

Cupich becomes 9th archbishop of Chicago



CHICAGO (AP) — Blase Cupich is poised to become the archbishop of Chicago on Tuesday when his predecessor hands him a bishop's staff and relinquishes the chair that symbolizes the leadership of the nation's third-largest diocese.

During a Mass, the transfer of power will be completed as Cardinal Francis George, who is retiring as he battles cancer, steps aside after being the spiritual leader of more than 2 million Catholics since 1997.

The installation of the 65-year-old Cupich — who was the bishop of the Diocese of Spokane, Washington, when he was selected by Pope Francis to succeed George — marks the first time in the history of the Chicago archdiocese that a new archbishop will assume leadership while his predecessor is still alive.

In a ceremony Monday night steeped in tradition and symbolism, Cupich arrived at the Holy Name Cathedral, crowded with hundreds of priests, religious leaders from several faiths and civic leaders and knocked on the door three times.

Those knocks, symbolic of his request to be admitted into the cathedral, set in motion a process that included a presentation of a garment called an archdiocesan stole that represents an invitation by the priests in the archdiocese to be the pastor.

The selection of the relatively anonymous Cupich to head the high-profile archdiocese is Pope Francis' first major mark on American Catholic leadership.

It also is seen as a message sent by the pope as he replaces George, a leading church conservative, with the more moderate Cupich. Observers say it is a signal that Francis wants a pastor to lead the archdiocese, someone who will follow his lead and emphasize mercy and ministering to the poor and

create a church that is more welcoming.

In his homily Monday night during what is called a Rite of Reception, Cupich said he intends to ratchet down the rhetoric that has driven young people away from religion. And he vowed to take an active role in the community, pushing for immigration reform, taking part in the battle against gangs and gun violence and other issues.

DON BABWIN - Associated Press