

# Father Lavastida named Notre Dame Seminary head

By PETER FINNEY Jr.

Father José I. Lavastida, who has served since 1998 as academic dean of Notre Dame Seminary, has been named the new president-rector of the seminary by Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes, effective July 31.

Father Lavastida was the unanimous recommendation of the search committee of the seminary's board of directors, and the executive committee ratified the recommendation at a meeting June 26. Father Lavastida will succeed Father Patrick J. Williams, who has served as president-rector for the last seven years.

"I feel great about it," Father Lavastida, 46, said. "There is an excitement and, at the same time, an understanding that this is a ministry that requires a lot of time and dedication. It can only be done with a lot of people working and collaborating closely and with the support of the entire archdiocese."

A native of Havana, Cuba, Father Lavastida resettled with his family in Puerto Rico and attended school there. After moving to the U.S., he graduated from Louisiana State University in 1982, receiving a bachelor's degree in business administration, and then was accepted at Notre Dame Seminary. He completed his studies with a master's degree, summa cum laude, in sacred theology in 1987, and was ordained that year.

Father Lavastida served in two parishes – St. Jerome in Kenner and Christ the King in Terrytown – before going to Rome for a doctorate in moral theology at the Accademia Alfonsiana, an Institute of Moral Theology of the Lateran University. He specialized in bioethics.

Father Lavastida began as associate director of spiritual formation at the seminary and then taught moral theology before becoming academic dean.

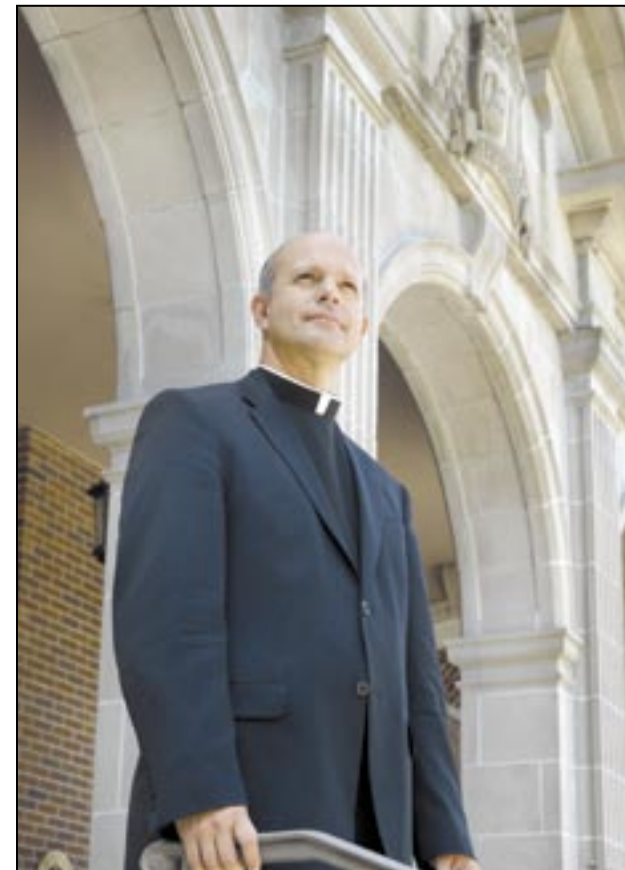
Archbishop Hughes expressed great appreciation to Father Williams for his service as rector. Father Williams and his staff reopened the seminary one month after Hurricane Katrina – at facilities provided by St. Joseph Seminary College – and made it possible for the seminary to preserve its entire academic and formational year.

Father Lavastida said seminary life is "at the very heart of the diocese." Notre Dame currently has about 100 seminarians and 30 lay students from dioceses across the Gulf South, including Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia and Oklahoma. In February 2006, a team appointed by U.S. bishops conducted an apostolic visitation of Notre Dame as part of its evaluation of all seminaries, and Father Lavastida said it "was a very friendly visit that went very well."

"We are always called to be very Christ-centric," Father Lavastida said. "Christ is the center of everything we do. We are also called to be mission-oriented. Father Pat Williams gave great leadership to the seminary, and we are good friends. He did incredible work keeping us afloat after the Katrina ordeal. It's also been an incredible experience for me working with our faculty."

As for his goals, Father Lavastida said he hoped seminarians "continue to see Notre Dame Seminary as a place where they have the tools

they need to discern a call to the priesthood, a place not only for prayer but also a place with prayerful support and people to journey with them."



FATHER JOSÉ LAVASTIDA

# Prayers have greatly aided his recovery, says Archbishop Hannan

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visitor, I could finish it by the end of the month. But the great thing about these people coming around is that when they talk they revive your memory, and I have a new spate of ideas simply because I

heard it from people."

For someone as well known and beloved as he is, finding that peaceful time can be a chore. Whenever he goes out to eat in Covington, people come to his table to shake his hand and talk. He is hoping to get strong enough in the near future to resume celebrating the 4 p.m. vigil Mass at St. Peter Church in Covington, where parishioners were so fond of his homilies they would give him a standing ovation.

Archbishop Hannan said his stroke symptoms came on suddenly.

"I noticed my memory was blurred, and as soon as I stood erect, I had a major lack of memory," he said. "Then I knew I was in real bad shape because I had never had a lack of memory. The peculiar thing was, within a couple of days, to the immense surprise of the doctors, my whole head began to recover. They said this was practically a miracle. I had never had a real difficult disease or illness, and I was absolutely determined to beat it."

Janie Harney, who helps coordi-

nate Archbishop Hannan's medical care, said doctors told him the stroke affected the part of his brain that controls mathematics skills.

"Within two hours of the stroke, they asked him, 'What is 8 times 2, plus 4, divided by ...'" Harney said. "And he got the answer right."

"To tell you the truth, I surprised myself," Archbishop Hannan said, smiling. "I was very amazed."

Archbishop Hannan said the hundreds of letters, cards and prayers he received have aided his recovery.

"It's amazing to me that so many people have responded," he said. "It's been great, and it's made my

recovery very easy. The people have been very generous in their prayers, and that, of course, has been a real big benefit to me. Secondly, it's proven to me that there's a real interest in this television network, and, therefore, that I'd better keep going."

What keeps him motivated? "Telling the story of my life for the simple reason that I have been extraordinarily blessed by so many people, especially the doctors," Archbishop Hannan said. "Believe me, I am very grateful because I have seen enough people that have had very slow recoveries, so I appreciate what's happening to me."



ARCHBISHOP Hannan checks the daily readings at the chapel in his Covington residence. He hopes to be able to celebrate Mass at St. Peter in Covington in the near future. (Photos by Frank J. Methe)