

Bishop lands squarely in a visible role

Hispanic cleric sees his Detroit mission

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FREE PRESS RELIGION WRITER

November 28, 2006



Msgr. Daniel Flores, 45, of the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas, is a new auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Detroit at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. (October 2006 photo by KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/Detroit)

5 questions for Flores

• What do you drive?

He's leaving his Chrysler Sebring behind in Texas and buying a Pacifica.

• Favorite movies?

"Casablanca" and "The Lord of the Rings" series, because "these movies are about courage, patience and never losing heart."

• Favorite popular music? "Music to me is a powerful way to evoke memory. Because my dad

[Fernando Javier Flores, who died in 1984] was a veteran of World War II, I still love the Big Band music that he loved, like Benny Goodman and songs by Frank Sinatra. And I love Mexican music, especially the songs of Augustine Lara, who wrote in the 1940s and 1950s."

• Favorite Bible passage? "When Jesus is speaking to Peter ... and tells him, 'Feed my sheep.' "

• Guest of honor at your ordination? His mother, Lydia D. Flores, 74, of Corpus Christi, Texas.

To attend ceremony

The ordination of Catholic Bishop-elect Daniel Flores will begin at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament, 9844 Woodward Ave., Detroit. It is open to the public.

As Catholic Bishop-elect Daniel Flores prepares to be ordained Wednesday as Michigan's first Hispanic bishop in a mainline denomination, it's clear he's also poised to become a hugely popular ambassador for his church.

Among other gifts, he's movie-star handsome and speaks with a deep, resonant voice to match.

Hispanic Catholics especially are thrilled that he finally arrived Sunday evening to settle into his new home.

For now, he is based at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. His ordination is to take place Wednesday afternoon at Detroit's Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

"I did not even have a dream that we would ever see a Hispanic bishop here in Detroit, so we are very happy that he is coming," Monsita Velez, a member of Ste. Anne's parish in Detroit for nearly three decades, said Monday.

But there's a lot more to Flores than his heritage.

On Monday, he said he is proud to serve as a unifying figure for Hispanic Catholics but his most enduring influence in the six-county Archdiocese of Detroit could extend far beyond the growing Spanish-speaking community. Of the 1.3 million Catholics in Lapeer, St. Clair, Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Monroe counties, at least 128,000 are Hispanic, though the number is believed higher, the archdiocese says.

Detroit Cardinal Adam Maida has asked the 45-year-old Flores to focus on vocations, the Catholic term for recruiting more young priests. Flores said he's ready for the challenge.

"I've found that young people have a deep longing to give their lives to something that will make a difference in the world," Flores said. "I am a teacher. I love teaching. And the mission of teaching in the church is always aimed at generating the gift of love in people. ... So I'm going to enjoy visiting our parishes and our schools and talking to people."

The Rev. Maurice Restivo, who worked as a colleague of Flores for the last five years at St. Mary's Seminary in Houston, Monday said the new bishop is well-suited to that larger challenge.

"I can tell you he's a phenomenal teacher, a very intelligent man and a very caring person," said Restivo, who is visiting Detroit this week to attend the ordination. "Students love him."

Flores said that interesting young people in the priesthood is a matter of simply showing them the work that parish priests traditionally perform. After all, that's what drew him to the priesthood as a teenager in his native Texas in the 1970s, he said.

"I had been thinking of law as a career, and my family really encouraged that," Flores said. "But, around age 16, I began to think more about the way the priests in our parish in Corpus Christi served people.

"What profoundly impressed me was the realization that these men gave their lives as a gift to the community. Because of that, they became an important part of so many other people's lives. I saw them serving the sick and elderly, visiting people throughout the community. That made a big impression on me."

While Flores is proud of his Hispanic heritage, he also is a cosmopolitan bridge builder.

Asked about his favorite foods, for instance, he said his family is Mexican-American, and he likes to taste the endless variations of traditional Mexican dishes.

"Every home makes a little different version of carne guisada and arroz con pollo," he said, referring to Mexican beef stew and rice with chicken. "But I also love Vietnamese food ... and I've been to the Middle East, and I love Arab food."

Of course, that kind of public admission means that Flores is likely to be stuffed with such foods in coming years.

At Ste. Anne's, Velez said, "Hmmm, so he likes carne guisada and arroz con pollo, does he? Well, those are Mexican dishes, and I'm Puerto Rican, but I can tell you: We Puerto Ricans know how to make it, too."

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