Hundreds crowd cathedral, nearby school

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Hundreds of clergy and other Catholic faithful welcomed the Most Rev. John Douglas Deshotel as the new bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette at a ceremony Friday in a packed Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist.

About 300 yards away, in the Cathedral Carmel Elementary School gymnasium, a 200-person crowd without the invitation needed to enter St. John's watched a live-stream broadcast of the bishop's installation. The ceremony lasted about 90 minutes.

Lafayette will accept the Most Rev. John Deshotel "warmly. From what I know of him, he's very Cajun."

KATHY BOURQUE, Installation attendee

The Most Rev. John Douglas Deshotel walks by clergy members outside the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist before his installation as the seventh bishop of Lafayette on Friday.

Advocate staff photo by LESLIE WESTBROOK

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Members of the Neocatechumenal Way of Louisiana play music outside of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Lafayette on Friday before the installation of the Most Rev. John Douglas Deshotel.

DESHOTEL

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Among those taking part were Archbishop Gregory Aymond, of the Diocese of New Orleans; Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature Monsignor Walter Erbi, a Vatican representative; and retiring Lafayette Bishop Michael Jarrell.

In his first homily in Lafayette, Deshotel spoke from the Gospel of St. John, telling of Christ’s message that his body and blood are spiritual sustenance needed to enter heaven.

“My flesh is real food. My blood is true drink,” Deshotel recited.

Kathy Bourque waited outside the cathedral for the ceremony to end, and for the long procession of deacons, priests, bishops and an archbishop to file out.

She said Lafayette will accept Deshotel “warmly. From what I know of him, he’s very Cajun.”

Deshotel, 64, was born and raised in Basile, a small town in Evangeline Parish where he was ordained a priest in 1978. He is the third of eight children born to Welfoot and Luna Deshotel. He’s been in Dallas since his ordination and there, rose to auxiliary bishop for the diocese. Deshotel said Friday that many of his friends from Dallas traveled to Lafayette to witness Friday’s installation.

During his years in Texas, Deshotel lost the distinct accent that comes from growing up in Cajun country. Bourque, who works for the Lafayette Diocese, predicted the accent will return to Deshotel “very quickly.”

His assignments in Dallas included associate pastor and pastor at a number of churches, and he was vice rector of Holy Trinity Seminary in Irving, Texas, serving on a variety of church boards and councils.

In February, soon after Pope Francis decided that Deshotel should be the seventh bishop in the Diocese of Lafayette, Jarrell introduced him to local Catholics at The Immaculata Center in Lafayette. Jarrell had been bishop in the Lafayette Diocese since 2002, when he succeeded Bishop Edward O’Donnell. In May, Jarrell announced his plans to retire.

Deshotel said in February his plans for the eight-parish diocese include reaching out to the growing number of Hispanic and Vietnamese residents, many of whom do not speak English.

The Diocese of Lafayette takes in the parishes of Lafayette, Acadia, Vermilion, Evangeline, St. Landry, St. Mary, St. Martin and Iberia.

Of the hundreds who attended Deshotel’s installation Friday was Leon J. Flusche, one of the faithful who did not have a ticket to get into the 566-seat cathedral.

Flusche, a family counselor from Arlington, Texas, near Dallas, said he knew Deshotel. Choking up and tearing up, Flusche said, “I think he’s great.”