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South Carolina's 13th bishop ordained

Bishop Guglielmone says his agenda is to meet the needs of God's people

by CHRISTINA LEE KNAUSS

special to the catholic news & herald

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone was installed as the 13th bishop of the Diocese of Charleston March 25 during a ceremony that combined the majesty of church tradition with warm emotions.

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist was filled to capacity with about 483 people. Priests, men and women religious, deacons and the bishop's friends and family from New York and elsewhere all came to celebrate with him.

An overflow crowd of about 125 filled the Cathedral Center hall and joined the ceremony through video feed. Others watched from homes, schools and churches via streaming video on the Internet.

The diocesan Web site received more than 6,500 hits during the live feed. The ordination was also broadcast on Mediatrix Catholic radio and catholicradiosc.com.

Cardinal Edward M. Egan, archbishop of New York, was the principal consecrator in the absence of Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta, who was unable to attend.

Co-consecrators were Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., and Bishop Robert J. Baker of the Diocese of Birmingham, Ala., who led the Diocese of Charleston from 1999 until September 2007.

Archbishop Pietro Sambi, apostolic nuncio to the United States, also concelebrated the Mass of ordination.

Archbishop Sambi read from the apostolic letter that officially called Bishop Guglielmone to service in the diocese. Prior to becoming bishop, he was rector at St. Agnes Cathedral in Rockville Centre.

"We are truly confident that as you faithfully teach and govern in the name of the Lord you will ... be a symbol of unity to all entrusted to your pastoral care," Archbishop Sambi said.

To be a bishop

In his homily, Cardinal Egan urged Bishop Guglielmone to commit himself to bear witness to the Gospel, to serve others and "love all who God places in your care ... including the poor and the weak, the immigrant and the stranger."

He also referred to the bishop's strong Catholic family heritage and to his late parents. "Carolina and Francesco are praying for you in heaven and will be praying for you every day," he said.

“You are the 13th bishop of one of the most historic and esteemed dioceses in the nation,” he said. “... You are standing on the shoulders of wonderful successors of the apostles. I’ve known six of the previous 12 bishops personally. If you need any help, just call me in New York.”

Cardinal Egan said it was appropriate that the ordination should take place on the feast of the Annunciation.

“On this day when we remember Mary handing herself totally over to the Lord, today you are making the same commitment,” he said. “Lead your people in prayer ... the greatest of all being the Eucharist. You are becoming bishop in a time of considerable turmoil in the nation and the world. People will look to you for leadership, unity and prayer.”

Cardinal Egan then led the Promise of the Elect, and asked Bishop Guglielmone to faithfully follow the Gospel and carry out his work as bishop. The Litany of Supplication followed as the bishop prostrated himself on the floor and the choir led the congregation in the Litany of the Saints.

Cardinal Egan and Bishops Baker and Murphy then performed the laying on of hands and led the prayer of ordination. Cardinal Egan anointed Bishop Guglielmone with sacred chrism, or holy oil.

During the Prayer of Ordination, two deacons held the Book of the Gospels over the bishop’s head to symbolize the importance of following the word of God.

Bishop Guglielmone received the kiss of peace from the consecrators and the 12 other visiting bishops. He also officially received the three symbols of his office — his ring, miter and crosier — and took his seat in the bishop’s chair, called the cathedra.

‘Pilgrimage of life’

Toward the end of the ceremony, the bishop walked around the cathedral and blessed everyone while the choir sang the hymn, “Te Deum.” He also offered some remarks.

“The first word that comes to my mind is ‘Wow!’ What a wonderful day this is for me personally,” he said. “I am so happy to be with you as your bishop ... I hope that I can be for you all that you hope for and pray for, and that we can always be a people of hope. I can’t help but be overwhelmed at all the love I’ve received, the Southern hospitality.”

Bishop Guglielmone promised to support the priests and deacons, men and women religious, and lay people of the diocese as they spread the Gospel message, and in turn asked for their support and prayers.

He said he was aware of the challenges facing the diocese, and society in general during the recent economic downturn.

“Folks, we’re on the pilgrimage of life together, and we need each other ... if we’re going to meet the challenges, we need to work together,” he said. “I can’t say I have an agenda. My only agenda is to form one with you as we forge on to meet the needs of God’s people.”

Bishop Guglielmone thanked everyone who supported him as a priest in New York. He became emotional as he explained that the crozier he carried was used by the Long Island bishop who ordained him.

He also thanked Bishop Baker and retired Bishop David B. Thompson for their help in learning about the diocese, and paid tribute to Msgr. Martin T. Laughlin, who served as diocesan administrator during the 17 months the diocese was without a bishop.

State and local dignitaries and other Christian clergy also attended the ceremony.

The bishop’s two older brothers, Nick Dana and Tito Guglielmone, attended with their wives and children.

“This was very powerful. I have no aversion to saying I was crying during parts of it,” said Tito, who lives in Callicoon, N.Y. “He’s a wonderful person, priest and human being. He’ll reach out to everyone.”

“The ceremony was magnificent,” Nick said. “I know he loves people, but it’s now obvious how people here already love him.”

Christina Lee Knauss is a reporter with the Catholic Miscellany in Charleston, S.C.