



For Immediate Release

8 November 2014

NEW BISHOP NAMED FOR FAIRBANKS DIOCESE

Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed a new bishop for the Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks. In accord with his reputation for doing the unexpected, Pope Francis has asked Reverend Chad W. Zielinski, an active military chaplain at Eielson Air Force Base, Fairbanks, Alaska to lead the United States' northernmost diocese. It is the first time in recent history an active military chaplain has been named to be the Ordinary, or spiritual head, of a diocese.

Bishop Elect Zielinski's ordination and installation is scheduled for 3 PM 15 December 2014 at the Carlson Center, Fairbanks, Alaska. A vesper prayer service will take place the night before at 6 PM at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Fairbanks.

The Fairbanks Diocese has been under the leadership of Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz, OMI, Archbishop of Anchorage, Alaska, since November 2013. Archbishop Schwietz took up the role of Apostolic Administrator when the Holy Father asked Fairbanks Bishop Donald J. Kettler to lead the diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota a year ago.

Archbishop Schwietz praised the Pope's selection.

"Bishop Elect Zielinski exemplifies many of the qualities needed to serve the people of the Diocese of Fairbanks. He has learned to work with people from all backgrounds, and do so under the stresses of war. Yet he is also humble and prayerful. I understand why the Holy Father chose him as a servant leader for Fairbanks."

Rev. Zielinski wasn't so certain of that. Writing to his parishioners at Eielson AFB, he explained he received a 6:15 AM call from the Apostolic Nuncio, the Vatican's ambassador to the United States, telling him of the Pope's appointment. Rev. Zielinski stated he thought the Nuncio had made a mistake:

"I was so tired and could not think straight, and just kept saying, "this makes no sense; how can this be?" He could sense my overwhelming confusion, frustration and bewilderment. So, he said, let's talk on Monday. I later apologized and thanked the saintly man for his patience."

Rev. Zielinski was ordained a priest for the Catholic Diocese of Gaylord, Michigan in 1996. Before becoming a priest, he was an active duty Air Force serviceman for four years. Then he got a higher calling.

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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On learning of Rev. Zielinski's appointment to lead Fairbanks, the Diocese of Gaylord Bishop Steven J. Raica made note of Rev. Zielinski's ardent response to God's call.

"Fr. Chad is an avid fisherman. Our Lord seemed to favor fishermen when he called his first disciples - Peter, Andrew, James and John. They responded with a resounding "YES!" to our Lord's invitation: "Follow me!" Now Fr. Chad has heard this invitation from the successor of Peter, Pope Francis, to join him on a unique mission as the Bishop of Fairbanks. Fr. Chad has responded with his resounding 'YES!'"

Rev. Zielinski attended seminary at Mt. Angel Seminary, St. Benedict, Oregon, graduating Magna Cum Laude with a BA in Philosophy in 1989. In 1996 he received a Masters of Divinity degree from Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan.

Following his ordination as a priest, Rev. Zielinski served at several parishes in Gaylord. Then in 2001 terrorists struck the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11. Rev. Zielinski soon saw a need for Catholic chaplains in the military and asked his bishop if he could serve as a chaplain. He was granted permission and in 2003 Rev. Zielinski found himself serving in Bagdad, Iraq.

He has seen three tours of duties in war zones. His last assignment was in Afghanistan where he served 18 forward combat positions. Often his prayer services and Masses were punctuated by the sound of live fire. On one occasion he was travelling in a military convoy that came under attack and the truck in front of his was destroyed by a rocket. One of his parishioners was driving that truck and died in the attack. Rev. Zielinski ended his day conducting a funeral service.

Archbishop for the Military Services in the United States Archbishop Timothy Broglio celebrated the Fairbanks Diocese's gain.

"Bishop-elect Zielinski is an exemplary priest. He impressed me when I came to the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA. His service as a recruiter of Air Force chaplains brought us into frequent contact. He later impressed me with his piety, zeal, and immense kindness in his service at the Air Force Academy. The faithful in Fairbanks will find in him a Shepherd after the Heart of Jesus. I only regret losing a fine chaplain!"

Rev. Zielinski was assigned to Eielson AFB in 2012. Until he received the Apostolic Nuncio's call, he served as Deputy Wing Chaplain, 354 Fighter Wing. He wrote his parishioners at Eielson he spent a long time praying in the chapel after he finally comprehended the Pope's request. He told parishioners, "My simple approach to this call in life is to love the Lord my God with all my heart, all my soul and all my mind and serve my brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Fairbanks."

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Bishop Elect Zielinski has chosen as his motto: *Illum Opertet Crescere*, "He Must Increase." It is taken from the third chapter of St. John's gospel. John the Baptist expresses his joy at the arrival of Jesus and he tells his disciples, "He must increase; I must decrease."

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