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Pope Francis and new cardinals arrive for a consistory for the creation of 21 new cardinals in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 30. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Francis on Sept. 30 elevated 21 Catholic prelates from around the world — including the Vatican's U.S. ambassador — to the rank of cardinal, telling the men who will one day elect his successor that they should resemble a symphony orchestra: diverse and with varied contributions, but always working toward harmony.

"A symphony thrives on the skillful composition of the timbres of different instruments: each one makes its contribution, sometimes alone, sometimes united with someone else, sometimes with the whole ensemble," said the pope in a pomp-filled ceremony in St. Peter's Square. "Diversity is necessary; it is indispensable. However, each sound must contribute to the common design."

The pope had announced on July 9 that he would create new cardinals. The formal Sept. 30 ceremony, known as a consistory, comes on the eve of the Oct. 4 opening of the Synod of Bishops, during which some 450 bishops and lay leaders will meet at the Vatican for the synod on synodality, a high-stakes summit on the future of the church.

In many ways, the monthlong synod assembly will mark a stark juxtaposition from the Sept. 30 Vatican ceremony.

While the consistory of new cardinals spotlights so-called "princes of the church," who receive gold rings and new scarlet vestments, the synod is expected to discuss how the church's institutions and ministries might be reformed to include greater participation of all its members, and for the first time ever, will grant lay Catholics a right to vote in its proceedings.

Under a sun-drenched, though somewhat sparsely crowded St. Peter's Square, the pope tasked the new cardinals — his new orchestra members — to represent "the harmony and the synodality of the church."

"This is why mutual listening is essential," he said. "Each musician must listen to the others. If one listens only to himself, however sublime his sound may be, it will not benefit the symphony; and the same would be the case if one section of the orchestra did not listen to the others, but played as if it were alone, as if it were the whole."

Reflecting on his own role, Francis said that the orchestra's conductor must listen more than anyone else.

"His job is to help each person and the whole orchestra develop the greatest creative fidelity: fidelity to the work being performed, but also creative, able to give a soul to the score, to make it resonate in the here and now in a unique way. orchestra, in order to learn to be an ever more symphonic and synodal church."

Today's Vatican ceremony is the ninth — and largest — consistory of Francis' decade-long papacy, where he has continued to leave his imprint on the elite body of men who both serve as his closest collaborators and will one day decide who succeeds him.

18 of the newly created cardinals are under age 80 and thus eligible to participate in a future conclave. Three are over 80, and being recognized for their service to the

Vatican or wider church.

Prelates about to be made cardinals by Pope Francis wait at the beginning of the consistory in

Prelates about to be made cardinals by Pope Francis wait at the beginning of the consistory in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 30. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Meditating in his Sept. 30 homily on a scripture passage from the Acts of the Apostles and the first Pentecost — sometimes referred to as the "birthday of the church" — the pope said that those gathered in Jerusalem were "'from every nation under heaven,' just like the bishops and cardinals of our time."

This consistory — which includes individuals from countries that include Malaysia, South Sudan and Tanzania — continues the pope's efforts to make the College of Cardinals more diverse and less European. Under his watch, the pope has given the cardinal's red hat to men from 27 countries that have never before been represented in the college.

According to an analysis from the Pew Research Center, since Francis' election in 2013, the percentage of European cardinals has dropped from 52% in 2013 to 39% in 2023. Consequently, there have been increases in Asia Pacific representation from 9% to 18%; sub-Saharan African from 9% to 13%; and in Latin American from 16% to 18%.

As of Sept. 30, there are now 136 members of the College of College under age 80. Of those, Francis has named 99 members, or nearly 73% of the voting age cardinals, along with 29 created by Pope Benedict XVI and nine created by Pope John Paul II.

(This figure does not include Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who remains a cardinal in title but renounced "the rights connected to the cardinalate" in September 2020 due to a series of financial scandals for which he is now on trial at the Vatican. Becciu has maintained his innocence.)

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The creation of 18 new cardinal electors by the 86-year-old Francis now puts the total number of cardinal electors well above the limit of 120 set by Pope Paul VI in

1975, though, by the end of 2024, 19 cardinals will reach age 80 and lose their right to vote in a conclave. Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI also exceeded that number at various points during their papacies.

Included in this new crop of cardinals are the Vatican's ambassador to the U.S., Archbishop Christophe Pierre, who hails from France and has represented the Holy See in postings throughout the globe; 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, a fellow Argentine and longtime theological adviser to Francis.

The pope also bestowed the red hat to several cardinals in delicate geopolitical hotspots, including Bishop Stephen Chow of Hong Kong, where at the moment the Vatican's tense relationship with mainland China looms large; the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who is tasked with navigating longstanding tensions between Israelis and Palestinians; and Archbishop Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla of war-torn Juba, South Sudan, the world's youngest country.

In an interview with NCR on the eve of the consistory, Pierre echoed the pope's call for unity in the church, while at the same time acknowledging the sometimes slow reception of Francis' pastoral agenda among U.S. church leaders.

"The pope is not an idea. Some people say 'I am with the pope, but not with this one.' And they are mistaken," Pierre said on Sept. 29, later adding: "If the pope says something, don't criticize him. Make an examination of conscience."

Speaking to the new cardinals on Sept. 30, Francis encouraged them not to be defined by past traditions, saying that the church must not "live off of an archeological patrimony, however precious and noble."

"The church, and every baptized member, lives the today of God, through the action of the Holy Spirit," said Francis.

Here is the full list of the 18 new cardinal electors:

- Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops;
- Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches;
- Víctor Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith;
- Emil Tscherrig, a retired career Vatican diplomat;

- Christophe Pierre, Vatican ambassador to the United States;
- Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem;
- Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa;
- Ángel Sixto, Archbishop of Córdoba, Argentina;
- Luis José Rueda Aparicio, Archbishop of Bogotá, Colombia;
- Grzegorz Ryś, Archbishop of Łódź, Poland;
- Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla, Archbishop of Juba, South Sudan;
- José Cobo Cano, Archbishop of Madrid;
- Protase Rugambwa, coadjutor Archbishop of Tabora, Tanzania;
- Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, Malaysia;
- Stephen Chow, Bishop of Hong Kong;
- François-Xavier Bustillo, Bishop of Ajaccio, France;
- Américo Manuel Alves Aguiar, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon, Portugal;
- Ángel Fernández Artime, Superior General of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

The new cardinals over 80 are:

- Agostino Marchetto, a retired Vatican diplomat and noted historian of the Second Vatican Council;
- Diego Rafael Padrón Sánchez, retired Archbishop of Cumaná, Venezuela;
- Luis Pascual, a Capuchin confessor of the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Pascual, who is 96, was unable to travel to Rome for the ceremony).