

# Former Mountain Maryland pastor named military bishop

By George P. Matysek Jr.

[gmatysek@CatholicReview.org](mailto:gmatysek@CatholicReview.org)

Pope Benedict XVI named the former pastor of a Western Maryland parish the auxiliary bishop of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services May 22.

Bishop-elect F. Richard Spencer, an Alabama native who was ordained for the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1988, served as pastor of Mountain Maryland's St. Peter the Apostle in Oakland in the 1990s. He is a former associate pastor of Sacred Heart, Glyndon, and also served at the Monsignor Clare J. O'Dwyer Retreat House in Sparks.

A U.S. Army chaplain since 1991, Bishop-elect Spencer has ministered to Catholic soldiers in the former Bosnia-Herzegovina, Seoul, the Sinai Peninsula and Germany. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army in 2005, and was appointed an episcopal vicar for the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services in 2006.

"I have known Father Spencer well for many years, first in my capacity as Archbishop for the Military and now as Archbishop of Baltimore," Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien said. "We are proud the Holy Father has chosen him, one of our own, to continue serving our brave and generous women and men in the military."

Bishop-elect Spencer was in Europe and could not be reached for comment by The Catholic Review.

Parishioners of St. Peter were ecstatic that their former pastor will become a shepherd of the church.

"He's definitely a good leader," said Donna Cook, St. Peter's secretary and the former director of religious education during Bishop-elect Spencer's tenure. "He

knows how to delegate. He likes to see programs through from the beginning to the end. He was always a real go-getter.”

Cook remembered that Bishop-elect Spencer was effective at reaching out to teens and was a driving force behind starting an ecumenical youth ministry program. After the departure of Bausch & Lomb, the area’s largest employer, Bishop-elect Spencer called an economic summit to help 600 people left without jobs.

Before becoming a priest, Bishop-elect Spencer was an officer for the U.S. Army Military Police for more than six years. He then became a Franciscan brother for three years.

“In addition to his priestly ministries, Bishop-elect Spencer brings to his new ministry a wide variety of experiences in many fields,” said Archbishop Timothy Broglio, archbishop of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services. “That experience will certainly contribute to the richness of the episcopal ministry to which he is now called.”

Bishop-elect Spencer was assigned as a military chaplain at the Pentagon when terrorists attacked on Sept. 11, 2001. He wasn’t there when the plane crashed into the building, but he soon arrived to bless dead bodies and pray with the wounded. “Entering the burning building with very little protective equipment was very difficult,” Bishop-elect Spencer told The Catholic Review in 2001. “I wanted to be with the troops as they performed their duties of collecting the bodies.”

Chaplain Robert J. Jenkins, a Protestant chaplain who worked with Bishop-elect Spencer at the scene, told The Catholic Review in 2001 that his partner exhibited a “quiet confidence” and “deep spiritual strength” as he went about the grisly task of praying over lifeless bodies.

Bishop-elect Spencer’s episcopal ordination date has not been set. He will also serve as titular bishop of Auzia.

Bishop-elect Spencer’s brother, Father Robert Spencer, is a priest of the Diocese of Charleston and serves as a chaplain for the U.S. Navy.