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An East Asian man wearing round glasses and a clerical collar smiles at the camera

Cardinal-designate Stephen Chow Sau-yan of Hong Kong, poses for a photo at the Varican. Sept. 28, 2023. (CNS photo/Carol Glatz)



by Catholic News Service

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Speaking to reporters a few days before receiving their red hats, many of the 21 new cardinals said their induction into the College of Cardinals was less about them and more about their local church and its contribution to the universal church.

Cardinal-designate Stephen Chow Sau-Yan of Hong Kong said, "The important thing is to have more diverse voices" in the College of Cardinals, and the Diocese of Hong Kong brings its history as "a bridging church," one with strong ties both to China and to the West.

It also is "a bridge between the church in China and the universal church, which we would like to see come closer," the cardinal said.

Chow said he is hopeful that closeness will increase with Pope Francis' approach to China's communist government and his willingness to negotiate with them on the naming of bishops.

The Chinese government's agreement that two bishops from the mainland can attend the assembly of the Synod of Bishops also is positive, he said, and he hopes it is a sign "they realize it's important for the faithful in China to have more connection with the universal church and with the principal see here."

"People will say that we are naïve, but we always have to have some optimism," the Hong Kong prelate said.

Cardinal-designate Stephen Brislin, 67, archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, said why Francis chose him "is the $60 million question," because "it was a great surprise that he even knew my name."

However, he said, he believes the experience of the church in South Africa, with its history of "apartheid and colonialism and the fact that ultimately we reached a peaceful settlement -- it's not complete -- that we managed to get over the bloodshed and the violence that had been meted out is a message of great hope that reconciliation is possible, but it takes hard work that you've got to keep working at, but it can be done."

"Many places in the world are in need of reconciliation at the moment, not simply because of physical violence, but also the verbal violence that goes on and the hatred that exists," he said.

Cardinal-designate Luis José Rueda Aparicio of Bogotá, Colombia, told Catholic News Service he comes from a church where a long line of bishops, priests, religious and lay Catholics had their feet solidly on the ground and their eyes and hearts wide open to the needs of their people.

In 1900, he said, Bogota had a population of 200,000 and by 2000 it had jumped to over 9 million people.

The growth was "accompanied by a church that adapted to the problems, to the migration from different regions, to the displacement of people coming from areas of the country hit by violence, who arrived and settled in Bogotá, seeking health, education, housing and employment," he said. "The church evangelized with the rhythm of the growth of the city, serving, loving, accompanying people not only with catechesis and evangelization itself but with a holistic service in education, with the sick, with the elderly, with drug addicts, with migrants, seeking peace, building homes, building neighborhoods."

Italian Cardinal-designate Pierbattista Pizzaballa, 58, has served for three decades in the Holy Land and he will be the first Latin patriarch of Jerusalem to be elevated to the College of Cardinals.

He told CNS he will bring his experience in Jerusalem, which is home to multiple religions and cultures and "where the concept of sacredness is also very important," and "I will also bring the desire to be a positive voice in a very complicated and conflictual context."

Communities should not be afraid of the many changes that happen as they become multicultural and diverse, he said. Even in an increasingly secular environment, he said, the important thing is not to be afraid but "to have something beautiful and constructive to say."

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Cardinal-designate Ángel Sixto Rossi, 65, of Córdoba, Argentina, told CNS he is happy to be one of three Argentinians who will be elevated Sept. 30; the others are Cardinals-designate Luis Dri, 96, and Víctor Manuel Fernández, 61, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

He said Dri, a Capuchin friar, is a deep "man of God" and Fernández "is a man of great spiritual and intellectual" strength with a "very valuable ecclesial outlook."

Rossi said he will be bringing his own spiritual and pastoral experience, particularly with his extensive work in assisting poor and vulnerable people.

Cardinal-designate Stephen Ameyu Mulla of Juba, South Sudan, told reporters, "It is important that the universal church should listen to the local church," so the new cardinals from Africa "bring the voice of the local church from Africa and present it to the universal church."

"We are not from another planet. We are all from the same planet," and some of the challenges the church faces are the same everywhere, he said, but the church benefits from hearing the voices of as many people as possible and not marginalizing anyone.

In Lisbon, Portugal, for World Youth Day, Francis repeatedly said there is room in the church for "todos, todos, todos," everyone.

As the head of the local organizing committee, Portuguese Cardinal-designate Américo Manuel Alves Aguiar was standing near the pope each time he repeated the point.

"Todos, todos, todos," he said, is exactly what Francis is doing with the College of Cardinals, ensuring its members come from the most diverse range of countries, many of which have cardinals for the very first time, and with a surprising range of ages.

"My brother from Mongolia and I are the 'enfants terribles,' the two youngest," the cardinal-designate said of himself and fellow 49-year-old Cardinal Giorgio Marengo. "It's a problem that will pass with time. It will soon pass and we will lose that status. But I think it's very important, even with the pope's trademark of wanting to reach out to young people, that we also have in the College of Cardinals some members that can have a sensibility" to younger church members.

Cardinal-designate José Cobo Cano of Madrid is not quite as young -- he's 58 -- but he is among a batch of archbishops under the age of 60 appointed this year to lead major archdioceses.

"What the pope is doing is appointing a generation of new bishops," he told reporters.

For the College of Cardinals, he surmised, "the pope is effectively looking for a profile of people who have come out of the parishes, who have had a very pastoral experience in our dioceses and who can make that contribution to the whole conclave, to the whole group of cardinals."

"They say that we are young, but the young people say that we are not so young," he said. "But it is true that we can contribute with the vision of our generation," which is different in terms of pastoral experience and in terms of living with and facing the challenges of technology, including artificial intelligence, for example.

Within the college and in a future conclave, he said, "there are different views, different generations and ours is a pastoral one, on the one hand, to be able to look at the emerging problems that perhaps the older ones, because of their age, cannot have."