

Pope Francis makes major American Church appointment



Pope Francis has named Bishop Blase Cupich of Spokane, Washington, as archbishop of Chicago, succeeding Cardinal Francis George, who has led the archdiocese since 1997.

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

Archbishop Cupich will be installed in Chicago on November 18.

Cardinal George is 77, two years past the age when bishops are required by canon law to turn in their resignation to the pope.

The cardinal was first diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2006 and had a recurrence of cancer announced in 2012. In August it was announced that he was participating in a clinical research trial for a new cancer drug.

His health concerns have stepped up the process of searching for his successor as archbishop of Chicago.

In a news conference in April he told reporters: “It’s a question of being able to spend your entire energy on what is my responsibility as Archbishop of Chicago. This is a position that demands a lot of constant attention.”

“Now it looks as if I’m going to have to be spending a little more attention on my health and so it’s just not fair to the archdiocese to have someone who may not be able to do the job as well as I believe it should be done,” he added.

Archbishop Cupich, 65, has been bishop of Spokane since 2010 after having served as bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota, since 1998. A native of Omaha, Nebraska, he was born in 1949, the grandson of

Croatian immigrants. He was ordained a priest for the Omaha Archdiocese in 1975.

In his ministry as a priest, he served as an associate pastor and pastor, teacher, seminary rector, and as a member of the staff of the apostolic nunciature in Washington.

The archbishop chairs the subcommittee on aid to the Church in central and eastern Europe and is former chairman of the committee for the protection of children and young people.

Cardinal George is the first native Chicagoan to serve as archbishop of Chicago. He was born in 1937 and attended schools in Illinois before entering the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1957. He was ordained a priest on December 21 1963. He was his order's vicar general in Rome from 1974 to 1986.

The cardinal has often said that one of his goals is to live to see retirement since all of the other Chicago bishops died in office. His predecessor, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, died in 1996 at age 68 of pancreatic cancer.

A five-month bout with polio when Cardinal George was 13 damaged both of his legs, forcing him to use a brace on his right leg. He walks with a pronounced limp.

He was president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops from 2007 to 2010.

He was made a cardinal in 1998. Before his appointment to Chicago, he was archbishop of Portland, Oregon, and before that bishop of Yakima, Washington.

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