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Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, gives the annual Cardina

Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, gives the annual Cardinal Dearden Lecture at the Catholic University of America in Washington April 26, 2023. Pierre will be elevated to the church's College of Cardinals Sept. 30. (OSV News/Courtesy of Catholic University of America/Patrick Ryan)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

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Rome — July 9, 2023
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Pope Francis on July 9 named 21 new cardinals, including the Vatican's ambassador to the U.S., Archbishop Christophe Pierre; American-born Archbishop Robert Prevost, who oversees the appointments of Catholic bishops worldwide; and the new head of the Vatican's doctrinal office, Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernández.

The pope made the announcement at the end of his weekly Sunday Angelus prayer from a window in the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter's Square. Francis said he would install the new cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican on Sept. 30, saying these new cardinals represent the universality of the global church and the "inseparable link" between the pope and dioceses around the world.

Of the 21 new cardinals, 18 are under the age of 80 and would be eligible to vote in a papal conclave. As of Sept. 30, with the new additions, the total number of eligible cardinal electors will be 137.

Among the new cardinal-designates are three Vatican officials: Prevost, Fernández and Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, 67, an Italian archbishop who in Nov. 22 was appointed as prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

Prevost, 67, is a Chicago-born Augustinian, who Francis appointed in January to head the influential Vatican office responsible for recommending priests the pope name Catholic bishops. Prevost was previously a bishop in Chiclayo, Peru, where he worked as a missionary for decades.

The elevation of Fernández, 60, comes just over a week after the pope announced he had tapped that prelate, a long-time theological advisor and fellow Argentine archbishop, to lead the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith. In a letter accompanying Fernandez's appointment to the doctrinal office, Francis asked the archbishop to steer the dicastery in a new direction marked by the promotion of ways of evangelization and doing theology, rather than controlling theologians. The appointment has already sent shockwaves through conservative quarters in the Catholic Church.

Pierre, 77, originally from France, is a long-time Vatican diplomat who has served in Mexico, Uganda and Haiti. In 2016, Francis appointed Pierre as his representative to the United States, a post the archbishop continues to serve in despite having reached the traditional retirement age of bishops of 75. In his role, Pierre is responsible for identifying and vetting potential bishops for the U.S. church.

He succeeded the now-disgraced former nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a Q-Anon conspiracy theorist who has previously called for the pope's resignation. Pierre has been a staunch defender of Francis in the U.S., where the hierarchy has often been reluctant to embrace the pope's pastoral priorities.

In a brief phone call with Pierre, he told NCR he was "astonished and grateful" by the pope's decision to name him a cardinal.

Prelates from 10 dioceses around the world will also receive the cardinals' red hat from Francis, along with an auxiliary bishop, two Vatican diplomats and the head of the Salesian order.

Among the notable new cardinal-designates are Hong Kong Bishop Stephen Chow, 63, who is a Jesuit and has recently tried to bridge divides between China and Hong Kong Catholics; Juba, South Sudan Archbishop Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla, 53, who hosted Francis in his visit to South Sudan in February; and Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, 58, who is the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The full list of new cardinal electors:

- Archbishop Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops;
- Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti; prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches;
- Archbishop Víctor Fernández; prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith;
- Archbishop Emil Tscherrig, retired apostolic nuncio
- Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States;
- Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem;
- Archbishop Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa
- Archbishop Ángel Sixto, Archbishop of Córdoba, Argentina;
- Archbishop Luis José Rueda Aparicio of Bogotá, Colombia;
- Archbishop Grzegorz Ryś, Archbishop of Łódź, Poland;
- Archbishop Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla, Archbishop of Juba, South Sudan;
- Archbishop José Cobo Cano, Archbishop of Madrid;
- Archbishop Protase Rugambwa, coadjutor Archbishop of Tabora, Tanzania;
- Bishop Sebastian Francis of Penang, Malaysia;
- Bishop Stephen Chow, Bishop of Hong Kong;
- Bishop François-Xavier Bustillo, bishop of Ajaccio, France;
- Bishop Américo Manuel Alves Aguiar, auxiliary bishop of Lisbon, Portugal;
- Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, Superior General of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

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In addition to the new cardinal electors, Francis also named three cardinals over the age of 80, who would be ineligible to participate in a papal conclave. Those are: Italian Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, a retired apostolic nuncio and historian of the Second Vatican Council; retired Cumaná, Venezuela Archbishop Diego Rafael Padrón Sánchez; and Capuchin Fr. Luis Pascual, confessor of the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The creation of 18 new cardinal electors by the 86-year-old Francis will put the total number of cardinal electors well above the limit of 120 set by Pope Paul VI in 1975. Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI also exceeded that number at various points during their papacies.

The September ceremony to create new cardinals, being held on the eve of the pope's highly anticipated Synod of Bishops in October, will be Francis' ninth consistory for the creation of new cardinals since his election as pontiff in March 2013. He last created new cardinals in August 2022.

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