News



Miami Auxiliary Bishop Peter Baldacchino attends the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual spring assembly in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, June 13, 2018. (CNS/Bob Roller)

by Catholic News Service

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Pope Francis has named Auxiliary Bishop Peter Baldacchino of Miami as the new bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The appointment was announced May 15 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States.

Baldacchino, 58, is a native of Malta. He was named auxiliary bishop of Miami in 2014 and was ordained a priest in the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, in 1996.

He succeeds Bishop Oscar Cantú, who was named coadjutor bishop of San Jose, California, last July and has now assumed pastoral governance of that diocese with the retirement of Bishop Patrick McGrath. Baldacchino will be installed in Las Cruces July 23.

Up to now, retired Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, Arizona, had been the apostolic administrator of the Las Cruces Diocese.

In Miami, Archbishop Thomas Wenski said Baldacchino "has served us well as an auxiliary bishop and pastor of St. Kieran Parish since his ordination as bishop on March 19, 2014. We will miss him, but wish him well. He is a 'missionary at heart,' so I am confident that he will serve the people of Las Cruces very well."

Baldacchino was born Dec. 5, 1960, in Sliema, Malta, and holds citizenship in both the United States and Malta. He studied for the priesthood at Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Newark from 1990 to 1996.

Redemptoris Mater seminaries are directed by the Neocatechumenal Way, "an itinerary of Catholic formation" for individuals and families that emphasizes "missionary zeal" in spreading the Gospel in today's world — or as St. John Paul II called it, the "new evangelization."

After his priestly ordination for the Newark Archdiocese, he was parochial vicar at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Ridgewood, New Jersey, for three years.

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Then in 1999, he was named chancellor of the Turks and Caicos Islands. By the end of 1998, the chain of islands, about 90 miles north of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, had been put under the jurisdiction of the Newark Archdiocese at the request of the Vatican.

Until his appointment as an auxiliary for Miami, Baldacchino also was pastor of Our Lady of Providence Church on Providenciales Island. He was named a monsignor in 2009.

He holds a diploma in sciences from the University of Malta; electrical installation licenses from Umberto Calosso Trade School, Malta; a Bachelor of Arts from Thomas A. Edison State College in Trenton, New Jersey; and a Master of Divinity degree in pastoral ministry from the School of Theology at Seton Hall University in Orange, New Jersey.

He speaks English, Italian, Maltese, Spanish and Creole.

Founded in 1982, the Las Cruces Diocese comprises 10 counties in southern New Mexico, covering 44,500 square miles. Out of a total population of about 558,000, Catholics number close to 140,000. The diocese has 45 parishes and numerous missions.