News



Pope Francis has named Fr. John C. Iffert, vicar general and moderator of the curia for the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, to succeed Bishop Roger J. Foys of Covington, Kentucky, who retired at age 75. (CNS photo/Chris Orlet, The Messenger)

by Catholic News Service

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Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop Roger J. Foys of Covington, Kentucky, and named as his successor Fr. John C. Iffert, currently vicar general and moderator of the curia for the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois.

Foys, who has headed the Diocese of Covington since 2002, is 75, the age at which canon law requires bishops to turn in their resignation to the pope. The bishop turns 76 July 27.

The changes were announced July 13 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio.

Iffert, 53, was ordained a priest for the Belleville Diocese June 7, 1997, by then-Bishop Wilton D. Gregory.

After high school and before he entered the seminary, the bishop-designate studied political science and economics at Illinois State University and upon graduation in 1988, he accepted a fellowship with the state of Illinois and worked as an analyst in Illinois' Bureau of the Budget.

He will be ordained and installed as the bishop of Covington Sept. 30 in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington.

Foys said that in the short time he has known Iffert, "I have come to appreciate his caring manner and his desire to do the will of God in his life. He also has a delightful sense of humor that will serve him well in his episcopal ministry."

"Our new bishop is sent in the name of Christ as a pastor to care for the portion of God's people entrusted to him," he said in a statement, adding that the newly named bishop "comes to a diocese of dedicated priests, deacons, consecrated religious and devoted lay faithful. I am confident that he will receive a warm welcome as he takes up his ministry among us."

"For my part, I pledge him my prayerful support and loyalty as a brother bishop and I look forward to his leadership among us," Foys added.



Bishop Roger J. Foys, who is retiring as prelate of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, is pictured with Pope Francis during an "ad limina" visit to the Vatican in December 2019. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

"I am astounded and deeply grateful that Pope Francis has elected me to serve as the 11th bishop of Covington," Iffert said in a letter to the faithful of southern Illinois.

"I am inspired by Pope Francis' vision of a church so deeply rooted in a relationship with Christ that we accompany the outcast, tend the wounded, mourn with the brokenhearted, and rejoice and give thanks in every circumstance, and so carry out Jesus' mission of evangelization," he said.

Serving as Belleville's vicar general and moderator of the curia since October 2020, he was named pastor of St. Stephen Parish in Caseyville, Illinois, in January of this year.

Bishop Michael G. McGovern of Belleville praised the newly named bishop as "an excellent priest and a dedicated pastor" who "is widely respected in our diocese."

"With his strong faith and many talents," the new bishop "will be an excellent shepherd for the people of northern Kentucky," McGovern said in a statement.

"While I will personally miss collaborating with him in the Lord's vineyard in southern Illinois, I look forward to his episcopal ordination and serving with him in the college of bishops," he added.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, welcomed the appointment of a new shepherd for the state "with great joy."

Iffert "brings a wonderful background in ministry" as well as a "great pastoral heart" and "excellent pastoral experience" in succeeding Foys, he said in a statement.

Kurtz said Foys "has served northern Kentucky with great distinction, and I join with the bishops of the province in thanking him for his leadership and collaboration since 2002."

The bishops of the province of Louisville, which includes Kentucky and Tennessee, "have a great fraternity," he added, and together welcome Iffert and "promise him and Bishop Foys our prayerful support."

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Gregory, the former bishop of Belleville who is now a cardinal and archbishop of Washington, said that with the appointment, the two dioceses "exchanged gifts."

Belleville is sending "one of its finest priests" to Covington to become its new bishop," he said in a July 14 statement. "Covington welcomed this new shepherd, and warmly embraced him into its own cherished legacy of faith. These wonderful exchanges will usher in a deeper era of faith for both communities under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

He said the Illinois diocese "takes pride in preparing such an excellent minister of the Gospel," and the Kentucky diocese "is filled with hope for an even brighter future under the pastoral care" of of the bishop-designate.

"Pope Francis has been the catalyst for this exchange of gifts, and he will rely on the generous faith legacy of both dioceses to strengthen the Church in our nation," Gregory added. "I am convinced he will be very pleased with the results of his

decision."

A native of Du Quoin, Illinois, Iffert is the youngest of John and Mary Iffert's three children. He grew up on the family farm on the outskirts of Du Quoin and attended Sacred Heart School and Du Quoin High School.

After college and his stint in public service with the state of Illinois, he entered Mundelein Seminary in August 1992. He earned a bachelor's degree in sacred theology in 1996 and a master of divinity degree in 1997.

After his ordination in 1997, Iffert was parochial vicar at St. Peter Cathedral in Belleville until 2000, when he was named administrator and pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in Columbia, Illinois. He served the parish until 2003.

Between 1997 and 2003, Iffert also was spiritual moderator of the Catholic Youth Organization in the Belleville Deanery and spiritual moderator of the diocesan Teens Encounter Christ movement.

In 2003, he entered the Dominican novitiate at the order's Province of St. Albert the Great in Chicago. He took simple vows as a Dominican in 2004 and renewed his vows in 2006.

He was parochial vicar at St. Thomas Catholic Center at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, from July 2007 to June 2008, when he left the Dominicans and returned to the Belleville Diocese.

His parish assignments included being named administrator for several parishes, including St. Mary Parish in Mount Vernon, Illinois, where he became pastor in 2010. He was named pastor of St. Barbara Parish in Scheller, Illinois, in 2014 while continuing as pastor of St. Mary.

He served the two parishes until he was named vicar general and moderator of the curia. From July 2014 to 2020, he also was co-vicar for priests.

Established in 1853, the Diocese of Covington encompasses the city of Covington and the 14 counties of northern Kentucky. The diocese has 48 parishes and approximately 90,000 Catholics within 3,358 square miles.