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Pope names new bishop for Orange, Calif.; New York bishop retires

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Bishop Robert J. Cunningham of Syracuse, N.Y., and Bishop Matthew H. Clark speak to the media Sept. 21 after Clark announced that his resignation as bishop of Rochester, N.Y., had been accepted by Pope Benedict XVI. (CNS/Catholic Courier/Mike Crupi)

WASHINGTON -- Pope Benedict XVI named Bishop Kevin W. Vann of Fort Worth, Texas, 61, to be bishop of Orange, Calif., and accepted the resignation of Bishop Tod D. Brown, 75, who has headed the diocese since 1998.

The pope also accepted the resignation of Bishop Matthew H. Clark of Rochester, N.Y., 75, and named Bishop Robert J. Cunningham of Syracuse, N.Y., 69, as apostolic administrator of the Rochester diocese until a successor to Clark is named and installed.

The appointments were announced Friday in Washington by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Clark celebrated 33 years as Rochester's bishop and the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination at a special Mass Sept. 16 at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester. When he turned 75 on July 15, he submitted his resignation, as canon law requires for all bishops.

Vann is to be installed in Orange in December. The date for his installation was not immediately released.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez said he welcomed Vann's appointment to Orange, saying he "possesses the pastoral sensitivity and leadership skills to serve the faithful of the diocese ... well into the future."

The Los Angeles Archdiocese and the Orange Diocese are not only "geographic neighbors," he said in a statement, but both "are blessed with similarly dynamic, diverse and large Catholic populations. ... I look forward to collaborating together with him for the good of the faithful in both of our local churches."

Then-Msgr. Vann was named coadjutor bishop of Fort Worth in 2005. Bishop Joseph P. Delaney was head of the diocese and as coadjutor, the newly named bishop would automatically succeed him upon his retirement or death. Delaney, who had been suffering from ill health, died one day before Bishop-designate Vann was ordained a bishop. He had headed the diocese for 24 years.

The ceremony went forward as scheduled, with Vann installed as head of the diocese July 13, 2005.

Born May 10, 1951, in Springfield, Ill., Kevin Vann began his studies for the priesthood at Springfield's diocesan Seminary of the Immaculate Conception and then graduated from Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis in 1981. He was ordained that year as a priest of the Springfield Diocese.

He earned a doctorate in canon law in 1985 from Rome's Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the Angelicum.

In Springfield, he served as associate pastor, pastor and was on the staff of the diocesan tribunal. Named a monsignor in 2002, he also served as episcopal liaison for Hispanic ministry.

A native of San Francisco, Brown was ordained a priest of what was then the Diocese of Monterey-Fresno, Calif., in 1962. Fresno became its own diocese in 1967.

He became the bishop of Boise, Idaho, in 1988, and 10 years later was appointed to head the Diocese of Orange.

The total population of Orange County, the area covered by the Orange Diocese, is 3.2 million, with 41 percent of the people, or about 1.3 million, Catholic.

In Rochester, Clark said in a statement: "I assure the good and faithful people in our 12 counties that the governance of this diocese is in excellent hands."

"Now that provision has been made for the pastoral care of our diocese, I am peaceful; and I look forward with lively curiosity to a new phase of my life and ministry after more than 33 years as bishop of Rochester," he said.

"I humbly thank God for having lived during this incredible time and for the opportunity to shepherd a beautiful, faithful and inspired people. Words cannot express my gratitude to the people of this diocese, whom I love very much," he added.

As the eighth bishop of Rochester, Clark's tenure was second only to the tenure of Rochester's first bishop, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, who headed the diocese from 1868 until his death in 1909.

"I am greatly honored, and humbled, to serve as apostolic administrator of this diocese," Cunningham said in a statement. "I ask for the prayers of all that I might serve you well, as long as need be. I will be traveling weekly between the dioceses of Syracuse and Rochester, and hope to make acquaintance with many new friends."

Cunningham, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., who was ordained a priest in 1969, was named bishop of Syracuse in April 2009. Before that he was bishop of Ogdensburg, N.Y., for five years.

"Above all, I want to help wherever I can, to be the solid bridge that spans the time between Bishop Clark and whomever the ninth bishop of Rochester may be," he said. "I do not know when that will happen, but I do know I am at this diocese's service as long as it takes."

More than 300,000 Catholics live in the Rochester Diocese, which was established in March 1868.

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