News

A Latino bishop speaks from behind a lectern. A Christmas tree, a crucifix, and a beaming Ca

Bishop-designate Evelio Menjivar-Ayala, left, speaks during a Dec. 19, 2022, news briefing at the Washington Archdiocese's Pastoral Center in Hyattsville, Md., where he was introduced by Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington. Earlier that day Pope Francis appointed him as an auxiliary bishop for the archdiocese. Currently pastor of St. Mary Church in the Washington suburb of Landover Hills, Md., he was ordained a priest for the archdiocese May 29, 2004. (CNS photo/Mihoko Owada, Catholic Standard)



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Pope Francis has appointed two Washington archdiocesan priests, Msgr. Juan R. Esposito-Garcia and Fr. Evelio Menjivar-Ayala, as auxiliary bishops of their archdiocese.

Esposito-Garcia, who turns 49 Jan. 10, is currently serving as an official in the Dicastery for Bishops at the Vatican. Menjivar-Ayala, 52, is currently pastor of St. Mary Church in the Washington suburb of Landover Hills, Maryland.

Their appointments were announced Dec. 19 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States.

They both will be ordained bishops Feb. 21.

Born in Argentina, Esposito-Garcia was ordained a priest for the Washington Archdiocese June 14, 2008. He has been a dicastery official since 2018 and was named a monsignor in 2021.

From 2016 to 2018, he was an adjunct judicial vicar and judicial vicar for the Washington archdiocesan tribunal.

Menjivar-Ayala was born in Chalatenango, El Salvador, and came to the United States with his brother as a teenager because of the violence and unrest in his home country, while his family remained in El Salvador.

Ordained for the Washington Archdiocese May 29, 2004, he has been pastor in Landover Hills since 2017.

As auxiliaries, the bishops-designate will join Auxiliary Bishops Roy E. Campbell Jr. and Mario E. Dorsonville in serving the archdiocese alongside Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington.

The cardinal said the pope has blessed the archdiocese by appointing two new auxiliaries "to serve all of Christ's flock in this local church."

"They have been selected from a zealous and generous local presbyterate, and now they are appointed as bishops," he said in a statement.

"They represent the goodness of all of our people, and both will dedicate themselves tirelessly to the promotion of the Gospel and the mission of Christ in serving with me and all of our clergy and faithful," Gregory added.

Esposito-Garcia was born Jan. 10, 1974, in San Luis, Argentina. After attending St. Michael Seminary and Catholic University, both in Argentina, he came to the United States, where he earned a master of divinity degree and a master of arts degree in moral theology from Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

He holds both a licentiate and a doctorate in canon law from The Catholic University of America in Washington.

His pastoral assignments in the Archdiocese of Washington have included serving as parochial vicar at the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville, Maryland, at St. Mark the Evangelist in Hyattsville, Maryland, and at the Church of the Little Flower in Bethesda, Maryland.

He also was administrator at Ascension Catholic Church in Bowie, Maryland, and has been an adjunct professor of canon law and adjunct spiritual director at Mount St. Mary's Seminary.

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Besides serving on the archdiocese's Metropolitan Tribunal, Esposito-Garcia also served on the archdiocesan Seminary Admission Committee, has been an instructor for the marriage preparation program and was a member of the Committee for the Archdiocesan Synod.

He speaks English, Spanish and Italian. He is thought to be the first native of Argentina named to be a bishop in the United States.

Born Aug. 14, 1970, Menjivar-Ayala is believed to be the first bishop for the United States who is a native of El Salvador.

The bishop-designate attended St. John Vianney College Seminary in Miami and the Pontifical North American College in Rome before his ordination as a priest of the Washington Archdiocese.

His assignments have included posts as parochial vicar at Mother Seton Parish in Germantown, Maryland, at St. Bartholomew Parish in Bethesda, Maryland and at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. He also has been administrator at Our Lady Queen of the Americas Parish, also in Washington.

He speaks English, Spanish and Italian.

The archdiocese held a mid-morning news conference at the Pastoral Center in Hyattsville, Maryland, on the appointment of the two new auxiliaries.

Esposito-Garcia was unable to attend because he is currently in Argentina visiting his parents for their 50th wedding anniversary.

Gregory read a prepared statement from him in which he expressed his "deepest gratitude" for what he called "this new opportunity to continue to serve everyone in our beautiful Archdiocese of Washington."

After the cardinal introduced Menjivar-Ayala at the news conference, the newly named auxiliary said he was grateful to the pope for the appointment and that he has accepted it "very much aware of my own personal limitations."

"At the same time, I accept it with much joy, trusting that God's grace and the maternal care of Our Lady of Guadalupe will never fail," he added.

"I thank the people of the different parishes where I have served as priest for over 18 years," he continued. "Your faith and your love for the church and the priests have sustained my own faith and enriched my ministry."

Speaking in Spanish, he said he was "honored to be a Salvadoran here in one of the largest Salvadoran communities in the United States" and credited his mother as "a pillar of faith for me and an inspiration. She is the one who taught me how to work, to pray, to serve (and) to never give up."

He said he just hopes "to serve everybody, the whole church."

"Obviously I have a special love for the Hispanic community. We are all children of God and the church is our mother who embraces each and every one of us," Menjivar-Ayala said. "In the Catholic Church, we are always home with family, no matter from where we came."

The Archdiocese of Washington is home to more than 667,000 Catholics, 139 parishes and 90 Catholic schools in the District of Columbia and five Maryland counties: Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St. Mary's.

At the news conference, Gregory said he had petitioned the pope for the new auxiliary bishops "to provide for the increasing pastoral needs -- the challenges and the opportunities -- of our parishes, schools and communities."

"I was overwhelmed with the number of worthy candidates," he remarked.

He said that in addition to celebrating parish Masses and presiding at confirmations and ordinations, auxiliary bishops also assist the archbishop with "a lot of the pastoral situations that go beyond a particular parish," such as serving the priests and deacons in the archdiocese.

"In a real sense, the auxiliary is an extension of the ministry of the diocesan bishops. I can't possibly be at every place or attend to every need, and the auxiliary bishops help me in doing that," the cardinal said.