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Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, N.M., pictured in a 2012 photo at the Vatican, to be coadjutor bishop of San Jose, Calif. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, New Mexico, to be coadjutor bishop of San Jose, California.

Cantú, 51, has headed the Diocese of Las Cruces since February 2013. Bishop Patrick McGrath, who turned 73 June 11, has headed the Diocese of San Jose since 1999.

The appointment was announced July 11 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

A Mass of welcome will be celebrated for Cantú Sept. 28 at the Cathedral Basilica of St Joseph in San Jose. The Diocese of Las Cruces plans to celebrate a Mass of farewell for the bishop but did not announce a date.

"I congratulate Bishop Cantú on his appointment and thank him for his willingness to come west," McGrath said in a statement. "I look forward to collaborating with him in our ministry of service to the people of this local church.

"As we prepare to welcome Bishop Cantú to San Jose, I ask the people of this diocese and all of our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church to join us in praying for Bishop Cantú."

McGrath added, "I know that the new bishop will be eager to come to know the people of the parishes, schools and other institutions of the diocese, and that he will be as impressed with the work of the clergy, religious and laity as I am."

Cantú is the former chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace. He is currently a member of the USCCB Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America and the Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs.

He was one of two delegates chosen by the bishops to represent the USCCB during Pope Francis' visit to Mexico in 2016.

Before he was named to head the Las Cruces Diocese, he was an auxiliary bishop of San Antonio for five years.

He was born in Houston Dec. 5, 1966, the son of Ramiro and Maria de Jesus Cantú, natives of small towns near Monterrey in Mexico. He is the fifth of eight children — five boys and three girls.

He attended Holy Name Catholic School and St. Thomas High School in Houston, and he earned his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Dallas in 1989. He has master's degrees in divinity and in theological studies (1994) from the University of St. Thomas in Houston. He was ordained a priest May 21, 1994, for what is now the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

In 2000, he earned his licentiate of sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; he also has a doctorate of sacred theology in dogmatic theology from the Gregorian.

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He spent his priestly career working in parishes throughout the Houston metropolitan area. His first assignment was as parochial vicar at St. Christopher Parish. He also taught at the University of St. Thomas and at St. Mary's Seminary. He served as pastor at Holy Name Parish.

He was involved in the Christian Family movement; conducted retreats and worked with the Engaged Encounter ministry. Cantú also was also involved in The Metropolitan Organization, or TMO, which addresses social issues in the community.

A coadjutor automatically becomes the head of the diocese upon the death or retirement of its bishop.

McGrath, a native of Ireland, was an auxiliary bishop of San Francisco from 1989 until 1998 when he was named coadjutor of San Jose. He became the head of the diocese after Bishop R. Pierre DuMaine retired. DuMaine was the first bishop of the San Jose Diocese, which was created in 1981.

The 1,300-square-mile diocese has a total population of just over 1.9 million people, of whom 620,000, or about 32.3 percent, are Catholic.