

Pope Francis redirects employee bonuses to charity

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Vatican employees won't receive the special bonus they are traditionally awarded when a new pope is elected, the Vatican confirmed on Thursday (April 18), under orders from Pope Francis to give extra money to charity instead.

"On account of the difficult situation of the general economy, it seemed neither possible nor opportune to burden Vatican institutions with a considerable unforeseen extraordinary expense," the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said in an emailed statement.

In place of the employees' bonus, Pope Francis ordered Vatican officials to make a donation to some "charitable organizations."

The money will be drawn from the pontiff's personal charity budget "as a sign of the church's attention for the many people who are suffering" from the global economic slowdown, Lombardi said.

In 2005, some 4,000 Vatican employees received a 1,000 euro bonus (\$1,300) upon the death of Pope John Paul II, and another 500 euros (\$650) upon the election of his successor, Benedict XVI.

Francis told journalists a few days after his election that he wanted a "poor church, for the poor," and he has brought a simpler and more sober style to the papacy.

He cut back on the liturgical pomp of his predecessor and has chosen to live in a Vatican guesthouse rather than in the luxurious papal apartments.

Lombardi stressed that the decision to forgo the bonus was not taken as a consequence of the Vatican's own financial difficulties.

In 2011, the Holy See's budget registered a \$19 million deficit. For the same year, the Vatican City State, which has a separate budget, posted a \$27 million surplus.

In December, the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, warned that the Vatican needed to adopt "effective" cost reduction measures in the face of a "continuing inability to increase revenues" on account of the global economic crisis.