

Pope kicks off reform mission in meeting with Vatican department heads

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Francis on Tuesday (Sept. 10) met for three hours with the heads of all Vatican departments, signaling his desire to introduce more collaboration and transparency in the traditionally secretive and top-heavy governance style of the Catholic Church.

About 30 people attended, including the heads of the Vatican's eight congregations and 12 councils, as well as top officials from the church's tribunals and from the administration of Vatican state.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's outgoing secretary of state, also participated, in one of his last official engagements before his successor, Archbishop Pietro Parolin, takes over on Oct. 15.

While the meeting took place behind closed doors and its contents were not revealed, the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said in a statement that Francis had the opportunity to listen to the "considerations and advice" of his closest collaborators in Rome.

While not unprecedented, such meetings in the past were usually convened to address a specific issue.

Lombardi stressed that Francis had already met all the Vatican's department heads personally in recent months.

Reforming the Vatican Curia, or central bureaucracy, was one of the key missions outlined by the cardinals heading into the conclave that elected Francis in March.

The reform process, according to Lombardi, will have another “important moment” when a group of eight cardinals summoned by the pope to oversee reforms for the Curia meets for the first time in Rome on Oct. 1-3.

The group includes Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston and is chaired by Honduran Cardinal Oscar Maradiaga.

Allegations of widespread mismanagement and corruption in the Curia overshadowed the final years of Pope Benedict XVI’s papacy, including the so-called Vatileaks affair. Many of the scandals were at least partly blamed on inefficiency and lack of collaboration among Vatican bureaucrats, who are mostly Italian churchmen.

“I think that the Curia has fallen somewhat from the level it once had,” Francis himself admitted during the in-flight news conference he held on the way back from Brazil in July.