

Bishop of Lincoln, Neb., retires; Denver auxiliary named his successor

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WASHINGTON -- Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of Bishop Fabian W. Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Neb., and has named Auxiliary Bishop James D. Conley of Denver to succeed him.

The changes were announced in Washington Sept. 14 by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, papal nuncio to the U.S.

Bruskewitz, head of the Lincoln diocese since 1992, is 77 years old. Bishops are required by canon law to submit their resignation to the pope when they turn 75.

Conley, 57, was ordained an auxiliary bishop for Denver in 2008.

His installation Mass will be celebrated Nov. 20 in the Cathedral of the Risen Christ in Lincoln. He will be the ninth bishop of Lincoln.

The Lincoln diocese welcomes "as our new spiritual shepherd, such a distinguished and accomplished prelate," Bruskewitz said in a statement. "Collectively, we thank almighty God for this precious and important gift which he has bestowed on us through the ministry of Christ's vicar."

Conley said he was "honored and humbled" by the appointment.

"There is nothing more important for a bishop than the care of souls," he told the Denver Catholic Register, the archdiocesan newspaper. "God has called me to be the shepherd of souls in the Diocese of Lincoln. I know I need to rely on his grace for this great responsibility. ... I am looking forward to getting to know Lincoln.

"My mission as bishop there will remain the same as it has in Denver: to help all people to encounter Jesus Christ, and to become holy, as God in heaven is holy," he added.

"Bishop Conley is a man of deep prayer, keen intellect, warm heart and fervent commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Denver Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila said in a statement. "He has become well-known for his commitment to the unborn, his enthusiasm for young people, and especially for the devotion with which he celebrates the most holy Eucharist."

James Douglas Conley was born March 19, 1955, in Kansas City, Mo. Conley is of Wea Indian descent. He is the son of Betty and the late Carl Conley, longtime residents of Overland Park, Kan. He has one younger sister, Susan, who lives in Olathe, Kan., with her husband and their two children.

Raised a Presbyterian, Conley became a Catholic at age 20, during his junior year in college. He graduated in 1977 from the University of Kansas with a bachelor's degree in English literature.

After college, Conley worked on a farm in north central Kansas and traveled to Europe. In 1980, he entered the seminary for the Wichita, Kan., diocese earning a philosophy degree from St. Pius X Seminary in Erlanger, Ky.

In 1985, he earned a master's in divinity at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md.

On May 18, 1985, he was ordained a priest for the Wichita diocese. He served as an associate pastor and diocesan director of the Respect Life Office. He returned to Rome in 1989, where he earned a licentiate in moral theology from the Pontifical Lateran University's Accademia Alfonsiana in 1991. Returning to Wichita, he was appointed pastor of St. Paul Parish (Newman Center) on the campus of Wichita State University while continuing to serve as diocesan pro-life director.

For 10 years, starting in 1996, he served at the Vatican as an official in the Vatican Congregation for Bishops. He held other positions, including as adjunct instructor of theology for Christendom College's Rome campus, 2004-2006. He was named a monsignor in 2001.

In 2006, he returned to Wichita to be a pastor and two years later was named an auxiliary bishop for Denver, at that time headed by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

Conley was apostolic administrator of Denver for 10 months after Chaput was named to Philadelphia in 2011 and before Aquila was named to Denver in 2012.

"He's a man of warmth and intelligence, a great mentor of young adults, and equally at home in college forums and local parishes," Chaput said of his former auxiliary. "He has a keen love for people and ideas, and a vivid zeal for the faith. ... The people of Nebraska will love him."

In Omaha, Neb., Archbishop George J. Lucas issued a statement saying the people of the Lincoln Diocese will find their new bishop "to be a wise teacher, a faithful shepherd and a loving father." He praised Bruskewitz for "his many years of faithful service."

During his tenure in Lincoln, Bruskewitz established new parishes and schools and a collegiate seminary, St. Gregory the Great Seminary, which opened in 1998. The diocese also opened, a diocesan-sponsored affordable housing development, 1997; Camp Kateri Tekakwitha, 2001; and St. Gianna's Women's Homes, 2011.

In 1996, he oversaw a diocesan synod, and in 2000, a eucharistic congress, a weekend celebration for the church's great jubilee and a diocesan pilgrimage.

In 1999, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter built a seminary in Denton, Neb. The order of priests is dedicated to celebrating the Mass in the extraordinary form, commonly known as the Tridentine rite.

Among his other writings, the bishop penned a regular column, "An Ordinary Viewpoint," for the diocesan newspaper, the Southern Nebraska Register. He compiled those columns into two books -- "A Shepherd Speaks" (1997) and "The Catholic Church: Jesus Christ Present in the World" (2007).

Over his years in Lincoln, various organizations have established chapters in the diocese, including the Catholic Lawyers Guild, the Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla Guild/Catholic Medical Association and Legatus.

Born near Milwaukee and raised in that city, Bruskewitz has always credited his parents with creating an atmosphere that enabled him to realize his priestly vocation.

The Lincoln diocese has a total population of about 589,000. Catholics number about 97,000. It has 134 parishes, 27 elementary schools and six high schools, 150 priests, 141 women religious and 44 seminarians.

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