

The next bishop of Raleigh is from Latin America, like many in his flock

Luis Rafael Zarama's appointment by Pope Francis is another indication of the growth in the number of Hispanic Catholics—especially in the South.

by [Yonat Shimron](#) in the [September 27, 2017](#) issue



Luis Rafael Zarama. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Raleigh.

Luis Rafael Zarama, 58, is the first Colombian-born bishop to lead a Roman Catholic diocese in the United States, and the state's first Hispanic bishop. The Diocese of Raleigh has more Latino and Latina parishioners than any other ethnicity.

"My concern and my only purpose for being there is to serve the church," Zarama said. "It doesn't matter if they're Anglo or Hispanic or Vietnamese or different races."

His goal is to unite the diocese.

"We have our own limitations," he said. "We all have our own gifts. How can we complement each other? How can we be open to each other? How can we share with

joy the gospel of Jesus Christ?”

Zarama, who has lived in the United States for 28 years, is not the first Latin American-born bishop to lead a U.S. diocese. But his appointment by Pope Francis is another indication of the growth in the number of Hispanic Catholics, who now make up about 40 percent of all U.S. Catholics, as well as the growth of Catholicism in the South, which has edged out the Northeast as the region with the largest proportion of Catholics: 27 percent versus 25 percent.

“I never thought I’d have a Spanish-speaking bishop here in the U.S.,” said Aida Ponce de Leon, 43, who immigrated from Mexico and now lives in Cary, North Carolina. “We can experience the love of God having someone understand what our hearts and souls are in need of.” —Religion News Service

A version of this article, which was edited on September 8, appears in the September 27 print edition under the title “People: Luis Rafael Zarama.”