

Benedict XVI: 'God told me' to resign

by [Alessandro Speciale](#)

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI resigned from the papacy because "God told me" to, according to a report by a Catholic news agency.

The Zenit news agency reported on Monday (Aug. 19) that Benedict decided to step back as a result of what he described as a "mystical experience" that shouldn't be confused with a vision.

That experience sparked an "absolute desire" to dedicate his life exclusively to prayer, in a solitary relationship with God, Benedict reportedly said.

Zenit writes that its report is based on the account of one of the few people who are granted a meeting with the former pope, who is living in a retrofitted monastery on the Vatican grounds.

Benedict shocked the world with the announcement of his resignation on Feb. 11, becoming the first pope to leave his job in more than 600 years. He told aides he intended to live out his life "hidden from the world."

When he announced his resignation, Benedict told a group of cardinals in Latin that his "strengths" were no longer sufficient "to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me" because of old age.

According to the report, Benedict also praised the "charisma" of his successor, Pope Francis, saying that his actions as the leader of the Catholic Church show that his election was "God's will."