

Donovan's leaving his office, but not retiring

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The Most Rev. Paul V. Donovan may be resigning as bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Kalamazoo, but odds are he won't spend much time relaxing.

"I'm not retiring," Donovan said Tuesday, joking with his successor, Bishop Alfred John Markiewicz of New York. "You don't want that."

Donovan plans to remain active in the community and the church, but said he decided to step down after 23 years because of health reasons.

He said he isn't ill, but lacks the energy required of a diocesan bishop.

The Rev. Eugene Sears, pastor at St. Joseph Parish in St. Joseph, will serve as temporary administrator of the diocese until Markiewicz is installed Jan. 31.

Donovan, 70, said he has a long list of projects to keep him busy.

His top priorities include helping Markiewicz, presiding over confirmation Masses to help other overtaxed bishops, reaching out to the area's poor and minorities and making quiet time for prayerful reflection.

"I've always had a deep desire to have time for contemplation, for quiet prayer," Donovan said.

He's found little spare time for that since being ordained the first bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo in 1971, when the diocese was formed.

For more than two decades, church officials said, Donovan built the diocese "from scratch," setting up its structure, programs and services. That hasn't left much time for soul searching.

"When you're a bishop, people are asking you to do things all the time," he said.

Donovan said he found it ironic that a churchgoer once remarked how nice it must be for Donovan to "be his own boss."

"I have 100,000 bosses," Donovan quipped, referring to the 104,000 Catholics who live in the diocese's nine southwestern Michigan counties.

Working with and for that many people over the years has brought tremendous rewards too numerous to recount, said Donovan, who was ordained as a priest in Lansing in 1950.

"It's just been a real privilege to serve . . . nine counties of these people," he said. "They are beautiful people. I have been well loved."

Donovan said he considers community members' increased participation in church activities as among the most memorable accomplishments of his tenure.