News



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Updated 9:30 AM Eastern Time May 29, 2019.

Pope Francis has named Bishop Robert Gruss of Rapid City, South Dakota, to head the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan.

Gruss, 63, has headed the Rapid City Diocese since 2011. Pope Benedict XVI appointed him May 26, 2011, and his episcopal ordination was July 28, 2011.

In Saginaw, he succeeds the late Bishop Joseph Cistone, who died unexpectedly Oct. 16, 2018, at age 69. Retired Bishop Walter Hurley of Grand Rapids, Michigan, has been apostolic administrator of the diocese since Oct. 17, 2018.

The appointment was announced May 24 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States.

His installation as the seventh bishop of Saginaw is scheduled for July 26. Hurley will continue to serve as apostolic administrator until Gruss is installed.

After introducing Gruss to the media in Saginaw, Hurley told reporters: "Over these past days and months, we have had some considerable challenges to face in the diocese. I think we've faced them with faith, courage and straightforwardness. It's a special joy to be with you today to introduce Gruss, who has an extensive background and service. I'm very confident he will serve so very well here."

In his remarks, Gruss that when he read the Gospel reading that morning, it confirmed to him that the Diocese of Saginaw is where the Holy Spirit wants him to be.

"We all know in the Lord's mind there is no coincidence," he said. "So when I got up this morning and celebrated my daily Mass, the Gospel reading from St. John had a lot of meaning for me."

The first few lines of the Gospel for May 24 read: "This is my commandment: Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:12-13)

"That last line, ‘No greater love,' happens to be my episcopal motto," Gruss said. "I do find it interesting that I come here to the Diocese of Saginaw, for the very first time, for this announcement as your bishop, on the day when the Gospel that is proclaimed happens to be my episcopal motto. I think it's the Lord's confirmation of this new assignment."

"Over these past days and months, we have had some considerable challenges to face in the diocese," Hurley said. "I think we've faced them with faith, courage and

straightforwardness. It's a special joy to be with you today to introduce Gruss, who has an extensive background and service. I'm very confident he will serve so very well here."

Members of the media asked Gruss questions on many topics, including clergy sex abuse.

"I believe in transparency and accountability," Gruss said. "There's no place in the church for sexual abuse of minors or anyone else. My desire is that the church becomes holy, in the way that Christ calls her to be, and those who abuse their power and authority will be held to accountability."

Gruss, who was a corporate pilot before becoming a priest, also answered questions related to his hobbies and interests, admitting some may not be common for a bishop.

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"I like to hunt and fish; I ride Harleys. I have a Harley, so I can't wait to explore Michigan on my Harley. I love riding horses."

Robert Dwayne Gruss was born June 25, 1955, in Texarkana, Arkansas. He attended Madison Area Technical College, in Madison, Wisconsin, and Spartan School of Aeronautics in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was a commercial pilot and flight instructor from 1980 to 1989 before entering seminary.

He pursued seminary studies at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa, from 1989 to 1990, then studied at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, 1990-1994. He earned a master of arts degree in spiritual theology in 1994 at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, also known as the Angelicum, in Rome.

In 1999, he completed studies at the Institute of Priestly Formation in Omaha, Nebraska, with an emphasis on spiritual direction training.

He was ordained to the priesthood July 2, 1994, by Bishop William Franklin of Davenport. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI named him a monsignor. The pope named him bishop of Rapid City in 2011. He was ordained a bishop July 28, 2011.

Gruss' previous assignments included chancellor and diocesan vocations director for the Diocese of Davenport, as well as pastor at Sacred Heart Cathedral. He also served as vice rector at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

The Saginaw Diocese covers almost 7,000 square miles and includes Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Sanilac, Saginaw and Tuscola counties. Out of a total population of close to 709,000, about 153,000, or nearly 13 percent, are Catholic.

In 1938, Saginaw's first bishop, Bishop William Murphy, dedicated the entire diocese under the patroness of Mary of the Assumption.