

St. Joseph Seminary rector appointed as new bishop of Prince Albert

Rev. Stephen Hero, a former associate pastor and vocations director who grew up in Edmonton and spent nine years as rector of St. Joseph Seminary, has been appointed as the new bishop of Prince Albert, Sask.

The announcement was made in Rome on March 25.

"I feel very much at peace actually," Father Hero said in an interview. "There have been some sleepless nights, I admit. Everything happens very quickly. But I really believe that God works through the Holy Father and the bishops in making decisions like this ... there is a lot of grace required to say 'yes,' but I guess it kind of opens a floodgate to grace, and God will help.

"I'm being sent now to these people to evangelize," Father Hero said. "I'm seeing myself as a missionary, working with a whole bunch of other good people there, trying to preach the Gospel. I see my role then to help build up the Catholic Church there, to help people come to faith in Jesus Christ through the Word, through the salvation of the sacraments, and to be one with each other and with Christ."

The current Bishop of Prince Albert, Albert Thevenot, has announced that he will be retiring. The diocese has scheduled a news conference for 9:30 a.m. March 25. More information will be available on the Facebook page of the Diocese of Prince Albert.

"It's a great announcement for the Church for sure. I have no doubt about that," said Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith, adding he had mixed feelings about the announcement.

"I guess the mixed reaction comes from a little bit of selfishness because I, like many people here in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, will be sad to see now-Bishop Elect Hero leave the Archdiocese. He has been a great presence here, a great servant of the Lord and servant of the Church. He has had a huge impact. Who wants to see that coming to an end? I don't.

"We have long known that he has wonderful leadership capacity," Archbishop Smith said. "He will be a wise, gentle, caring, and clear shepherd of the people entrusted to his care."

Read Archbishop Smith's blog

Stephen Andrew Hero was born in Lachine, Que. on Dec. 19, 1969, the youngest and only brother of four siblings. Kathleen Anne Hero and Louis Stephen Hero

lived with their children in Dollard-des-Ormeaux on the island of Montréal until Stephen was 10.

Hero moved with his family to Edmonton in December 1980. Discerning a call to priesthood while still in high school, he entered the Seminary of Christ the King in Mission, B.C. and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy in 1994.

Hero began theological studies at St. Joseph Seminary in Edmonton and was sent to Rome by Archbishop Joseph MacNeil to complete his theological studies at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Father Hero was ordained in Rome as a deacon for the Archdiocese of Edmonton by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) on Oct. 7, 1999 and he completed his Licentiate in Theology degree in June of 2000. Returning to Edmonton, Hero was ordained a priest on June 29, 2000 by now-Cardinal Thomas Collins, who was the Archbishop of Edmonton at that time.

Father Hero served as an assistant at St. Theresa's Parish in Mill Woods, Holy Family Parish in St. Albert, and as vocation director for the Archdiocese of Edmonton. He was asked to return to Rome for further studies in 2003 and obtained a Licentiate in Liturgical Theology from the Pontifical Liturgical Institute at Sant' Anselmo in 2005.

Since the fall of 2005, he has been a member of the formation team at St. Joseph Seminary and a lecturer at Newman Theological College in the areas of spirituality, liturgy, and sacraments. He has also taught regularly in the formation program of the Permanent Diaconate in Edmonton, and assisted on their formation team as well.

In the fall of 2010, he was appointed as vice-rector of St. Joseph Seminary. Two years later, he was appointed rector. Father Hero was appointed the Archbishop's deputy delegate for Safe Environments and Abuse Prevention in 2018.

"Happiness and sadness. It's a combination" is how Rev. Sylvain Casavant, vice-rector of St. Joseph Seminary, described hearing the news of Father Hero's appointment.

"I'm happy for the people of the Diocese of Prince Albert. They need someone who is faithful, who is able to lead them, and Father Stephen has done a good job of leading us for the last nine years in the seminary. He has a gentleness. He has a strong faith and is willing, really, to offer the fullness of himself in whatever he endeavours always in an atmosphere of continual prayer."

An announcement is expected this week on Father Hero's successor as rector of the seminary.

Under normal circumstances, the nuncio (papal representative) in Canada would

invite a candidate to Ottawa. However, with COVID-19 restrictions, Father Hero said he was informed of the decision over the phone by the nunciature.

“I was working on a homily for Mass that day, preaching in a few hours and got an unsettling phone call,” Father Hero joked. Within 24 hours, Father Hero had sent a letter to the Holy Father, through the nunciature, accepting the appointment.

Father Hero said he had travelled throughout Saskatchewan, but had not been to the City of Prince Albert until he was there this week. Hero said he will be researching his new diocese, which historically has a connection to Edmonton as part of the larger Diocese of St. Albert in the 1800s and its first bishop, Vital Grandin. And he is looking forward to meeting his community, which has large indigenous and rural population.

“In any rural diocese in western Canada, a lot of young people move away from home for education and for work ... and sometimes they stay away,” Father Hero said. “That’s challenging for the Church and for families.”

As bishop, Hero said his years at the seminary, and as a pastor and vocations director, has helped him work with young people to discern their vocation to priesthood, religious life, or marriage.

“I’ve really come to see the faith of people,” Father Hero said, “and I have been very edified by people in the parish. I know how much we need each other. People need the priests, and the priests need the people, so we build each other up in faith.

“Hopefully I’ve learned to have a listening heart,” Father Hero said.

“I love Edmonton. It has been my home,” Father Hero said. “I will certainly miss my family and friends, the priests that I have been ministering with here; the Church here in Edmonton which has really nourished my faith in so many ways as a teenager and young adult.”

Father Hero said he will miss hiking and jogging in the North Saskatchewan River valley. Moreover, to the friends, family, and the Edmonton community he’s leaving behind, Father Hero said: “I kindly ask people to keep praying for me. They’ll all be in my heart in the future, not far away.”

Send your congratulations, comments and well-wishes to Bishop-Elect Hero

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