

As you go around the archdiocese, what signs of encouragement do you see (among parishioners)?

It depends on where I go. Sometimes there aren't signs of encouragement. People are genuinely and understandably upset about losing parishes, and some people have not accepted that yet in places where we've found it necessary to do that.

Other places, I get a lot response from people saying they're happy we've made the decisions we have, in terms of trying to get some order in the chaos of our finances. We have an excessive amount of buildings for the number of practicing Catholics today. And it's really important that we don't let all our resources go into maintaining unnecessary buildings. We have to make sure the resources are going into preaching the Gospel, and new initiatives of evangelization and re-evangelization. So it depends. Some people are really enthusiastic about what has happened and others are hesitant; they don't know yet whether they think that we've turned the corner or not. I think it's important to be realistic about that.

It's a very large diocese and people feel differently in different locations.

Would you say (the archdiocese has) reached a point of stabilization?

I think certainly more stable than it was before. But again, if your parish has been merged you probably wouldn't think it's stable at all. All those people are part of the diocese, even if it's a small minority. It's a concern to me because they're as much the church as anybody else. But I have to be persistent in standing firm on the decisions we've made because the decisions are made for the good of the whole. We can't please everybody all the time; in fact we can't please everybody any time. We just have to do our best to please God and do what is prudent in all the circumstances.

Now having said all that I really do think we are in a better place than we were three and a half years ago. I think the World Meeting of Families does present us with a great opportunity not only for the strengthening of family life which is basic to all of us but also in having confidence in ourself as a church. To pull this off, to be the host for the World Meeting of Families at a very important time in

the history of the world regarding what family means and what family life is all about. I think we're going to do a great job and it's going to give us confidence because we should be grateful for the opportunity and proud of what we're able to do. So I think it's going to be a great moment and a great experience.

I'm deeply grateful for all the people in the archdiocese who seem to be enthusiastic and who want to be part of this great adventure.

Do people tell you that?

Yes, they talk about it all the time, both in terms of the massiveness of the scale of this -- they're astonished over what's going to be necessary -- but also they're happy, they want to participate.

A bishop will encourage people and also challenge them. What will the pope do to encourage, and how will he challenge?

I don't know. People will often ask me, "What's the pope going to do?" I don't know any more than you do. We're going to make suggestions to him about issues we think he needs to talk about. Some of those issues would be religious freedom, for example, and immigration which is another important issue that we don't seem able to face as a country in an adequate way. Catholic education is extraordinarily important in our history in Philadelphia, as is religious freedom too. So those are important issues we certainly hope the holy father will reflect on.

We've had our own sad history with sexual abuse of children here and I'm sure that the holy father will say something about that somewhere when he visits the United States, whether it be here or in New York or in Washington.

He certainly has a great love for the poor and he wants us all to become more involved with the poor. One of the things I like to consistently refer to when I remark on the pope is he is calling us to be personally involved with the poor. He's not calling for us to have the government do more for the poor, although it could happen that's what needs to be done.

But he's saying we find our salvation and we also find our conversion in a personal relationship with the poor and you can't delegate that to others, whether that's the government or even Catholic Charities.

That's what has happened in so many of our parishes. We no longer have the St. Vincent de Paul Society where people in the parish actually do work for and among the poor. We delegate that to the Catholic Charities office.

We have a wonderful Catholic Charities program, but if we just give money to that and don't have a personal involvement with the poor we're missing a great opportunity. And the pope is constantly referring to that. We need to be present in their life. We need to love them as well as serve them. And we have to become poor ourselves, which is the message that people don't want to hear.

So I think that's one of the unique contributions of the pope to the conversation of our time, and I hope he brings that up when he's here. We have some wonderful things here but not enough people are personally involved in helping the poor.

How do I, in my middle class or upper class neighborhood or parish, know the poor? What do I do to recognize the face of the poor person, not just the concept of the poor person?

I think what you ought to do is sit down with members of your parish and pastor to talk about this question, "What do we do to engage the poor?" I think most of us will find poor in our neighborhood. There are some neighborhoods that have no poor people, that's obvious, but there are some that have many, many poor people. It seems to be that those areas that don't have any, would have a duty in some sense to twin with other groups that do have poor. And not to just send them a check but to be involved in community service in those communities. There are great opportunities to do that. We have some of the poorest areas in the United States here in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the city of Philadelphia itself, and in other parts of the archdiocese not just in Philadelphia. It seems to me we would really please the holy father, and one of the fruits of his

visit would be if we would commit ourselves as individual Catholics to do something about this personally.

Do you think pastors and bishops could encourage people to do that, those sorts of parish partnerships?

I think bishops and pastors ought to encourage us to be Christian all the time but there's no reason another Christian can't encourage the bishops and the priests to be Christian. So I don't think that encouragement only comes from the leadership. It should come from the membership. Lay people are called to lead as much as bishops are called, in a different way, but in a real way. Evangelization in the early church was not done by priests, it was done by the laity, by good example. People became Christians because they saw the fruit of Christian life in their neighbors. I think that's the way of the new evangelization. That's the way to renew Christian life in our time; for the laity to decide this is not something for clergy alone but it's something for all of us.

Many lay people find that a new or difficult concept because they've been trained over many generations to defer from the top down, that the church will lead me where I need to go. You're suggesting we need a new mindset.

We do need a new mindset. One of the evils that Pope Francis talks about is clericalism which is giving too much responsibility for everything in the church to the clergy; or the clergy can claim too much of a role in the life of a parish or the life of a diocese. It's interesting how this shows itself. For example if you ever pick up a history of a diocese, it's usually the history of the bishops of a diocese, not the history of the diocese.

Look at our Catholic schools here in Philadelphia, our high schools. Who are they named after? Bishops. And I'm all for bishops, by the way – I am one – but it seems to me that kind of adds to this clericalism. (Besides) the role of a bishop or a priest or a deacon or a religious sister, the most important role is the one that comes from baptism, which we all share.

One of the external symbols of that is that whenever a priest vests for Mass the first thing he puts on is an alb, which is a white garment that symbolizes the

garment of our baptism. It's foundational. It's before everything else – not only symbolically. The fact that I'm a Christian is much more important than whether I'm a bishop. Baptism is a much more important sacrament than holy orders.

Do you think the preparation for the World Meeting of Families, and there is so much of it going on in parishes, is a sign of an emerging acceptance of the role of the laity, at least in Philadelphia?

I hope so. We have hired more than 30 people full time for the World Meeting of Families, and not a single one of those people is clergy. They're all lay people. They're doing all the heavy lifting. (They are) real leaders. I'm not giving them instruction. They're telling me what they're doing, I'm not telling them.

Is it safe to say you're pleased with the planning efforts so far?

I am very pleased. I'm grateful for the response of the people of the archdiocese and the people of Philadelphia, Catholics and non-Catholics too. We couldn't ask for better cooperation from the city or the state. All of our neighbors whether they're Catholics or not have been involved and interested in this because Pope Francis is a very interesting person.

What are you looking forward to from the World Meeting of Families personally?

I'm looking forward to it being over with. I say that jokingly but I mean it. It's an extra responsibility that requires a whole lot of my time. I haven't had a normal year yet as a bishop (of Philadelphia). The first year was given to the grand jury report. The second year was trying to deal concretely with our financial problems. And then the third year is focused primarily on preparation for the World Meeting of Families, and of course the fourth year, the same. I will celebrate my fourth anniversary as bishop in September and that's the beginning of the end of the preparations. I'm looking forward to 2016 as an ordinary year in the life of a bishop. I hope that I can do the things bishops ordinarily do rather than handle specific kinds of crisis situations.

What's an enjoyable thing for you to do in a "normal" time?

Well it's all enjoyable. I really do enjoy parish visits. I celebrate Mass at the Cathedral every Sunday night and that's probably the most enjoyable part of my whole week because I have a stable community that I preach at, and that's really important; I hear confessions. (I want to) spend more time with priests, more time in our parishes, spend more time with our candidates both for the diaconate and priesthood ordination. I don't have a lot of time; those crisis situations just sap energy. I'd like to refocus on the basics. We need to reorganize our family life ministry and our marriage preparation ministry, and I want to give personal attention to those kinds of things, not just delegate that to the Family Life Office. We're doing a demographic study of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and its real needs, and we hope to use that as the beginning of a pastoral plan, how to engage the next several years.

What happens after the crises? Will we have a long-range vision, and planning for that?

The church always has a long-range plan, it's called the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Anything more than that, in a way, is dressing. I've been part of a lot of long-range planning programs. It's not like a business. The goal is always conversion. That's a lot harder to measure and to cause – we don't really cause it, God causes it. (It's not like) the goals you'd have in a business plan. To constantly be focusing on how we could be more authentic to the Gospel with everything we do.

I hope the World Meeting of Families convinces everybody in the diocese – the families but also our clergy and those who work full time for the church – that we need to focus on supporting and strengthening families. And everything else – whether it's schools, youth ministry, care for the aged, helping poor families -- all of it really flows from family life.

We have a great opportunity here to formally connect all those in our minds as well as our actions. It will be interesting to see what happens.

Does that form the basis for growth for the future of the archdiocese?

What is growth, for the church? Is it numbers of members or is it commitment of faith? When the church began to grow in great numbers after the Edict of Milan

in the fourth century it was also a time when the intensity of faith began to diminish. That's where religious life began because people who wanted to live the Gospel intensely looked around and said, "We're not doing it as a church." And they're the ones who fled to the desert to start religious life. When the church first started you didn't have that movement because the church itself was living the Gospel rather intensely. Growth can be damaging if it's simply numbers. Growth has to be deep.

When I do interviews, people talk about reforming the church. What news people mean by that is he's going to change church teaching. They think reform is actually changing the church. We've always understood reform as living more faithfully the teachings of Christ. That's not changing the church but changing ourselves. We practice what we preach.

If there is an intensification of faith among people (in the future), not just Catholics and Christians but all people, how will you know it? What signs will there be of an intensification?

It will mean that the poor are cared for, that people pray intensely; we'll see an increase of vocations to religious life and to the priesthood. I'm convinced that the church always gets the vocations to religious life and priesthood that she deserves. Priests and religious come from families so we need families that have children, first of all, and who want their children to be committed to Christ for those kinds of vocations to flourish.

So I think the signs will be a renewal of commitment to the church by going to church on Sunday but also being involved in the ministry of the church in the world.

Are you hopeful that will be accomplished?

It will be accomplished regardless of our efforts because God always is working that way. But I hope that we take advantage of the opportunity to speed it along by this great opportunity of the World Meeting of Families.

The last time you saw Pope Francis in Rome, how did he look? Was he in good health?

The last time I was in Rome I had a personal visit with him sitting down one on one and we talked about the state of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. We didn't spend very much time talking about the World Meeting of Families. I wanted him to know the diocese he was coming to visit. He looked wonderful and we had a very nice visit and he seemed to be relaxed and serene about everything. He is very much looking forward to coming to be with us.

What kind of questions did he ask about the archdiocese?

He didn't know the archdiocese particularly well so he was curious about basic kinds of things; about the number of people we serve here, number of men we have in the seminary. What is the relationship of the local church to the government, the local as well as the federal government? Basic things about the state of the local church in relationship to the world. I talked about our saints of course and our great history of Catholic education. But we also talked about the grand jury report, and those kinds of things. He wasn't aware of those difficulties we've had.