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Biography of Bishop-elect James D. Conley

In his 23 years as a priest, Bishop-elect James D. Conley has served the Catholic Church in a wide variety of ways—as pastor, college campus chaplain, director of Respect Life ministries, theology instructor and a Vatican official. In all of these tasks, he has seen his life as a priest as a call to service and complete surrender to “God’s providential hand.”

For his episcopal motto, Bishop-elect Conley, a convert to the Catholic faith, has chosen the same motto as the great 19th century English convert, John Henry Cardinal Newman, “*cor ad cor loquitur*” which means “heart speaks to heart.”

Early Life and Family

Born March 19, 1955, in Kansas City, Missouri, Bishop-elect Conley is the son of Betty and the late Carl Conley, long time residents of Overland Park, Kan., a suburb of Kansas City. He has one younger sister, Susan, who is married to Daniel Atkins and resides in Olathe, Kan. They have two children, Kyle, 21 and Kaitlyn, 15. Bishop-elect Conley is of Wea Indian descent.

When he was 2 years old, his family moved to Denver, Colo. and then two years later moved to Arvada, Colo, where Bishop-elect Conley attended public school at Hoskinson Cottage School. The family moved back to Kansas when he was 8 years old and resided in Overland Park, where he attended public grade school and high school.

Academics and Vocation

In 1973, Bishop-elect Conley graduated from Shawnee Mission West high school in Overland Park and enrolled in the fall as a freshman at University of Kansas. He graduated in 1977 from University of Kansas with a bachelor's degree in English Literature.

While in college, he studied in the University of Kansas's Integrated Humanities Program, a well-known classical great books program. During his junior year, he converted to the Catholic Church on Dec. 6, 1975. His mentor and teacher in the Integrated Humanities Program, Professor John Senior, was his godfather.

After college, Bishop-elect Conley worked on a farm in north central Kansas and traveled Europe. In 1980, he entered seminary for the Diocese of Wichita. He received philosophical formation at St. Pius X Seminary in Erlanger, Ky., and his theological formation at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., where in 1985 he earned a master's degree in divinity. In 1989, his bishop sent him to Rome, where he earned a licentiate in moral theology from the *Accademia Alfonsiana*, part of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University.

Priestly Life

On May 18, 1985, Bishop-elect Conley was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Wichita. For the first few years of his priesthood, he served as associate pastor at St. Patrick Parish in Wichita and then as diocesan director of the Respect Life Office.

In 1991, after earning his licentiate in Rome, he was appointed pastor of St. Paul parish (Newman Center) on the campus of Wichita State University, while continuing his service as director of the Respect Life Office. He had the privilege in 1991 of baptizing both his mother and father and receiving them into the Catholic Church.

Bishop-elect Conley was called back to Rome in 1996 to serve the Holy See as an official in the Vatican Congregation for Bishops. In Rome, he also served as chaplain to the University of Dallas Rome Campus from 1997 to 2003 and as adjunct instructor of theology for Christendom College Rome Campus from 2004 to 2006.

On Feb. 9, 2001, Pope John Paul II named him “chaplain to his holiness” with the title monsignor.

After 10 years of service at the Holy See, Bishop-elect Conley was called back to Wichita Diocese and named pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish, effective August 1, 2006, until the present.

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