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New bishop wants to serve Oakland as pope serves 'the whole church'

by Michele Jurich by Catholic News Service

Oakland, Calif. — In a joyful celebration that incorporated the many gifts of the diverse communities that make up the Oakland diocese, Bishop Michael Barber was ordained and installed as Oakland's fifth bishop May 25 at the Cathedral of Christ the Light.

With his brother Jesuit Fr. Stephen Barber and another brother, Kevin Barber, serving as lector, Bishop Barber, 58, became the first Jesuit to become the bishop of Oakland. He also is the first priest to be named bishop of Oakland. All previous bishops had already been ordained bishops.

At the end of the Mass, the new bishop moved through the main aisle of the soaring glass-and-concrete cathedral, blessing the people and receiving applause.

"People have asked me, 'What is your vision as bishop?' " he said in remarks from the ambo. "I would like to do for Oakland what Pope Francis is doing for the whole church."

He was interrupted by applause.

"My vision is this: The priests take care of the people. The bishop takes care of the priests. And we all take care of the poor, and the sick and the suffering."

Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco was the principal consecrator for the ordination of Barber, who succeeds him in Oakland. Co-consecrators were retired Bishop Carlos Sevilla of Yakima, Wash., who is also a Jesuit, and Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Daly of San Jose.

Other bishops present included retired Bishop John Cummins, the second bishop of Oakland, from 1977

to 2003, and Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron, who was Oakland's third bishop. He was named coadjutor bishop in January 2003 and was head of the diocese from October 2003 to January 2009, when he was named to Detroit.

During his remarks, Cordileone told the new bishop he could count on the support of his brother bishops.

The Mass included contributions from a prelude by songs of praise and worship from the Voices of St. Benedict gospel choir; a spirited call to worship to the drumbeat of a "kebero" from the Eritrean Catholics of the Ge'ez Rite; a reading in Vietnamese; and a responsorial psalm in Spanish.

The cathedral, which was dedicated almost five years ago, was filled to its 1,350-seat capacity. An additional 300 chairs were placed on the Cathedral Plaza so those unable to be seated inside could watch a broadcast of the proceedings.

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During the ordination rite, in which chrism was poured on his head and hands to anoint him, Barber received the ring, miter and crozier before being invited to occupy the cathedra, or bishop's seat. The chrism was made from oil from the olive trees on the grounds of the motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. The oil was consecrated by retired Seattle Archbishop Alex Brunett, who had served as Oakland's apostolic administrator since last October.

In his comments later, Barber thanked Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, apostolic nuncio to the United States, and his consecrators, as well as Brunett.

"Everyone I have spoken to hates to see you go," he told the retired archbishop. "You will go down in the history of Oakland not as the apostolic administrator, but as the beloved apostolic administrator."

The new bishop thanked three people "here today who have played an important role in my life." He thanked the retired Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, who ordained him to the priesthood in 1985.

"The priest who baptized me as a baby at Mission Dolores Church back in 19-hundred-and ..." he said, running his hand across his mouth to playfully obscure the date, "He's here today. Father John Cummins, the second bishop of Oakland."

"Thirdly, the Dominican sister who taught me in the eighth grade," he said. "You may not realize it but this sister has taught every person in the diocese of Oakland because she taught me the faith, and I will hand it on to you. In honoring her, I honor all consecrated religious women, all teachers and all catechists in our diocese. Thank you, Sister Mary Jude."

"In 58 years of life, it never entered my mind that I would be bishop of Oakland, until three weeks ago," he said. In his initial nervousness, he said, he recalled what the late Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the previous apostolic nuncio to the U.S., had told a priest who was nervous about being made a bishop: "The Lord himself is going to be bishop of your diocese. You're only going to help him."

"That's what I'd like to do," Barber said. "I'm helping our Lord here be the bishop of this diocese. I know I'm unworthy, but I do know one other thing: That for all eternity, in the mind of God, to be bishop of Oakland has been my vocation. With God's help, and your prayers, and the love of Mother Mary, I intend to fulfill it."

The bishop left the cathedral, with applause greeting him as he moved through the congregation, blessing the people, to the "Navy Hymn," in tribute to his service as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy.

[Michele Jurich is a staff writer at *The Catholic Voice*, newspaper of the Oakland diocese.]

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