

Ukrainian Catholic Church elects new leader

Jonathan Luxmoore Catholic News Service | Mar. 28, 2011

WARSAW, Poland -- The Ukrainian Catholic Church elected its youngest bishop to succeed Cardinal Lubomyr Husar of Kiev-Halych, who retired Feb. 10.

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, 40, apostolic administrator of the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of the Protection of the Mother of God in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was elected during a five-day synod of bishops in Lviv. His election was confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI March 25.

Archbishop Shevchuk, a moral theologian, was to be enthroned as major archbishop March 27 during ceremonies at the Cathedral of the Holy Resurrection of Christ in Kiev.

The Ukrainian Catholic Church is the largest of the Eastern churches in full communion with Rome, and it is pivotal in ecumenical relations.

Born at Stryi, near Lviv, May 5, 1970, the new archbishop was ordained to the priesthood in June 1994 by Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, then the Ukrainian Catholic Church's leader. He later obtained a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas of Aquinas in Rome.

Archbishop Shevchuk served as prefect and vice rector of Holy Spirit Seminary -- now the Ukrainian Catholic University -- in Lviv between 1999 and 2002. He served as personal secretary to Cardinal Husar from 2002 to 2005. He returned to the university as rector in 2007. Subsequently, he was appointed auxiliary bishop for the Buenos Aires-based diocese in January 2009 and became apostolic administrator in April 2010.

In an interview with the *Livyi Bereh* daily newspaper March 23, Cardinal Husar said his successor's tasks would include "moralizing public life and bringing God into people's lives" as well as encouraging steps to combat corruption through education.

"Everywhere -- here in Ukraine, in Europe, in North and South America -- our church has things to do, and it's necessary to work on them," said the 78-year-old cardinal, who also ministered in the United States before returning to his native Ukraine as a bishop in 1994.

"If all the churches worked and trained the people, there would be change," he said. "The main task is to make the church a bigger part of our lives, so that people feel its apostleship and the need for sanctification."

Catholics make up a tenth of the Ukrainian population, which totals about 50 million. About a third of Ukrainians belong to the country's three Orthodox denominations.

When Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Catholic Church was forcibly united with the Russian Orthodox Church and became illegal. During 45 years under communist rule, the push for Ukrainian independence and the demand for religious freedom for Ukrainian Catholics often went hand in hand. The growth of Ukrainian democracy after independence in 1991 occurred at the same time that the church was being

rebuilt.

However, the return of religious freedom meant that many Christians who were worshipping as Orthodox decided to return to their Ukrainian Catholic roots. Church properties that had been confiscated by the government or given by the government to the Orthodox were re-claimed by Ukrainian Catholics in situations that occasionally included violence between Catholics and Orthodox.

Meanwhile, the head of Ukraine's smaller Latin-rite Catholic Church, Archbishop Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki of Lviv, told KAI, the Catholic information agency in neighboring Poland, he welcomed Archbishop Shevchuk's appointment with "joy and understanding." He said the new church leader knew Ukraine's problems well and was also "a man of high culture and very good with contacts."

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