

# Ottawa priest ordained as papal nuncio

Celebrating the feast of St. Joseph, Pope Francis ordained three new bishops who will serve as papal nuncios, or ambassadors.

The new bishops are: Archbishop Jose Bettencourt, a priest of the Archdiocese of Ottawa and former head of diplomatic protocol for the Vatican; Archbishop Alfred Xuereb, a Maltese who was general secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy and had served as assistant personal secretary to Pope Benedict XVI; and Archbishop Waldemar Sommertag, a career Vatican diplomat from Poland.

Archbishop Bettencourt will be nuncio to Georgia and Armenia; Archbishop Xuereb will take up posts as the nuncio to South Korea and to Mongolia; and Archbishop Sommertag will serve as nuncio to Nicaragua.

"I am really excited with my new service to the Church," Archbishop Bettencourt told Canadian Catholic News in an email. "First, and foremost, I am a priest like any other who has been asked to render a particular kind of service to the church—as a diplomat."

Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast welcomed the ordination.

"I was thrilled for him; this is the key type of service that he has been training for in the church," the archbishop said. "He has enjoyed his work in charge of protocol, but it is an extremely demanding office and he has done it very well."

"It required him to withdraw from even the limited parish ministry he would do in Roman parishes and I believe he missed that," he said. "This will give him an opportunity for "pastoral" work on a different level.

As Head of Protocol, Msgr. Bettencourt had been in charge of the diplomatic practices concerning the Holy See's relationships with other states. He welcomed visiting heads of state and presidents at the airport and dealt with diplomats and ambassadors accredited to the Vatican. He speaks English, French, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish.

Born in Velas, in the Portuguese Azores, on May 23, 1962, Bettencourt emigrated with his parents to Ottawa where he attended elementary and secondary school. He attended the Portuguese-language Parish of Senhor Santo Cristo. His widowed mother and brother and his family live in Ottawa.

He studied at the University of Ottawa where he obtained a B.A. in 1985; then studied theology at Dominican University College and Saint Paul University while preparing for the priesthood at St. Paul's Seminary.

"Msgr. Bettencourt is the soul of affability and cordiality," Archbishop

Prendergast said. "He is proud of his Portuguese and Canadian roots; his family, whom he visits often are simple, devout and open; they live close to Senhor Santo Cristo parish."

The archbishop said Bettencourt has remained close to his family and to the diocese, even though he has been away so long.

"He is the soul of discretion when it comes to his diplomatic service; still it is clear that he observes and understands the complexity of the Church's relation to the wider world," he said. "Wherever he serves, that country, I believe, will come to treasure his presence among them."

Archbishop Marcel Gervais ordained Bettencourt a priest of the Ottawa archdiocese on May 29, 1993. After serving in Ottawa parishes, he went on to get a doctorate in Canon Law at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was seconded to the Vatican's diplomatic service and began diplomatic studies at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy.

He served as secretary to the Apostolic Nunciature in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during a civil war, then returned to Rome to serve in the Secretariat of State section for Relation with States in 2002.

Pope Benedict named him a Prelate of the Papal ante chamber in 2007; and named him a Prelate of Honour in 2010.

"Over the years, Msgr. Bettencourt has been a great help to people from Ottawa and Canada, arranging for behind-the-scenes visits and special events," Archbishop Prendergast said. "All were uniformly grateful for his cordial hospitality and helpfulness. This will stand him in good stead in his new functions."

As is his practice, Pope Francis read the ritual homily for the ordination of bishops during the Mass March 19, but he added a few comments.

Reading the homily's reminder that a bishop is chosen to minister to men and women in the things related to God, the pope said they were not chosen for other tasks, "not for business, not for worldly affairs, not for politics."

After the reminder that bishops are called to take the position of the least and to serve, Pope Francis urged them to "flee from the temptation to be princes."

"Pray and offer sacrifice," the ritual homily urges new bishops. "Prayer is the first task of the bishop," the pope said, noting how when the widows of the early Christian community went to the apostles to complain that they were not being cared for, the apostles established the order of deacons to oversee the community's charity.

St. Peter explained to the deacons, “you do this, this, and this, and we will pray and proclaim the word,” the pope said. “A bishop who does not pray, does not fulfill his obligations. He does not live out his vocation.”

And, after reading the homily’s exhortation that bishops show special care for their priests, the pope added, “be close to priests, please. May they be able to meet the bishop the same day they ask (for a meeting) or at most a day later.”

– *With files from Deborah Gyapong, Canadian Catholic News*