

UPDATE: Pope names auxiliary bishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis to Crookston, Minn.

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Pope Francis has named Auxiliary Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of St. Paul and Minneapolis to head the Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota.

He has been an auxiliary bishop for the Minnesota archdiocese since 2013. A native of Denver, he was ordained a priest for St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1997.

His appointment to Crookston was announced in Washington Oct. 18 by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Bishop Cozzens succeeds Bishop Michael J. Hoeppner, whose resignation was accepted April 13 by Pope Francis. As requested by the pope, Bishop Hoeppner, 71, resigned following a 20-month investigation into allegations that he mishandled claims of clergy sexual abuse.

The pope appointed retired Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, to serve as apostolic administrator of the Crookston Diocese until the appointment of a new bishop.

Bishop Cozzens, 53, will be installed as the eighth bishop of Crookston Dec. 6 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Crookston. Prior to the installation, he plans to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving Nov. 28 at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul.

“I am grateful to our Holy Father for entrusting to me this important mission and my heart is already filled with love for

the faithful, the priests and the religious of the Diocese of Crookston," he said in a statement from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis Oct. 18. "I have great excitement for this opportunity to serve."

"At the same time, I also grieve the fact that I will be leaving my home," he said.

"After almost 25 years of serving in the archdiocese, I have immense love and gratitude for the innumerable ways the people, priests, religious and bishops have blessed and formed my life," Bishop Cozzens said.

"The life of the church in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis is vibrant, and in many ways, unparalleled in our country," he said.

"I have experienced personally that God is doing incredible things here through so many good people who love Christ and his church, and I expect that to grow as the archdiocese brings the synod to completion and begins a new phase of evangelization," he added.

Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis said the archdiocese is honored that Pope Francis has chosen "our auxiliary" to be Crookston's shepherd.

"I am not surprised that Pope Francis would have seen in him the extraordinary priestly gifts that have long been recognized by the priests and faithful of this archdiocese who have come to know him and love him as an energetic and capable shepherd with a huge heart, sharp intellect, and unfailing love for Christ and his church," he said in the archdiocesan statement.

Born Aug. 3, 1968, Andrew Harmon Cozzens is the son of Jack and Judy Cozzens and the youngest of three children. He attended Catholic grade school, high school and college.

He is a graduate of Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, where he grew in faith through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Prior to entering the seminary, Bishop Cozzens served from 1991 to 1992 as a team leader of NET Ministries, a traveling missionary outreach to youth. NET stands for National Evangelization Teams.

His first NET Ministries assignment was to the Crookston Diocese. The following academic year, he was co-director of campus outreach of St. Paul's Outreach, a college campus ministry. Both NET and St. Paul's Outreach have their headquarters in the Twin Cities.

As he discerned priesthood, Bishop Cozzens and a small group of other men formed the Companions of Christ, a fraternal community of priests and seminarians that has since established communities in the Archdiocese of Denver and Diocese of Joliet, Illinois. The organization received canonical recognition in 1992.

As an auxiliary bishop, Bishop Cozzens has assisted Archbishop Hebda in leading the archdiocese and has been at the helm of several initiatives, including as chairman of the executive team for the 2022 archdiocesan synod, a process that began in 2019.

He has served as vicar for Catholic education and overseen the archdiocesan offices of Latino Ministry, Evangelization, and Marriage, Family and Life.

He served as interim rector of St. Paul Seminary from June 2018 until January 2019 and has long been a leader in national efforts to strengthen seminary formation.

He is president of the board of directors of the Seminary Formation Council and also is the president of the corporate board for the Institute for Priestly Formation in Omaha,

Nebraska.

He is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, and in that position is leading a three-year National Eucharistic Revival that will begin in June. He also serves as chairman of the board of NET Ministries and St. Paul's Outreach.

Bishop Cozzens' episcopacy has coincided with exposure of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

As an auxiliary bishop, he helped lead the archdiocese through a Chapter 11 bankruptcy from 2015 to 2018 that involved more than 450 abuse claims and resulted in a \$210 million settlement with victim-survivors.

He also was involved in working to resolve criminal and civil charges filed against the archdiocese in 2015 related to its handling of clergy sexual abuse. That case and its settlement brought about serious, positive reform in the archdiocese's culture and safe environment efforts, Bishop Cozzens has said.

A month after he was ordained bishop, he also became involved in an internal investigation of sexual misconduct against Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, who led the archdiocese from 2008 until he resigned in 2015.

Bishop Cozzens later called that investigation "doomed to fail" because it was conducted internally and without its leaders having authority to act. He joined other U.S. prelates calling for a national, independent structure to investigate bishops accused of wrongdoing.

A structure was ultimately established worldwide through Pope Francis' 2019 legislative document "Vos estis lux mundi," which revised and clarified norms and procedures for holding bishops and religious superiors accountable for protecting abusers.

In his statement, Archbishop Hebda praised Bishop Cozzens for “his steadfast advocacy for those who had been hurt in any way by the church, his passion for Catholic education and evangelization, his creative guidance of our synod process, and his love for immigrants, refugees and those on the peripheries.”

These qualities have “have all left what I hope will be an indelible mark on me and on this archdiocese.” He added.

Located in northwest Minnesota, the Diocese of Crookston was established in 1909. It comprises 17,210 square miles and 14 counties.

According to its website, it has about 35,000 Catholics in 66 parishes served by 41 diocesan and three religious order priests; eight Catholic grade schools and one Catholic high school; and three Catholic hospitals and two Catholic nursing facilities.

It is considered “entirely rural in nature,” the diocese’s website states, with farming, logging and tourism as its main industries.

Contributing to this story was Maria Wiering, editor of The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.