Opinion
NCR Voices



A pallium received from Pope Francis sits on a table at the Pontifical North American College after Mass with the pope in St. Peter's Basilica June 29, 2023, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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U.S. Catholics from eight archdioceses are gathering in Rome to watch Pope Leo XIV impose the pallium on their new archbishops at Sunday's Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. Sunday is the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the patrons of the Roman Church, always a festival day in the Eternal City. This year, the occasion also marks a significant reshaping of the Catholic Church in the United States.

The pallium is a small vestment made of wool that comes, in part, from two lambs presented to the Chapter of St. John at Rome's cathedral, the Basilica of St. John Lateran, by the Canons Regular as a tax. The wool is woven into strips that are embellished with six crosses, three of which also have a cloth loop to hold a golden pin that is later inserted into the vestment.

When finished, they are placed in the Confessio of St. Peter's Basilica, the shrine underneath the main altar, next to the tomb of St. Peter, until the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul when all the world's new archbishops come to Rome to receive it as a sign of their unity with the pope.

Who are the eight men who will receive the palliums?



Boston Archbishop Richard Henning blesses the congregation with holy water during the Mass to open the Jubilee Year in the Boston Archdiocese, at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, Dec. 29, 2024. (OSV News/The Pilot/Gregory L. Tracy)

Boston Archbishop Richard Henning was appointed last August to succeed Cardinal Sean O'Malley. In 2003, O'Malley succeeded Cardinal Bernard Law in the midst of the clergy sex abuse scandal, and for 21 years he brought about healing, as well as spiritual and institutional renewal, in Boston.

Henning's patron is also a Bostonian, Bishop William Murphy, who was an auxiliary in Boston before becoming bishop of Rockville Center, New York, in 2001.

In 2016, when then-Archbishop Christophe Pierre first arrived in the U.S. as apostolic nuncio, I called over to the nunciature to see if he was coming to some big event at the Catholic University of America. I was eager to meet him. One of the secretaries told me that he would not be at the event because he was going up to Long Island to visit his old friend Bishop Bill Murphy.

On Pierre's watch, four of Murphy's protégés have risen to important dioceses: Bishop William Koenig in Wilmington, Delaware; Bishop Robert Brennan, first in Columbus, Ohio, and then in Brooklyn, New York; Archbishop Nelson Perez of Philadelphia; and, now, Henning.



Galveston-Houston Archbishop Joe Vásquez greets a man and woman during his installation Mass at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Houston March 25, 2025, the feast of the Annunciation. (OSV News/Galveston-Houston Facebook page)

Archbishop Joe Vásquez of Galveston-Houston was named to succeed Cardinal Daniel DiNardo on Jan. 20, 2025. A native of Texas and priest of the San Angelo Diocese in that state, he had served as an auxiliary bishop in the Galveston-Houston Archdiocese from 2002 to 2010 and then as bishop of Austin, Texas.

He is known as a mild-mannered pastor, but one capable of handling thorny situations. Vásquez was sent to stop the bleeding in the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, after Pope Francis removed Bishop Joseph Strickland in 2023, and he served as apostolic administrator there for over a year until a new bishop was finally installed

earlier this year.



Archbishop Shawn McKnight displays the apostolic mandate to lead the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, for all the congregation to see during his installation Mass May 27, 2025, at Church of the Nativity in Leawood, Kan. (OSV News/The Leaven/Jay Soldner)

The appointment of Archbishop Shawn McKnight of Kansas City, Kansas, represented one of the largest shifts in ecclesial sensibilities of the eight appointments. McKnight replaced Archbishop Joseph Naumann, who was one of the more conspicuous culture warriors in the U.S. hierarchy.

McKnight is deeply committed to the synodal process Francis began and is not afraid to ruffle feathers at meetings of the U.S. bishops' conference. I can't improve on Melinda Henneberger's masterful profile of McKnight in the Kansas City Star.



Archbishop Edward Weisenburger delivers his first homily during his installation Mass at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit March 18, 2025. (OSV News/Detroit Catholic/Tim Fuller)

Archbishop Edward Weisenburger's appointment as the archbishop of Detroit also constituted a significant shift in ecclesial sensibility, even if not as large as the shift in Kansas City. The Motor City's previous archbishop, Allen Vigneron, was not really a culture warrior himself, but he armed others for the battle. Sacred Heart seminary became a hotbed of criticism of Francis. The traditional alliance between the church and organized labor in the city was allowed to atrophy.

Weisenburger has been outspoken in his support for Francis' reforms, a defender of migrants and promoter of environmental protection.



Cardinal Robert McElroy of Washington speaks about the election of Pope Leo XIV at a news conference May 9, 2025, at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. (CNS/Kendall McLaren)

Cardinal Robert McElroy was one of the few prelates to be named a cardinal while still presiding over a diocese, San Diego, not an archdiocese. In January, Francis sent McElroy to Washington, D.C., which is only an archdiocese because Franklin Roosevelt begged the Vatican to remove the nation's capital from the spiritual overlordship of Baltimore's Archbishop Michael Curley. The Irish-born Curley was loudly anti-British and isolationist. Curley fought having his archdiocese, the nation's oldest, cut in two and he lost, but Roosevelt did not get his wish either: Washington became a separate archdiocese but Curley was named its first archbishop.

Before Roosevelt's New Deal, World War II and the invention of air conditioning, Washington was a sleepy Southern city. Now it is the center of the empire. McElroy, arguably the leading intellectual on the U.S. bench, is especially well-versed in Catholic social teaching and U.S. history, as seen in his book on John Courtney

Murray's theology.

His appointment is not a significant ideological shift. His predecessor, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, was a Pope Francis man, too. But McElroy is perfectly placed in front of the ecclesial microphone in the nation's capital at a time when our politics is challenged by both a libertarian left and an authoritarian right.



Archbishop Robert Casey smiles ahead of his installation Mass April 3, 2025, at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains in Cincinnati. (OSV News/Courtesy of Cincinnati Archdiocese)

Archbishop Robert Casey of Cincinnati is one of the most cheerful people you will ever meet. At conferences or at meetings of the bishops' conference, you will spot him across the room and he is always smiling. But he was vicar general and moderator of the Curia in one of the largest and most complex archdioceses in the country, Chicago, so behind the smile there are some real management chops.

Casey succeeds Archbishop Dennis Schnurr, a fine man who never joined the opposition to Francis but who never evidenced a great deal of support for the pope's

reform agenda either.



Archbishop Jeffrey Grob concelebrates Mass with the presbyterate during his installation as the 12th archbishop of the Milwaukee Archdiocese Jan. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Catholic Herald/Andy Gilicinski)

Milwaukee and Chicago have been sending each other bishops for a long time. In the last century, Cardinals Samuel Stritch and Albert Meyer both served as archbishop of Milwaukee before being transferred to Chicago. Archbishop William Cousins was an auxiliary in Chicago before becoming bishop of Peoria, Illinois, and then archbishop of Milwaukee. Archbishop Jerome Listecki, also, was a Chicago auxiliary before becoming the ordinary in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and, in 2010, Milwaukee.

So, it was not entirely surprising that when it came time to replace Listecki last year, Pope Francis plucked a Chicago auxiliary, Jeffrey Grob, to be the new archbishop in Milwaukee.



Archbishop Michael McGovern processes in during his installation Mass at St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha, Neb., May 7, 2025. (OSV News/Ervin Photography/Courtesy of Omaha Archdiocese)

Finally, there is the new archbishop of Omaha, Nebraska, Archbishop Michael McGovern. He was a priest in Chicago before he was named bishop of Belleville, Illinois, in 2020. McGovern's resume is almost entirely in pastoral assignments, and that pastoral touch comes through in his sermons and in casual conversations with him: You think you are the only person in the room when he speaks with you.

McGovern also has a keen love for liturgy and hopefully he can bring some good sense and uncommon inspiration to that discussion which, of all things, should unite Catholics, not divide them.

The fact that three of the eight new archbishops hailed from Chicago has been cited by some to indicate the influence of Cardinal Blase Cupich on the process. It never hurts to have one's patron sitting on the Dicastery for Bishops, but these three men all were drawn to the priesthood and ordained by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, and

then assigned positions of increasing responsibility under Cardinal Francis George. Anyone who flourishes under the tenure of three such very different church leaders is someone with the gifts for ecclesial leadership needed at a time of polarization.

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Taken together, the eight appointments signal a shift away from the opposition or indifference to Francis' reforms that has been too common among some bishops in the U.S. None of these eight is going to be named ecclesiastical adviser to the Napa Institute. None of them offered testimonies on behalf of now disgraced former nuncio Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò when he attempted a putsch against Francis. None of them are radical lefties either. They are all churchmen.

What we can expect from them is a commitment to synodality in their archdioceses. We can expect them to be strongly, but not exclusively, focused on opposition to abortion in the public square. Look for initiatives on climate change and support for migrants and a profound commitment to Catholic social teaching.

All will be loyal to Pope Leo XIV and all will help him shape the next generation of episcopal leaders as they help select suffragan and auxiliary bishops in their provinces.

Sunday marks a milestone in the life of the church in the U.S. These eight archbishops will not only receive a pallium; in important ways, they will shape the destiny of the church in the United States.