

Bishop Robert Byrne to succeed Bishop Séamus

POPE Francis has named Bishop Robert Byrne to succeed Bishop Séamus Cunningham.

He will be installed during Mass in St Mary's Cathedral on March 25, Feast of the Annunciation, as the 14th Bishop of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

At a press conference in Cathedral House, Newcastle, on Monday, Bishop Byrne, 62, said he wanted to help disadvantaged people and to care for priests. He said he wanted: "to be a pastor for the specially poor and marginalised" and highlighted unemployment concerns following Nissan's recent production announcement.

He said: "I would like to listen and to help. There is a lot of poverty, and I would like to address it. The care of priests is also important – priests are there to care for the people and bishops have to care for the priests."

He also told Northern Cross that prisons were a special interest and said he intended to

visit prisons in the diocese.

Born in Manchester in 1956, Bishop Byrne said he was a proud Mancunian who wanted to make his home in the diocese.

His said his first job would be to get to know the local community and other church leaders, and become a true disciple trying to live out the message Pope Francis gave England's bishops during their Ad Limina visit to Rome.

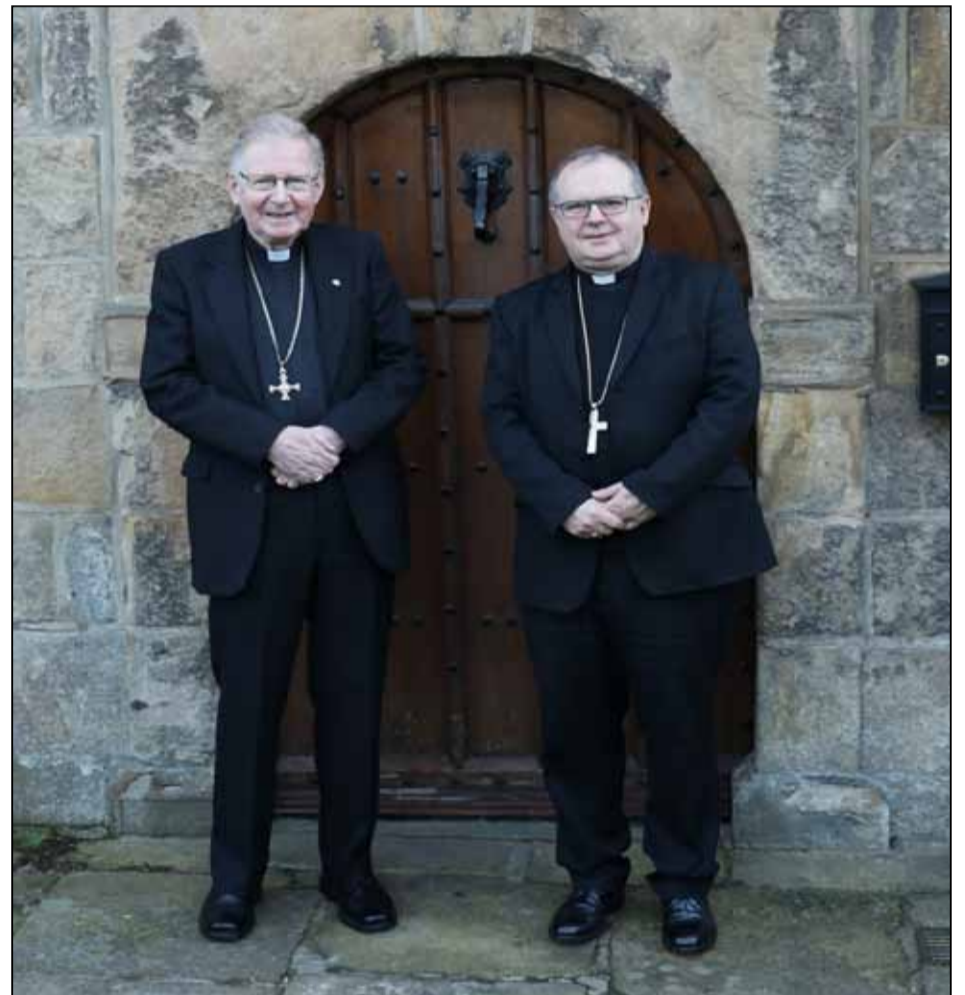
Welcoming his successor, Bishop Séamus said that spiritual formation remained a big issue, and that the clergy and laity must move forward together.

At Pope Francis' request, Bishop Séamus will serve as apostolic administrator until March 25.

He submitted his resignation to the Pope in July 2017 and intends to remain in the diocese after retiring, living in Seaburn.

Tributes have poured in for Bishop Séamus since the announcement was made.

John Bailey and Alison Rebello.



Looking to the future...Bishops Séamus and Robert.

Announcement chimed with Papal proclamation

AS THE noon Angelus was being said in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, the announcement of the 14th Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle was being made at 11am in the Cathedral Church of St Mary's, Newcastle.

Diocesan press officer Monsignor Andrew Faley told reporters: "The Holy See today announced that Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Robert Byrne as the 14th Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle."

Bishop Séamus Cunningham said: "I am pleased to welcome Bishop Robert Byrne as my successor. I have been appointed as

the apostolic administrator by Pope Francis until Bishop Robert's installation. So now I must decrease, and he must increase."

The Rt Rev Robert Byrne Congregatio Oratorii is an Oratorian priest. His society is known as the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri.

He began his ministry in the Birmingham Oratory, co-founded by Cardinal John Henry Newman, before moving on to Oxford.

Bishop Byrne is the second appointment from the Archdiocese of Birmingham, following Bishop

Séamus Cunningham's predecessor, Bishop Kevin Dunn.

The bishop designate said: "I look forward to meeting everyone and especially the marginalised."

He told the press conference that during a recent visit to Rome the Pope had told him to tell people about "the deep joy of being with Christ".

Bishop Byrne added: "I have already done that in the diocese where I am now and I deeply believe that Jesus Christ has a message for the world.

"I want to be an instrument for the people in the diocese of Hex-

ham and Newcastle, to get to know the civic society here, the Anglican bishops, clergy, laity and others within the North East."

After the press conference Bishop Byrne greeted men and women who were entering the cathedral for midday Mass, and surprised them by introducing himself as the new bishop of the diocese.

Many stood up in awe and one even kissed his ring. He showed warmth and good humour to all.

Bishop Byrne will move from Birmingham to Newcastle on St Cuthbert's feast day, March 20.

Don't miss the special commemorative pull-out giving thanks for Bishop Séamus in March's Northern Cross, out on March 3.