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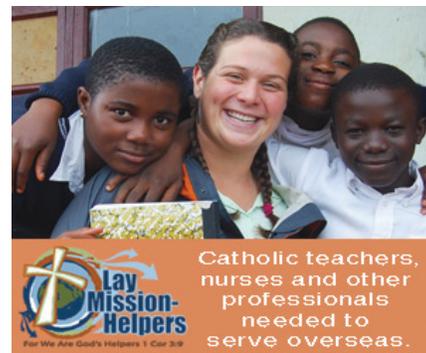
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Vatican's bishops czar says papal accuser guilty of 'political frame-job'

Elise Harris and John L. Allen Jr. Oct 7, 2018
SENIOR_CORRESPONDENT



Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, acknowledges the congregation after concelebrating Mass July 26 at the Basilica of Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupre in Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupre, Quebec, on the feast of St. Anne. Also pictured are Archbishop Valery Vienneau of Moncton, and Cardinal Gerald Lacroix of Quebec City. (Credit: CNS photo/Philippe Vaillancourt, Presence.)



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ROME — In a stinging three-page letter, the Vatican's top official for supervising bishops has accused a former papal envoy who linked Pope Francis to the scandals surrounding ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of a "deplorable and incomprehensible" attack, which is both at odds with the truth and a betrayal of his priestly calling.

In what he said was his own "testimony" on the McCarrick case, Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, said not only that Francis did not conceal sexual abuse by McCarrick, calling Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's accusations a political "frame job," but he also said that while private restrictions had been in place against McCarrick, there were no formal "sanctions" imposed by Pope emeritus Benedict XVI that Francis ignored.

Viganò, who served as the papal ambassador in the U.S. from 2011 to 2016 under both Popes Benedict and Francis, made his charges in an explosive letter released Aug. 25. This marks the first time a senior Vatican official has directly responded to the substance of those charges.

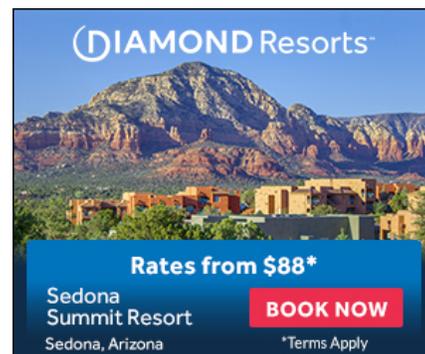
With regard to Viganò's claim that he briefed Francis on the McCarrick case in 2013, Ouellet in his Oct. 7 letter expressed "strong doubts" that the pope truly understood the gravity of the case.

"Imagine the enormous amount of both verbal and written information that he would have received on that occasion on many persons and situations," he said, referring to the fact that Viganò spoke to Francis during a meeting with papal envoys from all over the world.

"I strongly doubt that McCarrick would have interested him to the point that you want people to believe, since at the time he was an 82-year old archbishop emeritus, and for seven years had not had a job."

Further, Ouellet adds that from the moment he took over for the Vatican's office for bishops in 2010, he never brought up McCarrick with either Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI or Francis except recently.

Ouellet confirmed that McCarrick had been asked by his predecessor, Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, to avoid public appearances and stay out of the spotlight, but he said those were not formal "sanctions" and neither Benedict nor Francis had ever signed a letter to that effect. The reason, he said, is because at the time, they did not have enough evidence to prove his guilt.



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public,” in order to prevent rumors, and was urged to live a “private life” of silence “with the rigor of canonical penalties,” he said.

Ouellet said he is “amazed” at the flaws in the selection process for bishops that led McCarrick to rise to power, but he could not comprehend how Viganò came to believe the “monstrous accusation” leveled against the pope, given that Francis had nothing to do with McCarrick’s promotion in the dioceses of New York, Metuchen, Newark and Washington.

He voiced hope that out of respect for the victims and the need for justice, the investigations currently being carried out both by the U.S. bishops and by the Vatican would “finally offer us an overall critical view of the procedures and circumstances of this painful case, so that such facts are not repeated in the future.”

The prelate accused Viganò of making unfounded accusations for political reasons, saying that “in response to your unjust and unjustified attack, I conclude that the accusation is a political frame job without a real foundation intended to incriminate the pope and I repeat, that it has profoundly wounded the communion of the Church.”



To this end, he noted how Viganò took issue with his stance on Francis’s 2016 exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, as well as the pope’s decision to adjust the Catechism of the Catholic Church to read that the death penalty is inadmissible in every circumstance.

Referring to the most recent letter published by Viganò, published Sept. 29, in which the prelate makes a direct appeal to Ouellet to publish documents contained in the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops related to McCarrick and accuses Francis of forgetting about Christ, Ouellet said that the message, though apparently spiritual, “seemed really too sarcastic, even blasphemous! This cannot come from the spirit of God.”

In a more personal tone, Ouellet said he is aware that “bitterness and delusion” have marked Viganò’s service to the Holy See, but urged the former ambassador not to end his priestly life “in open and scandalous rebellion, which inflicts a very painful wound on the spouse of Christ, which you pretend to serve better, aggravating the division and confusion of the People of God!”

obedience to Christ, and closed his letter with an appeal for Viganò to remember his priestly call, asking him directly: “How can you celebrate the holy Eucharist and pronounce his name in the canon of the Mass? How can you pray the holy rosary, St. Michael the Archangel and the Mother of God, condemning condemning him whom the Lord protects and accompanies everyday in his heavy and courageous ministry?”

The prelate’s letter comes the day after the Vatican announced that they are carrying out a “thorough investigation” of the McCarrick case by examining documentation on him in the archives of the Roman Curia, and that they will reveal the conclusions “in due course.”

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