



It's official: Pope Francis is coming to Philadelphia

By Matthew Gambino

Pope Francis ended months of eager speculation by confirming he will visit Philadelphia next year.

During a meeting on marriage at the Vatican this morning, Nov. 17, the pope said he intends to visit Philadelphia at the conclusion of the Sept. 22-25, 2015, World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

"I wish to confirm according to the wishes of the Lord, that in September of 2015, I will go to Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families," Pope Francis said in Rome. "Thank you for your prayers with which you accompany my service to the Church. Bless you from my heart."

Although few details of the papal visit have been made public, organizers for the families' congress expect Pope Francis to arrive Friday, Sept. 25 for an afternoon public visit with civic officials.

That would begin his first trip as pope to the United States and the second papal visit to Philadelphia in a generation; St. Pope John Paul II visited the city in 1979. The visit will mark the fourth time a sitting pontiff has visited the U.S.

Archbishop Charles Chaput is in Rome attending a three-day interreligious conference on traditional marriage, "Complementarity of Man and Woman," during which the pope broke the long-anticipated news of his visit.

The archbishop said he was "overjoyed" by the announcement.

"A hallmark of his papacy," the archbishop said of Pope Francis, "has been a keen focus on the many challenges that families face today globally. His charisma, presence and voice will electrify the gathering.

"As I've said many times before, I believe that the presence of the Holy Father will bring all of us — Catholic

and non-Catholic alike — together in tremendously powerful, unifying and healing ways. We look forward to Pope Francis' arrival in Philadelphia next September and we will welcome him joyfully with open arms and prayerful hearts."



Pope Francis talks with Archbishop Charles J. Chaput on March 26 during the pope's general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. The pope confirmed Nov. 17 that he will visit Philadelphia Sept. 25-27, 2015. (CNS photo/Paul

Haring)

During his visit, Pope Francis is expected to attend the Festival of Families on Sept. 26, a cultural celebration for hundreds of thousands of people along Philadelphia's main cultural boulevard, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

Donna Farrell, executive director for the 2015 World Meeting of Families and its chief planner, said although Philadelphia has hosted St. Pope John Paul II's visit in 1979, the city has "not had anything like this unique Festival of Families. It's really going to be something special."

Registration for the congress opened last week, and the first details on the content of programming for the week-long series of talks, discussions and activities also came to light. Only last Friday, 10,000 letters written by Catholic school students in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were sent to Rome inviting Pope Francis to Philadelphia.

The pope is expected to celebrate a public Mass for an estimated 1 million people on Sunday, Sept. 26 on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in full view of the crowds arrayed from the museum down the Ben Franklin Parkway.

Philadelphia will enjoy the brightest global spotlight on that day, thanks to the pope's announcement. The work of planning for the eighth World Meeting of Families and its estimated 15,000 attendees from around the world, plus a papal visit made even grander in scale thanks to the immense popularity of Pope Francis, now becomes even more intense in the run up to September 2015.

NEWS BRIEF

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One year after typhoon, CRS help to rebuild Filipinos' lives

Most residents of the Philippine Islands were not especially worried last November when they were warned a huge typhoon was about to hit. They'd weathered Typhoon Washi in 2011 and Typhoon Bopha in 2012, both of which caused serious damage and loss of life, not to mention a category 7 earthquake in October.

Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda in the Philippines), the full force of which slammed into Samar and Leyte in the central part of the archipelago on Nov. 8, 2013, turned out to be the grand-daddy of all typhoons, which at its peak had winds clocked at 195 m.p.h., the strongest storm ever recorded to hit land anywhere.

The real game changer was the added element of a storm surge with towering waves like a tsunami, said Caroline Brennan, a senior communications officer with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) who visited the typhoon area to report on her agency's response to the catastrophic storm that claimed 6,201 lives in the Philippines and damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes.

Brennan, who gave presentations on Haiyan one year later at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center and St. Charles Seminary on Nov. 6, explained this emergency created a special challenge because CRS' supplies warehoused locally in the Philippines had been mostly used up in response to the earthquake the previous month.

New supplies were brought in as quickly as possible to provide for immediate needs including temporary shelter, food, pure water and sanitation.

Relief agencies and governments from around the world responded to the emergency. CRS was especially effective because of long experience in emergency relief and, in this case, because the Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country with a natural existing network to partner with.

A team of paid workers was assembled, and this was important because the typhoon not only destroyed property it destroyed livelihoods.

"We are employing about 3,000 people," Brennan estimated. "Cash for work is key."

During the initial cleanup phase she estimates 4,000 tons of debris was cleared away by the CRS team, including some that could be recycled, and temporary shelter was provided.

A program was begun to repair houses that could be repaired and to build new houses if this could not be done. In some cases houses can't be rebuilt because their location has been judged prone to destruction in future storms and reconstruction is forbidden.

A prime industry in the area was coconut cultivation, but virtually all of the coconut trees were uprooted during the typhoon and because new trees will not mature for five to seven years, the growers were left without an immediate livelihood.

Through CRS seeds were obtained for crops that can be grown around newly planted trees to tide the farmers over until coconuts can be harvested again.

Black Catholics honor St. Martin with fervent prayers and songs

St. Ignatius of Loyola Church in West Philadelphia hosted the 52nd annual celebration of the canonization of St. Martin de Porres with a prayer and praise liturgy Sunday afternoon, Nov. 9.

More than 500 people filled the church for the two-hour program, coordinated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office for Black Catholics, which featured prayers from pastors serving predominantly Black Catholic parishes in the archdiocese and music from three local choirs.

Msgr. Federico Britto, pastor of St. Cyprian Parish, delivered the homily. Among those recognized was the Martin de Porres Foundation, which provides scholarships and subsidizes programs in the African American Catholic community.

During the opening procession many people displayed icons, paintings, statues and even a stone sculpture of St. Martin de Porres, who was born in Lima, Peru, on Dec. 9, 1579, the son of a free African mother and Spanish father.

He is the patron saint of African American Catholics, mixed race people, innkeepers, barbers and public health workers.

"Reflect on the life of St. Martin de Porres," Msgr. Britto told the people in his homily. He pointed out that the saint lived in Latin America. He drew parallels between how the old TV sitcom "The Cosby Show" showcased an upper middle class intact African American family drew criticism in its day from some people, just as venerating St. Martin de Porres did.

Msgr. Britto drew thunderous applause as he noted that the thing that kept the television show alive was the love it showed, just as the celebration of St. Martin de Porres continues because of the love among Catholics, particularly those of color.

"Martin was blessed by God and he grew in faith and love," Msgr. Britto said.

"Today we see the strength of the Black Catholic community," said Deacon Bill Bradley, director of the Office for Black Catholics.

"As Msgr. Britto said, I don't know what we have started here, but we do want this to continue. We are clearly here to worship God. We are the church and we do feel joyful in God's sight."

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