



Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Gerard W. Battersby is pictured in an undated photo. Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Battersby to succeed Bishop William P. Callahan of La Crosse, Wis., 73, whose resignation for health reasons he accepted March 19, 2024. The changes were publicized in Washington by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States. (OSV News/courtesy Archdiocese of Detroit)



by OSV News

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Washington — March 20, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



Bishop William P. Callahan of La Crosse, Wis., is seen in this undated photo. Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Callahan, 73, from the pastoral governance of the the west-central Wisconsin diocese for health reasons March 19, 2024, and appointed Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Gerard W. Battersby as his successor. The changes were publicized in Washington by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States. (OSV News/courtesy Archdiocese of Milwaukee)

Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop William P. Callahan, 73, from the pastoral governance of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin, for health reasons, and has appointed Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Gerard W. Battersby as his successor.

The resignation and appointment were publicized in Washington March 19 by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Bishop Battersby, a Detroit native, was named a Detroit auxiliary bishop Nov. 23, 2016, and ordained to the episcopate Jan. 25, 2017. He will be installed as the 11th bishop of La Crosse May 20 at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman.

Callahan has headed the west-central Wisconsin diocese for 14 years, but made national headlines three years ago by removing from his pastorate a controversial priest who later revealed himself to be a sedevacantist and openly called for the pope's death.

In a statement, Callahan called it a privilege to serve as La Crosse's shepherd. "During this time, I have been blessed with numerous wonderful memories. I am grateful for the meaningful prayers and reflections that have connected my heart and soul with joy and gratitude," he said.

"I look forward to continuing my service to Bishop Battersby and spiritual service to brother priests and deacons in La Crosse. I am grateful for the opportunity to remain in this wonderful community for as long as God allows, and I will cherish the memories and experiences I have had here," the now-retired bishop said.

Callahan turns 74 June 17. At a late morning press conference in La Crosse, he noted that in 2025 he turns 75, the typical age at which bishops submit their resignation to the pope under canon law.

He said his tenure has been "just amazing" and praised the diocese "for all of the good things" accomplished during that time.

"I'm getting a little long in the tooth and everything hurts," Callahan added, without elaborating on why he chose to retire now. "Thank you for the good things that we have accomplished in the Diocese of La Crosse and we are certainly looking forward to new ones that are going to be accomplished."

Before making his remarks, Battersby asked those at the press conference to stand and give Callahan a round of applause.

"I'm very cognizant of those who have preceded me, Bishop Callahan and all those before him. I'm cognizant of the fact that these are superior men of faith, dedicated churchmen, men who are in their very heart disciples of Christ," Battersby said. "I thank God for them and ask you with me to continue to pray for them. I'm also aware that God has something new planned for La Crosse, and I mean that not because I'm here and I'm special, but because Jesus is Lord and he is risen, and we, me, are his witnesses.

"This is a great day for La Crosse because the Lord has done great things and he has shown his light upon us. It's a time for renewal. It's a time for new beginnings. ... it's the time for us to remember that we are a Eucharistic people."

"I'm grateful to be able to say to the world that I am your bishop," he added.

In a statement issued when his appointment was first announced, Battersby said he received the news "with joy."

Advertisement

"When I was baptized, ordained a priest, and consecrated a bishop, I received a call within a call, an invitation to follow," he said in a statement. "The Risen One has bid me to follow him to western Wisconsin, to the banks of the Mighty Mississippi. I leave with hope and anticipatory joy."

Since his episcopal ordination, Battersby has been at the forefront of the Archdiocese of Detroit's efforts to implement Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron's pastoral vision laid out in the archbishop's pastoral letter, "Unleash the Gospel." He served as chairman of the archdiocese's Unleash the Gospel Pastoral Council in addition to his role as moderator of the archdiocese's South and later Northwest regions.

Vigneron said the Detroit Archdiocese has been blessed by the gift of Battersby's ministry. He said, "Like a truly joyful, missionary disciple, Bishop Battersby has always faithfully answered the call to go forth in new ways to share the Good News of Christ."

"The gift of Bishop Battersby's ministry now goes to the people of La Crosse," the archbishop added. "The priests, religious, and faithful of Detroit send him there with our heartfelt prayers of gratitude."

The youngest of nine children along with his twin brother, Gerard William Battersby was born May 15, 1960, to the late Christopher and the late Helen (Buckley) Battersby. In 1993, he entered Sacred Heart Major Seminary and received a master of divinity degree in 1998, being ordained to the priesthood by Detroit Cardinal Adam J. Maida.

After ordination, he served in parish ministry for about 10 years, including as pastor of St. Christopher Parish in Detroit. In 2007, he was appointed to Sacred Heart Major Seminary, where he received a licentiate in the new evangelization in 2008.

While serving as director of graduate seminarians and graduate pastoral formation at the seminary, then-Father Battersby also served concurrently as administrator of St. Leo Parish in Detroit. In 2009, he was assigned to graduate studies at the Angelicum in Rome. In 2011, Battersby was appointed vice rector and dean of seminarian formation at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. In 2015, he was concurrently appointed pastor of St. Mary of Redford in Detroit. The same year Vigneron appointed him as vicar forane in 2015, followed a year later or so by his appointment as a Detroit auxiliary.

Callahan, a Chicago native who was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee April 30, 1977, is the first Conventual Franciscan to be named a bishop in the U.S. He was named an auxiliary bishop for Milwaukee by Pope Benedict XVI Oct. 30, 2007. Before that he was spiritual director for the Pontifical North American College in Rome for two years.

Last May, Callahan launched a three-year initiative called "Rebuild My Church," which seeks to continue and update the efforts accomplished in the last 17 years by bishops, clergy and laity toward strategic planning in the La Crosse Diocese.

Three years ago, in July 2021, Callahan made national headlines when he removed Father James Altman as pastor of St. James the Less Parish in La Crosse. The pastor had stirred controversy since the fall of 2020 when he criticized Catholic Democrats from the pulpit, saying they must "repent" because of the party's support for legal abortion or "face the fires of hell."

In 2021, he called the U.S. bishops "ineffective" for "their failure to stand up against the godless government over the past 14 months," referring to the pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions that all houses of worship had been required to follow to stem the spread of the virus. Altman was barred from public ministry and removed from his pastorate after refusing to back down from his statements.

A diocesan statement issued July 9, 2021, said Callahan "and his diocesan representatives have spent over a year, prayerfully and fraternally, working toward a resolution related to ongoing public and ecclesial concerns" about Altman's ministry. "The obligation of a bishop is to ensure that all who serve the faithful are able to do so while unifying and building the body of Christ," it said. "In accordance with the norms of canon law," the statement said, Callahan issued "a decree for the removal" of Father Altman as pastor, which is "effective immediately and for an indeterminate period of time."

Altman revealed himself as a sedevacantist in a 2023 video where he publicly called Pope Francis a "heretic." He has called for Pope Francis' death and likened him to the devil. Currently, the priest has a website that he describes as his "virtual office."

The Diocese of La Crosse covers just over 15,000 square miles and has 135,268 Catholics out of a total population of about 875,000. In addition to 156 parishes and 65 schools, the Diocese of La Crosse is home to St. Rose of Viterbo Convent, the motherhouse of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration; and the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which opened in 2008.