

Adviser to Pope Francis calls resignation rumors 'cheap soap opera'

by [Claire Giangravé](#) in the [July 13, 2022](#) issue



Pope Francis delivers his address during an audience with members of the Italian Civil Aviation Authority at the Vatican on May 13. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

In an interview published June 8, Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga dismissed rumors circulating in the media that the pope might resign as nothing more than “a cheap soap opera.”

According to Rodríguez Maradiaga, who advises the pope within the Council of Cardinals, news reports suggesting Pope Francis’s physical decline will soon lead to a new conclave are “fake news” perpetrated by outlets located primarily in the United States, where, he added, the pope notoriously faces “strong opposition.”

“He has never thought about [resigning],” Rodríguez Maradiaga said in the interview with Spanish news outlet EFE. Rodríguez Maradiaga is coordinator of the Council of

Cardinals, also known as the Council of Cardinal Advisers, which helps the pope in the management of Vatican and church affairs, and he is considered to be in the pope's inner circle.

Numerous articles published recently in major news outlets have attempted to draw conclusions from a conflagration of scheduled events next month. On August 27, cardinals from all over the world will convene at the Vatican for a ceremony at which the pope will make 21 new cardinals. The next day, Francis will visit the basilica where Pope Celestine V, known for resigning from the pontificate, is buried.

Cardinal summits, or consistories, are rarely held in August, and Vatican insiders had predicted the event would take place in September. The earlier date is fueling speculation that Francis may be in a hurry to cement his legacy. The choice to appoint cardinals—which the pope had done with consistent frequency until the pandemic—has also been interpreted as a sign that he is paving the way toward his successor.

Rodríguez Maradiaga said that the consistory instead “is proof that the pope is moving forward, he is not going to resign, nor is he sick.”

The pope's physical health has seen a decline ever since he was brought to a Roman hospital for a “programmed intervention” in the removal of one side of his colon in July 2021. Since then, Francis's longtime struggles with sciatica and knee pain have worsened, leading him to cancel events that put a strain on his legs and eventually forcing him to use a wheelchair.

The Vatican has maintained its classic silence concerning the pope's health and has released no statement on his medical situation or assistance. Pope Francis himself has been dismissive of concerns regarding his health, joking in St. Peter's Square in May that “a bit of tequila” is all his knee really needs.

What has most fueled conversations about a possible retirement is Francis's decision to visit the Basilica of Collemaggio in the town of L'Aquila, Italy, where Pope Celestine V, who retired from the pontificate in 1294 after curial opposition, is buried. Pope Benedict XVI visited the holy site in 2009, four years before he handed in his own resignation, and laid his pallium, a liturgical vestment symbolizing papal authority, before the tomb. Benedict has been living inside the Vatican since his resignation, and while keeping a low profile, he has become a symbol for Francis's critics who preferred the traditional bent of the German pontiff.

There is no canon law that determines what happens to pontiffs who choose to resign. Creating a legal framework for the role of the emeritus pope “is not a necessity,” said Juan Ignacio Arrieta, the secretary for the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, while speaking to a handful of reporters on May 24. But “many are thinking about this,” he admitted, adding that “handling these situations is hard.”

Arrieta said little can be gained from the experience of retiring bishops in dioceses, since even in those cases the transition is rarely smooth. He also said that as the supreme legislator, popes can change laws at will, meaning if a law for emeritus popes were to be made now, it doesn’t mean that the next pope would not change it or eliminate it.

“We leave all things to people’s common sense,” Arrieta said. —Religion News Service