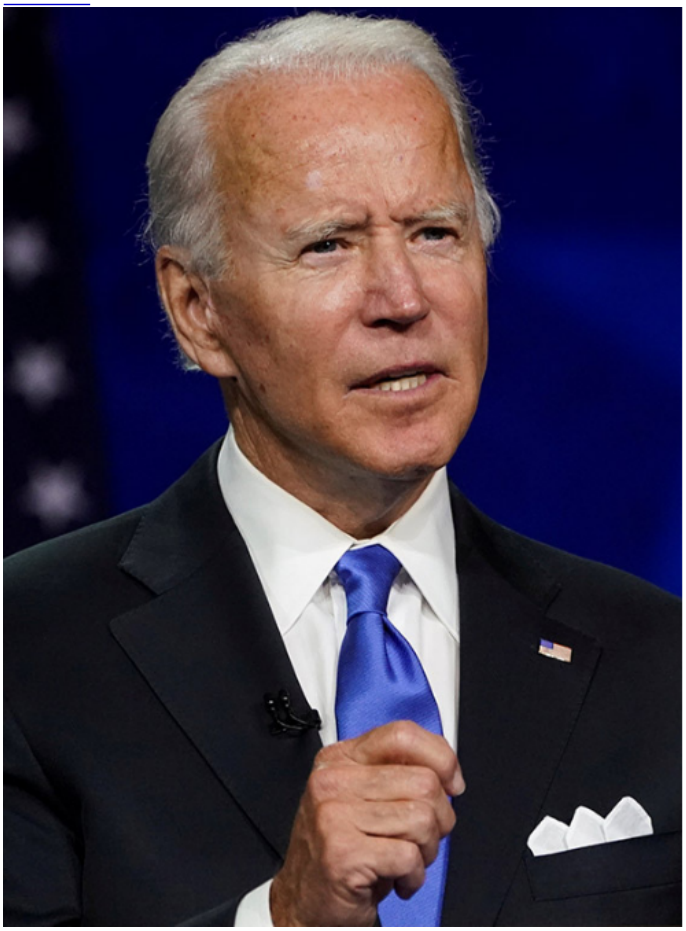
News




Former Vice President Joe Biden, left, in a 2020 file photo, and Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington, in a 2019 file photo (CNS/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque, Catholic Standard/Jaclyn Lippelmann)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

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Former Vice President Joe Biden has joined the chorus of voices hailing Pope Francis' historic decision to create Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington a cardinal, making him the first African American to ever receive the honor.

"Jill and I were delighted to hear the news from Pope Francis that Archbishop Gregory will be elevated to the College of Cardinals," Biden said in a statement to NCR. "This historic appointment will give the Archbishop an even larger platform to continue his lifelong commitment to social justice and those on the margins of society."

Pope Francis announced Gregory's elevation to the College of Cardinals during his Sunday Angelus in St. Peter's Square on Oct. 25.

Should Biden, a practicing Catholic, be elected president next month, he will become only the second Catholic president in United States history, and Gregory would become his cardinal archbishop. Earlier this week, Biden — who has regularly spoken about his faith on the campaign trail — cited Pope Francis' new encyclical during a speech in Georgia.

Neither the White House nor the Trump campaign responded to NCR's request for comment.

While Gregory's elevation has been met by an outpouring of support from Black Catholics and other church leaders, on Oct. 27, he also received the backing of The Washington Post's editorial board, a body that in recent years has been sharply critical of past Catholic leaders in the nation's capital.

"His promising track record so far this century, as an archbishop taking over the scandal-ridden Washington archdiocese and, before that, as the first Black president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and as archbishop of Atlanta, suggests he may be an influential voice for a church that is more inclusive, tolerant and racially clued-in, unafraid to take firm stances on socially divisive issues," wrote the editors.

"His overall record is admirable, and he stands poised now to help nudge a massive global institution in a positive direction," they concluded.

On Oct. 27, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston also offered a personal tribute to Gregory, acknowledging the historic nature of the appointment.

"The long and valiant struggle for racial justice in this country from the 17th century to the inspiring events of 2020 has been given a powerful acknowledgment by the Holy Father whose voice for social justice, human dignity and equality has been a hallmark of his papacy," said O'Malley.

Gregory is set to be elevated to the College of Cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican on Nov. 28. Due to the global pandemic, and increased restrictions in Rome due to rising COVID-19 infection rates, it remains unclear as to whether he will attend the ceremony in person.

[Christopher White is NCR national correspondent. His email address is cwhite@ncronline.org . Follow him on Twitter: @CWWhite212.]

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