

Statement from Bishop Mark J. Seitz on Appointment as Bishop of El Paso  
May 6, 2013

I would like to begin by thanking Pope Francis for the confidence he has placed in me by calling me to serve this historic and extraordinary Diocese.

One never knows for sure what God has in mind. He is full of surprises for me and for you. I grew up in Wisconsin never imagining that I would live anywhere else. Then I found myself entering the seminary in Dallas thinking I would return to a seminary in Wisconsin after a couple of years. I fell in love with Texas and with the Church of Dallas. In 1980 I was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Dallas.

My life took another totally unexpected turn when, 3 years ago the Bishop of Dallas, Bishop Kevin Farrell, called me into his office. As I was entering his office he said prophetically, "I'm about to turn your life upside down." Since that time I have actually begun to like being upside down, because I have found that the Lord is there with me.

I have not anticipated any of this but the simple fact that it is not my plan or my doing gives me hope. I know the Lord will supply for my defects because this is His Church. If I allow it God will use me as His instrument.

Last Saturday a new surprise came my way in the form of a call from the Papal Nuncio to the United States. He informed me that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, had named me the next bishop of El Paso. All I could say was "Wow!"

Admittedly, I didn't know very much about the El Paso Diocese, but I did know that the Church had been planted here by the earliest missionaries little more than a generation after Europeans first came to the Americas. I knew that this was a region of Texas that I have always wanted to see. From my experience of the State in its other regions the word 'Texas' and 'mountain' did not come together. I am struck with the beauty of this place!

I have since begun to learn of the history of the Church here, with the wonderful diversity of cultures and the holiness of so many of her members. You have active Catholic communities of the First Americans. I have long admired Native American culture which has been so beautifully highlighted with the canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha in the past year. I was also raised to be proud of the small seasoning of Native heritage that is part of my ancestry.

Of course a large percentage of the Church here is of Hispanic origin. One of the greatest joys of my priesthood has been to serve the Latino communities in the parishes where I have ministered. Estoy aprendiendo el idioma de español. Todavía habla con errores, pero espero que ustedes puedan corregirme. He recibido mucho de la cultura Hispana, de su espiritualidad, sus valores de familia y comunidad. Debo confesar que también tengo un gran amor para la comida Mexicana.

My intention and my desire is to serve the entire community here without distinction of race or culture. But I do have one bias I hope to effectively share, that is a preferential love for the poor. I will do my best to emulate the poor myself by living simply and not putting my trust in material things. Like Pope Francis has said I too would like the Church to be poor and to be for the poor.

In my heart there is also a special place for those who have suffered from abuse, especially sexual abuse by members of the clergy. I pray that I may help bring healing to any who have suffered this terrible violation of their human dignity and I promise that it will be among my highest priorities to assure the safety of our children and vulnerable adults who are all so dear to the Lord.

I am very grateful to Bishop Ochoa for the warmth of his welcome and the assistance he has already given me. His loving and effective leadership provides me with a model I hope to build upon.

I am looking forward particularly to meeting the priests and deacons of the Diocese, both diocesan and religious. You will be my primary co-workers and my brothers. Already I have heard of your goodness and your labors.

Women religious, active and contemplative are among the greatest treasures of any diocese. I understand we have a number of religious brothers as well. What a joy it will be to get to know you and work with you!

I am anxious in these coming months to meet as many of the people of the diocese as possible, to visit parishes and Catholic institutions. I will listen a lot because I have a lot to learn. You will be my teachers. With the help of God and through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe I promise to give my all to work in collaboration with all of you as we open this new chapter in the life of this great Diocese of El Paso!