News

Pope Francis shakes a man's hand who is wearing glasses and a black and purple cassock

Pope Francis greets then-Msgr. Frank Leo of Montreal during a meeting at the Vatican Dec. 6, 2018. The Holy See announced Feb. 11, 2023, that Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Thomas Collins as archbishop of Toronto and named Leo as his successor. (OSV News photo photo/Vatican Media)

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The Holy See announced Feb. 11 that Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Thomas Collins as archbishop of Toronto and named Bishop Frank Leo of Montreal as his successor. Leo will be installed as archbishop of Toronto at St. Michael’s Cathedral on a date to be announced.

Collins was three months shy of 15 years of service to the Archdiocese of Toronto when the announcement was made.

Collins, who was visiting and preaching a feast day homily at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Toronto as news of his retirement spread, offered his "prayers and best wishes" to Leo in a prepared statement released at 6:30 a.m. Feb. 11.

"(Leo's) knowledge of the church, both in Canada and around the world, as well as his unfailing service over many years, demonstrates his commitment to serve joyfully and faithfully," the retiring archbishop's statement said.

Speaking to The Catholic Register, a Toronto-based newspaper, before the Mass, Collins praised the multicultural reality of Toronto with "so many people from all over the world" and said they are what makes it a great city.

"It's just been a joy to be archbishop here," he said. "Ever since I came here, the people have been so kind, so generous. So many good people have stepped forward to help. Some people say it must be a heavy burden. I've never found it so. I love everything about (Toronto)."

Having submitted his mandatory resignation letter to the pope last year at age 75, Collins is still eligible to participate in papal-electing conclaves until he turns 80.

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Leo, 51, said in a statement that his immediate thought after being notified of his appointment by the papal nuncio was to picture the Annunciation where Mary accepts God's will to become the Mother of God.

"I thought of the Blessed Mother, her amazement and questioning, her trust and her availability to join forces with the Holy Spirit in bringing about the Incarnation; in accepting to play her unique role in the Lord's loving and saving plan; to be a humble instrument in the hands of our loving and saving God. Upon learning of the Holy Father's decision to appoint me, I, too, was asked to utter my own personal and ecclesial Fiat -- and I have done so with all my heart," he said.

It has only been a year since Leo was named vicar general of Montreal on Feb. 1, 2022; six months later Francis named him one of two auxiliary bishops of Montreal. He was consecrated a bishop in mid-September.

Leo, who describes himself as "the son of immigrant parents," has a doctorate in systematic theology, a graduate certificate in spiritual direction, a licentiate in philosophy and a diploma in classical studies. He has served in the Holy See’s diplomatic service and speaks English, French, Italian and Spanish.

He will now lead Canada's largest archdiocese of about 2 million Catholics with almost 400 priests serving 225 parishes where more than 30 languages are spoken. He will be stepping into the shoes of the much-loved Collins, whose admiration by Catholic Torontonians was most publicly evidenced by his annual Cardinal's Dinner that attracted a record 1,300 people last year.

"I invite the Catholic community in the archdiocese to join me in giving thanks to God as we pray for our new shepherd," Collins said in his retirement statement to the faithful.