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Vicar general of Diocese of Tyler, Texas, named its bishop

by Susan De Matteo by Catholic News Service

Tyler, Texas — Pope Benedict XVI has appointed Msgr. Joseph E. Strickland, the 53-year-old vicar general of the Diocese of Tyler, to serve as its bishop.

The appointment was announced Saturday in Washington by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Strickland succeeds Bishop Alvaro Corrada del Rio, who was named bishop of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, in 2011 after heading the Tyler Diocese for more than a decade.

He will be ordained a bishop and installed Nov. 28 at a special Mass to be celebrated in Caldwell Auditorium in Tyler.

At a news conference Saturday in Tyler, Strickland called his appointment a "joyful message" and said he was "grateful to God" for the opportunity given him.

"It's a joyful message we share today," he said to fellow priests, deacons, consecrated religious, lay faithful and local press. "My greatest joy has always been to gather around the altar of Christ with you.

"I know this is a tremendous challenge," the bishop-designate said. "But I'm here with family."

Strickland said he will dedicate his ministry as bishop to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and said his episcopal motto will be, "To dwell in the house of the Lord."

He also announced that he will lead a prayer vigil on the Tyler courthouse square Nov. 4 and invited

people of all faiths to join him.

"In this election year," he said, "let us gather and pray for our nation."

Joseph Edward Strickland was born Oct. 31, 1958, in Fredericksburg to Raymond and Monica Strickland, but the family moved to Texarkana in 1959 and then to Atlanta in 1963. The Stricklands were founding members of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Atlanta, and young Joe was an altar server.

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He graduated from Atlanta High School in 1977 and entered Holy Trinity Seminary and the University of Dallas in Irving. He received a bachelor's in philosophy in 1981 and continued his seminary studies.

He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Dallas on June 1, 1985, by Bishop Thomas Tschoepe and was assigned as parochial vicar at then Immaculate Conception Church in Tyler.

In 1987, when the Diocese of Tyler was created from the Dioceses of Dallas, Beaumont and Galveston-Houston, Strickland was incardinated as a priest of the Tyler Diocese. He was named director of vocations by Bishop Charles E. Herzig.

In 1992, he entered The Catholic University of America in Washington to study canon law. He received his licentiate in canon law in May 1994, and was named rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Tyler. He was appointed judicial vicar for the Tyler Diocese by Bishop Edmond Carmody in 1995.

In 1996, Pope John Paul II named him a monsignor.

When Carmody was transferred to the Diocese of Corpus Christi in 2000, Strickland was elected administrator of the Tyler Diocese by fellow priests serving as consultors. He served in that position until Corrada was installed as third bishop of the diocese in January 2001.

Corrada named him vicar general of the diocese in 2010, and he served in that post until Corrada's transfer to the Diocese of Mayaguez in July 2011. Corrada was made apostolic administrator of the Tyler Diocese until his successor could be named, and Strickland served as delegate of the apostolic administrator.

The Diocese of Tyler covers more than 23,000 square miles and encompasses 33 counties in northeast Texas. The total population of the area is about 1.4 million people; about 55,000, or 4 percent, are Catholic.

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