

Archbishop who oversaw nuns probe transferred to Indianapolis

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI on Thursday (Oct. 18) appointed a high-ranking Vatican prelate as archbishop of Indianapolis after he played a key role in trying to bridge the gap between Rome and U.S. nuns.

Archbishop Joseph William Tobin, a 60-year old Detroit native, was called by Benedict only two years ago to take the role of secretary, or the No. 2 position, of the Vatican department that oversees religious orders all over the world.

In that role, Tobin had struck a notably more conciliatory note than Cardinal Franc Rode, who headed the department until 2011.

In 2008, Rode opened a controversial "visitation" of American nuns, telling Vatican Radio he was worried by their feminist views and secularized mentality.

The visitation was led by Mother Mary Clare Millea, the superior general of the Catholic Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but the Vatican has yet to issue an official report on its results.

A parallel, independent investigation on the largest umbrella group for U.S. nuns, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, was launched by the Vatican doctrinal office. That probe led to the appointment of Seattle Archbishop Peter J. Sartain to overhaul the LCWR's practices and perceived theological ambiguities.

In an interview with National Catholic Reporter soon after his Vatican appointment in August 2010, Tobin said his experience had offered him a "different picture of American women religious than the one that has been presented in Rome. My own impression is extremely positive."

Coming from a family of Irish descent with 12 brothers and sisters, Tobin served as the head of his religious order, the Redemptorists, from 1997 to 2009.

At a news conference on Thursday morning in Indianapolis, the new archbishop sported a Colts scarf and greeted Latino Catholics in Spanish.

"It is humbling for me to receive this mission in a place where the Catholic Church predates the United States," he said.

Tobin admitted being surprised by his appointment, but added that neither the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, nor the head of Vatican department for bishops, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, linked his transfer to Indianapolis to the investigation of American nuns.