Bishop Harry Flynn says goodbye at a Thursday press conference

**Flynn bids adieu, predicts succession will take time**

**By Bill Decker**

Staff Writer

Archbishop Harry J. Flynn says the search for his successor as bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lafayette could take months, maybe as much as a year.

And recent decisions by the church have increased the possibility that the new bishop here will be black, Flynn said at a Thursday press conference marking his appointment as coadjutor archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis, Minn.

"The church is certainly looking to the African American community for this kind of leadership," Flynn said.

"Certainly we do have a large number of African Americans in this diocese, more so (as a percentage of the population) than in any diocese in the United States," Flynn, who last year made the controversial decision to close financially troubled and all-black Holy Rosary Institute, said the church has recently appointed new black bishops in Memphis, Tenn., and Belleville, Ill.

He said two other minority bishops serving in Atlanta and Los Angeles passed away recently.

"There is certainly the possibility that my successor could be an African American priest," Flynn said.

In April Flynn will be installed as coadjutor to Archbishop John Roach.

Within 10 days of Flynn's departure, a group of ranking clergymen, called consultants, will choose a temporary priest-administrator for the diocese until the Vatican appoints a new bishop.

The papal pro-nuncio in Washington D.C., Agostino Cacciavillani, will compile a list of recommendations for submission to Rome.

That's a rather lengthy process and it has been taking some time for the process to be completed," Flynn said.

The bishop said in interviews that the succession process may take nine to 12 months.

Flynn said he learned about the appointment by Pope John Paul II in a phone call from Cacciavillani two weeks ago.

I responded that I would do anything that our Holy Father asked me to do, and that I wholeheartedly accepted the appointment," Flynn said.

The news became public Tuesday in a press conference in Minneapolis. Reporters "kept asking me, 'What is your program? What are your goals?'"

"I said the only goal that I had is the goal that I had when I came to Lafayette ... and that is to make Jesus Christ known and loved."

Flynn, 60, said he will miss the diocese he has served since 1986, when he was appointed coadjutor bishop to Gerald Frey. Flynn held that post until he succeeded Frey in 1989, when Frey retired.

A native of New York state, Flynn is the fourth bishop in the 76-year history of the Lafayette Diocese. He moves to a diocese with three times the civil population, nearly three times the number of church schools and twice the number of Catholics as the Lafayette Diocese.

The archbishop, who worked for 20 years at a Maryland seminary, will lead an archdiocese in which the church runs St. Thomas University, with an enrollment of 11,000.

Flynn's appointment means he will one day chair the university board.

There is a sense of excitement going to a new territory and doing something for the church in that territory," Flynn said. "But at the same time there's a poignancy and a certain pain in leaving that which I've known and that which I've come to love."

As coadjutor, Flynn has the right to succeed Roach, 72.

Roach has served as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and is known as a liberal on some matters of doctrine.

Flynn wouldn't speculate on the reasons for his appointment.

"It's always hard to figure out how that exactly works," Flynn said.

Archbishop Roach has been greatly respected in the conference and has had a very warm relationship with the representative of (John Paul II), and with the Holy Father himself."