



Archbishop Nelson J. Perez speaks during a homily at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Mich. in 2018. (CNS photo/Dan Meloy, The Michigan Catholic)

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Editor's note: *This story has been updated from its original version with more information. The byline has also been changed.*

The bishop of Cleveland will become the new leader of the Philadelphia Archdiocese, the Vatican announced Jan. 23, making him the first Hispanic archbishop to lead the region's 1.3 million-member flock.

A news conference was scheduled Thursday morning to introduce Nelson Perez. He will succeed Archbishop Charles Chaput, a conservative culture warrior who will step down after turning 75 last year, the traditional retirement age for Catholic bishops.

Perez, 58, is coming home in a way, after attending the diocesan seminary in Philadelphia in the 1980s and serving in a number of Philadelphia parishes before being named as an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, and then bishop of Cleveland in 2017.

In a tweet, Perez said "it is with great joy tinged with a sense of sadness that I accept the appointment - joy that I will be returning to serve @ArchPhilly, sadness in that I will be leaving @DIOCESEofCLE."

While serving in Cleveland, Perez launched an initiative to develop a strategic plan for strengthening Catholic education in the diocese. He implemented changes in elementary religion teaching and began a "think tank" to recommend ways to ensure that youth and young adults are fully involved in the life of the local church, according to a news release from the Cleveland diocese.

Perez has also had to deal with the issue of sexual abuse by priests. The Cleveland Diocese last year made public a list of 22 previously unidentified priests and other clergy it said had been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors. Perez said in a letter announcing the release of the names that a committee assembled by the diocese determined that the accusations against the clerics were "more likely than not to be true."

Perez had pledged in 2018 to follow the lead of other dioceses and release the names of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse, past and present. The Cleveland Diocese in 2002 began publishing the names of priests who were accused from that year forward.

Chaput, for his part, faced a difficult task trying to restore credibility in the Philadelphia hierarchy following revelations of clergy sexual abuse and cover-up by his predecessors that were revealed in 2005 and 2011 grand jury investigations.

Appointed in 2011, Chaput was very much in favor under conservative Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, named to participate in important Vatican missions even while being denied the cardinal's red hat that his predecessors enjoyed.

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Chaput, a member of the Capuchin order, has denied he is a critic of Pope Francis, and he hosted the Argentine pope when he visited Philadelphia in 2015 for a big family rally. The visit, including a Mass that drew a reported 1 million people, gave Francis a much more positive impression of the U.S. than he had going into the trip.

But the two clashed. After Francis opened the door to letting divorced and civilly remarried Catholics receive Communion in 2016, Chaput closed the door in Philadelphia by saying they must abstain from sex if they want the sacrament.

Chaput was also one several U.S. bishops who praised the integrity of leading Francis critic, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. The former Vatican ambassador to the U.S. in 2018 called for Francis to resign for allegedly rehabilitating ex-cardinal Theodore McCarrick, alleging he was part of a two-decade conspiracy of cover-up.

In his letter, Viganò implied Francis opposed Chaput's conservatism, quoting the pope as telling him in 2013 that U.S. bishops must not be ideologically driven, "they must not be right-wing like the archbishop of Philadelphia."

Francis has said he doesn't remember details of the 2013 meeting.

While Francis quickly accepted Chaput's resignation, this week he formally told another 75-year-old prelate to stay on indefinitely. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the archbishop of Vienna, is a strong Francis supporter and helped draft the final document at the controversial Amazon Synod, where bishops called for married priests in the Amazon.

[Nicole Winfield in Rome and Lisa Cornwell in Cleveland contributed to this report.]

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