

Father James B. Bissonette

Chosen as Diocesan Administrator



On Dec. 4, 2019, Father James B. Bissonette, pastor of St. Raphael Catholic Church in Duluth and St. Rose Catholic Church in Proctor, was elected as diocesan administrator for the Diocese of Duluth.

Under church law, a group of diocesan priests called the College of Consultors elects the diocesan administrator, who will care for the diocese while it awaits the appointment of its new bishop by Pope Francis.

This process takes place shortly after a diocese (also known as a “see”) has become “vacant,” meaning it no longer has a bishop, often through an appointment of a bishop to some other post. The Diocese of Duluth became vacant with the sudden death of Bishop Paul Sirba on Dec. 1. Among the consultors are the deans of each of the five regions, called deaneries, in the diocese, who were key advisors to the bishop. Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph Churches belong to the Cloquet Deanery. The current dean is Father Justin Fish.

The role of the diocesan administrator, who takes on some of the obligations and powers of a diocesan bishop, is to maintain the diocese in its ongoing work until a new bishop is installed.

“I am humbled that the priest-consultors have placed their confidence in me to serve as diocesan administrator,” Father Bissonette said. “I ask prayers that I may fulfill my duties well. I also ask prayers for the faithful of this local church, that we might faithfully live the Gospel as we await the Holy Father’s appointment of the next shepherd for the flock in northeastern Minnesota.”

Father Bissonette also previously served as diocesan administrator before the appointment of Bishop Sirba.

New bishops are chosen by the pope, and there is no certain timeline for when that appointment will be made, but according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website, “it often takes six to eight months — and sometimes longer — from the time a diocese becomes vacant until a new bishop is appointed.”

To honor the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ as carried out by Bishop Paul D. Sirba,
memorial gifts may be sent to:

The Diocese of Duluth
2830 East Fourth Street
Duluth, MN 55812

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