

Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law retires from prominent post

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Nine years after the clerical sex abuse scandal forced his resignation as archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Bernard F. Law has stepped down from his controversial post as head of a prominent basilica in Rome.

The Vatican announced on Monday (Nov. 21) that Pope Benedict XVI has named Spanish Archbishop Santos Abril y Castello as the new archpriest of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major.

The announcement made no reference to Law, who has served as archpriest since May 2004. Advocates for sex abuse victims criticized the late Pope John Paul II for giving Law the prestigious post after his mishandling of clergy sex abuse in Boston, which broke open the abuse scandals that shook the Catholic Church in the U.S.

Law turned 80 earlier this month, the normal retirement age for cardinals, and also lost his right to vote in any future papal election. The Rev. Federico Lombardi, the Vatican's chief spokesman, said Law's membership in several Vatican offices -- including the body that advises Benedict on the selection of bishops -- has expired.

Archpriests of papal basilicas often serve past retirement, however. Law's immediate two predecessors at St. Mary Major both held the largely ceremonial post until the age of 82.

Law has not announced where he will go next or what activities, if any, he will pursue. A spokesman for the Archdiocese of Boston referred reporters to the Holy See. Lombardi said that he had no knowledge of Law's plans, which he said would be "entirely up to his discretion."