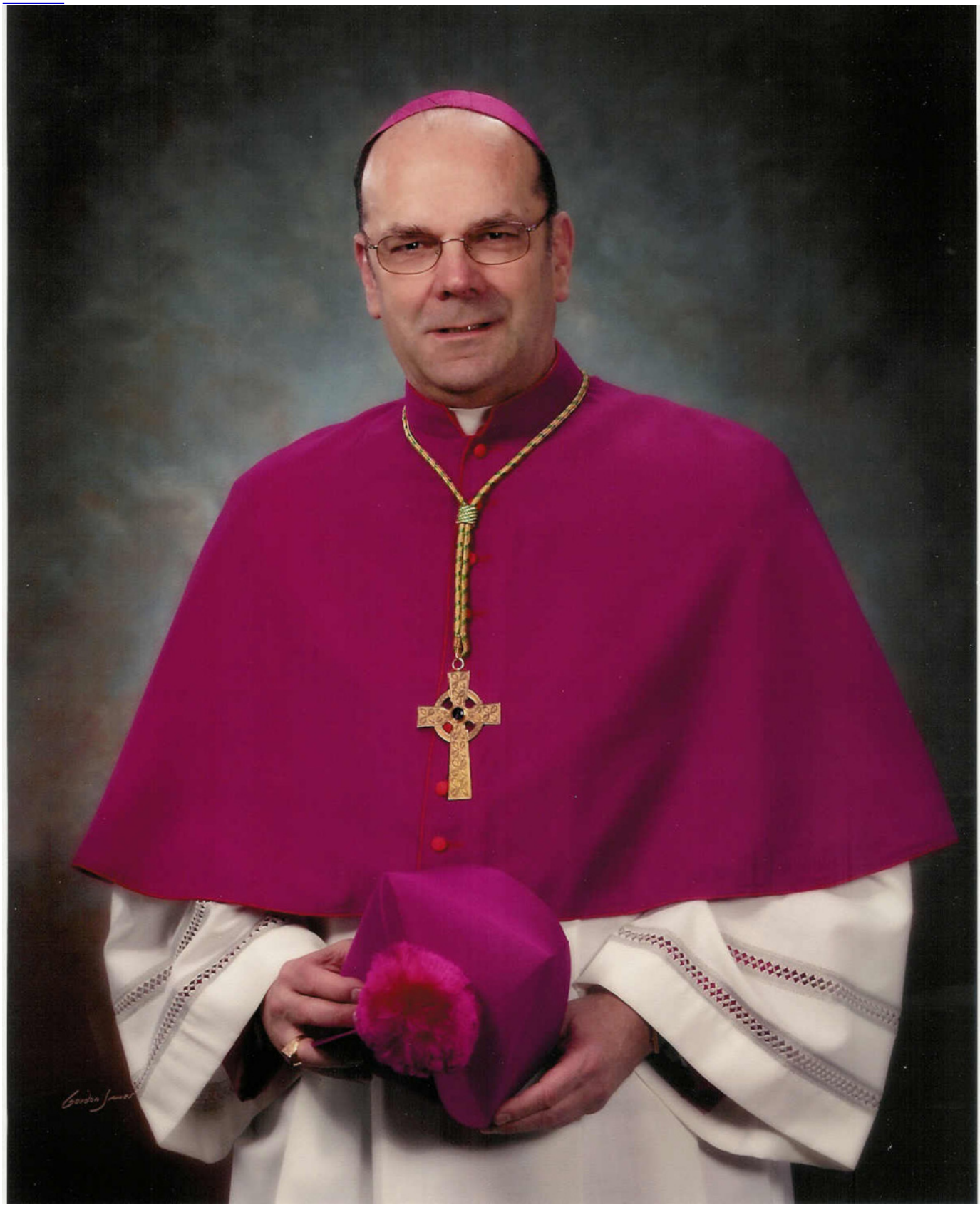
[News]



Bishop Robert Cunningham of Syracuse, N.Y., is pictured in this May 14, 2009, photo. Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop Robert J. Cunningham of Syracuse, New York, and has named as his successor Fr. Douglas Lucia, a priest of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, New York, who is a pastor and diocesan director of vocations and seminarians. (CNS/courtesy Diocese of Syracuse)



by Catholic News Service

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Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop Robert Cunningham of Syracuse, New York, and has named as his successor Fr. Douglas Lucia, a priest of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, New York, who is a pastor and diocesan director of vocations and seminarians.

Cunningham has headed the Syracuse Diocese since 2009. He is 75, the age at which canon law requires bishops to turn in their resignation to the pope. He turns 76 June 18.

Bishop-designate Lucia, 56, is a native of Plattsburgh, New York. He was ordained to the priesthood May 20, 1989.

The changes were announced June 4 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Vatican nuncio to the United States.

The newly named bishop was introduced to the people of the Syracuse Diocese at a morning news conference at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Syracuse.

Bishop-designate Lucia recalled the words inscribed on the chalice gifted to him at his ordination in 1989: "Ordained to God's Service."

"These words have been a beacon for the past 30 years of my priestly ministry and they set the stage for the next part of the journey with you," he said.

"I am here to serve the people of the Diocese of Syracuse, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. I look forward to getting to know you and you getting to know me," he said. "I can tell you that one of my first priorities will be to visit folks in their parishes."

Cunningham began the news conference by reminiscing that it didn't seem that long ago that he stood in the door of the cathedral and was welcomed as the new shepherd of Syracuse by then-Bishop James Moynihan. Cunningham was appointed April 21, 2009, and was installed May 26 of that year.

"But even before that, when I was named the bishop of Ogdensburg (in 2004), there was a young priest in Ogdensburg who greeted me at the garage door of the bishop's house and snuck me in at night the night before the announcement was made – and that was Fr. Lucia," Cunningham said. "We were privileged to live and work together for five years there, living together for two years as Fr. Lucia served as my secretary and master of ceremonies in the Diocese of Ogdensburg."

"We're delighted to welcome Bishop Lucia. We look forward to his coming and living and dwelling among us, teaching us, leading us ever closer to Christ," he said.

Lucia said he was "still in shock over the occasion that gathers us together" and that "you would be correct in stating that this appointment as the 11th bishop of Syracuse comes as a total surprise to me. I've had no clue whatsoever that my life was going to change so dramatically."

He thanked Cunningham for his welcome and support over the last few days "as I tried to figure out what I was supposed to do while maintaining strict confidentiality."

He said he would take as his episcopal motto “In the Name of Jesus,” words drawn from Acts 3:6 that reference "the greatest gift Peter could give someone along the way: to show the healing and merciful face of God."

"That is my simple prayer for my time of service in the Diocese of Syracuse," Lucia said.

Douglas John Lucia was born in Plattsburgh March 17, 1963, the son of Leward and Betty (Pepin) Lucia. He and his twin brother and their sister and younger brother grew up in Altona, New York.

He received a bachelor of arts degree from Wadhams Hall Seminary College in Ogdensburg in May 1985 and a master's degree in divinity from Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, New York, in May 1989. He was ordained to the priesthood at St. Mary's Cathedral in Ogdensburg by Bishop Stanislaus Brzana.

His first assignment after ordination was as parochial vicar at St. Patrick's Church in Watertown, New York. In 1990, he was sent to the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall, Ontario, for two years of service where he was parochial vicar at St. Columban's Church in Cornwall.

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When he returned to his home diocese, he was parochial vicar for three years at St. John the Baptist Church in Plattsburgh, then was parochial vicar at St. Mary's Cathedral in Ogdensburg. In 1996, he became associate secretary of the diocesan marriage tribunal.

From 1997 to 1999, Lucia studied canon law in Rome at the Pontifical University at St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the Angelicum. During the summer of 1998, he was parochial vicar of Holy Family Church, Watertown, and worked part time for the diocesan tribunal office.

In June 1999, he was named adjutant judicial vicar and vice chancellor. He also served as administrator at St. Raphael's Parish in Heuvelton, New York, and as a part-time chaplain at the Gouverneur Correctional Facility.

In 2000, he was appointed secretary to Bishop Gerald Barbarito, who was then head of the Ogdensburg Diocese and now is the bishop of Palm Beach, Florida. In 2003, Lucia was named diocesan director of vocations. He also was administrator of St. Mary's Church in Canton, New York.

In September 2004, then-Ogdensburg Bishop Cunningham named him chancellor and episcopal vicar for diocesan services. A year later, he also became diocesan director of seminarians.

In June 2006, in addition to his diocesan duties, he was appointed pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Morristown, New York, and St. Peter's Church in Hammond, New York, with its mission of St. Patrick's Church, Rossie. He also was appointed diocesan director of the Office of Worship.

From 2008 until June 2017, he was pastor of St. Mary's, Canton, as well as episcopal vicar for worship and adjutant judicial vicar. He then was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Church Waddington, New York, and St. John the Baptist Church in Madrid, New York, and judicial vicar of the diocese – while continuing as vocations director and director of seminarians.

The Diocese of Syracuse is comprised of seven counties covering 5,479 square miles. It has a Catholic population of over 220,000 Catholics.