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Pope Francis on May 26 named Bishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva — a relatively unknown 55-year-old prelate from a tiny diocese at the bottom of Argentina — to lead his hometown of Buenos Aires.

García Cuerva, who has a long history in prison ministry and working with marginalized populations, has been the bishop of Rio Gallegos, Argentina, since 2019. He will succeed Cardinal Mario Aurelio Poli, who the pope appointed to fill his own shoes as archbishop of Buenos Aires, following Francis' election to the papacy in 2013.

Poli, 75, will remain eligible to participate in a papal conclave until his 80th birthday.

García Cuerva is now set to lead the country's largest Catholic diocese, home to some 2.7 million Catholics, potentially for more than two decades.

Born in Rio Gallegos, in the southern Argentine province of Santa Cruz, García Cuerva moved to the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires for his university studies.

Soon thereafter, he pursued a vocation to the Catholic priesthood following missionary work in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

In 1997, García Cuerva was ordained a priest of Buenos Aires Archdiocese and holds degrees in civil law, canon law and theology. Before returning to lead his hometown diocese in 2019, he served as an auxiliary bishop in Lomas de Zamora, Argentina.

García Cuerva currently serves as the director Episcopal Conference of Latin America's Prison Ministry without Borders program, is a previous member of the National Commission on Drug Dependence of the Episcopal Conference of Argentina and was vice president of Caritas Argentina from 2012-2017.

In July 2021, Pope Francis appointed him as a member of the influential Dicastery for Bishops, the Vatican department responsible for advising the pope on the selection of bishops around the world.

Following that appointment, in a 2021 interview, he described what characteristics he would look for in potential candidates in his new role.

"Pope Francis, in a simple but very graphic way, presents the profile of the bishop that the church needs when he says that he wants a church that is going out, a poor church for the poor, bishops who are close to the people, bishops who are close to Jesus in prayer, and close to the priests who are their first neighbors, shepherds with the smell of sheep, close to the suffering of our people," García Cuerva said in 2021.

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In his first speech following his election as pope in 2013, Francis joked that: "You all know that the duty of the conclave was to give a bishop to Rome. It seems that my brother cardinals have come almost to the ends of the earth to get him."

By selecting García Cuerva, a self-described "bishop of the peripheries" who hails from Argentina's remote southern province of Santa Cruz, it seems the pope has followed a similar course for his hometown.

In a similar move earlier this year, Francis — who has been pope for 10 years — made an equally surprising pick in naming the 51-year old Bishop Frank Leo to succeed Cardinal Thomas Collins as Archbishop of Toronto. The selection of the

youthful Leo to lead Canada’s largest Catholic diocese was widely viewed as a legacy appointment in North America.

The 86-year-old Francis will also have the opportunity to radically reshape the U.S. hierarchy in the next two years, with 13 archdioceses and over 20 dioceses needing new bishops by 2025.

In addition to taking over the reins of the massive diocese of Buenos Aires, García Cuerva may find himself with the extra responsibility of overseeing a much anticipated homecoming of Francis next year.

On May 25, just a day before García Cuerva's appointment, Francis told a group of young people that he hopes to make his firstreturn to Argentina since being elected pope in 2013.

"My idea is to go next year," said the pope. "We'll see if we can."