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The Indonesian archbishop who was chosen by Pope Francis as one of 13 new cardinals of the Catholic Church called his appointment a sign of special appreciation for his country's Catholic community, a small minority group spread across 37 dioceses located on more than 17,000 islands.



Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo in November 2018 (Wikimedia Commons/Albertus Aditya, CC by SA 4.0)

Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo, who leads the church in the capital of Jakarta, said he understands the pontiff's choice of him as "recognition of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, which in my opinion is very much alive and remarkably

dynamic."

In a written interview with NCR, Suharyo, 69, said he had been surprised that the pope's Sept. 1 announcement of new cardinals had included his name.

"On the afternoon of Sept. 1, even though my phone kept ringing I didn't pick it up because I did not know the number of the person who was ringing," explained the archbishop. "Only then did the Apostolic Nuncio in Jakarta call to inform me of this appointment."

"Naturally, I was stunned, for I had no inkling beforehand," he said. "The Nuncio called me in a very happy tone. It took me a few days to calm down, because I really felt shocked."

The Sept. 1 announcement was the fifth time in his six-year papacy that Francis has announced new cardinals. Suharyo and the other 12 newest appointees will be formally added to the ranks of cardinals at a Vatican ceremony Oct. 5.

The pope has widely sought to internationalize representation among the membership of the College of Cardinals, often choosing to appoint new cardinals from places that have never had a cardinal before, or have not in many years. Suharyo's group includes appointees from three separate African nations and a rural town in Guatemala.

The Indonesian archbishop will be his country's third cardinal, following his predecessor in Jakarta, retired Archbishop Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, and the late archbishop of Semarang, Justinus Darmojuwono.

Suharyo cited Darmojuwono's example in explaining how he understood a cardinal's service to the church.

"I had never thought for a moment that I might one day be a cardinal," said the cardinal-designate. "As I was taught since my initial formation for the priesthood, in the Church no one should consider a personal career path."

Darmojuwono, said Suharyo, "gave a pristine clear personal example: on retirement as Archbishop of Semarang in central Java at the age of 66, he became an ordinary parish priest in a new parish until he died."

Suharyo also reflected on the smallness of the his country's church, which only represents about three percent Indonesia's population of some 264 million, calling it

a "little flock."

Indonesia, a chain of islands in Southeast Asia between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. A 2010 census indicated that about 87% of the population is Muslim.

Suharyo, who has led the church in Jakarta since 2010, praised his country's recognition of religious freedom, noting that his cathedral sits directly across the street from the national Istiqlal Mosque.

"The Muslim and Christian places of worship were built facing each other as a symbol of brotherhood between religious communities in Indonesia," said the cardinal-designate. "Many heads of State and government leaders, when visiting Jakarta, are invited to enter the Istiqlal Mosque, then to cross the road and enter the Catholic Cathedral."

"Dialogue between faith communities is taken to be the shared historical responsibility of every Indonesian citizen," said Suharyo. "Examples are too numerous to tell."

The Indonesian archbishop also expressed gratitude to Francis for his recently announced plan to visit the neighboring countries of Thailand and Japan this November.

"As Asians, we naturally feel proud that Pope Francis is visiting Asia again," said Suharyo, adding that the Indonesian bishops have also asked for the pontiff to consider visiting their country.

"I am sure that the impact of such a visit would be great," said the cardinal-designate.

"We live in hope that the Pope will reply positively to our request and come to Indonesia."

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