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Council of Cardinals to meet with Francis for fourth time

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 25, 2014

The select group of eight cardinals advising Pope Francis on reforming the governance of the Catholic church are set to meet with him for the fourth time, following the canonization ceremonies for Popes John XXIII and John Paul II.

While it remains unknown just what the prelates are expecting to discuss in their April 28-30 meeting, the group has previously spent significant time studying the Vatican's finances.

Following their last meeting, held in February, Francis announced a sweeping reorganization of the church's financial structures [1] -- creating a new central office for financial matters called the Secretariat for the Economy. Sydney Cardinal George Pell, a member of the Council of Cardinals, was appointed to lead the office.

Francis established the Council of Cardinals last year to "study a project of revision" of the Vatican's bureaucracy.

The Vatican has not indicated what the cardinals might be studying in their April meeting. But in a visit to the U.S. in early April, the group's coordinator, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, said Francis is seeking a "new way" of governing the church [2].

"What the Holy Father is proposing to us in a simple manner each day are elements of a teaching role that is rich in the novelty of the Gospel," Rodríguez said April 8 at a meeting of the English Speaking Conference of the Order of Friars Minor in St. Petersburg, Fla.

"There is a new way of thinking, including the way of governing in the church, here," Rodríguez said. "We have such a lot to learn."

Besides focusing on financial matters, the cardinals' group also previously advised Francis to set up a Vatican commission tasked with advising the pontiff on safeguarding children from sex abuse and working pastorally with abuse victims.

The pope announced the initial members of that commission [3] in March, tasking Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, along with four laywomen, one layman and two priests, to begin its work. At press time, that group was set to meet for the first time in Rome May 1-3.

The cardinals' group met in October and December 2013, and again Feb. 17-19. Following April's meeting, they are scheduled to meet again in Rome with the pope July 1-4.

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