

Bishop Loverde says his successor 'possesses the heart of a shepherd'

By Michael F. Flach

Catholic News Service

ARLINGTON, Va. - Bishop Michael F. Burbidge expressed deep gratitude to Pope Francis on his appointment as the fourth bishop of Arlington on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

At an Oct. 4 news conference, he pledged his continued loyalty and obedience to the pope, who named the bishop of Raleigh, North Carolina, to succeed retiring Bishop Paul S. Loverde, who has headed the Arlington Diocese for 17 years.

Bishop Burbidge also thanked Bishop Loverde for being "a treasured friend" and said he will continue to depend on him for prayers and support as he begins his new ministry in Arlington.

"Like all of you, I have profound respect and admiration for Bishop Loverde," he said. "United with all those you have served so well since 1999, I express deep gratitude for Bishop Loverde's steadfast, dedicated and generous ministry."

He recalled after his father's death, there were times when his mother, Shirley, would visit him in the Diocese of Raleigh.

"Whenever I would drive her home to Philadelphia, there was a tradition," he said. "Once we arrived in the boundaries of the Diocese of Arlington, I would say: 'Let's call on speaker and say hello to Bishop Loverde.' Upon ending the conversation, my mom would always say: 'He sounds like such a nice man.' She had great insight."

Bishops Burbidge and Loverde held a joint news conference in Burke Hall at the Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington. Bishop Burbidge's installation is scheduled for Dec. 6 at the cathedral.

In his official acceptance letter to Pope Francis, Bishop Burbidge conveyed that while his knowledge of the Arlington Diocese currently is limited, he is well aware that it is a faithful and vibrant diocese and one that has been blessed with the dedicated service of three wonderful bishops.

"I promised Pope Francis that I will work tirelessly to build upon the strong foundations that have been provided by Bishop (Thomas) Welsh, Bishop (John) Keating and Bishop Loverde," he said.

Coincidentally, both Bishop Burbidge and Bishop Welsh served as rectors of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, and were auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Bishop Burbidge said he either taught or

attended the seminary with many Arlington priests, including Father Robert J. Rippy, cathedral rector.

A native of Philadelphia, Bishop Burbidge was ordained a priest of that archdiocese in 1984. He was ordained an auxiliary bishop for Philadelphia in 2002. He was appointed to the Raleigh Diocese in 2006.

Bishop Burbidge admitted that he still has strong allegiance to Philadelphia's professional sports team, but he is ready to jump on the bandwagon of the Washington Nationals, set to begin their playoff run Oct. 7 against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"These past 10 years (as bishop of Raleigh) have been a source of great joy for me and I will treasure all the memories and be ever grateful for the support and love and goodness extended to me by all in the diocese," he said. "They have been and will remain a special gift in my life."

Asked about his vision for his new diocese, Bishop Burbidge said, "The answer can only be developed upon listening and learning. To do so, I will travel throughout the diocese beginning today and tomorrow and will continue doing so more thoroughly after my installation.

"Some priorities are the same for all dioceses," he said. "They come from the mandate of the Gospel, the teaching of the church, and from the example we see in Pope Francis."

During a whirlwind two days visiting several sites in the diocese, Bishop Burbidge was scheduled to celebrate Mass with Bishop Loverde at the cathedral Oct. 5, before heading back to Raleigh.

In his opening remarks, Bishop Loverde said he was grateful to the Lord and Pope Francis for Bishop Burbidge's appointment.

"I am confident that you will find Bishop Burbidge to be personable and welcoming, perceptive and attentive, with much wisdom from an experienced background and with a discerning spirit that will engage potentials for the future growth of the church's mission within our diocese," he said.

He described Bishop Burbidge as a man of integrity, who teaches the truths of the faith with clarity and joy. "He possesses the heart of a shepherd, reflecting the pastoral love and care flowing from the heart of Christ, the good shepherd, and model of all bishops," he said.

Bishop Burbidge said he cherished the fact that he was able to celebrate Mass earlier in the day with Bishop Loverde on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

"How providential that this announcement comes on the day the Catholic Church honors St. Francis of Assisi," he said. "It is the saint our Holy Father was inspired by as he chose the name he would take as the successor of St. Peter."

He reflected on the personal connection he has with the saint. It is the name of

Bishop Burbidge's father, brother, nephew and grandnephew. The bishop also took Francis as his confirmation name.

"Today is a reminder that I, and indeed all of us, must strive daily to imitate the simplicity, humility and charity of St. Francis of Assisi," he said.

Fran Burbidge, the bishop's older brother, drove from his home in Philadelphia to attend the news conference and show his support.

He told the Arlington Catholic Herald, the diocesan newspaper, that his brother is "super excited" to be in Arlington and "will be in his glory" with his residence being so close to the cathedral and St. Thomas More Cathedral School.

Elizabeth Elliott contributed to this story.

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