Bishop James Golka of Colorado Springs, Colo., left, and Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver

Bishop James Golka of Colorado Springs, Colo., left, and Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver are seen in a combo photo. Pope Leo XIV has accepted Aquila's resignation and named Gorka, 59, as his successor to lead the Archdiocese of Denver. (OSV News/Courtesy Diocese Colorado Springs and Courtesy Archdiocese of Denver)



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Pope Leo XIV has accepted the resignation of Archbishop Samuel Aquila of Denver and named as his successor Bishop James Golka of Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The resignation and appointment were announced by the Vatican on Feb. 7 and publicized in Washington by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Aquila, who has led the Denver Archdiocese since 2012, submitted his resignation to Pope Leo on Sept. 24, his 75th birthday, as required by canon law. His successor, Golka, 59, a native of Grand Island, Nebraska, was ordained and installed as the third bishop of Colorado Springs on June 29, 2021.

Golka will become the ninth bishop of Denver when he is installed March 25 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

"While I am excited to discover God's plan for me in the Archdiocese of Denver, I am also very sad to be leaving the Diocese of Colorado Springs," he said in a statement.

"I have grown to love the people and parishes of our diocese. Be assured of my continued prayers for you."

Golka asked the faithful of the Diocese of Colorado Springs to pray for him as well as his successor, whoever it might be.

"Thank you for keeping me in your prayers. I also join you in praying for the next Bishop of Colorado Springs. We have no idea when that person could be named, but in the meanwhile, we can hold him in our prayers before we meet him," he said.

The Denver Archdiocese welcomed his appointment "with great joy and gratitude to God." Aquila introduced his successor to the media Feb. 7 at a livestreamed press conference.

Born Sept. 22, 1966, James Robert Golka is the fourth of 10 children born to Robert and Patricia Golka. After graduating from Grand Island Central Catholic High School, he went to Jesuit -run Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, 1985-89, where he earned degrees in philosophy and theology.

He spent a year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps working on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota 1989-1990 before entering St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he received both a master's of divinity and master's of arts in sacramental theology. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Grand Island on June 3, 1994.

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In the Nebraska diocese, Golka served as a parochial vicar and pastor in various parishes. His diocesan positions included director of ongoing formation of clergy; director of diocesan youth retreats; chair of the personnel board; and member of the finance council.

Pope Francis appointed then-Fr. Golka to head the Diocese of Colorado Springs on April 30, 2021.

In an interview prior to his episcopal ordination and installation, he said that at Creighton, the Jesuit priests were influential in his priestly vocation "They taught me how to pray, how to discern. They asked me one day, 'Have you ever thought about

being a Jesuit?' "

He said he had thought about being a Jesuit — once for about 10 minutes — but he felt called to the diocesan priesthood because he loves "what happens in parish life."

During his tenure as shepherd of the 10-county diocese in central-eastern Colorado, Golka recorded a popular series of weekly videos containing reflections on the Sunday readings. In 2025, he established the first diocesan shrine, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Divine Redeemer. He currently serves as episcopal moderator of the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference and is on the board of directors of Cross Catholic Outreach.

Golka has worked with national consultants to help parishes develop stewardship as a way of life. He has offered numerous retreats across the country, "preaching the blessings of ordering our lives in recognition that all we are and all we have is a gift from God," according to a diocesan biography. "A guiding Scripture passage is Psalm 116:12 which proclaims: 'How can I repay the LORD for all the great good done for me?'"

Aquila was ordained as a priest of the Archdiocese of Denver on June 5, 1976. He had served in the archdiocese for 25 years — including as rector of the St. John Vianney Theological Seminary — when then-Msgr. Aquila was named coadjutor bishop of Fargo, North Dakota, in June 2001. Nine months later, in March 2002, he became bishop of Fargo.

On May 29, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI named then-Bishop Aquila as archbishop of Denver, succeeding Archbishop Charles Chaput. He was installed on July 18, 2012, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Denver.

He currently serves on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops's Committee on Divine Worship.

The Denver Archdiocese, which is also served by Auxiliary Bishop Jorge Rodríguez, covers 25 counties of Northern Colorado and has a Catholic population of about 600,000, which is about 15% of the total population. The archdiocese includes 148 parishes and mission parishes, 313 priests, 195 deacons, 35 elementary schools and nine high schools.