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Cardinal Antonetti, Vatican diplomat, finance manager, dies at 90

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Italian Cardinal Lorenzo Antonetti, who died Wednesday at the age of 90, dedicated many years as a "diligent colleague" at the Holy See, Pope Francis said.

The cardinal had spent more than 35 years at the service of the Vatican as a diplomat and a financial manager, and he'd been the papal delegate for the basilicas of St. Francis and St. Mary of the Angels in Assisi, Italy.

The pope said everywhere the cardinal worked "he expressed valued testimony of fervent priestly zeal and fidelity to the Gospel."

Pope Francis made his comments in a telegram of condolence released Wednesday at the Vatican.

Born in Romagnano Sesia in the northwestern corner of Italy, Antonetti studied at the diocesan seminary in Novara before being sent to Rome for further studies. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1945.

After ordination he continued his studies in Rome, earning a degree in theology the Pontifical University of St. Thomas, known as the Angelicum, and a degree in canon law from the Pontifical Gregorian University.

From 1949 to 1950, he studied at the Vatican's diplomatic academy. After a brief assignment in the Vatican Secretariat of State, he was posted to the apostolic nunciature in Lebanon, where he stayed until 1955.

Next came a four-year assignment at the apostolic delegation in Venezuela, then another assignment at the Secretariat of State's department for foreign relations.

After four years in the apostolic nunciature in France, in 1968 he was very briefly posted to the apostolic delegation in Washington.

In February 1968, he was named an archbishop and nuncio to Nicaragua and Honduras, a post he held until 1973. His first assignment to Africa came next; he was nuncio to Zaire from 1973 to 1977.

In 1988, he served as nuncio to France, where represented the Vatican in Paris for seven years.

When Antonetti was named pro-president of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See in 1995, it marked a return to the Vatican financial office. He had been secretary of the office for 11 years. He retired in 1998.

Blessed John Paul II named him to the College of Cardinals in 1998.

Antonetti's death left the College of Cardinals with 205 members; 113 of those would be under the age of 80, and eligible to vote in a conclave.

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