

Pope Francis cleans house at the Vatican Bank

by [Alessandro Speciale](#)

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Two top managers of the Vatican Bank resigned on Monday (July 1), just five days after Pope Francis appointed an independent commission to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the scandal-plagued bank.

The surprise resignation of the bank's director general, Paolo Cipriani, and of his deputy, Massimo Tulli, follows the arrest of a senior Vatican official with close ties to the bank who was charged on Friday with attempting to smuggle 20 million euros into Italy from Switzerland.

Cipriani, 58, served as the bank's director general since 2007 and will be replaced on an interim basis by the bank's president, German financier Ernst von Freyberg, who was appointed last February in one of Pope Benedict XVI's last official acts.

With its checkered history marked by allegations of shady deals and its tradition of utter secrecy, the Vatican Bank has become a focal point in criticism over mismanagement and corruption within the Curia, the church's central bureaucracy.

Francis, who was elected with a clear mandate to reform the Curia, has called for a simpler, poorer church. To him, the Vatican's scandals are a powerful countermessage to the church's mission of preaching the gospel.

By moving swiftly to reform the an institution formally known as the Institute for the Works of Religion, Francis seems to be signaling his resolve to tackle a persistent source of scandal that his predecessors were unwilling or unable to put down.

In 2010, Cipriani was put under investigation by Rome prosecutors for alleged money laundering, together with then-president Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, who was

sacked two years later.

During the investigation, magistrates froze \$33 million in two Vatican bank accounts in Italy.

The money was released some months later, but the investigation is still ongoing.

On Wednesday, Pope Francis created an independent review commission with full powers to access the bank's data and documents, as a prelude to reforms that might bring its operations more in "harmony" with the church's mission.

The Vatican has spent the last three years trying to bring its financial practices in line with international standards; an international watchdog has recommended more oversight on the bank's operations.

The bank has been overshadowed by scandal for several decades, most famously the collapse of an Italian bank which led to the death of Italian banker Roberto Calvi. He was found hanging from Blackfriars Bridge in London in 1982.

According to Vatican press release, interim president von Freyberg "will be supported by Rolando Marranci as acting Deputy Director and Antonio Montaresi in the newly created position of acting Chief Risk Officer with responsibility of overseeing compliance and special projects." Both men are Italian but have experience in the banking sector in the U.S. and in London.

They will be assisted by Elizabeth McCaul and Raffaele Cosimo, advisers from the Washington-based consulting firm Promontory Group, who are charged with "conducting a forensic review and screening its client relationships," according to the bank's press release.