

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“There is Cause for Rejoicing Here”

In case you have not yet heard, it is important that you know: there is cause for rejoicing in our diocese! One of our own native sons and diocesan priests, Father Dennis Walsh, who was pastor of Saint John the Evangelist Delphos, Saint John the Baptist Landeck and Saint Patrick Spencerville, was chosen by our Holy Father to be the new Bishop of Davenport (Iowa). An announcement of his nomination was made public on Tuesday, June 25, 2024. Now “Bishop” Walsh was ordained and installed on September 27, 2024 in Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport. Several of our priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay faithful, particularly his mom and members of his family, along with folks from various parishes where he served, were privileged and elated to attend. I, too, was privileged and elated, at Bishop Walsh’s request, to preach the Solemn Vespers the evening before his Ordination and Installation, and to be one of the co-consecrators during the Ordination Ceremony. It is particularly significant that this was the first time in the history of our diocese that one of our priests was nominated and appointed directly from priest to bishop of another diocese. Truly, there is cause for rejoicing here!

The reading assigned in the Liturgy of Hours for Vespers the evening before Bishop Walsh’s ordination and

installation was from the Letter of Saint Peter, which providentially began with the words: “There is cause for rejoicing here (1 Pt 1:6).” Those words captured the sentiments of all of us gathered in the joy of the moment,

to pray with and for Bishop Dennis Walsh and all the members of the Diocese of Davenport, that together, the new bishop and his flock might be strengthened with every grace so that, no matter the trials, their faith by its genuineness may lead to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears.

Not a few have asked, how is it that Father Dennis Walsh was chosen to become a bishop, a Successor of the Apostles? What were some of

the details which he needed to attend to in preparation, and what “inside info” can you share? Although some are convinced that the choice of a priest to become a bishop is shrouded in mystery and decided in incense filled rooms inside the Vatican, the truth is it is an age-old process which is publicly known because it is described in the Church’s *Code of Canon Law*! As many of you know, I like to say: “Go to the sources!” In fact, anyone can go to Canon Law to discover just how the process works!

Having worked for fifteen years in the then Congregation, now Dicastery, for Bishops, whose principal task is to assist the Holy Father in his choice of and care for shepherds for the Universal Church, I can attest that the process



described in canons 375-380, from start to finish, is conducted thoroughly, thoughtfully and prayerfully with the utmost confidentiality. The name of a priest may be presented to the Holy Father's representative (the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, DC) for consideration as a candidate for the episcopacy either by an individual bishop or by the bishops of an ecclesiastical province, for example, the Bishops of Ohio. The Nuncio by letter seeks individually and in strictest confidence the opinions of clergy, consecrated religious and lay faithful who know, have worked or lived with the priest. If there is a Diocese to be filled, the Nuncio conducts inquiries on several priests and bishops, and then compiles a list of three names, a *terna*, which, after study, prayer and deliberation, he sends to the Dicastery for Bishops with his recommendation. His report is reviewed by the staff of the Dicastery, by a body of Cardinal Members, and then presented to the Holy Father himself who, yes, personally makes the decision and appoints every bishop! Once the decision is made it is communicated to the Nuncio, who informs the priest, usually by a telephone call, that the Pope has named him a bishop. Imagine! Once the newly named bishop has accepted the appointment, a date is set for the public announcement, and for the Ordination and Installation in the diocese to which he is appointed. That's the process in a nutshell!

But why was Father Dennis Walsh chosen? Believe me, he was the first to ask that question! And in his humility would be the first to say that there are so many other priests worthy of consideration for the office of bishop. While Bishop Walsh may not agree, it is clear to those who know him and those whom he has served that he possesses the qualities for him to make a most worthy bishop! Obviously, that's what the Holy Spirit thought!

No priest, if the process is respected and the people who receive inquiries observe the requested strictest confidentiality, even knows he's being considered for the office of bishop! And Bishop Walsh was no exception. Once named, in the longstanding custom, the bishop chooses an episcopal motto, a "mission statement" of sorts for his life and ministry as a bishop, and with the help

of an heraldic artist, designs his coat of arms, reflective of his family and priestly life. The motto Bishop Walsh has chosen, in Latin, is "*In manus tuas Domine,*" "Into your hands, Lord," taken from Psalm 31, words spoken by Jesus to the Father from the Cross. And his Coat of Arms poignantly reflects his family and priestly life (you may study the Coat of Arms here: davenportdiocese.org/bishop-dennis-walsh)



It has been my deep joy as his bishop to accompany Bishop Walsh from the moment of his receiving the news of his nomination to the laying on of hands in ordaining him a bishop. One person at the Ordination Mass in Davenport said that I looked like a proud papa! And that's exactly how I felt, until the moment Bishop Walsh was ordained, when I became a proud

brother bishop! How blessed and honored I am to call him a brother in the episcopacy! How blessed and honored our Diocese is that a native son has been called to the episcopacy. And how blessed and honored our presbyterate is that one of our own priests has been called to be a bishop. We are blessed indeed!

On Friday, November 15, 2024, at 7:00 pm in the evening, I have invited Bishop Dennis Walsh to return to the Diocese of Toledo, to offer Mass as celebrant and homilist, followed by a reception in his honor. You are most cordially invited and encouraged to attend! Wouldn't it be a great sign of the affection and esteem in which Bishop Walsh is held if we packed our Cathedral to join him in praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the episcopate, to wish him well in his new apostolic ministry, to accompany him prayerfully in his transition to his new home in Davenport, and to celebrate with him the gift and blessing he has received in being called to serve the Church as a successor of the Apostles. For truly, there is cause for rejoicing here!

+ *Daniel E. Thomas*

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