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New bishop of Pueblo urged to help faithful accept teachings of Christ

by Veronica Ambuul by Anna Maria Basquez by Catholic News Service

Pueblo, Colo. — Citing the words of Pope Francis, Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of Denver told the Diocese of Pueblo's newly ordained Bishop Stephen J. Berg that bishops and priests are shepherds who "should take on the smell of the sheep."

The archbishop also called on Berg during his episcopal ordination Feb. 27 as the fifth bishop of Pueblo to help the faithful accept the teachings of Jesus in a time when people readily turn away from God.

"As you look upon the faithful and serve them, always remember that they are entrusted to you, but they belong to Christ," Aquila said in a packed Memorial Hall in downtown Pueblo.

"We must help the faithful, in their encounter with Christ, receive the teachings of Christ and his church," he added. "In this day and age, it is no easy task. We live in times in which people are rapidly rejecting God. You will experience the same rejection that Jesus himself experienced."

The archbishop encouraged Berg, former administrator of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas, to get to know all the priests in the far-flung diocese that covers southern Colorado.

"It is important that you come to know them and love them as Christ loved the apostles," he said. "They will be your closest collaborators."

Concelebrating the ordination Mass were Bishop Michael J. Sheridan of Colorado Springs, who had been apostolic administrator of the Pueblo Diocese since the resignation of Bishop Fernando Isern in June, and retired Bishop Joseph L. Charron of Des Moines, Iowa, who is Berg's maternal uncle and who ordained him to the priesthood.

In acknowledgement of the diocese's large Hispanic population, the readings were proclaimed in English and Spanish, and Aquila began his homily in Spanish.

The archbishop also advised Berg to rely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to carry out the duties of his office.

"At times, we can become distressed and disturbed and think, 'What have I gotten myself into?' We must always remember that those kinds of movements are from the devil. It is only when we approach in confidence the Spirit that we are able to proclaim the truth of Christ in season and out of season," he said.

Prior to the rite of ordination, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States, read the Jan. 15 letter from Pope Francis telling Berg of his appointment.

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"As you go forth from Fort Worth to the Colorado desert lands, allow yourself ... to imitate the model of Christ, who cried out in the wilderness in order that those who are at a distance may hear and understand, from the loudness of the sound of your voice, the vastness of the thing spoken of," Pope Francis wrote.

After the ordination rite Memorial Hall erupted in thunderous applause as Berg sat in the cathedra (bishop's chair) for the first time. Representatives from around the diocese, including some dressed in native Mexican garb, then lined up to kiss his newly received ring.

In addressing the congregation at the close of Mass, Berg noted that he had accidentally left his prepared remarks at home and had to speak off the cuff.

The bishop, who turned 63 March 3, thanked his mother, Jeanne, and his nine siblings, all of whom were in attendance along with 15 of his 31 nieces and nephews.

He also acknowledged the burden carried by the priests in Pueblo, some of whom have to travel long distances to tend to several parishes.

"I thought I was a busy pastor when I had four rural parishes. Yet I see that some of you have six, seven or eight parishes and missions, and I just want you to know that I will get to know you. I will listen to you and we are going to work together."

He said that vocations to the priesthood would be a top priority.

"We are moving into the future," Berg said.

Paul Harris, who worked with Berg in the Christmas tree business prior to his 1999 ordination to the priesthood, traveled from his home in Austin, Texas, for the ordination along with his wife, Marylee.

"They got lucky when he was assigned here," Harris said of his friend. "They're going to enjoy his

stewardship. He cares; he listens; he is a very open person."

Berg is the oldest of 10 children born to Conrad and Jeanne Berg in Miles City, Mont. He earned a bachelor's degree in music for piano performance in 1973 from the University of Colorado and a master of music degree in piano performance from Eastern New Mexico University two years later.

Shortly after earning his music degree, he began working for Wolfe Nursery in Fort Worth. He later joined Nurseryland Garden Center in Southern California, eventually becoming vice president and general manager. However, Berg felt called to the priesthood and entered formation for the Fort Worth Diocese in 1993.

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Ambuul is assistant editor of The Colorado Catholic Herald, newspaper of the Colorado Springs Diocese; Basquez is a freelance writer based in Denver who writes for the Catholic Herald and the Denver Catholic Register, newspaper of the Denver Archdiocese.

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