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Pope names Dallas seminary rector to be bishop of Fort Worth

by Catholic News Service

Washington — Pope Francis has appointed Msgr. Michael Olson, currently rector of Holy Trinity Seminary at the University of Dallas in Irving, Texas, to head the diocese of Fort Worth, Texas.

Olson, 47, is a Fort Worth diocesan priest. He succeeds Bishop Kevin Vann, who was named bishop of the diocese of Orange, Calif., in September 2012.

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

Olson, who has been Holy Trinity's rector since 2008, will be ordained and installed Jan. 29 at a Mass to be celebrated in the Fort Worth Convention Center. He will become the second youngest bishop in the United States to lead a diocese. The youngest bishop is fellow seminary classmate Bishop Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, N.M. Both are graduates of the St. Mary's Seminary in Houston.

"I am very humbled and deeply moved by Pope Francis' appointment of me to serve as the bishop of Fort Worth," the newly named bishop said at a news conference at the Fort Worth diocesan Catholic Center. "In a very special way, I am delighted to return home to the diocese of Fort Worth to serve the priests, deacons, religious, and all of the faithful as their bishop."

He is the first priest of the diocese of Fort Worth to be named a bishop. He will lead a fast-growing diocese of an estimated 710,000 Catholics in 90 parishes in the 28-county north Texas region.

"I know over the last 14 months we've all been praying for a new bishop, and last Tuesday morning, I received a phone call from the apostolic nuncio, who very graciously informed me that our Holy Father

Pope Francis had asked me to be the next bishop of Fort Worth," Olson said. "I responded to him at the time, as I respond today, that relying on the help of Almighty God and with the help of the Blessed Mother, 'I accept.' "

He described the previous week as "a period of discernment and prayer, prayer for all of you as well as prayer for me, prayers especially for our deacons, priests and religious and our staff here at the Catholic Center."

He added that Viganò told him Pope Francis "holds our diocese in esteem, as part of the new evangelization and as part of a vital area of growth in the church."

Dallas Bishop Kevin Farrell said he has enjoyed working with the bishop-designate the last several years and looks forward to "a collaborative relationship" with him as a bishop. He said the newly named bishop's experience and diverse background "make him an outstanding choice to lead the growing diocese of Fort Worth." He called Olson "a proven, exceptionally capable and pastoral leader."

During his tenure as rector, Olson has "overseen extensive remodeling and staff expansion at Holy Trinity Seminary and under his leadership the number of seminarians has grown to near capacity," Farrell added.

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Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston in statement said he "rejoices" in the episcopal appointment of the seminary rector. "We offer him our prayers and support in his new role and, together with the people of Fort Worth, look forward to his episcopal ordination in January."

Born in Park Ridge, Ill., June 29, 1966, to Ronald and Janice Fetzer Olson, Olson has three sisters, Mary Elizabeth Rogers, Patricia Tucker and Lizbeth Schweitzer. He began seminarian studies for the archdiocese of Chicago in 1984 but moved to Fort Worth when his parents relocated to the city in 1985.

In 1988, he officially transferred as a seminarian of the diocese of Fort Worth. He was ordained June 3, 1994.

He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy in 1988 and 1989, respectively, from The Catholic University of America in Washington. He also has a master's of divinity degree and a master of arts degree in theological studies from the University of St. Thomas in Houston.

He was a charter recipient of the Catholic Relief Services Global Fellowship in 1993 through which he traveled to Egypt and Burkina Faso to learn about global development in social justice. He also is a past recipient of the Presidential Fellowship of St. Louis University, where he studied at the Center for Health Care Ethics in the Catholic Tradition between 1997 and 2001.

Olson was granted the title of monsignor by Pope Benedict XVI in May 2010. In March 2011, he earned his doctorate in moral theology at Pontifical Lateran University's Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome.

[Joan Kurkowski-Gillen, a correspondent for the *North Texas Catholic*, newspaper of the Fort Worth diocese, and Seth Gonzales, a staff writer at *The Texas Catholic*, newspaper of the Dallas diocese, contributed to this story.]

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