



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Ukrainian Catholics in Australia set to welcome new shepherd

Media Release

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Pope Francis has appointed Fr Mykola Bychok CSsR, currently in ministry at St John's Parish in New Jersey, the third Eparch of Sts Peter and Paul of Melbourne for Ukrainian Catholics in Australia and New Zealand.

Bishop-Elect Bychok will succeed Bishop Peter Stasiuk CSsR, who has served as eparch since 1992. Bishop Stasiuk, now 76, offered his resignation to Pope Francis upon turning 75, as canon law requires.

Fr Bychok was born and raised in the western Ukrainian city of Ternopil, feeling a call to follow Christ when he was a teenager. The Redemptorist Fathers, whose parish he regularly attended and whose zeal in preaching was an inspiration, helped him discern his vocation.

He entered the Redemptorist order in 1997, professing his first vows the following year. His studies in Ukraine and Poland included a focus on ministry to young Catholics. He was ordained deacon in 2004 and priest in 2005. His 15 years of ministry has included time in Russia, Ukraine and, for the past five years, in New Jersey.

Fr Bychok, who will turn 40 next month, said his preparation for ministry and his time as a priest offered many role models for him as a faithful Christian.

"I have met many witnesses of truly spiritual life with God – from bishops, priests, religious and faithful. Their examples are unforgettable," he said.

"I was enriched by them, learning what it means to be a Catholic in the third millennium. I hope that all the experiences from my priestly life will help me in my ministry as Eparch of Sts Peter and Paul in Melbourne."

Fr Bychok said he has never visited Australia but, since learning of his appointment, has spent time researching the country and the Ukrainian Catholic context, including from brother priests who have served in Australia.

"First of all I want to be with Ukrainians in Australia, listen to them and grow together as a community of faith in Christ our Redeemer," he explained.

As with other Eastern Catholic Churches with dioceses in Australia, which are in communion with Rome and the Holy Father, the Eparch of Ukrainian Catholics becomes a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

President Archbishop Mark Coleridge said he and his fellow bishops welcome Fr Bychok, who will be the youngest member of the Conference, saying he will bring a "fresh energy" to that group.

"But he will bring also the great richness of the Ukrainian Church and the powerful apostolic witness of the sons of St Alphonsus Liguori," Archbishop Coleridge said, referring to the founder of the Redemptorist order.

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“The bishops look forward to meeting Bishop-Elect Bychok and coming to know him in the years ahead. We look forward to working with him in service of the Gospel at this complex and challenging time for the Church in Australia.

“We pray for him as he prepares for his new mission in a new land and for the Ukrainian Church in Australia which will welcome him as their chief pastor.”

Fr Bychok acknowledged his age will allow him to bring a new perspective to the Bishops Conference. But, he said, he will also rely on the experience of other bishops to nourish his own faith and help him in his ministry.

Bishop-Elect Bychok will be ordained in the Ukraine, likely in a few weeks’ time. Bishop Stasiuk will serve as apostolic administrator of the eparchy until Fr Bychok arrives in Australia to take up his appointment.

Archbishop Coleridge thanked Bishop Stasiuk on behalf of the Bishops Conference for his “long years of faithful service in Australia, praying that he will enjoy a peaceful retirement”.