

An estimated 1,000 people attended the ordination of Bishop Michael J. Hoepfner at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Friday.

Hundreds more watched the historic event unfold via an Internet site established to provide live coverage.

Some people having trouble accessing the site hurried to the cathedral trying to find a seat, with many still able to find space at the rear of the church.

"We couldn't get the ordination on the computer right away, and I didn't want to miss it," said Benedictine Sister Norma Jean Edie, who hurried to the church from Mount Saint Benedict Monastery.

"After all, we haven't seen a bishop ordained here for 31 years. This is a big event." So big, that Catholics came from miles to witness the event, some waiting hours "just to get a good seat."

"I didn't have to travel for miles," said St. Joseph Sister RuthAnn Scherer. "But I was at the Cathedral by 10:30 a.m. just the same. If you wanted to get a good seat, that's what you had to do.

"And I, for one, didn't want to miss anything."

More than 50 Knights of Columbus dressed in full regalia, some with bright purple plumage on their hats, led the long procession into the church as music from the large pipe organ joined with loud blasts from the trumpet section, filling the church with music of triumph.

The knights were followed by dozens of deacons and priests, most from the Diocese of Crookston, but also several from other dioceses including Winona, where Bishop-elect Hoepfner served as vicar general for three terms.

Then, no less than 19 bishops outfitted in flowing red robes and tall, white miters, the traditional headdress of bishops, entered the church. People in the pews looked up from their hymnals and momentarily stopped singing to watch as the procession swept by. The assembly included several bishops who graduated with Bishop-elect Hoepfner in 1975 from the North American College in Rome. With the ordination of Bishop-elect Hoepfner, the class of 1975 now has the highest number of bishops from any class at that college.

Also included in the assembly was Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the pope's apostolic nuncio in Washington, D.C., who initially contacted Father Hoepfner on his cell phone months earlier, telling him he had been designated the seventh bishop of Crookston.

"I don't think he's stopped smiling since," said bishop-elect's sister Patricia, who along with other members of the Hoepfner family carried gifts to the altar during the Mass celebration.

Also smiling since the news was announced has been Crookston Bishop Victor Balke, now 76.

Bishop Balke submitted his resignation more than a year ago at age 75, when bishops are allowed to do so. He has served as the shepherd of the Crookston diocese for a record 31 years, and retires with the distinction of being the only bishop in the United States to serve one diocese that long.

The final man in Friday's ordination procession was Archbishop Harry Flynn. Dressed in flowing red robes, he wore a tall red and gold miter and carried a gold-toned crosier, the staff traditionally carried by bishops.

He took his place at the bishop's chair at the head of the church, from which he presided.

The ceremony began with a welcome to all guests, and the request for ordination of Father Michael Hoepfner to the office of bishop.

Archbishop Sambini then read the apostolic letter of Pope Benedict XVI, announcing his appointment of Father Hoepfner and outlining the expectations of his new role in the episcopate.

“Go therefore and make disciples...inspiring them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always until the end of the age,” Archbishop Sambini read.

“These words, from our blessed savior, clearly define the spirit of every bishop.”

“So, on this beautiful feast of St. Andrew the apostle, the church of Crookston rejoices.

“By the supreme apostolic authority we appoint you bishop of Crookston,” he said, in a thick accent.

As he concluded reading the letter, the people stood and loudly applauded, indicating their consent of Bishop-elect Hoepfner’s ordination.

Readings from the old and new testaments and the gospel message were then proclaimed. All those present sang *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

Archbishop Flynn then addressed Bishop-elect Hoepfner, and all present on the duties of the bishop.

“Lastly and gratefully, I ask you to welcome our brother, whom now we bishops admit into the college...” he said.

“He has been entrusted with the task of bearing witness to the truth of the gospel, and with a ministry of the spirit of God.

“Remember the Lord spoke to the apostles - whoever listens to you, listens to me. And whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

“And so our brother Michael, chosen by the Lord, consider that you are chosen from among men and appointed on their behalf for those things that pertain to God,”

Archbishop Flynn said to Bishop-elect Hoepfner.

“Remember, Michael, the title of bishop is a title of service.

“This is the way of the master.”

He spoke of listening to others and wholehearted devotion to seeking grace for others, from the fullness and the holiness of Jesus Christ.

“In this church, entrusted in you today, be a faithful and moderate guardian as one chosen by the father,” he said.

“Be mindful always of the good shepherd. Know your sheep and let them know you.

“Do not hesitate to lay your life down for them, perhaps not in a bloody fashion, but in a fashion in which you are willing to say no to yourself for their sake, so that God’s wonderful people might grow and flourish here in this diocese.

“And with the parity of the father and a brother, love all who God has placed in your care.”

After the archbishop concluded his homily, he went through a series of questions, an examination, of Bishop-elect Hoepfner. The bishop-elect then publicly expressed his “fidelity to the apostolic faith of the church” and the church’s liturgical, pastoral and social mission.

Everyone present then joined in prayer.

Bishop-elect Hoepfner then knelt before Archbishop Flynn, now seated in the bishop's chair. The archbishop laid his hands on bishop-elect's head, a traditional gesture to express the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Walking from the bishop's chair, he then knelt near the altar. Bishop Balke was the next to lay his hands on bishop-elect's head, removing his zucchetto before doing so.

Then all the bishops present, forming a straight line, took turns doing the same, each saying a silent blessing as they did so.

A large Book of the Gospels was then held over Bishop-elect Hoepfner's head by two deacons, one on each side, to express the power of the Word of God over the life of the new bishop.

Bishop Hoepfner then knelt again in front of Archbishop Flynn, who anointed his head with sacred chrism oil, a final sign of the outpouring of the spirit.

He was then presented with symbols of his ministry - the bishop's ring, miter, and crosier or pastoral staff, which reflects the role of a bishop as a shepherd of the church.

Bishop Hoepfner was then embraced by each of the bishops present in a gesture of welcome into their ranks.

The altar was then prepared for Mass, with the gifts presented by Bishop Hoepfner's family.

As the Mass concluded, Bishop Hoepfner now seated at the bishop's chair stood and walked to the ambo, the lectern where the readings are proclaimed.

"Are we having fun yet?" he asked smiling, as everyone laughed.

"That's a line from one of my classmates, but my dad always used to say, 'Tell me you're having fun.' So we're having fun.

"There are so many people to thank and my heart is so full. So many who have contributed so wonderfully for this day and these days."

The first one he thanked was God.

"God is so good to us, and I thank God every day now for his special call to be a successor to the apostles, and to be here in this wonderful church," he said.

"Please continue to pray that I would be a holy and good bishop here."

He thanked the pope for his choice, his appointment, and for placing his confidence and trust in him

Bishop then thanked his parents, Joseph and Ann Marie, now deceased.

"They are responsible for me being here this day," he said. "They were two very loving people for whom family was everything. I know they are rejoicing this day from their wonderful vantage point in heaven."

His list of thanks was long, and included all the bishops, especially Bishops Balke and Bernard Harrington of Winona, his family, friends, his mentor Father Andrew Fabian, the people at the Diocese of Winona, the people of the Diocese of Crookston, the religious communities, and all those who worked so hard to make his ordination special.

"And if I've missed anyone please know that I thank you too," he said, as he momentarily paused.

"Last week I was asked, 'Do you have any final thoughts for the people of this diocese,'" he added.

"I said, 'Tell them they have a bishop who loves them.

"So I tell you, you have a bishop who loves you."

An audible sigh of happiness rolled through the cathedral as people in the pews smiled at their new shepherd. They then stood and applauded.

And the new bishop who loves them, walked amongst his flock blessing all present.

As organ music filled the cathedral and voices were lifted in song, the long line of knights, deacons, priests and bishops recessed from the church to a reception hosted by the Sisters of Saint Benedict at the monastery.

There, Bishop Hoepfner greeted hundreds of people who stood in line to speak to with the new shepherd of the Diocese of Crookston.