

Life as a bishop's episcopal secretary

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PALM BEACH GARDENS

What exactly is an episcopal secretary?

Over the past 10 months, many Catholics may have noticed a young priest who seems to accompany the bishop in his travels throughout the diocese. Quite often he is seen driving the bishop to parishes or schools. At other times, he is observed in the sanctuary before Masses celebrated by the bishop, organizing readings, directing altar traffic or just attending to last-minute details of the liturgy. Sometimes he can be found carrying the bishop's personal items – vestments, miter or crozier.

His office is located on the second floor of the pastoral center in Palm Beach Gardens, not far from that of the bishop. He is here and he is there. Attending to this, taking care of that. What is he doing? Who is he? Is he a chauffeur, a valet, a butler, a man Friday? If your answer were, "Yes," to any or all of these questions, you would be correct.

Ask Father Brian King, who, on July 1, became the second episcopal secretary to a bishop of the Palm Beach Diocese. Father King's predecessor, Father Mario Castaneda, who now is parochial vicar at St. Rita Parish in Wellington, served the former bishop, now Archbishop Seán Patrick O'Malley, OFM Cap, of the Boston Archdiocese, during the bishop's 10-month tenure in Florida.

Hmmm, new bishop, new episcopal secretary, could it be just a coincidence?

"Absolutely. That is exactly what it is," says Father King, in an interview with *The Florida Catholic*. "While my assignment as episcopal secretary was effective on July 1, the same day the appointments of Archbishop O'Malley and Bishop Barbarito were announced by the Vatican, it was purely a coincidence. I was appointed several months ago by Archbishop O'Malley, well before the appointments of the archbishop and bishop," he said.

According to Father King, the episcopal secretary is far more than an administrative assistant to the bishop. In the sometimes frenetic seven-day-

a-week schedule of the diocesan leader, it can make all the difference in the world.

"I am whatever the bishop needs me to be, when he needs me," he said.

The son of a devout Northern Irish Catholic mother and British High Anglican-turned-Catholic father, Father King was born in Jamaica Feb. 23, 1970. His early years were spent in Jamaica and Belize, until he moved to Coral Gables, where he attended Gables High School.

He attended the University of Miami as a pre-med student and switched majors when he transferred to the University of Florida, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting in 1990. After graduation, Father King worked for four years as a financial analyst for the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative.

When asked about his vocation, Father King said he had thought about it early on in life.

"When I was 6, I wanted to marry a neighbor named Linda and be rich and I also wanted to be the pope. I told my mother that I wanted to be pope. She told me that I had to be a priest first. I said, 'Forget that, I want to be the pope.'"

His mother patiently again explained that he couldn't just be pope, that priests couldn't get married, and that the papacy was the highest order in the Catholic Church. He asked his mother if that meant he would be in charge.

"When she said, 'Yes,' I said, 'Good. Then I would make Linda the co-pope.'"

He still laughs at the memory.

Father King's sense of humor has stayed with him over the years. While he has grown intellectually and spiritually, he loves people and his church, it is apparent that he still loves a good story of which he has many.

Take for instance how he was selected to become episcopal secretary to the bishop. As he tells it, he was in the company of Archbishop O'Malley one evening. During a casual conversation, the archbishop asked if the young priest would consider becoming an episcopal secretary. He told the archbishop, "No," that his dream was to be an associate priest in one par-



TFC PHOTO BY JOANNE HAMEL

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ish, to get to know the people, their children, and their grandchildren, and be lost there for the rest of his life.

Archbishop O'Malley told Father King that was also his dream.

"The archbishop was laughing, and so was I," Father King said. "But then he asked me if I would do it and I told him that if my bishop is asking me, then I'll do it. ... The hardest vow isn't celibacy, it's obedience."

He explained that the few weeks he spent with Archbishop O'Malley before his move to Boston were very stressful for the archbishop.

"He was getting calls galore, from Boston, from Rome, the media. I just tried my best in the midst of everything, in all that stress, to make him laugh. I would try to keep it lighthearted, and I love jokes so I told him a lot of one-liners to make light of the situation, just to make him laugh. I tried to bring just a little happiness for just a short period in his very stressful life."

In addition to comic relief, Father King's responsibilities as episcopal secretary will include driving the bishop to diocesan events, scheduling appointments, serving as master of ceremonies for events in which the bishop is celebrant, organizing liturgies and readings, performing introductions at recep-

tions, and very importantly, acting as a sounding board for the bishop at the end of the day.

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He will also continue his work in the Hispanic ministry at the Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola in Palm Beach Gardens. Father King is fluent in Spanish, French and English, and can read and understand Italian, Latin and Portuguese.

An intellectual, he graduated valedictorian of his class at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach, where he received a master's degree in theology in 1999 and a master's degree in divinity in 2000. He was ordained a priest May 20, 2000.

Over the last three years since his ordination Father King has been assigned as parochial vicar at St. Juliana Parish in West Palm Beach. He said it was difficult to leave the parishioners and students who attend the school.

"I've been a priest now for three years and they have been the happiest years of my life," he smiled.

Bishop J. Kevin Boland and the people of the Diocese of Savannah extend prayerful congratulations to Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito on his installation as Bishop of Palm Beach.



*In Solidarity With Our New Shepherd
We Welcome and Congratulate
Bishop Gerald Barbarito*



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