New bishop named for BR
Boston native to succeed Ott

By FRED KALMBACH
Advocate staff writer

An Irish-American from Boston is to become the next Roman Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, church officials announced Tuesday.

Alfred C. Hughes, the 60-year-old auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston, told reporters at a news conference Tuesday that it’s important for the church “to be conserving what is at the heart of the faith.”

Hughes added that, at the same time, the church must connect with society to make the church’s teachings “come alive.”

Hughes, who is to be installed Nov. 4, will lead the estimated 223,000 Catholics in the diocese.

He will succeed the late Bishop Stanley Joseph Ott, who died last November after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Father John Carville, who has served as diocesan administrator since then, said he will feel relieved to turn over the leadership of the diocese to Hughes.

Ott and Hughes knew each other through their service with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Hughes described Ott as a “joy to be with,” and said they shared common interests and concerns.

“We developed a certain affinity because of our stature,” quipped Hughes, who is short and slim, like Ott was.

Hughes, who described himself as an avid racquetball player, said he is pained to be leaving Boston — where he has spent almost his entire life — but excited about coming to lead the diocese in Baton Rouge.

While Hughes has been to New Orleans several times, Tuesday marked his first visit to Baton Rouge.

“I ask you to receive this pilgrim from the North as your brother in the Lord, committed to walk the journey of faith with you, and your father in the Lord, desirous to be the shepherd Christ asks me to be for you,” Hughes said.

Church employees and volunteers who gathered Tuesday at the Catholic Life Center to applaud and meet Hughes expressed delight at the prospect of soon having a new bishop. Several said they hope Hughes will be as active in the community as Ott was.

“I think we need a pastor more than an administrator,” said Tom Abel, director of the Marriage and Family Life office.

Sister Mary Michaeline, superintendent of schools for the diocese, said she’s pleased with Hughes’ appointment. Michaeline referred to his background in education and said she hopes he will support the schools.

Hughes is a longtime administrator and teacher at several colleges, including St. John’s Seminary in Boston.

Rabbi Barry Weinstein, of B’Nai Israel Synagogue, Tuesday said he looks forward to meeting and working with the new bishop.

Weinstein said he developed a close relationship with Ott.

“Bishop Ott helped set the tenor and the model of interfaith relationships,” Weinstein said.

Weinstein said he’s optimistic that the ecumenical spirit will continue.

Patricia Hannie — president of the League of St. Michael the Archangel, Baton Rouge, a conservative Catholic group — said she’s pleased with Hughes’ upcoming appointment, though she doesn’t know much about him.

“We’re very willing to work with him,” Hannie said.

Hughes is serving in Boston as the top administrator under Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston.

Hughes said that, as bishop here, he hopes to be “a little more realistic” in his scheduling and set aside time for study and prayer.

“A significant portion of the role of being bishop is to have time to think and pray well,” Hughes said.

Sister Michaeline had a message for Hughes, who said he is Boston Irish, “third-generation on both sides.”

“Be sure to tell the new bishop that we do have a St. Patrick’s Day parade,” she said.

The Rev. Frank Uter, far left, videotapes Bishop Alfred C. Hughes, far right, during a tour of St. Joseph Cathedral Tuesday. With Hughes are, left to right, the Revs. Tom Ranzino and John Carville and Monsignor Bob Berggreen.

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