News



Bishop Paul J. Bradley is pictured in this undated file photo. Pope Francis has replaced Bishop Bradley as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, with Bishop Edward M. Lohse of Kalamazoo, Mich., the Diocese of Steubenville announced June 14, 2024. Bishop Bradley is the retired bishop of Kalamazoo. (OSV News/Paul Haring, CNS archive)

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Steubenville, Ohio — June 17, 2024
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Pope Francis has replaced Bishop Paul J. Bradley as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, with Bishop Edward M. Lohse of Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Steubenville Diocese announced June 14.

The change comes amid exploration of the Steubenville Diocese's merger with the neighboring Diocese of Columbus, an idea first proposed by Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton, who led the Steubenville Diocese from 2012 until his appointment as an auxiliary bishop of his native Archdiocese of Detroit last year. In 2021, Ohio's bishops voted in favor of the merger, drawing widespread criticism from Catholics of the Steubenville Diocese.

"As the discernment process continues to move forward in regard to the future of the Diocese of Steubenville, the Holy Father has informed me that my service as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese has been completed, and thanked me for my

leadership over these last nine months," Bradley wrote in June 14 a statement to the Steubenville Diocese's clergy and faithful.

"I am so very grateful to the Holy Father for giving me the privilege of serving as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Steubenville for these many months, and for getting to know the wonderful priests, deacons, Religious women and men, and Lay Faithful of this very special Diocese," he wrote. "I am confident that Bishop Lohse will provide excellent leadership to the Diocese throughout the remainder of this process. These nine months have been a great blessing to me, and I promise to always keep the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese in my daily prayers. Please pray for me as well."

Lohse will serve as the diocese's apostolic administrator in addition to overseeing the Diocese of Kalamazoo. Bradley described the apostolic administrator role as providing "direction and Episcopal leadership."

Bradley, who retired last year after 14 years as bishop of Kalamazoo, was appointed in September to serve as the Steubenville Diocese's temporary apostolic administrator. In an interview with Crux published in February, Bradley contradicted a narrative of decline, instead describing the Steubenville Diocese as "vibrant." He said that he "would have no basis that I can see for coming to that conclusion" that the diocese could not survive on its own.

"I think what we're finding is that while there are some who think that the Diocese of Steubenville is not able to survive, that is not what I've found so far," Bradley told Crux in January.

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The interview followed a joint letter with Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus stating they "have begun very preliminary discussions regarding the potential merger of the dioceses" at the request of the apostolic nunciature, the diplomatic mission of the Holy See to the U.S. led by Cardinal Christophe Pierre.

"The Apostolic Nunciature has asked the dioceses to work together to consider how different dimensions of the dioceses, including the temporal aspects of life, might be affected by such a proposal," the letter stated. "While no decision has been made, due diligence is needed so an educated and responsible decision can be discerned in

a timely manner. Ultimately the decision is up to the Holy Father."

In a December interview with OSV News, both bishops said the potential reshaping of the diocesan territories to meet current and projected pastoral needs requires both temporal efforts and spiritual discernment.

"It could very easily be that we get through this process of information gathering and it's determined that no, we should leave things as they are, or find some other way to address the issues" prompting the possible merger — specifically, population and priestly vocational decline, Bradley told OSV News.

He and Fernandes said they were working to present their diocesan information by March 2024 to Ohio's other Catholic bishops.

The change in diocesan administrator was made while the bishops were meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, for the June 12-14 spring plenary assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Bradley and Fernandes told OSV News that the merger was expected to be assessed by U.S. bishops at this meeting prior to examination by the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops and then Francis. The matter did not, however, appear on the assembly's public schedule. The bishops met privately June 12 and the morning of June 13.

The Steubenville Diocese was created by Pope Pius XII in 1944 as a missionary diocese from the eastern part of the Columbus Diocese. Besides Columbus and Steubenville, Ohio has three other Catholic dioceses — Cleveland, Toledo and Youngstown — and one archdiocese, Cincinnati.

According to 2021 statistics, the Columbus Diocese has a Catholic population of nearly 290,000 out of a total population of just over 2.8 million. Statistics on the Steubenville Diocese from 2020, the latest available, show that there are just over 30,000 Catholics out of a total population of about 496,000.

In a June 14 media statement, Lohse said, "I thank Bishop Bradley for his wonderful pastoral outreach to the people of the Diocese of Steubenville, and I look forward to meeting the clergy, religious, and faithful of the diocese."

A native of Erie, Pennsylvania, Lohse was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Erie in 1989 and held several leadership roles. He also served as an official of the now-Dicastery for the Clergy in Rome from 2010 to 2015 while earning a doctoral degree in canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained a bishop and

installed to head the Diocese of Kalamazoo in July 2023.