News

Bishop Menjivar-Ayala of Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va.

Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala of Washington is pictured in an undated photo. On May 1, 2026, Pope Leo XIV named Bishop Menjivar-Ayala as bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va., succeeding Bishop Mark E. Brennan, whose resignation he accepted the same day. The diocese comprises the entire state of West Virginia. (OSV News/Archdiocese of Washington)



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Washington — May 1, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV has accepted the resignation of Bishop Mark E. Brennan of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, and named as his successor Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala of Washington.

The resignation and appointment were publicized in Washington May 1 by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

An installation date for Menjivar-Ayala as the 10th bishop of the statewide diocese has not yet been announced.

At a morning news conference, Brennan expressed gratitude for being able to serve as "chief shepherd" of the diocese for nearly seven years, and he welcomed his successor and 10th bishop "to serve the people going into the future in this wonderful state."

He prayed to God to bless Menjivar-Ayala as he assumes his new responsibilities and to "open the hearts and minds of our people as they welcome him." He also prayed for "a smooth transition from one bishop to another" in serving the faithful of "this wonderful diocese."

He said his successor possesses "integrity, intelligence, zeal for God's people."

Brennan, 79, also noted how long he has known Menjivar-Ayala, going back to before the bishop was even a priest and when Brennan was director of priestly vocations in the Archdiocese of Washington, a post he held for 10 years.

A native of El Salvador, West Virginia's new bishop migrated to the United States in 1990 and was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Washington on May 29, 2004. He was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of Washington by Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory, then archbishop of Washington, at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in February 2023, becoming the first Salvadoran bishop in the country.

"I give thanks to God for the many ways he has revealed his love and mercy in my life," Menjivar-Ayala, 55, said at the news conference. He thanked "the first American pope" and Pierre, "for their trust and confidence in me, for calling me to shepherd this beautiful diocese."

He thanked Brennan for welcoming him into priestly formation many years ago. "Little did we know what the Lord had in store for us. Thank you for being part of (my) journey, and I hope you will continue mentoring me as I adjust to this new mission."

He said he accepted his new appointment "with great joy and humility."

"I come to you first and foremost as your brother in faith," Menjivar-Ayala, said. "I hope you will allow this stranger to walk with you on the journey of faith."

"May we discover our shared humanity and dignity as children of God. I come to you as your bishop, your servant, to love you and to serve you. This is the only agenda that I bring, to love you and to serve you as best I can in faith and in fidelity to Christ," he added.

He described West Virginia as a land of striking beauty, rich in diversity and rich in natural resources, and at the same time, he said, many of its people "continue to endure hardship, marginalization and inequality." He praised West Virginians for their faith and resiliency.

He said he would be deeply proud if in time, "you accept me as a fellow West Virginian."

But West Virginia "is not a strange land to me," he said. When he was first ordained a priest, he helped out with the Spanish Mass at St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg. During the COVID pandemic, he recalled, he would look for places to hike – "my favorite sport" – and started hiking and camping in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, which cover 1.8 million acres along the border of Virginia and West Virginia.

He later bought a small cabin where he has spent his days off and where "the people of the holler" welcomed him. "I feel very much part of that community," which even for its small size, is diverse, he said, with Hungarian and Italian Americans and others who have formed "the backbone of the labor force, coal mining in the state."

Menjivar-Ayala told Catholics of the diocese that he wants to begin his ministry "by getting to know you," and the "best way to do this is by listening attentively" to the priests and deacons, men and women religious, the leaders of diocesan offices and the laity.

"We are partners in mission," he said, adding he wants to also listen to the young people – "you are not only the future of the church, you are the present of the church" – and to the poor, workers and immigrants. He also will reach out beyond the church to the wider community, listening to public officials, other faith leaders and business leaders.

"I believe together we can make a difference here in 'almost heaven West Virginia,' " he added, quoting a popular John Denver song. "My office will always be open, if I am there. I hope to spend my time out among the people, accompanying you in your daily lives, rather than remain behind the desk or in the sanctuary."

He concluded his remarks by saying a few words in his native Spanish. Besides English and Spanish, the bishop also speaks Italian.

Born Aug. 14, 1970, in Chalatenango, El Salvador, Menjivar-Ayala studied philosophy at St. John Vianney College Seminary in Miami and theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum) in Rome. He earned his licentiate at the Pontifical Scalabrinian Institute of Pastoral Theology for Human Mobility in Rome before his priestly ordination for the Washington Archdiocese.

He served as assistant pastor at Maryland parishes in Germantown (2004–2008) and Bethesda (2009) and at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington (2009–2013). He was pastor of Our Lady Queen of the Americas Parish in Washington (2013–2017) and of St. Mary Parish in Landover Hills, Maryland (2017–2023), before he was named an auxiliary bishop.

Brennan, born February 6, 1947, in Boston, was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Washington by Archbishop William Baum at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington on May 15, 1976.

He has headed the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston as its ninth bishop since his installation on Aug. 22, 2019. Prior to that, he was an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Baltimore (2017-2019), after serving as Washington's archdiocesan vocations director. He serves on multiple committees for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, including the National Advisory Committee, the migration committee and the pro-life committee.

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