

Wilton Gregory to become first Black American cardinal in Catholic Church

by [Elana Schor](#) in the [November 18, 2020](#) issue



(AP Photo / Andrew Harnik)

Washington, DC, archbishop Wilton Gregory is set to become the first Black American cardinal in the Catholic Church, a historic appointment that comes months after nationwide demonstrations against racial injustice.

Gregory's ascension, announced on October 25 by Pope Francis, elevates a leader who has drawn praise for his handling of the sexual abuse scandal that has roiled the church. The Washington-area archbishop also has spoken out about the importance of Catholic leaders working to combat the sin of racial discrimination.

Gregory, 72, was ordained in his native Chicago in 1973; he took over leadership of the capital's archdiocese last year after serving as archbishop of Atlanta since 2005. The ceremony making his elevation official is slated for November 28.

"With a very grateful and humble heart, I thank Pope Francis for this appointment which will allow me to work more closely with him in caring for Christ's Church," Gregory said in a statement issued by the archdiocese.

Gregory helped shape the church's zero tolerance response to the sexual abuse scandal while serving as president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops from 2001 to 2004—although the church continues to face criticism about a lack of consistency and transparency in its process.

More recently, amid nationwide protests this summer sparked by the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Gregory made headlines for issuing a statement critical of President Donald Trump's visit to the St. John Paul II National Shrine. That presidential visit to the shrine came one day after demonstrators were forcefully cleared to facilitate Trump's visit to an Episcopal church in Washington, and Gregory responded that he considered it "baffling and reprehensible that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused and manipulated."

In addition to his work combating racial injustice and sexual abuse in the church, Gregory has drawn notice for his more inclusive treatment of LGBTQ Catholics. In 2014, while serving in Atlanta, he wrote a positive column about his conversations with a group of Catholic parents of LGBTQ children.

—Associated Press reporter David Crary contributed.