

Chaput in Philly swims against 'nostalgia and red ink'

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 14, 2012



Archbishop Charles Chaput (CNS/Catholic Standard and Times/Sarah Webb)

Charles Chaput, whose blunt speech and strong leadership style made him both a celebrated and a controversial figure for almost fifteen years in Denver, was installed as the ninth Archbishop of Philadelphia on September 8, 2011. To say the very least, he's had a tumultuous first year on the job.

The very day Chaput arrived, he was informed that the archdiocese's chief financial officer, Anita Guzzardi, had been suspended. She would later plead guilty to embezzling almost \$1 million over a decade, to support a gambling addiction. The experience hinted at two constants Chaput has faced -- scandal and red ink.

The past twelve months have also brought:

- The trial of Monsignor William Lynn, which ended in the first-ever conviction of a church official not for sexually abusing a minor, but for allegedly covering it up. Lynn was sentenced to 3 to 6 years in prison, and is behind bars while the case is on appeal.
- Review of the cases of 27 priests suspended after a damning 2011 Grand Jury report on the handling of sex abuse allegations. So far, seven priests have been permanently removed from ministry by Chaput, seven have been reinstated, and one has died, while decisions are pending for the rest.
- Serious financial shortfalls, with a deficit for next year projected at \$6 million, something Chaput says he can afford only because he's selling off the historic 13,000 square foot archbishop's residence.
- An announcement that the Vatican's next 'World Meeting of Families' will be held in Philadelphia, which means the honor of a papal visit, but also a steep challenge for a cash-starved archdiocese -- not to mention the risk that it could easily be perceived, in the context of American debates, as a massive anti-gay marriage rally.
- Teachers at Philadelphia's Catholic high schools were on strike when Chaput arrived, and while that dispute was settled, hard questions remain -- including the viability of a new 'Faith in the Future Foundation,' a lay body hired by Chaput to run his high schools.

2012 is also an election year and Pennsylvania is a battleground state, putting the robustly political Chaput at the center of national attention. To top things off, Chaput, who will turn 68 on Sept. 26, is also scheduled to have knee replacement surgery in December, addressing a decade-long problem that's making it hard for him to walk, even to stand.

One year ago, Chaput gave an exclusive interview to *NCR* in which he spoke about his anxieties regarding the new job. Twelve months later, Chaput sat down with *NCR* again to review what the past year has brought.

The interview took place in the archbishop's residence on Sept. 6, and covered five broad areas: the sexual abuse crisis, the grim financial situation, politics, pastoral life, and Chaput's own future.

The Sexual Abuse Crisis

Allen: Did Lynn get a fair trial?

Chaput: People will draw their own conclusions. Lawyers in this community who watched the trial, and other objective observers in the courtroom, have raised questions about the fairness of the trial and its outcome.

I do want to say this: I don't understand the penalty that was imposed on Monsignor Lynn, and it seems wrong. The law he was charged under was changed long after his work as vicar for clergy ended, so experienced attorneys and outsiders to the church have raised questions about whether he should have been brought to trial at all on that charge. Because there's an appeal in process, I wouldn't want to comment more than that.

The archdiocese is supporting the appeal?

We're supporting Monsignor Lynn and want a fair process for all involved. He has no financial resources.

How's he doing?

Last time I saw Monsignor he was in jail. I think he's doing well considering the circumstances. To me, he seemed peaceful. He was able to articulate what he's going through from the perspective of a person of faith. Of course, he feels that his sentence was not appropriate for what he did, so he's suffering under that burden. I think it was very important for Monsignor to know that he has the love and spiritual support of his brother priests in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and he knows he has the love and support of his family and many friends.

By the way, you haven't asked, but I need to stress this: I also very much want to be available to support victims of sexual abuse by any of our clergy. I'm very aware of their suffering and my responsibility to help them. They should never be overlooked or made to feel ignored. Msgr. Lynn is not the only one I want to reach out to; but at the same time, he certainly is a member of the church like anybody else.

When we talked a year ago, I asked if you support the idea that church officials have to be accountable before the law like everybody else, and you said yes. Do you still stick to that?

I still stick to that, including the second part of it, "like everyone else." It does seem to me, though, that there's more focus on church personnel than anyone else these days, and that seems inappropriate.

Many people believe Lynn is a fall guy for Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, and that he wouldn't have acted without Bevilacqua's blessing. Is that a fair perception?

I don't have any reason to believe that's true, and I wouldn't sit in judgment on my predecessors, or on any other bishops who are active today. I know that in my circumstances, I rely on many people, but I hold myself responsible for all important decisions because I'm the archbishop.

In other words, if something similar to what is alleged to have occurred in the Lynn case were to happen today, it would be your fault?

Those were different times, and things are different from the way they were ten and twenty years ago. I simply do not see how the issues that have been raised in that trial could happen today with the systems we have in place. But in the end, this is a critical issue for the church and this archdiocese; and as I said, I view myself as ultimately responsible for all important issues, especially this one.

Some victims' groups have suggested that Monsignor Lynn ought to be laicized. What's your reaction?

Laicization is done in one of two ways, either at the request of the person, who feels that he didn't have a vocation to the priesthood and wants to be removed from the responsibility of that office, or because a person has deliberately committed a crime in such a way that he should be removed under the requirements of the church's legal system. I'm confident Monsignor Lynn does not believe he ever intended to hurt anybody, or put anybody in the path of danger. It seems that those who are calling for this kind of action want some kind of symbolic gesture and even more punitive action. We shouldn't deal in symbolism when it comes to people's lives. We should deal with realities. The focus needs to be on fixing the problem and healing everyone involved.

Of the 27 priests suspended under Cardinal Rigali after the Grand Jury report, you've permanently removed seven. What were the triggers that led to those decisions?

We start by focusing on the recommendations of the experts who reviewed these cases in detail, based on their professional experience. We also carefully review the input from our Review Board, again a very fine group of professionals with practical experience in these issues. Finally, I focus on safety, healing, and the facts and circumstances in each case. It's a difficult exercise, and I must say the weight almost has to be against the priest in favor of ensuring the faithful's safety. This is hard, but necessary.

In those cases where you've made a final decision, are there still a couple where you think, 'I just don't know'?

The standard that I hold myself to, and that the church asks bishops to hold themselves to today, is to trust the collective judgment of our review boards on these matters. If I were on my own in making these decisions, it would be much more difficult, and it would make me much more nervous.

As I noted above, in all these cases, I've had the advice not only of our Archdiocesan Review Board, but also a multi-disciplinary team of experts, composed of law enforcement professionals, therapists, and so on. These folks are experts in their fields, and their credentials are really first-class. When they come together and make a common judgment, I have great confidence in following their advice.

I don't know that any records of any diocese in the country have been reviewed more closely than ours. We spent millions of dollars reviewing these cases. That doesn't include our Review Board, whose members work generously and without pay, but rather the panel of experts and the former district attorney we paid.

Was it money well spent?

We've been careful not to spend our people's money on legal and expert fees, but instead to sell assets to pay for these extraordinary expenses. Many people had lost confidence in the judgments of the church, so we turned that information over to professionally experienced experts and asked them to ensure the decisions were right.

For those priests who have been returned to ministry, how have they been received?

It depends on the person. Some were popular pastors before this happened, and some were less popular. It seems like those who were popular pastors were welcomed back with great joy, and for those who weren't, the concerns that were expressed were much more about their style as pastor rather than the abuse issue.

In some cases, people asked that they be informed what the accusation had been. That's just not appropriate for me to do. I gave encouragement to the men who were put back to say what they wanted to say. If they felt they could say what the accusation was, without violating anyone's privacy, they should do that. We also need to make sure that the privacy of the people who made the accusations is respected because they usually don't want their names or situations known.

For those cases where you haven't yet made a decision, how much longer will it take?

In most of those cases, they haven't come back yet from the various District Attorney offices. In those few remaining instances, the DAs don't want us to make statements or to investigate as long as the file is still active. It's in their hands, and I respect their request to put our work on hold. It's my intention that when reports come back, I submit them first to the multi-disciplinary team and then to the review board, and then I act as quickly as possible, for the sake not only of the individual priest involved but also for the parish and the church.

Overall, what's your judgment on that 2011 Grand Jury report?

The first and second grand jury reports were both issued long before my arrival here. I've studied them with a singular goal: to make sure we do the best job possible of protecting children and young people, and ensuring that we're never subject to legitimate criticism again. I think it would be wrongheaded to judge the reports or their authors, other than to say that my hope is that people with such power always act seriously and without any desire to sensationalize or focus on a goal other than caring for victims and ensuring fairness.

You resisted proposals to extend time limitations for filing civil suits against the church in Colorado. Will you resist such proposals here in Pennsylvania?

There are many good reasons why retroactive repeal of laws is dangerous and bad. That being said, I have said and stand by it, that I wouldn't resist such a law if it were equally applied, with equal penalties and no special escape clauses for all entities and individuals who employ others. If it's good to change the law, then it's a good thing to do so for everyone and not just private entities, and certainly not just the church. And it needs to be done in an honest way, without passing it for everyone one year, and then repealing it just for public institutions the next. That's manipulative and cynical. Most of the sexual abuse done outside the family happens in the public school system, so if you can sue the church, you also surely ought to be able to sue the school system.

People often say they don't want to apply the law fairly to public schools because it would make the public school system collapse. But if sexual abuse is so egregious, and it clearly is, why would that be mitigating factor? I think the same kind of serious damage can be done to the common good of our country by suits directed at private employers, including religious organizations and non-profit organizations. To be blunt, I don't think lawsuits strengthen our community or protect victims. In most of these decades-old cases that such retroactive laws are designed to revive, the alleged perpetrator is long deceased and certainly the true facts are almost impossible to determine. What we do is shift large sums of money to a very few individuals and their lawyers, which in my experience does not lead to healing.

Haven't the lawsuits created a powerful deterrent against cover-up?

No. Lawsuits about events decades ago do not help identify or address any current issue. I can't fix the past. There's deterrence in place in the form of liability under the existing laws. Additional lawsuits about the past don't contribute anything to child protection.

Shortly after you arrived, the Penn State scandal exploded. Is there part of you that wants to say, "See, it isn't just us"?

Thoughtful people, and those who read the papers and listen to the news every day, already know it's not just us. My feelings about Penn State are sadness that there were victims, and sadness that we have perpetrators society has to deal with -- not just employers but all of us -- and recognition from experience these are very hard problems to confront. I do not believe it is prudent for our society to punish the students who are going to Penn State today because of the actions of a few others in the past. Putting the past on trial as a way to award money simply is not a system that I understand as a minister and person charged with fixing problems in front of me. Is that the way we want to operate as a society? So I return to my recurring thought when I see those news stories that the present students and faculty of Penn State are being punished for the actions of others, and I don't know that that's ever appropriate.

At the big-picture level, is there anything you've learned over the last year about the sexual abuse crisis you didn't already know?

In the decades I've worked on this issue, I've seen a huge change in the way society handles abuse, I think for the better. We have a much clearer understanding of the issue of sexual abuse of children, which society clearly didn't understand years ago. Every time a case comes up you learn something more, and every time I meet a victim and see the pain this has caused, I understand more keenly the depths of their suffering and of the problem. It makes you more committed to ensuring that this can never happen again.

Money

You've said Philadelphia can no longer afford to live off ?nostalgia and red ink.? What's your deficit?

When we drew up the budget for 2012-13, if we had accepted the figures our various departments gave me in terms of costs and income, we would have been \$17.5 million in debt. We made a decision to reconsider everything, because who can run that kind of deficit and survive? We immediately took steps, such as downsizing our staff and cutting programs. We're now expecting a deficit of \$6 million. We hope it will come in less than that, ideally nothing, but we're willing to risk a deficit of \$6 million in order to maintain the programs we currently have.

The diocese has been in deficit spending for many years. I think there was always a hope that the economy would turn around and that interest on the money we have would bear fruit, but that hasn't happened.

Is the archdiocese broke?

We have significant property. We're currently very low on cash, but we do have property, and as you have seen we're selling some assets to address these issues.

You can't spend as if you're rich?

We can't spend at all, quite honestly. I am going to be spending \$6 million more this year than I bring in, and the only reason I can afford it is because I'm selling my home.

Is that why you're selling the residence?

No. I made the decision to sell it because I don't need it. It's an expensive house to keep when you don't need it. It's very nice, it's beautiful, and when it was built by the church for the bishop it had a purpose. But we have a lot of empty space around the diocese I could use as my home, and I've decided to do that.

Where are you going to live?

At the seminary, in the quarters where Cardinal Bevilacqua was living when he died. I'll move sometime between now and March 1.

How much do you expect to get?

We'll get \$10 million.

Is that fair market value?

You're always hoping for more, but it's not a fire sale.

Do you worry that you're selling off a piece of the church's patrimony to solve a short-term cash flow problem?

That's exactly what I'm doing!

Does it bother you?

No, because every family has to do that when they can't pay the bills. The bills I have are for things like schools and inner-city parishes. The subsidy we give every year to inner-city parishes is extraordinary. Every large urban diocese has those issues, but we've been keeping schools open for many years that haven't been able to pay for themselves. In my judgment, some of them shouldn't have been kept open.

There was always hope that things would somehow change, but they haven't. People have moved into other parts of the diocese, and people aren't having children like they used to, and people also aren't willing to sacrifice to pay the tuition as they did in the past. All this is a sign that people don't value the Catholic school system like they used to. If people want to blame anybody for the closing of some of our schools, it's because parents don't send their children there. I can't force them to do it, and they don't. The more children we have in a school, the less we have to charge for tuition; the fewer children, the more we have to charge in order to pay our teachers. It's a kind of vortex that chews up schools that are small and expensive.

It's not you closing schools, it's the market?

It's the market. I have to make the decision, and I have to call my people to be realistic about the market. We still want to provide Catholic education for as many children as possible, and make it affordable for as many children as possible. At the height of Catholic education in Philadelphia, we had 267,000 students. Now we have around 60,000, but many of those schools are still around. Some have 120 students, some have 90. You could walk down the block and find another school, which also had 90 or 100 students. We've asked three of these schools to merge into one, and even with that the enrollment doesn't fill the one school.

We're going to do our best to keep as many schools open as possible, but they have to be viable. We need a bridge period in which I can do this in a sensible way, because we can't just start closing everything. We have to give them a chance to reinvigorate themselves. I have the sense that the decision we made will give some of the schools two or three years to prove themselves. If they don't, they're going to close. I'm not going to prop them up, because that's meeting a short-term need when we should be focusing on long-term goals.

In late 2011, you announced the closing of 49 schools and there was serious blow-back. Were you surprised?

I was surprised by the hostility of some of the people who reacted. The e-mails directed at my blue ribbon commission and at me were just not Christian.

It doesn't accomplish anything to be mean-spirited. Plus, what we did was reasonable. It's not like we were cavalierly closing schools because the bishop wanted to live in a big house. It's just that we couldn't afford them.

You pushed back against those critics fairly hard. Do you regret that?

Not at all. It seems to me that if people push in an unjust way, the bishop should push back. I need to do it in a charitable way, in a just way, but push back nonetheless. It does no good to just sit there passively and let people attack.

What was the idea behind the 'Faith in the Future' Foundation?

It was a recommendation that came to me from our blue ribbon commission to study the future of Catholic schools in Philadelphia. There was a feeling we should have an independent foundation to raise money for our

schools, for two reasons. First, some people didn't trust the church with their money, and they wanted it to go to a group outside the ordinary power structure. Also, when it comes to these mission schools, non-Catholics will support the schools but they aren't particularly interested in giving the money to the church. I thought it was a fine idea, so I was strongly supportive.

Many of the people who helped put the foundation together have been very committed to helping the poor, especially in education programs. Some of them began to think that maybe we could become involved in helping to manage the schools in a more efficient way, bringing excellence and creativity to the process. They offered themselves as a management group for our Catholic high schools. We were going to close four, and they asked me to keep them open, promising that the Faith in the Future Foundation would cover any subsidy for the next two years. I wouldn't be risking money of the archdiocese, which we don't have. The more I thought about it, I came to the conclusion that we ought to cooperate with these people to manage our Catholic high school system, so that we can grow Catholic education rather than just barely keeping it open.

As we negotiated, there were some things I thought I should keep to my own responsibility, such as the Catholic identity of our schools and also curriculum. But in terms of financial development, hiring and firing of teachers, and decisions to open or close schools, we've entered into an agreement in which I won't make unilateral decisions without consulting the foundation, nor will they make decisions for closing schools or indebting the archdiocese without my agreement.

You still own the schools?

Yes. But the management of the high schools for the next five years will be in the hands of this group and me, together. One of the conditions was that we would maintain control of Catholic identity. That's entirely in the hands of the archbishop and the Catholic schools office.

Don't business practices also bear on Catholic identity? For example, how people are paid?

Certainly, and we make those decisions together. They can't make those decisions alone, because we have an agreement. If I were to come to the conclusion that we're dealing in an unjust way with our teachers, they have to listen to me.

Is this a new model of lay empowerment?

I don't know if it's new, because I don't know if anybody else is doing it. Certainly part of my reason for doing it is that I believe there has to be a partnership between the clergy and the laity, at all levels of church life. ... I believe that baptism makes us a family. I have a unique position in the family, but I'm not the only one responsible for the church. We're all responsible for it together, and I think this is a way of concretely demonstrating that.

You're still the CEO?

I was ordained to be a father, which is part CEO. You know, when my priests tell me they don't want to be a CEO, I say, "Sorry, brother, because you are responsible." We're not a business CEO, of course, but it's like a father of a family saying he doesn't want to be responsible for the bills; he just wants to be a loving father. That's nonsense. You demonstrate being a loving father by paying the bills and being responsible.

You've never had to deal with a teacher's union before. What do you make of it?

The church believes that laborers should have the freedom to organize to protect their rights, and I certainly believe in that. When it comes to issues of Catholic identity, I think the participation of a union makes things much more complicated.

How?

In some cases, there might be resistance to things like expectations of faculty members going to church with their students. Those kinds of things ought to be non-negotiable in Catholic schools, and when the union tries to

negotiate those points rather than basic issues such as salaries and benefits, it makes things much more difficult. A union in which the leaders are committed to Catholic identity, and the teachers are committed to Catholic identity, shouldn't be a problem at all.

Is that the situation?

We're working on it. A union that understands Catholic identity and is committed to real cooperation on the educational enterprise, such as developing modern techniques of teaching -- a union open to change, that puts the needs of students first ahead of those teachers -- could work out very well. But if a union is self-interested in terms of protecting teachers' rights and less focused on students' needs, it can be very difficult.

How was it possible for the chief financial officer to bilk the archdiocese out of almost \$1 million?

I arrived for the announcement of my appointment in July last year. Cardinal Rigali came to the airport to pick me up. In the car on the way to this house, he said, "By the way, we have another problem. The CFO has been put on leave because of suspicion that she stole from the diocese." What happened is that American Express saw some charges they deemed inappropriate and they notified the District Attorney, not the archdiocese. That's how she got caught.

Since she'd apparently been doing this for a number of years, and we have annual audits of diocesan finances, the obvious question is how this could have gone unnoticed. She'd do it in increments of \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year. She was a controller for a long time. Look, \$60,000 is a lot of money to you and me, to any of our people individually, but the auditors apparently call it "non-material." My point is that we need to take immediate steps to improve and take every step to ensure we don't have that kind of issue again. We've tried to do that.

You promised to implement stronger controls. Have you done that?

As one simple example, there's much greater attention now to the monthly reports on our income and expenditures. There wasn't an insistence on those kinds of reports in the past; now my vicar general and CFO personally review those. We've strengthened the Finance Council. They're aware of what happened, so they're much more attentive to those kinds of details. With all the steps that have now been implemented, I believe we are getting accurate reports and we're making decisions that will keep us from spending in a deficit way in the future, once we get past the immediate crisis of the next year.

Have parishes and schools at risk of being closed been informed?

I'm committed to telling them. We have reviews of many of our parishes going on now, and it's been my insistence that the parishioners become part of those reviews so they can know what the problems are and suggest solutions.

People won't be surprised [if their parish or school is closed], but they'll still be angry, I'm sure. If they are surprised, it's my fault.

Politics

We're speaking on the night Barack Obama is delivering his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. Let me ask flat-out: Do you believe a Catholic in good faith can vote for Obama?

I can only speak in terms of my own personal views. I certainly can't vote for somebody who's either pro-choice or pro-abortion.

I'm not a Republican and I'm not a Democrat. I'm registered as an independent, because I don't think the church should be identified with one party or another. As an individual and voter I have deep personal concerns about any party that supports changing the definition of marriage, supports abortion in all circumstances, wants to restrict the traditional understanding of religious freedom. Those kinds of issues cause me a great deal of uneasiness.

What about the wing of the church that says a party that supports the Ryan budget also ought to cause concern?

Jesus tells us very clearly that if we don't help the poor, we're going to go to hell. Period. There's just no doubt about it. That has to be a foundational concern of Catholics and of all Christians. But Jesus didn't say the government has to take care of them, or that we have to pay taxes to take care of them. Those are prudential judgments. Anybody who would condemn someone because of their position on taxes is making a leap that I can't make as a Catholic. ... You can't say that somebody's not Christian because they want to limit taxation. Again, I'm speaking only for myself, but I think that's a legitimate position. It may not be the correct one, but it's certainly a legitimate Catholic position; and to say that it's somehow intrinsically evil like abortion doesn't make any sense at all.

That said, do you find the Ryan budget troubling?

The Ryan budget isn't the budget I would write. I think he's trying to deal with the same issue in the government I'm dealing with here locally, which is spending more than we bring in. I admire the courage of anyone who's actually trying to solve the problems rather than paper over them. I think a vigorous debate about the issues, rather than the personalities, is the way through this problem. It's immoral for us to continue to spend money we don't have. I think that those persons who don't want to deal with the issue are, in some ways, doing wrong by putting it off for their own political protection or the protection of their party.

Religious freedom has become the signature issue for the bishops' conference. Was the 'Fortnight for Freedom' a success?

It was a success in the sense that it brought this issue to greater awareness in the lives of many Catholics. In terms of really changing either the church or the national situation concretely, we have to yet to see its effects. The history of the world demonstrates that if we aren't always on guard about religious freedom, we'll lose it. It happens everywhere, and it could happen in the United States.

Church officials in Europe, bishops and cardinals, have told me that they're astonished there is an actual threat to religious freedom in the United States. They've always seen us as embodying religious freedom more clearly than any other government or country in the history of the world. It's also surprising to me. I would never have thought, even ten years ago, that we would be dealing with it so quickly. What opened my eyes was my service to the United States as a member of the Commission on International Religious Freedom. I saw things in Western Europe that disturbed me in terms of limitations on religious freedom, mostly for non-Christian groups such as the Muslims. I thought that if Western Europe could do this, it could happen in the United States too.

Also tonight, Cardinal Timothy Dolan is delivering a benediction at the DNC, after having done the same thing for the Republicans. In 2008, you didn't offer a benediction for the DNC when it met in Denver. Had you been invited, would you have accepted?

I was safe from making that decision because they didn't invite me. It would have been very hard for me to have done it without saying things about abortion and the meaning of marriage. If they would be willing to let me be myself and say something about my convictions in my prayer, then I would have prayed. If they would have restricted my freedom about what I thought should be said, I wouldn't have accepted.

Both U.S. Senators in Pennsylvania and the Governor are Catholic. How are your relationships with them?

I'm committed to on-going relationships with them because I'm the Catholic bishop here. For the first time in a long while, we have three or four men who could be executed under the death penalty law in the state of Pennsylvania. I'm communicating formally with the governor right now and the state legislature on this matter, because the church is opposed to capital punishment and I'm certainly opposed to it.

Are you optimistic?

I certainly am. We haven't executed anyone in Pennsylvania for a long time, and there's just no reason for anyone to be committed to doing that.

Nationally, where do you think the insurance mandates issue is going?

I can't imagine that the courts won't stop it. I think that when it comes time for the courts to weigh in on it, whether it's the Supreme Court or wherever it ends up, we'll win. If we don't win, I'll be astonished, and I'll be even more worried about the future of religious freedom in our country. At the same time, I think there's a huge number of people in our country who are very worried about the encroachment on religious freedom indicated by those mandates. I also think that people who don't agree with us on abortion and marriage would still be sympathetic to us on religious freedom.

Those who oppose us on the mandates are very insistent. I thought they would back down by now, but they haven't. We have to fight as vigorously in opposing them as they are in imposing them. Who's going to win? I don't know. It will be whoever fights the hardest and wins the hearts and minds of the people.

Pastoral Life

The Year of Faith is about to begin. What's its significance?

First of all, I'm worried about our ability to be free enough from our concrete problems to be fully engaged in the Year of Faith. So much of my energy, and the energy of my curia, is focused on solving our problems rather than being actively involved in evangelization. In other words, we're tied to the management rather than to the mission of the church, and that's not good. It's necessary right now, because there's no way I can continue the mission of the church without dealing with these problems. I've asked my senior staff to help me make sure we don't consume all our energy dealing with problems, but that we also become involved in the Year of Faith.

What do you think Benedict XVI is trying to do with this year?

He's doing what every Holy Father has tried to do in my history as a priest, which is to get us refocused on mission rather than maintenance.

He's got his own maintenance problems.

Yes he has, and it's amazing to me that in his own reflections he's able to remain so focused on the mission of the church. He's been criticized by a lot of people for not paying enough attention to maintenance, but I don't share that. Jesus didn't have the problem of maintenance, because the church didn't have a lot of structures in those days. Those of us who are idealists always dream of having the same kind of freedom, but as a matter of fact I've been placed in a diocese that has huge structural expressions of our faith from the past. The difficulty is sorting out which we should continue, and which really are albatrosses around our neck. Yet we have to be focused on mission first, and I expect that the Year of Faith will be the beginning of our diocesan engagement.

How was the decision made to bring the World Meeting of Families to Philadelphia?

I, along with other bishops across the country, was asked if I'd be willing to host it. Of course I've made the Holy See aware of our financial problems, so I told them it was hard for me to imagine that we could organize an event for 200,000 or 300,000 people, because that's a huge expense. I think the last one cost 10.5 million Euro, which is around \$13.5 million. I said we can't possibly do something like that, but if you're willing to envision a gathering of about 100,000 people, we can pull that off. With that caveat, the Holy Father chose Philadelphia.

What's your projected budget?

I'm thinking it's going to be \$12 million. I've begun to refuse invitations to speak outside the diocese, because I tell people now that for the next two years any free time I have I will spend raising money for this. There's a natural sympathy out there towards Philadelphia, because our problems are all public. That's why I'm not afraid.

What does it mean for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to have the pope here?

It means huge things. Everywhere I've been where the pope has gone, it's been a moment of grace for the local church. I experienced that in an extraordinary way in Denver, where I inherited a diocese that had hosted World Youth Day. That visit changed the face of Denver.

The people of Philadelphia, the Catholics of Philadelphia, are still very proud of their local church. The Catholic community is a very large part of the culture. They're very much aware of their Catholic identity and committed to it. I think it will be very good for us, especially because I believe the people of Philadelphia want renewal, they want a change, they want a fresh start. This is going to provide it for us, in a way that I can't personally do it. I'm deeply grateful to the Holy Father for picking Philadelphia, and we will be very receptive to graces of the moment.

Can the pope come to Philadelphia and not talk about the sex abuse crisis?

It would be hard for him not to talk about it. That's especially so since this is an event about the family, and sexual abuse undermines family life. As we plan for the World Meeting of Families, we intend not to run from the controversial issues. The obvious one, of course, is the natural meaning of marriage. That certainly will be opposed by large segments of the society in the United States, and in Philadelphia. The sex abuse issue also has to be engaged. When we talk about the meaning of human sexuality, sex abuse is a huge violation of its dignity. I think we'll have workshops on it. I can't imagine that we won't be very proactively engaged on that issue.

Are you worried that some people will see this as a big anti-gay marriage rally?

I do worry about that. The enemies of the church's position will say that's what it is. It's important for us not to let that happen.

How?

By focusing on the meaning of marriage. That's not anti-anything, it's pro-marriage. We'll focus on the importance of relating children to marriage, relating human sexuality to the context of committed love and family. That's not going to keep those who want to damage us, or who oppose our teaching, from claiming things that won't be true.

Will you have to be vigilant to make sure the rhetoric isn't inflammatory?

Yes, absolutely, but also not to be afraid. The danger is we'll be so afraid that we'll tiptoe around things. We can't tiptoe around this issue, and I won't let that happen.

Spiritually, what's the most encouraging experience you've had in Philadelphia?

The biggest source of consolation has been my reception by the priests. I'm not originally from Philadelphia,

and I'm coming at a late stage in my life, with a reputation that is probably mixed in terms of people's perceptions of me. But from the very beginning, I have felt very much welcomed by our priests. I've not only felt that way, but many have reached out to me in ways that concretely demonstrate it. A lot's at stake for our clergy here. Many of their friends were removed from ministry because of the Grand Jury reports, but that hasn't kept them from giving me the psychological freedom to pursue the truth of things. I've tried to do it as effectively and efficiently as possible, and they've been patient with me. It's taken a long time, and I'm deeply grateful to them.

I've received the same kind of welcome from our people, although the diocese is so big in terms of numbers of people that I just haven't been able to spend a whole lot of time in the ordinary venues. When I have been with people, however, they've gone out of their way to be kind to me, to thank me for being here, to say that they believe it was God's will that I come and that they want to be my partners in making a better future for our church.

If there hadn't been a crisis here, you know what the headline about your appointment would have been: ?Archconservative heads to Philly to lead internal jihad.? Is there a sense in which having to face all these practical management problems allowed you to introduce yourself without the usual ideological baggage?

My simple answer is that if there were no crisis, I wouldn't have been sent to Philadelphia. I'm not a natural choice. I know the way the church works, and I wouldn't have been a candidate here. I suppose I might have been in some people's minds who wanted me to have a bigger ministry and related voice, but I wouldn't have been appointed. I was sent here specifically for the issues that we're dealing with.

You describe accurately the situation I encountered. My ideology, whatever people perceive it to be, wasn't an issue here, except in a theoretical kind of way. All the problems we're facing gave me a different way of presenting myself. I have no doubt that's true.

The Future

Cardinal Dolan's term as president of the conference is up in 2013, and since the custom of automatically electing the vice-president has been broken, it's a wide-open race. Do you have any interest?

Not the least bit. I would tell the brothers that I have many issues here and I can't afford the distraction. I would hope they wouldn't nominate me precisely because of that. I've gone out of my way to avoid those kinds of responsibilities since coming here. The bishops nominated me on a possible list for the synod [the October Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization.] I took my name off because I just can't afford the risk of being away.

However, I do have a candidate. Archbishop [Jose] Gomez [of Los Angeles] should be the next president of the bishops' conference.

You're launching the ?Gomez for President? campaign here and now?

I don't know that he needs anybody to launch his campaign. He's a capable man, and his unique gift is being in some ways the national spokesperson on Hispanic Catholic issues. I think it's time for us to have a Hispanic leader in the conference. He'll have my full support.

Do you assume this is your last job?

It was hard for me to imagine that this would even come so late in my life, so I hope it's my last job.

One other trajectory would be giving you three to four years to put out the fires in Philadelphia, and then bringing you to Rome for a five year run as the head of a Vatican department before you retire.

I don't have the languages to do that.

Lots of prefects come without languages.

I don't think that's prudent.

Are you saying you're not interested?

I'm not interested. I'm a diocesan bishop, not a curial bishop. My natural talents and natural interests are in diocesan leadership.

If the pope says he wants you to take over a Vatican department anyway, is there one in particular you'd be attracted to?

Probably the Council for the New Evangelization. That's how I want to be a bishop. The advantage of being in Denver rather than Philadelphia was precisely that I could spend more time on the New Evangelization, on mission rather than maintenance. That's where my natural interests are. I'd rather be preaching than doing administration.

A few years ago some people thought I might go to the Congregation for Religious, but that wouldn't be my first choice. However, I've always said yes. I said yes to Philadelphia without hesitation, although I wouldn't have imagined coming here. If the pope says go, I'd go, and I'd make the best of the situation. But it's very unlikely to ever happen. And that makes me glad. My home is Philadelphia now.

A year ago, you said you worried that in Philadelphia you'd become a bureaucrat rather than an evangelist. One year later, what do you think?

That was my fear. It still is my fear. This year, I've been a bureaucrat. There are a lot of administrative and managerial issues I have to deal with here, and as I said earlier, when the priests complain about doing that kind of work, I tell them it's their duty as a father to care about their communities in that way too. I'm happy to do it, because it has to be done. But I certainly hope that after a year or so, I'll be freer to be an evangelist. It probably won't happen until the World Meeting of Families is over, because between now and then I'll be doing bureaucratic things and raising money.

When you get to that clearing, do you have another book you want to write?

Writing a book is so difficult, I don't know that I'll ever write one again. You know what I'd really like to do? I'd like to write something on the Creed, because it's at the heart of who we are as Catholics. To make it evangelical and alive would be a great challenge. If I write another book, it'll be about the Creed.

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