

# New rector appointed for St. Joseph Seminary

Rev. Sylvain Casavant, a pastor and teacher for many years, has been appointed as the new rector of St. Joseph Seminary.

It's a position he's accepted with enthusiasm – and characteristic humour.

“My enthusiasm wavered a little bit. It's a position that demands a lot more attentiveness and responsibility. But, as well, I thought 'OK Lord, you've set this up. You've done this to me!'”

“God provides what he knows will be the best,” Father Casavant said. “We may not always see it, just like being called to become rector ... My faith tells me God is doing this for a reason and it will be for the greater good, more so than for the greater agony even though I fear the agony!”

Father Casavant has been appointed rector after his predecessor, Rev. Stephen Hero, was named bishop-elect of the Diocese of Prince Albert, Sask. on March 25. Father Casavant was vice-rector for a year under Father Hero.

Casavant is the ninth rector since priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice religious order were asked by Archbishop Joseph MacNeil in 1990 to manage St. Joseph Seminary.

“I thank Father Casavant for his generous acceptance of this responsibility,” Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith said in a March 26 statement, after consulting with the provincial council of the Sulpicians which recommended Father Casavant. “Let us all be sure to support him, and all members of the seminary formation team, with our prayers.”

As Father Casavant begins his new mandate, the main objective remains as always: Increase vocations.

“That is always the goal, not one of the goals. That is always the goal!” Father Casavant said.

This year there are 30 students at St. Joseph Seminary down from 35 last year. In 2018, there were 41.

In addition, as rector, Casavant leads the formation team. There are six priests on the formation team at St. Joseph Seminary, half of them Sulpicians. He also represents Archbishop Smith – “You're pastoring his seminary”, he explained – and ensures the seminarians are cared for.

“Our main goal is 'How are the seminarians doing? What's happening with their

discernment to the priesthood?’ That really becomes the major role of the rector,” Father Casavant said.

Sylvain Casavant was born in Granby, Que. in 1964 into a military family. Because of his father’s position, the family moved several times. The Casavant family has lived in Edmonton since 1970.

During his last year at Archbishop O’Leary High School, Casavant felt a call to consider the priesthood. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan. He began his studies at St. Joseph Seminary in 1986 and he was ordained in 1992.

Father Casavant served as associate pastor at St. Theresa’s parish in Mill Woods and then as pastor in Rimbey, Sylvan Lake, Bentley and Winfield. In 2001, he was appointed vocations director for the Archdiocese of Edmonton – a position he held for two years.

Father Casavant served at St. Francis Xavier parish in Camrose, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Bashaw and finally St. Thomas More in Edmonton. He completed his Licentiate in Theology degree in 2011 and began working at St. Joseph Seminary in August of that year.

Normally, the superior of the Sulpicians would meet with the formation team, Archbishop Smith, and others to discuss the succession plan. However, that was not possible due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Father Casavant said he wasn’t completely surprised by his appointment since there had been discussions last fall about Father Hero’s successor, as his current three-year mandate was ending.

Father Hero leaving the seminary formation team is a big change.

“It changes the dynamics of our formation community, the role that he’s played but also the friendship that we’ve had, being able to go for walks, having conversations at the dinner table,” Father Casavant said.

“We really do live in community for an extended period of time.”

Throughout the nine years that Father Hero was rector, there was only one vice-rector – Father Casavant – for a year. It’s Father Casavant’s prerogative now to appoint a vice-rector if needed.

“I’ll figure out what I’m doing for a couple of months,” Father Casavant said, “then I’ll say ‘OK. OK. Now I know. I need somebody to help with this!’”