News



Bishop Michael Pham receives the apostolic mandate from Pope Leo XIV at the Mass installing him as head of the San Diego Diocese on July 17, 2025, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish in San Diego. (NCR photo/Chris Stone)



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Citing John's Gospel passage of the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep, Bishop Michael Pham told a packed church: "In serving others — this requires daily dying."

The first Vietnamese American bishop to head a U.S. diocese, and a leading church activist for protection of undocumented immigrants, was formally installed Thursday, July 17, as leader of the San Diego Diocese.

At St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish, Pham said: "We pray that the Holy Spirit gives us the strength and courage to take on the task to serve all people without discrimination, especially the poor, the homeless, the immigrants, the migrants, the refugees and the voiceless."

His remarks at the 100-minute Mass revisited themes of diversity and social justice.



Bishop Michael Pham gives his homily at his installation Mass on July 17, 2025, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish in San Diego. (NCR photo/Chris Stone)

"We, too, are sent by Jesus to bring the same spirit of love to the world filled with division and hatred, through our active participation in justice and peace, in forgiveness and reconciliation actualized now in the Eucharist," he said in a 13-minute homily.

Besides parish priests and Pham's family, observers included Cardinal Robert McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, D.C., returning to his old diocese, and apostolic nuncio Christophe Pierre, the cardinal representing the Vatican.

Also attending were Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles and Bishop José Gomez, archbishop of Los Angeles, the nation's largest Catholic community.

At the service, dozens of people lined up to give Pham hugs and spark animated exchanges and thumbs-ups.

Pham noted Pentecost and the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, where "people spoke in different languages and yet they understood each other."

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"As our Pope Francis pointed out to us, listening is the important key to creating synodality in our church," Pham said. "Only by listening to the word of God and to each other can we be guided by the Holy Spirit to right the injustices created in today's world due to our human flaws and thus achieve peace."

Pierre read a message from Pope Leo XIV — who noted that McElroy has "not been forgotten" by San Diego, stirring laughter.

"Bishop Pham, you are well-equipped for this vocation," said Leo's personal message. "You have clearly shown a genuine zeal, as well as skill, in what pertains both to pastoral demands and administration."

After hearing the pontiff's official decree, made May 22, Pham recited his pledge: "With faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and with the love of God in my heart, I do accept the pastoral care of the people of God in the Diocese of San Diego. I resolve to serve faithfully the spiritual needs of this local church."

Pham then held aloft the decree, an opened scroll, and made his way up and down aisles of the church.



Bishop Michael Pham smiles as he's greeted by attendees before his installation Mass on July 17, 2025, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish in San Diego. (NCR photo/Chris Stone)

At the end of his homily, Pham spoke briefly in Vietnamese and Spanish.

Then he took a self-effacing turn, noting his height — a little over 5 feet.

"You may be used to seeing tall bishops and cardinals at the lead," he said to laughter. "But now you can envision before you a shorter bishop — like Yoda in 'Star Wars' — getting ready to lead.

"Whether we are tall or short, figuratively or literally, we all are called to be bearers of hope and beacons of good news to peace, justice and love for all."

He concluded: "Mary, Mother of the Church — pray for us!"

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