

Pope Francis directs Curia to hear confessions

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December 17, 2013

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ROME (RNS) As part of Pope Francis' pastoral reforms, all 44 senior members of the Roman Curia, or governing body, must take turns hearing confession at a church near the Vatican.

There is even speculation that Francis himself could hear confessions at the Church of the Santo Spirito in Sassia, just outside the Vatican walls, where his bishops and cardinals have been directed to perform the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

"I think it's likely the pope will discreetly hear confessions at some point," said Giacomo Galeazzi, a veteran Vatican watcher from Italy's La Stampa newspaper. "The pope has long been an advocate of the pastoral aspects of the ministry and now the Curia will as well."

Galeazzi and others said the change, announced Sunday (Dec. 15), is part of a wider reform of the Vatican bureaucracy under Francis that includes the appointment of Archbishop Pietro Parolin as secretary of state. The two share a similar approach with an emphasis on humility.

The Curia, which has a powerful and central governing power at the Vatican, is seeing its role change.

"The pope doesn't want bureaucrats," Galeazzi said. "He wants pastors."

The selection of the Church of the Santo Spirito in Sassia as the location for the confessions is not a coincidence: The church is dedicated to the Divine Mercy devotion of Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who was named a saint in 2000 by Pope

John Paul II.

The centerpiece of the devotion, according to Robert Moynihan, founder of Inside the Vatican Magazine, is the belief that God's mercy and love are always available for human beings even if they are not deserving of that love.