oxford University, in medieval studies from the University of Toronto and in sacramental theology from the

Pontifical Athenaeum Sant'Anselmo in Rome.

He was ordained a priest in 1989 in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and served from 1989-91 as vicar at St. Brendan's parish in the Bronx. He came to the doctrinal congregation in 1994, working in the doctrinal section, and in 2004 also became an adjunct secretary of the International Theological Commission.

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