News

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks is pictured during the 2018 fall general assembly of the U.S. Conferen

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks of Joliet, Ill., has been appointed archbishop of New York, succeeding Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Hicks is pictured during the 2018 fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. (OSV News/CNS file, Bob Roller)



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Pope Leo XIV has appointed Bishop Ronald A. Hicks of Joliet as the next archbishop of New York, marking a decisive shift in leadership style for one of the most visible dioceses in the United States.

Hicks, 58, succeeds Cardinal Timothy Dolan, whose resignation was accepted after he reached the mandatory retirement age of 75 in February. The appointment, announced today (Dec. 18) by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, ends months of speculation and places a bishop with a markedly pastoral and missionary profile at the helm of an archdiocese facing institutional and financial restructuring and deep cultural change.

The appointment is widely seen as a signal from Rome that the center of gravity in U.S. Catholic leadership is continuing to move away from media-driven cultural confrontation and toward a model rooted in listening, social engagement and pastoral proximity — a model closely associated with both Pope Francis and his successor.

Hicks and Dolan appeared together at a press conference Dec. 18 at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan Dec. 18. In his first public remarks as the new archbishop of New York, Hicks recalled the moment he learned of his appointment. "When [the nuncio] called me to share the appointment, I told him that simply, I want to do the will of God. I asked him to tell the Holy Father that I say yes with great humility and that I accept this appointment with an open heart."

Hicks will be installed as archbishop Feb. 6.

The Archdiocese of New York has long functioned as a national and international platform for American Catholicism. Under Dolan, who was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, it became known for its visibility and assertive engagement in political and cultural debates. Hicks inherits a different reality.

The archdiocese is currently liquidating significant assets to fund a $300 million compensation program for survivors of clerical sexual abuse, including the sale of its former chancery headquarters. It is also engaged in mediation toward a global settlement with survivors, while continuing litigation with its longtime insurer.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan waves as he arrives for the 79th annual Alfred E. Smith Mer

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan waves as he arrives for the 79th annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York City Oct. 17, 2024. Pope Leo XIV accepted the resignation of Dolan, who turned 75 in February. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

The archdiocese also faces a steep decline in priestly vocations and long-term drops in religious practice. Between 1970 and 2020, the number of priests fell by more than half, even as the Catholic population grew substantially. Only two men applied to study for the priesthood in the archdiocese in 2024.

During the press conference, Hicks said he was committed to understanding the funds set aside to resolve claims in the archdiocese. Hicks said the church "can never rest" in efforts to prevent abuse, protect children and care for survivors, even when the work is challenging and painful.

Formation and missionary experience

Born in Harvey, Illinois, in 1967, Hicks was educated entirely within the Chicago ecclesial ecosystem. After studying philosophy at Niles College of Loyola University Chicago, he completed his theological formation at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, earning both a master of divinity and a doctorate in ministry. Ordained in 1994, he served briefly in parish ministry before moving into priestly formation and diocesan administration as former auxiliary bishop of Chicago and later bishop of Joliet.

A formative period came in 2005, when Hicks spent five years in El Salvador as a regional director for an orphanage network operating across Latin America. That experience, according to those who know him, remains central to his pastoral outlook.

> '[Bishop Ronald A. Hicks] certainly lives the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and I'm sure will bring that to whatever ministry he's involved in.'
> —Bishop Gerald Kicanas
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"Ron Hicks demonstrates what we need in our bishops today," Archbishop Robert Casey of Cincinnati — who has served with Hicks as co-auxiliary bishop of Chicago — told the National Catholic Reporter. "He is a man of great intellect and also of great heart."

Casey recalls that he and three classmates from the Chicago priesthood class of 1994 were elevated to the episcopacy without any expectation that three of them would become auxiliary bishops of Chicago and he would be named archbishop of Cincinnati.

"We did not begin our discernment towards priesthood with any thought of becoming bishops," he said. In Casey's view, this matters institutionally.

"I think our church today calls for humble servant leaders, and that's what I see in my classmates."

In the role of a bishop, administrative experience features prominently. Casey noted that Hicks' role in Chicago as vicar from 2018 to 2020 placed him at the center of governance, personnel decisions and crisis management. He said that Hicks' capacity to handle pressure without destabilizing the institution is a key reason he is being entrusted with the New York Archdiocese.

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks of Joliet, Ill., stands across the street from the Joliet Treatment Center,

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks of Joliet, Ill., stands across the street from the Joliet Treatment Center, Dec. 25, 2022, where he celebrated Christmas Mass for inmates. (CNS/Courtesy Diocese of Joliet)

The challenges Casey identified that Hicks will face are not unique to any one diocese. He pointed to polarization, parish reorganization and a loss of trust in church structures. These, he said, define the environment in which bishops now operate. Hicks, he said, has already shown "a level of leadership capability" that addresses these conditions through steady governance and pastoral presence.

Casey also believes the appointment fits the direction set by Leo. The archbishop described the pope's emphasis on "this notion of being bridge builders, with this idea of synodality," stressing that bishops do not act in isolation or represent only the present moment.

"As bishops, we don't just step into a role," Casey said. "We step into a church that existed before me and that will exist after me."

Bishop Gerald Kicanas, apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Tucson, Arizona, and one of Hicks' earliest, closest mentors, first encountered Hicks as a student at Quigley Seminary South in Chicago. "He was a very dedicated, committed young man, very interested in the possibility of serving as a priest. It was my privilege to recommend him for ordination," Kicanas said in an interview.

Kicanas recommended Hicks for ordination and followed his progression through seminary leadership, episcopal appointment and diocesan governance. Reflecting on Hicks' time in Central America, he emphasized its personal dimension: "He is a

missionary at heart and I think he was generally really a father to these young people at the orphanage in El Salvador. He loved that work."

"He certainly lives the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and I'm sure will bring that to whatever ministry he's involved in."

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Fr. Larry Lisowski, a Chicago pastor and a longtime housemate of Hicks in Chicago, described a leader shaped by routine, discipline and pastoral confidence. Hicks lived at Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph Parish, a mile from his office at the Quigley Pastor Center and regularly walked to and from work. According to Lisowski, that habit reflected a temperament marked by focus and reflection after long days of administration.

He described Hicks as "a man filled with hope" whose leadership is "rooted in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ."

"I have seen Cardinal Dolan on TV many times and he has a larger than life personality. But Bishop Hicks is his own man who is comfortable in his own skin," he said. "People will be attracted to him and his leadership as he brings a [spirit] of renewal to the Catholic Church."

A leadership style centered on listening

Those who have worked closely with Hicks describe a bishop whose first instinct is consultation rather than direction. Kicanas said that style will likely define Hicks' early months in New York.

Exterior of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York

The exterior of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City is seen in a nighttime file photo. About 2.4 Catholics make up the Archdiocese of New York. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

"What Bishop Hicks does, and I believe he will do in New York, is he will want to listen," he said. "He will talk to many different people. He will try to understand what are the issues that are important for the church to address in this very complex organization like the Archdiocese of New York."

His first response, Kicanas said, "will be what Pope Francis always told us, which is we have to listen, we have to learn, we have to come to understand before really making decisions."

That method similarly mirrors Leo's leadership style. Hicks has spoken publicly about meeting Leo, then Cardinal Robert Prevost, during a 2024 visit to Illinois. "I walked away [from the talk] saying 'I learned something tonight. I learned something about our faith. I learned something about our church,' " Hicks said in a May interview with WGN News.

He described the future pope's demeanor as "clear, concise, creative, and — finally — humble," and recalled that the former cardinal "takes more time to listen than to talk." Hicks also noted that while Leo does not avoid difficult questions, he leads "with the heart of a shepherd."

Credibility with Hispanic and immigrant communities

Hicks' years in El Salvador and his fluency in Spanish have given him sustained credibility with Hispanic Catholics, a demographic that will be central to the future of the church in New York.

In 2021, there were more than a million Hispanic Catholics among 2.4 million Catholics in New York, according to the archdiocese. Some 143 of the archdiocese's 277 parishes offered Hispanic ministry, according to a 2024 survey by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Another 134 parishes have a Hispanic presence, but no Mass in Spanish.

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks enters the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Joliet, Ill., just before

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks enters the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Joliet, Ill., just before the start of the Sept. 29, 2020, Mass installing him as the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Joliet. Pope Leo XIV has appointed him archbishop of New York. (CNS/Bethany Duckworth, Diocese of Joliet)

Elizabeth Roman, president of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry, worked with Hicks during his tenure in Chicago and Joliet and described his relationship with Latino communities as consistently relational.

"His care, his accompaniment with the Latino community has been really, really important," Roman said. "He served in El Salvador, and so he speaks perfect Spanish, and he is a great ally of the Hispanic community."

Hicks is "always there when you call him, he always says yes to the mission," she said. "We always felt accompanied and supported by our bishop."

Asked why Hicks is well suited for New York, Roman pointed to a convergence of age, experience and temperament. "He is bilingual, bicultural. He's attentive. He has this kindness about him and he's approachable," she said.

"I think with New York and in this country, going through what we are going through with the topics of migrants and Latinos, he's going to be a really powerful voice, a supportive voice that will lift this issue. I really think he'd be a great ally to the Latino community."

On Dec. 18, Hicks pointed to New York's immigrant history as a source of optimism, expressing a desire to work across religious and civic lines to uphold "human dignity" and keep that hope alive.

Speaking briefly in Spanish during the press conference, Hicks highlighted his deep ties to Latin American culture and ministry, referencing years of service in Mexico and Central America and close connections across the Spanish-speaking world.

"I want to work with all of you, united as brothers and sisters," he said in Spanish.

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