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Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, speaks at a Vatican news conference Oct. 9, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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After 13 years of daring acts of charity that made him break the law in the name of the Gospel and elevate Rome's homeless to the heart of the church, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the pope's "Robin Hood" leaves Rome after nearly three decades to become archbishop of Lódz, Poland.

Five months into Pope Francis' papacy, on Aug. 3, 2013, then-Msgr. Konrad Krajewski was picked by the pontiff to be the charity point-man of the Vatican.

"He told me that I would not have a desk, that I should not stay in the Vatican City, that I should not deal with formal offices ... that I should not have my own car, and that I should not have a secretary," he told OSV News March 12.

"He told me to give up everything," Krajewski said. "And later I realized that I actually received the most when I simply had nothing."

"It turned my life upside down," the Polish prelate said. He spoke to OSV News the day the Vatican announced he would leave the post of prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity and return to his hometown.

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Longtime archbishop of Lódz, Cardinal Grzegorz Rys, was appointed archbishop of Kraków Nov. 26, 2025. Since then, the search for the new archbishop of Lódz continued.

"The Holy Father asked me ... whether, after so many years, I could see myself there and whether I would want it. It was not that the Holy Father told me that I must go ... he simply asked whether I could see myself there. Whether I would be available," Krajewski told OSV News.

"I said, of course, with joy: yes. But it wasn't only about joy," he said.

"From the very beginning of my priesthood, I believed that I had promised obedience to the bishop. And it is precisely in moments like these that this promise is fulfilled: One does not think about oneself, but about what one's superiors propose."

He told OSV News he is returning home after 28 years spent in Rome, where he arrived first to serve St. John Paul II, then Pope Benedict XVI as master of papal ceremonies and over 12 years as papal almoner for Pope Francis.

"I never really left Lódz. I left Lódz in order to be here, in Rome, with the universal church, with the pope. But I never left Lódz in my heart; I always remained connected to it."

He admitted, however, that in Rome he leaves behind a Vatican family.

"Apart from the homeless who were entrusted to me by Pope Francis and whom I served in his name" — and who sent him many of the 800 "heartfelt" farewell messages he received on March 12 — he said he feels "a very deep bond with the workers of Rome."

"Not so much with the hierarchy as with the ordinary people — carpenters, those who set up the chairs in St. Peter's Square, plumbers," he told OSV News.

"In order to create all those shelters and showers for the poor, I worked together with them — my Roman family. They never needed any documents or paperwork. Whenever I called, they were there."

They were there when in November 2014, showers for the homeless would be built under the sweeping white colonnade of St. Peter's Square.

Over the years, an outpatient clinic for the poor was built in that same spot, in the touristy center of the Vatican.



Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, helps carry a cake as he hosts a dinner for the poor in the dining hall at the Vatican June 29, 2018. (CNS/Gianna Iasilli)

In 2019, the plumbers and carpenters of the Vatican were there for him when Krajewski hit another milestone of Francis' revolution of tenderness: The pope had an empty Roman palace to allocate.

After extensive renovation carried out under the supervision of Krajewski, and which left historical frescoes on the walls, Palazzo Migliori was opened in November 2019 in time for the third World Day of the Poor.

Recalling his Roman "family," Krajewski told OSV News: "They also drove around Rome with me whenever some intervention was needed — things that were not always fully possible according to the law, such as turning on water or electricity in abandoned houses. All of them helped me, putting themselves at risk."

In a move that gained him the nickname of the pope's Robin Hood, Krajewski on May 12, 2019, climbed into a manhole in Rome to restore electricity to an abandoned building occupied by about 450 people, including many migrants, and around 100 children.

The power had been cut because of more than $300,000 in unpaid bills. To reconnect electricity, he broke a police seal — technically committing a crime — but was never charged despite criticism from then-Italy's interior minister.

When questioned about the legality of his actions, Krajewski replied, "The Gospel is my law." A year later, several migrants living in the building — most of them Muslim — sent him a video thanking him for what he had done.

"In a moment like that you don't think about the consequences, but only about the fact that the help is necessary," he said.

"I was able to do many things because I had the trust of Pope Francis. He told me to think according to the Gospel, and that challenged me. It was something that kept me awake at night," he said.

"He only said: 'You must have a lot of imagination — evangelical imagination. So think about what Jesus would do.' When someone leaves you that kind of freedom, but at the same time shows you a clear goal, then all your strength becomes, so to speak, focused and united," Krajewski told OSV News.

"I experienced the most beautiful years of my life here as a person," he said of his three decades in Rome. "But I think I did not waste those years. They were truly for the church — through people."



Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Service of Charity, distributes humanitarian aid in Zaporizhzhia, eastern Ukraine in September 2022. (OSV News/courtesy Dicastery for the Service of Charity)

He said he learned the most from the poor of Rome during his mission as an almoner.

"Their needs had to be discovered, so that we would not help someone the way we wanted to help, but in the way they actually needed. It is very easy to force help on someone — for example, to give someone a ham sandwich when he doesn't even

like ham. Instead, you ask the person what he or she really needs."

"That is true charity," Krajewski told OSV News. "It means sharing yourself and thinking about what each person needs in order to restore their dignity."

With Krajewski in charge, the poor were regularly welcomed inside Casa Santa Marta, where the pope lived, and the Swiss Guards were saluting them as they made their way to the Elemosineria Apostolica — the Apostolic Almsgiving office — for lunch with Krajewski in his apartment every Tuesday. Francis made it perfectly clear — they're one of us, and they deserve the Vatican to be their home, the cardinal pointed out.

"The task of the Apostolic Almsgiving is to empty the account for the charity of the Holy Father for the poor, according to the logic of the Gospel," reads the main banner on the website for the office — entrusted now to Spanish Augustinian Archbishop Luis Marín de San Martín, new prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity.

A Vatican almsgiving task that elevated Krajewski to one of the major — and most colorful — figures in the universal church, taught him "to wait."

Earlier on, "I wanted everything immediately, all at once," having a "choleric temperament." But with the poor, "it doesn't work," he told OSV News.

"They taught me. They calmed me down a bit. They showed me that everyone has their own path, and that making calculations or statistics doesn't really make sense," the cardinal told OSV News.

"If someone asked me how many poor people there are in Rome, I would say: I don't know. Because every person is different. Restoring the dignity of even one person was the most important thing. Numbers or systems never mattered."

"You have to wait for them," he said of ministering to the poor. "The door must always remain open. They must always have your phone number. And you shouldn't be surprised if someone calls at two in the morning saying that the next day he wants to go back home after 10 years. So they taught me this kind of inner calm — for their sake."

Krajewski traveled to Ukraine 10 times under Francis' pontificate to distribute help, but above all — to "embrace" the Ukrainians, in his own words, and bring them

comfort from the Holy Father.

The Ukraine mission that included escaping gunfire in September 2022, came full circle for Krajewski as he sent a truckload valued at over 1 million euros ($1.15 million) to the war-torn country on behalf of Pope Leo XIV in February.

"In the bull I received from the pope when I became a bishop, it was written that I should teach by example, and only if that was not enough, then by word. And I think that is how it was. It really was," he told OSV News.

He said he already met with the new papal almoner, telling Archbishop Marín, "You must become an alms yourself."

"It is the life of solitude, because during the day the almoner has to function in the office — dealing with documents, papal blessings, financial assistance. But in the afternoon, when everyone goes home, that's when you take the car and drive around to the places where the shelters are, where the parishes are, where there are soup kitchens or places that offer showers," the cardinal said.

"You stay with them, you strengthen them, you support them financially — but above all, the pope taught me that presence matters. Presence is what counts."

One of the poor present in a packed lunch March 10 in the almoner's apartment, asked the cardinal, "Why do you do all this?"

He replied: "Because I represent Jesus."

"Only then the works of mercy will last. They're not linked to a person. They're linked to the Gospel. Only this way they will last."