

# **First Haitian to lead U.S. diocese is ordained bishop for Charleston, S.C.**

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (CNS) – About 2,500 people gathered on the feast of Our Lady of Fátima to celebrate the episcopal ordination of the first Haitian-born bishop to lead a diocese in the United States.

Bishop Jacques E. Fabre-Jeune was ordained as the 14th bishop of the Diocese of Charleston on May 13 at the Charleston Area Convention Center.

As guests arrived for the historic celebration of a new bishop, they enjoyed spiritual songs and dance along the convention center's surrounding sidewalks.

Bishop Fabre-Jeune, 66, is a native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and one of six children. He immigrated to New York City while in high school and completed his secondary school education there. In 1982, he joined the Missionaries of St. Charles, a religious order known as the Scalabrinian Fathers.

Prior to being named a bishop, his assignment was in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, where he served as administrator of San Felipe de Jesús Mission in Forest Park, Georgia, for 13 years.

Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington ordained the Haitian American priest to the episcopate in North Charleston.

Concelebrants of the Mass included Atlanta Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer of Atlanta; Bishop Luis R. Zarama of Raleigh, North Carolina; Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States; Father Leonir Chiarello, superior general of the Scalabrinian Fathers; and nine other visiting

bishops.

The Charleston Diocese “has been blessed to begin a new chapter with a priest from a religious community whose charism is missionary at heart,” said Cardinal Gregory. “He will add to the glorious history of this venerable and early American diocese.”

The Holy Spirit will abide and guide Bishop Fabre-Jeune in his new role, just as it has in his successful ministry as a priest, said the cardinal, who has known the new bishop for nearly four decades.

Then-Father Jacques was ordained a priest in October 1986 by the cardinal when he was an auxiliary bishop of Chicago. Both also served in the Archdiocese of Atlanta as priest and archbishop, respectively.

“I enjoy a special grace today in ordaining as a bishop one that I ordained as a priest,” said Cardinal Gregory during the homily. “I do so for the pastoral service of this local Church, whose own eminent son, Joseph Louis Bernardin, ordained me as a bishop. Our lives are thus linked through the Sacrament of Holy Orders that spans both time and location.”

Cardinal Bernardin was archbishop of Chicago from 1982 until his death in 1996.

Bishops are to teach, govern and sanctify the people entrusted to their care, said Cardinal Gregory. “You must stand in the midst of your people. Pray with them and for them as you together with each one of them seek the face of Christ.”

“Pastoral governance necessarily comes with the episcopal cleric,” said the cardinal. “But it is always properly and successfully exercised in a collaborative and consultative method in order to be fruitful.”

The cardinal also encouraged the new bishop to lean into his

religious order's charism of serving migrants, refugees and those in need.

"You should invite all of the people of this local Church also to strengthen their tender hearts in concern for the poor," said Cardinal Gregory. "Not just those who may lack financial security, but also those whose spirits are heavy with sorrow, anxiety and fear – the poor in spirit, as the beatitude calls them."

"You must become a visual image of the unity and reconciliation that Christ offers the people of every social class, race, religion and culture," said the cardinal.

"May the Mother of God herself, whose feast day we observe under her title of Our Lady of Fátima, guide you and all that you do and will do to enrich and strengthen God's people in South Carolina."

"You have already lived your priesthood in Cuba, Colombia, Rome, Dominican Republic and here in the United States in a distinguished way as a Scalabrinian father," Archbishop Pierre said to the soon-to-be ordained bishop prior to reading the apostolic mandate on his episcopal appointment.

"Your gifts, not only with languages, but of sensitivity to diverse groups of people and cultures, have not gone unnoticed and will be a great asset to the Church."

On behalf of Pope Francis, Archbishop Pierre encouraged the new prelate to become close with the people of Charleston.

"Do not sit idly, but go and set this diocese on fire with the love of Jesus Christ and his Gospel," said the archbishop.

After reading the apostolic mandate, Bishop-designate Fabre-Jeune then held up the papal letter for all to see and was met with applause. He then promised to faithfully carry out his new role.

As the congregation prayed the litany of the saints, he prostrated himself before the altar. After the laying on of hands by the bishops, he knelt before Cardinal Gregory as sacred chrism was poured on his head in anointing.

The Book of Gospels was opened and extended above his head while the cardinal prayed that the new bishop would preach the word of God with patience and sound doctrine.

During investiture, the new bishop received the signs of his office – the ring, miter and crosier. Finally, he was escorted by Cardinal Gregory and Archbishop Hartmayer to sit in his chair as leader of the Charleston Diocese. The bishops gave him congratulatory hugs as the congregation applauded.

Bishop Fabre-Jeune is the second Haitian American bishop in the United States and the first Haitian bishop to lead a diocese in the States. The first to be ordained a bishop was Auxiliary Bishop Guy A. Sansaricq of Brooklyn, New York, who died in August 2021 at age 86.

More than 50 members of the Atlanta Haitian Alliance Community traveled to the Charleston Diocese to support the new bishop and celebrate the historic moment in the Church and their culture.

Bishop Fabre-Jeune remembered his Haitian roots in his personal coat of arms, incorporating a palm tree and the colors of the Haitian flag.

Atlanta's Chorale Harmonie Divine, a Haitian choir led by Darío Clena along with Andy Desty, combined efforts with the choir of San Felipe de Jesús Mission to provide music for the episcopal ordination.

"To have a Haitian to be a bishop is a big thing for us," Clena told The Georgia Bulletin, newspaper of the Atlanta Archdiocese. "I hope he brings people together."

Bishop Fabre-Jeune is now shepherd of a diocese that is more than 200 years old and serves nearly 200,000 Catholics across 46 counties in South Carolina. He plans to listen to the local Catholic community and build relationships with priests as he begins his new role.

“You are going to be the bees of Christ together with me,” said Bishop Fabre-Jeune to the Charleston community. “Not to sting, but to work hand in hand to build the kingdom of God – where everyone can find sweetness and life.”

*Smith is a staff writer for The Georgia Bulletin, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.*