

**REMARKS OF CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF THE MOST REVEREND STEVEN J. MAEKAWA, O.P.**  
**AS SIXTH BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS**  
**CARLSON CENTER – FAIRBANKS, ALASKA**  
**OCTOBER 12, 2023**

Your Excellency Archbishop Bellisario and all of my brother bishops; dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and members of the faithful; dear friends:

It is my pleasure to be with you today as the personal representative of Pope Francis. When Pope John Paul II visited Fairbanks in 1984, he said:

“Today I am here in person to give you the assurance that I have not forgotten you. Even when I am miles away, I hold the people of Alaska and those of the whole of the United States close to me in my heart. I do not forget you, for we are linked by bonds of friendship, of faith and of love.”<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, Pope Francis wants you to know of his spiritual closeness and paternal affection, even though he cannot be here in person.

Archbishop Bellisario, thank you for the care that you have given to the people of God in this local Church for the last year. I know that you, together with the people, are joyful because of what we celebrate today. Ever since the transfer of Bishop Zielinski to Minnesota last fall, the people of this Diocese prayed faithfully for their next Shepherd. Three months ago, they were introduced to the man they had been praying for, Fr. Steven Maekawa. And today, we all rejoice in his ordination as the 6<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Diocese of Fairbanks.

Bishop-elect Maekawa, thank you for your “Yes”. Not only for your “Yes” to Pope Francis when he elected you to be a bishop this year, but for your “Yes” more than 30 years ago, when you responded to God’s call to enter formation with the Order of Friars Preachers, and eventually to become a priest.

Your “Yes” to God has taken you many places, and has involved you in ministries of great variety. You have directed a campus Newman Center; served as a military chaplain, including a deployment to Afghanistan; cared for those discerning their vocations; and you have been a parish priest, most recently here in Alaska. By saying “Yes” to God’s plan for your life, you have allowed the Holy Spirit to work for the care and salvation of many people. Not only that, but you have brought others along in this missionary work, including some of your fellow Dominican friars.

With your “Yes” to this new calling to be a bishop, we have every reason to believe that God will continue to spread the Gospel of Jesus to many people and places, especially throughout the great expanse of central and northern Alaska. May the example of your “Yes” to God inspire many others, including the young, to say a similar “Yes” to God’s invitation to follow him.

Now, I will read the Papal Decree appointing you as Bishop of Fairbanks.

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<sup>1</sup>Address of Pope St. John Paul II to Authorities and People of Alaska, Fairbanks Airport, Alaska, May 2, 1984.