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Archbishop Gabriel Mestre of La Plata has resigned unexpectedly after only eight months in the Argentine archdiocese previously headed by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, provoking a crisis in church governance in the South American country.

The Vatican did not disclose the reasons for Mestre's resignation.

The archbishop confirmed his resignation May 27, saying in a letter he was experiencing, "profound peace and total rectitude of conscience before God for how I acted." He is only 55 years old — two decades younger than the typical retirement age of 75, when canon law requires bishops to submit their resignation to the pope.

Mestre added that he had been called to Rome to answer questions on "some aspects from the Diocese of Mar del Plata after my transfer to the Archdiocese

of La Plata since being designated metropolitan archbishop by Pope Francis.”

The Diocese of Mar del Plata to the south of Buenos Aires has been in turmoil since Archbishop Mestre's departure in November 2023 with his two successors resigning their posts without being installed.

Bishop José María Baliña resigned less than a month after being appointed, citing health complications following surgery for a detached retina, according to The Pillar. He was followed by Bishop Gustavo Manuel Larrazábal, who resigned barely a month later.

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The reasons Larrazábal's resignation remain unclear, though the newspaper La Capital Mar del Plata reported that a woman had accused the bishop of harassment and abuse of power between 2007 and 2013. The apostolic nunciature in Buenos Aires issued a brief statement Jan. 9, saying the Vatican had "full confidence" in Bishop Larrazábal and called "rumors" surrounding the bishop’s departure "baseless."

Pope Francis, who is from Argentina, subsequently appointed Auxiliary Bishop Ernesto Giobando of Buenos Aires as apostolic administrator in Mar del Plata.

Argentine newspaper La Nación reported that a crisis erupted in Mar del Plata during Holy Week over the transfer of a prominent priest, whom the local church saw as a possible candidate to succeed Mestre, citing sources saying a protest had occurred inside the cathedral there April 5.

Demonstrators waved posters protesting that Father Luis Damián Albóniga, the former diocesan vicar under Archbishop Mestre, had been transferred to Jujuy — a province some 1,200 miles to the northwest on the border with Bolivia.

Albóniga has been transferred to Jujuy in January for undisclosed reasons, La Capital reported.