Diocese of Lafayette announces Basile native as next bishop

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The Diocese of Lafayette introduced its new bishop Wednesday by welcoming home The Most Rev. J. Douglas Deshotel, a Catholic priest born in Basile who has served in the Diocese of Dallas since being ordained in 1978.

"I have to begin by first thanking Pope Francis for his trust and for his desire to send me here and serve the Diocese of Lafayette," Deshotel said. "I'm very humbled." He will replace Bishop Michael Jarrell, who announced his plans to resign in May, upon reaching the mandatory Catholic Church retirement age of 75 for bishops. Deshotel will be the seventh bishop for the Diocese of Lafayette, which was established in 1918.

Deshotel's appointment to Lafayette was first announced Wednesday in Washington by the papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano. An announcement by the Lafayette Diocese followed. But it's not official yet. Acadiana Catholic managing editor and diocese spokeswoman Stephanie Martin said Deshotel will continue his role of auxiliary bishop in Dallas until his installation to the Lafayette post is made sometime later this year. Martin said she will alert the public when it becomes official.

See a video from the outgoing and incoming priests at www.theadvocate.com.

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The news conference Wednesday at the Catholic Diocese's Immaculata Center was a jovial affair. "I, however, started right here in this room," Deshotel said, speaking to a crowd of about 150 from behind a lectern in the gym of The Immaculata Center, a Lafayette Diocese facility off Carmel Drive in Lafayette. He said that as a 14-year-old he played basketball and watched movies in the gym.

Jarrell, who has been bishop going on 14 years, poked fun at what was apparent: Deshotel has been in Dallas so long he lost the accent of his youth in Basile, located in Evangeline Parish.

"Are you Cajun?" Jarrell joked.

"I can take my shoes off and show you I have webbed feet," Deshotel replied, adding later that he is happy to be returning to the "very rich Catholic culture of south Louisiana."

Deshotel, 64, was born in Basile in 1952, the third of eight children of Welfoot and Luna Deshotel. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Dallas 37 years ago by then-Lafayette Bishop Maurice Schexnayder, who conducted the ceremony in Basile. In 2010, Deshotel was ordained an auxiliary bishop in Dallas.

His assignments have included associate pastor and pastor at several churches in and around Dallas. Deshotel also was vice rector of Holy Trinity Seminary in Irving, Texas, and served on the Diocesan Presbytery Council, the Diocesan Priests' Personnel Board, Diocesan Finance Council and on the Dallas bishop's senior staff.

Deshotel's post to the Lafayette Diocese is his first outside the Dallas area. When he is permanently settled in Lafayette, he'll have ecclesial and administrative domain in the diocese's eight parishes in Acadiana: Lafayette, Iberia, St. Mary, St. Martin, St. Landry, Evangeline, Acadia and Vermilion.

Deshotel noted Wednesday the diocese's growing Hispanic and Vietnamese populations, and said he wants to conduct an accurate count of those residents, many of whom do not speak English.

Deshotel, who speaks some Spanish and can conduct Mass in the language, said the children in the homes often are bilingual when their parents are not. He said he wants to gauge the extent to which the clergy in the Lafayette Diocese can communicate with those not native to south Louisiana. He said it is important that religion lessons taught in English be reinforced at night by parents.

Jarrell, an Opelousas native, was ordained into the priesthood in 1967 at the age of 27. His first assignment was in the Lake Charles Diocese as a teacher at Landry High School, now St. Louis High School, for five years. He then took associate pastor and pastor positions at churches in Acadiana, including at Sacred Heart Church in Broussard and Sacred Heart Church in Ville Platte.


Jarrell said Wednesday he will stay in Lafayette after retiring.

"I'm going to work closely with the priests and encourage them in their work to build up the parishes," he said.