



Pope names delegate to Lourdes for care of pilgrims



Pope Francis has named Bishop Antoine Hérouard, auxiliary of Lille, France, as his special delegate charged with the pastoral care of pilgrims visiting Lourdes. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, announced the appointment at the French Marian shrine on Thursday.

By Andrea Torielli

The decision is in line with the one already taken in 2017 for Medjugorje. Pope Francis has shown his particular concern for the care of pilgrims, and desires that centres of Marian devotion should become “ever more a place of prayer and of Christian witness corresponding to the needs of the People of God.” This is seen in the letter that the Pope has sent to Bishop Antoine Hérouard, auxiliary Bishop of Lille, France, in which he communicates to him the decision to nominate him as delegate *ad nutum Sanctae Sedis* (that is, “at the disposition of the Holy See) for the sanctuary of Lourdes.

The papal letter was read in the small centre of the Pyrenees, the site of one of the most popular Marian apparitions in history, in the presence of the chaplains and administrators of the sanctuary. It was made public at noon on Thursday, 6 June, by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, the Dicastery which two years ago Pope Francis entrusted with the duty of promoting the pastoral care of sanctuaries. As noted in the letter, in recent months Abp Fisichella himself has undertaken a mission as “special envoy” to the sanctuary that each year sees millions of pilgrims coming from every part of the world.

“Following the assessment” of Abp Fisichella, the Pope writes, “I desire to understand what further form the Sanctuary of Lourdes might adopt, beyond the many already in place, in order to become

ever more a place of prayer and of Christian witness corresponding to the needs of the People of God.”

The mandate of Bishop Hérouard, who continues in his position in Lille, is limited to the sanctuary alone, while the Diocese of Tarbes and Lourdes remains entrusted to Bishop Nicolas Jean René Brouwet. It should be noted that the appointment of the delegate is not for an indefinite period of time (as was the case of Archbishop Hoser to Medjugorje); and this means that it is intended not as a permanent charge, but a temporary one, aimed at the pastoral and spiritual care of pilgrims. Pope Francis, who has this care very much at heart, wishes to accentuate the spiritual primacy over the temptation to overemphasize the managerial and financial aspect; and wants to promote ever more the popular devotion that is traditional in sanctuaries.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium gaudium*, the Pope wrote that, “Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on.” Pope Francis continues, citing the Aparecida Document containing the conclusions of the meeting of the Latin American episcopate, which took place in Brazil’s most important Marian sanctuary. He recalled “the riches which the Holy Spirit pours forth in popular piety by his gratuitous initiative,” affirming that “‘Journeying together to shrines and taking part in other manifestations of popular piety, also by taking one’s children or inviting others, is in itself an evangelizing gesture.’ Let us not stifle or presume to control this missionary power!”