

Ordination, installation of new bishop fills Savannah cathedral

SAVANNAH, Ga. – With reverence, high ceremony, singing, prayer and applause, Conventual Franciscan father Gregory John Hartmayer was ordained and installed as the 14th bishop of Savannah.

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah was filled to capacity for the two-and-a-half-hour Mass Oct. 18, attended by parishioners from across the diocese and people from every period of Bishop Hartmayer's life – family, hometown friends, fellow Franciscans and former parishioners.

Bishop Hartmayer served as principal of Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore in the mid-1980s.

The ordination Mass was celebrated by over 200 priests, including 20 bishops, one cardinal, five abbots and seven provincials. The bishop's mother, Sally Hartmayer, and three siblings served as gift bearers, and his brother Douglas was one of the readers.

The service reflected Bishop Hartmayer's Franciscan order, through the presence of dozens of friars, the St. Francis hymn and a newly written hymn using his motto, "Pax et Bonum" (Peace and Good).

Monsignor Jean-Francois Lantheaume from the apostolic nunciature in Washington read the apostolic mandate, the written directive from Pope Benedict XVI appointing the new bishop of Savannah.

The ordaining prelate, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta, offered words of welcome, encouragement and advice to his close friend and newly appointed brother bishop.

"You must propel the people of the Diocese of Savannah toward Christ himself," Archbishop Gregory said. "You do so most importantly through your own good example of prayer and reverence for the things of God."

Bishop Hartmayer said the day marked “the first ordination of an ordinary that I’ve ever attended,” generating laughter and one of many rounds of sustained applause during the service. He spoke of his gratitude for the respect that the people of the Diocese of Savannah show to the office of bishop. “Personally I need to earn the respect of the people.”

Bishop Hartmayer, who succeeds Bishop J. Kevin Boland, who retired at age 76, pledged to pursue a “mission of evangelization” in his new post.

“It was overwhelmingly magnificent,” said Karen Sheehan of St. Michael’s Parish on Tybee Island. “It was so touching, his gratefulness for his mother being there. From our vantage point we couldn’t see everything, but we could see the anointing with the oils by the archbishop.”

“We watched him grow as a priest and we knew there were going to be other things for him,” said Judy Atkins, a parishioner at St. Philip Benizi Parish in Jonesboro, where Bishop Hartmayer was pastor for 15 years. “We’re just going to pray for him every day, for the strength he’s going to need to lead this diocese.”

At the time of his appointment, Bishop Hartmayer was serving in the Archdiocese of Atlanta as pastor of St. John Vianney Parish in Lithia Springs.

A native of Buffalo, N.Y., he was ordained for the Conventual Franciscans in 1979 and has worked as a guidance counselor, teacher and principal in various cities in New York and in Florida, in addition to Baltimore.