

A shepherd of the people

Bishop's first year a busy, productive one

by KAREN A. EVANS

staff writer

CHARLOTTE -- The past 12 months have flown by for Bishop Peter J. Jugis.

"It has been just as busy as I expected, from observing Bishop (John F.) Donoghue and Bishop (William G.) Curlin," said Bishop Jugis of his first year as bishop of the Diocese of Charlotte. He is discovering that just as in parish life, a bishop's ministry has to be based in prayer. Without prayer, his ministry would lose its "soul," he said.

"It has to be Christ-centered -- based in prayer and your living relationship with the Lord," the bishop said. "I've seen that prayer is even more essential than in my parish ministry."

Bishop Jugis has had many accomplishments during the past year -- numerous confirmations, visits to parishes and schools, dedication Masses and two visits to Rome. But he is most proud of his ordination of four men to the priesthood and three men to the transitional diaconate.

"To give the gift of more priests to the (Catholic) Church is the greatest service I can give as bishop," he said. "These men will serve for the next 40 or 50 years and touch many people's lives."

Being selected as bishop of a growing and increasingly diverse diocese has proved to be a challenge to the young bishop, just 46 years old at his ordination Oct. 24, 2003. Bishop Jugis had to spend a significant amount of time becoming fully familiar with the extent of the clergy sex abuse crisis in the United States.

He also is responsible for presenting the Catholic Church's teaching on a range of topics, from abortion to the revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Included in his audience are members of the secular press, who don't necessarily have the benefit of a full understanding of the Catholic faith.

Recently, Bishop Jugis met with several members of the press and answered questions ranging from the ordination of women to his alleged shyness. He isn't shy, he said -- but he does consider himself contemplative.

His popularity among his flock is evident at every public event he attends -- from the warm smiles of his parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Monroe on the Sunday following the announcement of his election as the fourth bishop of Charlotte in August 2003, to the scores of people who lined up to greet him at the Room at the Inn in Charlotte banquet Oct. 14.

"Everywhere I go, people have been most encouraging of me and of my service as shepherd of the diocese," the bishop said. "People always tell me they are praying for me -- I can feel the inner strength which comes from the grace of those prayers."

For the immediate future, he will continue to fulfill the promise he made at his episcopal ordination to visit each parish and school within the diocese. So far, he has called upon 52 parishes and 9 schools.

"I ask the people to please be patient with me," he said. "I am going to make it to each place." Bishop Jugis has set as one of his top priorities to make welcome the multitudes of newcomers to the diocese, particularly immigrants from other nations.

The bishop also plans to focus on the Year of the Eucharist, which began Oct. 17, by participating in regional and diocesan celebrations.

Pope John Paul II has encouraged Catholics to commit themselves, "to following Jesus, the way, the truth and the life," and frequently adore the Eucharist during the next 12 months.

"As a priest, and now as bishop, I love meeting and serving the people," Bishop Jugis said. "I take them into my heart and pray for everyone."

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