



DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

Des Moines Diocese Press Conference Opening Statement
Father William Joensen
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I am likely the most amazed person in the room today—amazed and a little bit dazed, if truth be told. Less than two weeks ago, after the Fourth of July, I was beginning to turn my thoughts to planning and preparation for a new academic year. The call from the United States Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Pierre, with the request to become your bishop, was not simply a huge surprise, it was rather daunting. Among my initial responses was: “You’re sure, Archbishop, that the Holy Father knows about this and signed off on it?” To which he gave his little French chuckle and reassured me that, yes, the Holy Father was on board.

Beyond surprise and some trepidation, though, my heart was stirred and filled with peace and attraction to the position. For I am thoroughly an Iowa guy—you’ll notice that I didn’t say “Iowa Boy,” as I’m aware that former DSM Register columnist Chuck Offenburger still retains proprietary claim over that title! My first 22 years were in Ames, graduating from Ames High and Iowa State; there were two brief but pivotal years in Iowa City, and eventually 24 years as a priest in Waterloo and mainly Dubuque. I may be fortunate to have lived and studied in different places in the country and even the world, but I LOVE this state and its people with their rootedness in the land and their deep faith, and I’ve always wanted to spend my life here serving others. I love the premium that people place on education, their no-nonsense approach to life

that is a healthy reality check for politicians and priests alike. I respect our culture's core values that find their nucleus in the family and community. Yet people are people, neighbors are neighbors, and so the diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and challenges and blessings that Iowans represent all contribute to the quality of life and human dignity that I believe finds its fullest expression in Jesus, the source of all life and goodness.

My greatest hope and heart's desire as a priest, soon-to-be-bishop, is that people have the graced chance to encounter Jesus, to experience his love and his mercy (as I certainly have!), and to form a friendship with him through Sacred Scripture, the life of the sacraments--especially the Eucharist--and through the communion we know with one another. Jesus is the truth I've staked my life on, but I am humbled and inspired when I am privileged to walk with other people and witness their deep goodness, the sacrifices they make for those they already care about and for those who don't believe God or anyone else cares for them—as Jesus indeed does. I want to do what the good priests of this Des Moines Diocese and other pastoral ministers and people of God do: bear the living water of Spirit to others (cf. Jn. 4:10), allowing them to draw compassion, hope and strength from the abundance Jesus has poured forth in his Cross and Resurrection. Part of the Spirit-led renewal called for these days is being ever true to our vocations so that we can help restore the bruised—for some, broken--trust that people hold for the Church. Likewise, if we are simple as doves and clever as serpents as Jesus counsels us to be, we know that we also need a good measure of prudence and fortitude to remain ever firm in the faith, to engage the many voices and spirits blowing in our own time that would confuse and scatter the flock.

As it seems I've been given the opportunity to become a shepherd and teacher of the faith, I want to accompany and occasionally navigate (as the son of a former Air Force navigator might be inclined to do) for people on their life's journey to heaven. Jesus saves us for the sake of his heavenly Father. That is our mission: to help God make this world become ever more the Kingdom, so that we can one day behold Jesus and his Father face-to-face. And in the process, we will see how beautiful we all are in the light of God's glory, starting with Jesus' Mom, Mary.

Me gustaría ofrecer algunas palabras, especialmente a nuestros hermanos y hermanas hispanos. Aunque mi español es de un nivel básico, sé que juntos hablamos un idioma común: el lenguaje del Evangelio, la creencia de que el Espíritu de Jesús nos habla, llamándonos juntos en la amistad, en la confianza y en el amor--en la casa del pueblo de Dios -la Iglesia. Espero colaborar con ustedes, comunicarme en diferentes niveles y aprender de ustedes cómo podemos servir mejor a Cristo y su Reino. Gracias por sus oraciones.

[Though my Spanish is only at a basic level, I know that together we speak a common language: the language of the Gospel, the belief that the Spirit of Jesus speaks to us, calling us together in friendship, mutual trust, and love, into the house of God's people—the Church. I look forward to collaborating with you, to communicating on different levels, and to learning from you how we can best serve Christ and his Kingdom. Thank you for your prayers.]

A friend of mine with whom I've served in ministry at Loras in the past, Fr. Bob Gross, once said to me, "Bill, wherever you are, you're all there." For roughly three decades, with timeout

for some more schooling, “there” was NE Iowa, specifically Loras College. But now God has called me here, and while it might take a little bit, I promise to be all here, pouring myself out for the people, the priests and religious of the Des Moines Diocese, and for the citizens of the metro area and SW Iowa, including members of various faith communities: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other traditions. This is an area of no small distinction: the seat of our state government, the World Food Prize Foundation, Drake University, Living History Farms, Mercy College of Health Sciences, Dowling and St. Albert’s High Schools, many corporate headquarters, and the vast number of farms and agriculturally related enterprises that make this Cyclone proud.

Of course, I am keenly aware that in undertaking this role, I am only taking the baton from those who’ve served with distinction for so long: starting with Bishops Dowling and Drumm, with successors like Bishop Digmann and his great passion for social justice, Bishop Charron with his compassion and approachability, and of course, the man standing here with me, Bishop Pates. I’ve witnessed Bishop Pates’ evangelical spark, his engaging personality, his love for Christ and for his flock, not only of this Diocese, but his work for the larger Church in his solicitude for immigrants and refugees and others looking for a place to call home. I’ve sensed his paternal regard and astute discernment for his seminarians whom he sent us at Loras, and for Loras students from the Des Moines Diocese whom he sought out as a good shepherd, just like Pope Francis instructs us to do. Like Elijah and Elisha, I will only partly be tongue-in-cheek as I ask him to throw his mantle over me and give me a double portion of his Spirit (cf. 2 Kgs 2:9)—which ultimately is THE Spirit in which we become brothers and sisters, united in one faith, one Lord, one baptism (cf. Eph. 4:5).