

STATEMENT OF THE MOST REVEREND
GEORGE JOSEPH LUCAS
ARCHBISHOP-DESIGNATE OF OMAHA



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Today Pope Benedict XVI has appointed me the fifth Archbishop of Omaha and the tenth bishop to lead this local church. It is humbling to be given such responsibility by the Vicar of Christ, and I thank the Holy Father for this privilege. I renew my pledge of loyalty and respect to him today and for the days ahead.

I thank Archbishop Curtiss for his warm welcome and for his kindness in recent days since I have learned of my appointment. The archdiocese is indebted to him for his 16 years of generous leadership and service to the people of God here. I have known Archbishop Curtiss for a few years. While I was rector of Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in Saint Louis in the late 90's, Archbishop Curtiss served as a member of the seminary board. I look forward to the assistance of his experience that he has promised to give in the days and years to come.

During my years as rector of Kenrick, I was able to visit the Archdiocese of Omaha a couple of times – once for an ordination and once for a first Mass in Columbus. I know some of the priests who were seminary students while I was rector. On those brief visits, the vitality of the Catholic Church in Northeast Nebraska was very apparent to me. Since I learned of my appointment, I have been studying the archdiocesan Web site, and my initial impressions have been reinforced, even through cyberspace.

This archdiocese has a rich history. I am arriving here 150 years after the arrival of Bishop James O'Gorman, the first Vicar Apostolic of Nebraska. Now at this time, the risen Christ is preached and made visible in so many vibrant apostolates. It is clear to even the casual observer that Catholic education is an important priority across the archdiocese. I look forward to being not a casual observer but an active participant in this effort. Vibrant parish life, animated by the Holy Spirit, is so evident in rural, urban and suburban communities. There, Catholic family life is supported and enriched. Through organized programs and in individual choices, Catholics extend the charity and justice of Christ himself to their neighbors in countless ways each day. All of this is given unity and meaning in the Holy Eucharist.

I look forward to learning about all of the ways in which the gospel is preached and lived in the Archdiocese of Omaha. I have a great deal to learn, and you all have much to teach me. I will rely on the generous collaboration of baptized and confirmed lay faithful, of those dedicated to the Lord in consecrated life and of the many deacons who have responded to the Lord's call to service. I will depend in a particular way on the diocesan and religious priests who stand at the head of communities across the archdiocese in the person of Jesus Christ. I

offer my fraternal greetings in a special way to the priests. Not only will I depend on you to teach me about the varied aspects of Catholic life here, I will depend on you to support me, as I support you, in shepherding God's people according to the mind and heart of Christ. Jesus is the true head and shepherd of this local Church. We, as the presbyterate of the archdiocese, must seek always, by God's grace, to become more perfectly configured to him in our lives and ministry.

I look forward to meeting our diocesan seminarians who are being formed for the sacred priesthood. It will be my happy responsibility in the days to come to invite many others to join their ranks and to give encouragement to all who support religious and priestly vocations in the archdiocese.

I am sure that together – people, clergy and archbishop – we will experience many blessings and face many challenges as we witness to Christ clearly, with charity and without compromise. It is Jesus who has brought us together – it is up to us to keep him at the center of all we say and do in the church. Then we can be confident that he will bring us to life with our sins forgiven in the house of his Father, whom he has taught us to call our Father.

The joy and anticipation I feel about my appointment to this great archdiocese is tempered today by some sadness at having to leave the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, which has been my home for nearly 10 years. I ask you to join me in praying for the priests and people of that diocese who will now be facing a transition of their own. In fact I have been praying a lot lately for you both. Almost every day since I have learned of my appointment to Omaha, I have gone out to celebrate Confirmation at parishes in central Illinois. I pray the rosary while I drive and I have been offering those prayers for both dioceses. In my years as a bishop particularly, Mary has been a great teacher and support, especially at times of challenge or change. I count on you to pray with me that she will intercede for us all and teach us how to become more wholehearted disciples of her son Jesus Christ.