

US cardinal-designate has worked close to popes for 30 years

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Oct. 25, 2012
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Cardinal-designate James M. Harvey has spent 30 years working at the Vatican in positions requiring great discretion and bringing him into daily contact with the pope, the world's most powerful government leaders and millions of Catholic faithful.

Pope Benedict XVI announced Wednesday that he would induct Harvey, a native of Milwaukee, into the College of Cardinals Nov. 24 and that he would appoint him archpriest of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, the major basilica built over the presumed tomb of St. Paul.

As prefect of the papal household since 1998, Harvey has arranged the daily meetings, first, of Pope John Paul II and, now, of Pope Benedict. He coordinates with the pope's personal secretary and other members of the "pontifical family" -- those who work in the papal apartment and have been shaken by the actions and conviction of Paolo Gabriele, the former papal butler, on charges of aggravated theft.

When heads of state make official visits to the pope, it is Harvey who greets them first and escorts them to the pope.

And when the pope meets small groups or holds his large weekly general audiences, Harvey is at his side. At a July 2011 prayer service in Cardinal-designate Harvey's home archdiocese, Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI of Milwaukee introduced him as "the second most photographed person in the world."

Harvey, 63, was one of the three Vatican officials closest to Blessed John Paul, coordinating his audiences and public appearances as the pope aged and became increasingly debilitated by Parkinson's disease.

Pope John Paul personally ordained him a bishop in 1998, along with now-Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, the pope's longtime personal secretary, and Archbishop Piero Marini, his longtime master of liturgical ceremonies and current head of the commission overseeing the International Eucharistic Congress.

At the ordination Mass, the pope said he was particularly close to the three because of their "unique service to the Holy See and to me personally.

The pope described Harvey as "my faithful collaborator in the Secretariat of State," who was about to take on responsibility for his "daily round of audiences and meetings."

Harvey, a member of the Vatican diplomatic corps, was assigned to the secretariat of state in 1982 after a two-year posting in the Dominican Republic. In 1997, he was named assessor of the secretariat, a rank similar to that of an undersecretary at a Vatican congregation.

Although he has been at the Vatican for 30 years, he has kept his ties with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Preaching at a prayer service last year on the eve of the ordination of Milwaukee Auxiliary Bishop Donald J.

Hying, Harvey spoke about the challenges of public ministry and about the mystery of God calling human beings, with all their flaws, to bring the Gospel to the world.

The Milwaukee Catholic Herald, archdiocesan newspaper, quoted him as telling the congregation, "In every age, especially in recent years, priests, bishops, human beings have been placed under huge reflectors, powerful spotlights on stage," particularly during the clerical sex abuse scandal. "The harsh lights were focused, the heat on the stage is so intense that the makeup cake is running off these actors' faces, leaving exposed every blemish, every scar, every wart and pockmark for the world to see," he said.

Yet, "human beings are creatures of this world that God designed to be his instruments for bringing us closer to him," he said. The mission of drawing people to holiness is "a noble task, a beautiful task, a daunting task."

Born Oct. 20, 1949, in Milwaukee, the soon-to-be cardinal did his high school and college studies at the Milwaukee archdiocesan seminary. Sent to Rome's Pontifical North American College, he earned a license in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University and was ordained to the priesthood in 1975 by Pope Paul VI.

In 1976, he began studies at the Vatican's diplomatic academy. After earning a doctorate in canon law, he entered the Vatican's diplomatic service in 1980.

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