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Exclusive interview with Archbishop Charles Chaput

by John L. Allen Jr.



Archbishop Charles Chaput (CNS)

DENVER-- Love him or hate him, Archbishop Charles Chaput, Pope Benedict XVI's choice as the new chief shepherd of the embattled Archdiocese of Philadelphia, is impossible to ignore.

Few American bishops relish public debate more than the 66-year-old Chaput, whose background is in the Capuchins, and who's widely regarded as an intellectual leader of the "evangelical" movement in Catholicism. He's fiercely loyal to church teaching and tradition, and passionate about taking the Catholic message to the street.

By naming him to Philadelphia, the pontiff -- who is, of course, no stranger to controversy himself -- effectively has handed the fiery Chaput a bigger cultural megaphone.

Benedict has also signaled confidence in Chaput's personal integrity and administrative chops. In Philadelphia, Chaput faces the turmoil created by last February's Grand Jury report, which found that 37 priests facing credible accusations of abuse remained in ministry.

In conjunction with the appointment, Chaput sat down for an extended, and exclusive, interview with *NCR*. He put no limits on the topics to be covered, which included his move to Philadelphia, his overall leadership style and vision, and his views of the sexual abuse crisis. The lone condition was that the interview not be published until the appointment became official.

In part, the picture that emerges is already familiar. Chaput wants to lead the church back "to a clear embrace of the Gospel, without compromise." He tackles the Latin Mass, the visitation of American nuns, health care, communion bans for pro-choice politicians, and gay marriage -- in each case, staking out what most would regard as strongly conservative positions.

Yet there are also surprises.

For one thing, Chaput is positive about the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, saying that the right Catholic response to a distinction between the moderate, social justice emphasis of Bernardin, and the more evangelical ethos under John Paul II, is "both/and."

"If we don't love the poor, and do all we can to improve their lot, we're going to go to Hell," Chaput says, in typically blunt fashion.

Chaput actually bristles at the label "conservative," insisting that he's faithful to church teaching, but strives to be "creative and contemporary" in applying it.

On the sex abuse front, Chaput insists that priests and bishops who break the law need to face the music. He openly calls for serious reflection about new accountability measures for bishops, implying that bishops who do their jobs have no reason to fear scrutiny.

The following is a transcript of the interview with Chaput, which took place at his residence in Denver.

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The Appointment

How and when did you learn you were going to Philadelphia?

I found out by a call from the Nuncio [Archbishop Pietro Sambi] on Tuesday, July 5, about 11:45 in the morning here in Denver. I was getting ready to go to a staff luncheon when he called and informed me that the Holy Father had asked that I serve the church as the Archbishop of Philadelphia. After talking with him for a while, and discussing what it meant, I said yes.

Was there any part of you that considered saying no?

No. There were parts of me that were afraid, because every change is difficult. I'd never imagined going to Philadelphia. I know there are always rumors about these kinds of things, but those of us who are close to church matters know that those rumors don't necessarily have any basis in reality. So I'd heard rumors, but I didn't take them seriously.

I've been trained in my Capuchin formation that you do what you're asked to do, and you think about it

later. Even to have thought about it for a while before saying 'yes' would have been contrary to my formation. If the Holy Father asks me to do something, I'll do it, with joy and enthusiasm, as best I can.

Quite honestly, though, I had thought I was safe in Denver, in part because of my age. I'm not a kid!

In ecclesiastical terms, being 66 makes you still a young buck.

I know, but to embrace a new responsibility, especially one that's bigger, is something that most 66-year-old people in this society don't do. I had thought the older I got, the safer I was!

There's never any official explanation, but you must have thought about it. So: Why you?

I really don't know. I've thought about it, of course. Part of it may be the fact that I have a bit of a record in terms of dealing with difficult circumstances in the church. The Holy See asked me to do an Apostolic Visitation in Australia that was difficult, and I was also part of the Apostolic Visitation of the Legionaries of Christ in North America, which was another difficult situation.

We know that one of the issues Philadelphia is facing is the Grand Jury report, and all the difficulties around that. In Colorado we've had to deal with these kinds of issues ourselves, and I hope I've dealt with them in a way that respects the good of everyone, from the priests who are accused to the victims who are in pain, and the church in general. Perhaps it has to do with my record on those kinds of things, but I really don't know.

You mentioned the visitations of the Legionaries and Australia. Some may be tempted to read this appointment as a reward for services rendered, meaning that you did what the Vatican wanted and so they're moving you up the ladder, quid pro quo.

I don't think the Holy See gives rewards for services rendered in the church, and it shouldn't. Those services are for the glory of God and the good of the community, and I don't think there's any reward that comes from them, other than the reward of being faithful to God's plan.

Is it fair to say those assignments put you on the pope's radar screen?

I know the Holy Father was very much involved personally in both of those issues. I'm sure that he read the reports I sent on those issues.

Did you meet with him personally about either of the visitations?

I met with him as part of a group of bishops who did the Apostolic Visitation for the Legionaries of Christ, but not one-on-one. I did not meet with him about the Australia visitation. I did that at the request of the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, Divine Worship, and Bishops.

You didn't see either of those jobs as your ticket out of Denver?

I love being in Denver, so I wouldn't go looking for any ticket out of here. It's been a wonderful opportunity.

How well do you know Philadelphia?

I lived in Pennsylvania for ten years, four years as a student at St. Fidelis in Herman, which is western Pennsylvania [a Capuchin college and seminary], near Pittsburgh. I taught in that seminary for three years, right after I was ordained. Then I was the provincial secretary in the Capuchin province of St.

Augustine in Pittsburgh for three years. Of course, western Pennsylvania is the other side of the state, but there's a similar culture.

When I was in Pennsylvania, I felt very much at home there and loved it, so I expect that I will very much love the people of eastern Pennsylvania as well.

Over the years, have you been in Philadelphia much?

In Advent of 2005, I was invited by Cardinal Rigali to speak at a recollection day to all the priests. I gave two talks, I think, and had a chance to meet some of them. It was a very pleasant experience, and I was grateful for it. I've also visited the Capuchins in Philadelphia. When I was a member of that province we didn't have a ministry in Philadelphia, so it was in later years. One time I went to Bensalem to visit the shrine of St. Katharine Drexel. She had a great impact on Catholic Indians in our country, and I've always had a great devotion to her because of that. I think that's the extent of my visits to eastern Pennsylvania.



So there will be a learning curve?

It'll be a big learning curve, because I'm coming to an area where I've never actually lived. Although I've heard wonderful things about the church of Philadelphia, I don't know it personally.

What wonderful things have you heard?

Through the years, I've known that Philadelphia has been a strong church with a good seminary, and it's shown leadership for the Catholic church in the United States. We always saw Philadelphia as kind of the paradigm for what it meant to be a Catholic in this country. Since I didn't have any personal relationship, I've always seen it from a distance. Now I'll be able to see it up close, and learn if those things are true from personal experience.

What's your relationship with Cardinal Rigali?

Cardinal Rigali is unfailingly courteous and kind to everyone he meets, and he's always been that way with me. The first time I met him was when John Paul II visited the Indian community in the United States in Phoenix in 1987. I was chosen to be the master of ceremonies for that visit, and then-Bishop Rigali was travelling with the Holy Father. He was kind to me then, and he's been kind to me ever since. I don't know him very well. We haven't been close friends, because we haven't worked closely with one another. I respect and honor him, and I know he's given great service to the church, both in Rome and in the United States, in St. Louis as well as in Philadelphia, for many years and in very generous ways.

Have you had any conversations about what his role will be after the transition?

No, but I look forward to doing that when it's appropriate.

You inherit four auxiliary bishops: Dan Thomas, Michael Fitzgerald, John McIntyre and Timothy Senior. Do you know those guys?

The one I know best is Bishop Thomas, because he was part of the Congregation for Bishops for many, many years. All of us who went through there met him. He's a very kind man, and has a lot of charm. He served as a spiritual director for many of the men at the North American College, and I always heard good things about him as a spiritual mentor for seminarians.

I've met the others, all of them, but I don't know them well. I've talked to all of them on the phone since I found out this was going to happen, and they've all been gracious in welcoming me. They all demonstrate intelligence and an ability to articulate what the issues are, and I look forward to collaborating with them. I'm going to have a lot of great help from them, both to learn the archdiocese and then together to uncover whatever the issues might be and to solve the problems.

When do you plan to be on the ground?

In terms of my official presence, I'm going to be installed on the Feast of Our Lady's birthday, on Sept. 8. I don't think it's really appropriate to be on the ground before that. I don't know exactly when I'm going to move to Philadelphia. It'll probably be sometime in the week before that date.

This appointment puts you in line to become a cardinal ?

People will presume that, but I don't think there's any guarantee of a connection with any diocese in the United States, except maybe New York and Los Angeles. I don't want to jump to that conclusion.

In any event, Philadelphia is one of seven dioceses in America led by a cardinal. With your appointment, two of those seven 'premier dioceses' will be led by Capuchins. Is there a Capuchin ascendancy in America?

I read a column a few weeks ago by a guy named John Allen which suggested that, in a humorous kind of way, and I thought it was delightful! Honestly, though, I don't know that there's any truth or substance to it.

Cardinal O'Malley and I arrived at being bishops from very different places. He was very involved in Spanish ministry in the archdiocese of Washington, D.C., and his talents were known very clearly by the church there and by the bishops there. He served the church wonderfully well when he became the bishop of St. Thomas. When he was in Fall River, he dealt with some of the first examples of the sexual abuse crisis in an extraordinary way. So it made sense that he would go to Boston. My path was through my Indian ancestry. They were looking for a bishop for the diocese of Rapid city, South Dakota, which has a heavy Indian Catholic population compared to other dioceses.

Capuchins, as you know, aren't ordinarily bishops except in mission territories, so this is really unusual. I don't know that in either case, it has anything to do with the fact that we're Capuchins. I would hope that our Capuchin formation trained us in such a way that those qualities which have led to our being appointed bishops have been enhanced by being Capuchins.

With this appointment, Benedict XVI will be responsible for five of the seven leaders of those premier dioceses. He's appointed Wuerl in Washington, Dolan in New York, Gomez in Los Angeles, and now you in Philadelphia, and he made Di Nardo in Houston a cardinal. Can you make any general observations about what Benedict is looking for in terms of leadership in the United States?

I haven't thought about that. To be honest, I suspect some of it is accidental. We can look for patterns, but I think sometimes it has to do with who happens to be available, and what specific set of skills seems best fitted to the situation in a given diocese.

What's your biggest fear about this job?

I suppose it would be my age. I'm entering this new ministry at a time when many in the world around me

are retiring. I really hope I'll have the energy and enthusiasm and physical strength to do everything that's necessary to meet my responsibilities. I certainly think I do, or I wouldn't have accepted the responsibility, but that's a concern.

Other than that, I don't think I really have any fears. I regret leaving my friends here. They're an extraordinary group of people.

How many of those friends might follow you to Philadelphia?

I doubt that many will. Many of them gravitated to Denver because of our friendship, and they've established their families here. They have different kinds of responsibilities now. They've developed communities of their own, which they can't pick up and transfer. In some ways, the best gift I've given to Denver is my friends who have come here.

A new CEO has two options in terms of existing staff. One is to bring in their own people right away, and the other is to keep everyone in place, making changes gradually through attrition. Which will be your approach in Philadelphia?

The church is different than a corporation. It's a family, and I'm entering it. I can't just replace the family, although I can bring different dimensions to family life. If I had to pick between the two models you outlined, it would be the second. I trust that Cardinal Rigali and those who have gone before me have established a community of people who are competent at what they do, and I start off believing that. You won't see me coming in and making massive changes at the beginning. It would be foolish, and it can't happen anyway, because it's a family.

You're not going to ride into Philadelphia on a bulldozer?

I certainly will not!

On a lighter note, are you prepared to become a Phillies fan?

I'm going to have to become a Phillies fan, and an Eagles fan, and everything else in Philadelphia. I genuinely mean that, because I think it's important for the bishop to embrace the sports teams that his people embrace. But I want you to know that all the time I've been a Broncos fan, I've secretly been a Steelers fan ? I hope that doesn't get me into trouble in Philadelphia!

I'm an old Pittsburgh guy. I was there for three Super Bowls that the Steelers won, and that made a permanent impression on me. Secretly, where it has to be hidden, I'm a Steelers fan, but I also want to embrace the local community.

Leadership Style and Vision

You know what the headlines are likely to be: "Pope names arch-conservative to Philadelphia," or "Hard-liner to take over Philly church." Are you really an arch-conservative and a hard-liner?

I actually don't see myself as a conservative at all. I try to be faithful to the church's teaching, as the church has handed it on to us. I don't feel that as a Christian or as a bishop I have a right to play with that tradition, which is the apostolic tradition of the church. I hope that I'm creative and contemporary, however, in applying that teaching and in the structural living out of it in the local church.

I think that if people came and looked at the Archdiocese of Denver for themselves, they'd see that we're not a 'conservative' diocese but we're a very creative diocese. We're open to lay leadership, the new

movements, and alternative ways of doing things beyond how they've been done in the past. As an example, I certainly want to be faithful to the Holy Father and his teaching about the traditional expression of the Roman liturgy in the Tridentine form. I supported that and will continue to support that. It isn't, however, my personal interest or direction.

As far as being a 'hard-liner,' I think people who know me, my priests and others, would say that I'm a rather kind and gentle person, but I also am not going to run away from issues. I'm not going to hide. We have to deal with difficult things right away, rather than letting them fester.

Your view is that dealing with things up front is ultimately less divisive?

It's less divisive, both for our own personal hearts and our relationships with people.

George Weigel has argued that Dolan's election as president of the bishops' conference marked "the end of the Bernardin era," by which he means it crystallized a shift from a centrist, social justice outlook associated with the late Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, to a more evangelical stance associated with John Paul II. Does your appointment to Philadelphia confirm that shift?

I think that if the church doesn't change as time goes on, it's not being faithful to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. I believe the contributions of the bishops of the church in the 1960s, 70s and 80s were guided by the Holy Spirit, but we're not there anymore. We're in a different time. I don't spend much time trying to be different from the past. I try to be faithful to the future, and what I think the Holy Spirit is inspiring me to do. I don't know that I want to make any clear distinction between those times and our times.

Honestly, I'm not terribly interested in criticism of the past. I really don't even want to listen to criticisms of myself very much, so that I'm not paralyzed to go forward. Of course I hope I receive appropriate criticism and act on it, but when I read articles where people are critical of me ?

You've had some experience of that.

I've had a lot of experience of it, but it doesn't keep me from going where I think I should go in terms of leadership in the church. I'm deeply grateful for the contributions of Cardinal Bernardin and the bishops of his time, as well as the bishops who have preceded me everywhere I've been. But my duty is not to be like them, but to be what God calls me to be now, whatever that's going to look like.

As far as the social justice question goes, I don't think you can be an evangelist, or part of this evangelical movement in the church, without being as clearly committed to social justice as the church has been in the past. We can't preach the Gospel and not live it. If we don't love the poor, and do all we can to improve their lot, we're going to go to Hell. It's very clear from the gospels that we have the duty to do that. To be an evangelist means to preach that too, but it also means you don't just preach that. There's a clear difference between being a social worker and being a preacher of the Gospel. You can be a social worker without believing in God, but not a preacher. The Gospel calls all of us to be social workers, in a sense, but not all social workers are called to be evangelists.

Could we say that, granted a distinction between the Bernardin years and the John Paul years, the right Catholic attitude is both/and?

It's both/and. I'm sure Cardinal Bernardin believed 'both/and' too. When you move through time, you see different things. In one era, if the church and the world isn't paying attention to a given dimension of the Gospel, you emphasize it. As you move forward, it may be that because of the preaching and activism in that area, there's been a loss of focus on others, so then you emphasize those. You have to preach all of

them, and all together.

If you're a sincere Catholic, you've got to be committed to the transformation of the world in terms of justice and peace.

You mentioned a speech you gave to the priests of Philadelphia in 2005. In that address, you said that a priest is 'unavoidably a leader, not a facilitator or coordinator of dialogue.' Presumably you didn't mean dialogue is unimportant?

You can't lead unless you first enter into dialogue with people. My point was that a priest can't just be a man of dialogue and consensus, because at some point he also has to lead.

A *fortiori*, the same point applies to a bishop. So, where do you want to lead the church?

I'd like to lead the church in the same direction St. Francis indicated by his life and preaching in the 13th century, which is back to a clear embrace of the Gospel, without compromise, in all circumstances and at all times.

Where I go to discover that is the teachings and traditions of the church, including the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which is the most clear and important expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church in my lifetime. I want to embrace the council in all its details, enthusiastically and faithfully. Because I'm a Catholic, I also want to follow the lead and direction of the Holy Father, who is the successor of St. Peter and the head of the College of Bishops. At the same time, I do believe that the bishops are part of a college, and we have the duty and responsibility of sharing our insights and our experiences with the Holy Father as he makes important judgments for the church.

When you say you want to lead the church back to a clear embrace of the Gospel, it implies there's a lack of clarity somewhere. Where do you see it?

In my own personal life, first of all. I'm not always faithful to what the Gospel tells me to do. I'm a sinner, like everyone. If that's true about me and about other individuals, it's also true about our communal life. In some sense, the church is always going back to the teachings of Jesus. It's not that we're going backwards, but we're going to our foundations and sources, which are the gospels and the traditions of the church.

When I say 'go back,' I don't mean there's some pristine time we should try to recapture. I mean that we always depart from our sources, and then try to embody them in the context of contemporary society. There's nothing about the Gospel that I'm ashamed of, or that I think we are free to discard. We have to embrace all of it.

Let me make a couple observations about you, and ask you to comment. First of all, while you take all your responsibilities seriously, it seems that the part of the job which gets you most excited is the ad extra dimension -- evangelization and issues of faith and culture, as opposed to the nuts and bolts of administration. True?

I would agree with you, that's where my heart is.

You've been helped by the fact that Denver doesn't have a massive ecclesiastical infrastructure, which has freed you up to do things such as writing books and giving lectures. Are you worried that the behemoth you're inheriting in Philadelphia will crimp your style?

I'm very worried about that. That's why I've been delighted to be the archbishop of Denver. I'm afraid of

the size of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, not in the sense that I can't understand or assume that responsibility, but I know it's going to take a lot more time to know and understand what's going on in such a large church. In some ways, I think that's the disadvantage of a large diocese. There's so much bureaucracy that it saps the time and energy of any bishop and gets in the way of being an evangelist, which is what the early bishops all were and what I want to be. How I'm going to manage that I don't know, because I've never had that experience before. I'm going to try to still be committed to personal evangelization, not only in terms of preaching, writing, and so on, but also my personal relationships with individual Christians. I want to be a pastor as well as a preacher, and I don't want to be a bureaucrat.

Of course, I'm not going to do anything that comes at the price of neglecting my duties. I want to know the Archdiocese of Philadelphia very well, because I can't make good decisions unless I do. I need to know its people and its structures, and that's going to take time.

The contrast between you and Rigali could be a bit jarring. Rigali is a behind-the-scenes operator, who keeps a fairly low public profile. You're more of an out-front figure, comfortable with the media, unafraid of controversy. Do you plan to bring that style to Philadelphia?

I want to be myself, and that means bringing my style with me. I don't want it to come, however, at the price of neglecting the administrative end of things.

I think people would say that in the Archdiocese of Denver, we have a very well-functioning machine. I have wonderful staff members, who free me up to be an evangelist. I have great confidence in my staff, whether it be the financial folks, or those involved in buying new properties and building churches, or whatever. I generally delegate those kinds of things to others, but I keep a close eye on it personally because I'm ultimately responsible for all of that.

I expect to find a very good staff in Philadelphia, and I'll depend on them. I'll also expect them to be effective at what they do and to keep me informed.

Here's another observation: You're not a very 'clerical' bishop. You're comfortable with laity, you have only a spectator's interest in Vatican gossip, and you've never invested much energy in the bishops' conference. The references in your writings and speeches, for the most part, aren't drawn from ecclesiastical sources but from the secular world -- Niels Bohr, Postman, Marcuse, and so on. Is that right?

I think that's very accurate. I'm not especially clerical. Part of that is my Capuchin background. We're not a clerical order, and we emphasize the importance of being brothers not only to one another but to the people around us, and even to the world of creation. St. Francis saw us as the 'lesser brothers,' and I really do think I've been formed by that. That's probably perceived by people who see me as being rather non-clerical. Clerics are raised up by the church as a symbol for the presence of Christ, but we're not supposed to be a distinct caste.

You're not a tribe?

We're not a tribe. Some of my best friends are clergy, but a lot of my best friends are laity.

It seems important to you to be engaged with currents of thought outside the church.

Absolutely. That's what evangelization is about, trying to see the best of the world around us and to show how the Gospel makes it better and richer, and how the Gospel at the same time corrects it and purifies it. There's no way the Gospel can embrace and purify the world unless it knows the world.

Here's a bet I'd be willing to make: You'd have more luck ticking off members of the Colorado congressional delegation than heads of Vatican departments.

I think that's probably true. In part, of course, that's because I have a responsibility for the folks in Colorado ?



But it's also indicative of where your mind is at.

Yes that's what I prefer. I suppose if I were involved in the Vatican in a more direct way I'd be able to name their names, but I'm not able to do that, quite honestly.

At the level of popular images, sometimes we can capture the role a bishop plays with a sound-bite. Wuerl is a behind-the-scenes broker of compromise; Dolan is a great front man and communicator; Gomez is the face and voice of the church's Hispanic wing; Rigali is the master Roman operator and kingmaker. What's the sound-bite for Charles Chaput?

I don't know. I'll let you guys [in the media] worry about that.

What I hope I do is encourage and enable those inspired by the Holy Spirit, whether they're lay or clerics, to be creative in the New Evangelization. That's what I really hope I do. I see my role as encouraging and getting out of the way, rather than managing all the things going on in the church. I have a duty to make sure they're in conformity with the Gospel and the teachings of the church, but I think the best thing I can do is to be an encourager. I want to encourage the laity, I want to inspire them, by telling them they're called by God to be evangelists too. I don't have to run everything, and I don't have to know every detail. I just have to preach the Gospel and do what I can to help people be faithful to the Gospel in my area of responsibility.

I'd like to take a rapid-fire tour of a few contentious issues. The idea is to get your basic position, without going into details. Let's start with one you already raised: the Latin Mass.

The Latin Mass is deeply loved by some members of the church. The Holy Father, beginning with John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI, has asked the bishops to be very sensitive to their needs. I was ordained in Rapid City in 1988, around the time that the Holy Father set up the Ecclesia Dei commission. As soon as I became aware of his desire, I welcomed the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter to Rapid City to establish a community to meet the needs of those people. There were three or four St. Pius X [break-away] communities in the diocese, but by the time I left they had all disappeared because we met their needs. In Denver, we have a full parish served by the Fraternity of St. Peter, and we have two other places where the priest, at least on occasion if not weekly, celebrates the Tridentine form of the liturgy.

I'm very happy to follow the lead of the Holy Father on all of this, because he has insights that I don't have. He also has an inspiration from the Holy Spirit which I don't have.

The visitation of American nuns?

It was a decision of the Holy See to do this, I guess because they received many suggestions that there was a need for this kind of visitation. I've been part of visitations, of seminaries and the Legion of Christ,

and I think those visitations can be very good for the communities involved -- as long as the people doing the visitation are really open to listening, and are loving of the people they're called to visit in the name of Jesus Christ.

It's always good, if serious issues are raised, to have outside eyes look at them. How the Holy Father and the Congregation for Religious will follow up on this, I don't know. But there's no reason to be afraid of a visitation, if it's done well.

Communion bans for pro-choice Catholic politicians?

I think that people who make decisions contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in public ways, in matters of faith and morals, should decide for themselves not to receive communion. They've broken their communion with the church, and to receive communion means you're in communion with the church. If you're not, it's hypocritical to receive communion.

I think the best way to handle this is the way the bishops of the United States have agreed together to handle it, which is first of all to talk personally with those individuals who make decisions contrary to the teaching of the church. If they fully understand the teaching of the church and continue to act contrary to it, we should ask them not to receive communion.

If they persistently decide to do so in a way that causes scandal, which means leading other people into the same kind of sin, then I think it's necessary for the bishop to publicly say something.

Health care reform, the Catholic Health Association, and Obama at Notre Dame?

That's a lot of things together. Health care, of course, is one of the things the church has done in imitation of Jesus Christ, who came to heal the sick and to drive out evil in the world. It's very important for us to be involved, but in a way that Jesus is involved, and not to do anything at all that would contravene the teachings of the Gospel. I stood with the president of the bishops' conference, Cardinal George, when it came to the health care bill.

I was very disappointed when the Catholic Health Association took a position that really undermined the authority of the bishops. I wish that hadn't happened. I think it was a severe moment of lack of communion in the church. I think we ought to continue to insist that when it comes to matters of faith and morals, bishops, in the name of Jesus Christ, have to be the ones who make the final decisions.

With regard to Notre Dame, I wrote a column in our Denver Catholic paper following the example of the local bishop, Bishop D'Arcy. I was very disappointed in the decision by Notre Dame. When the bishops met in Denver in 2004, we made a decision that Catholic universities shouldn't give honors to people who are actively engaged in promoting abortion. That has happened with the current administration, so it seems to me that it was inappropriate for Notre Dame to give the President an honorary doctorate. I'm sure the President is a good man, and that he's following his own conscience on the matter, but it isn't the conscience of the church and he shouldn't be honored because of that.

Gay marriage?

This is the issue of our time. The church understands marriage as a unique relationship, with a unique definition, which is the faithful love of a man and a woman for each other, permanent, and for the sake of children. As children, if we don't know that our parents love one another, our lives are very unstable. That's why I think every child deserves a family where the father loves the mother, and the mother loves the father. For us to redefine marriage as anything else undermines that notion. I think it's very important

that the church keep insisting on this.

It's also important to say that we're not against gay people. What we're doing here is promoting marriage and the meaning of marriage, not condemning others. The church does believe that human sexuality has a meaning in itself, that it's about love and procreation. Any other sexual relationship is contrary to the Gospel, and so a relationship between two people of the same sex is not in line with the teachings of the church and the teachings of the Gospel, and is therefore wrong. That said, we should always respect people who do things contrary to the Gospel. We live in a society where different ways of life are accepted by the general community, and it's important for us to live in a way that's not hostile to people.

We have a duty as Catholics, however, to speak clearly about God's plan for human happiness. Part of that plan is traditional, faithful, Catholic/Christian marriage.

Let's turn to some biographical points. How does being a Capuchin influence your episcopal style?

I think it has a huge influence. I and my classmate and good friend, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, exercise that in different ways. For instance, he wears his habit quite frequently, while I never wear mine. That's not because I'm ashamed of being a Capuchin, but because I've always wanted to identify very clearly with the diocesan priests I'm called to serve as a bishop. But I am thoroughly Capuchin, from head to toe. I chose to leave a diocese to join them -- I was studying to be a priest for the diocese of Salina, Kansas, and I left to be a Capuchin. That's what my deepest personal desire was.

I think being a Capuchin has taught me qualities such as collaboration, and embracing the Gospel in very simple and clear ways. St. Francis said we should embrace the Gospel "without gloss," which meant without making excuses that would explain away our commitment to it. I really am very conscious about my responsibility to do that, in my preaching and also in my decisions about church life. I hope that it has made me a good bishop, but it certainly has influenced the way I think about being a bishop.

It sounds as if being a Capuchin is pretty central to your identity.

It is. Of course, most people don't know what that means. They probably understand 'Franciscan' better. Being a Capuchin, however, really is who I am. If people want to know me, they ought to know the Capuchin tradition.

You mentioned the diocese of Salina, in Kansas. You and I both grew up in that diocese, about 90 miles apart from one another. Have your roots in the Midwest stamped you in some way?

I don't know. When I was in Pennsylvania for ten years, I felt very much a man of the East. The reason I came back West was because the Capuchin province of St. Augustine, to which I belonged, divided into Eastern and Western parts. If I had done what I personally wanted to do, I probably would have stayed in the East, because I loved it back there. My family was from the West and I felt family obligations, so I came West.

Am I Midwestern? I don't know ? I think I'm a little bit of everything. I think I can adapt wherever I am, and love it and be part of the people there. I'll let other people make the judgment as to whether I'm a Midwestern kind of guy.

For instance, I'm used to the informality of the church in the West, as compared to the church in the East. There is a real difference, and we can see it when we go different places. But I'm happy to live the life of the church wherever I am. I'm going to miss Denver, just as I missed Rapid City, but I'm sure that I'll quickly feel at home in Philadelphia.

Quickly: Is it fair to say you're more an Augustinian than a Thomist?

Yes. I'm also more Franciscan than Dominican!

More von Balthasar than Rahner?

Yes, certainly.

More John Paul II or Benedict XVI?

I can't answer that! What I can say is that I hope that I have the evangelical energy of John Paul II, and the clarity of preaching of Benedict XVI.

The Sexual Abuse Crisis

Before coming to the situation in Philadelphia, give me your overall view of the crisis: How did it happen, what does it mean, and where do we go from here?

Despite the fact that it's been criticized by many people, I think the 'causes and context' study recently released by the bishops' conference does a better job of articulating the roots of the crisis than I could, especially in a short amount of time. I think it's accurate, and those who criticize it from the left and the right are mistaken. I think it really does capture the spirit of the times.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s was a difficult time in the church. I think many of the bishops of the church were left confused by it all, and some of them didn't act appropriately because they were confused. It wasn't just the church, it was the broader society. I know that civil authorities acted in exactly the same way that the church acted in those days. School districts acted in exactly the same way.

I came along slightly after that period, in terms of my own responsibilities in church leadership. It was a different time and so I acted differently, but I'm not going to sit here and judge the past. Objectively, I can certainly judge that some bishops of that time made mistakes, but I don't know how to judge their prudence. It seems their way of acting was reinforced by the entire society.

We live in a different time now, and we have to do something about it. It's critically important to reach out to victims, who are the ones who have suffered most from this, and their families. Often they're alienated from the church, and it's important for us to always do everything we can to overcome that alienation from the church, which is the body of Christ. I think the focus has to be on victims and those who have been hurt, rather than on protecting the church.

At the same time, I have a duty as a bishop to be sure that what's asked of the church is reasonable in the light of history and the way these things have been handled everywhere. The church can give a good example to the rest of society in terms of how to handle this in the future, but the church also has to call the rest of society to handle it in a way that protects individuals and ensures their dignity. We have to constantly reach out to those who have been hurt.

Are you saying that you don't want the Catholic church to be a scapegoat for the broader social problem of sexual abuse of minors?



I don't think the Catholic church is being made a scapegoat, quite honestly. I do think, however, there's a tendency to punish the church as though it was the only one involved. It's important for those who are critical of the church to understand the church in the context of the broader society.

Because of the recent Grand Jury report and its aftermath, in some ways Philadelphia is an archdiocese in turmoil. What do you need to do right away to restore confidence?

I don't think I can do anything right out of the gate to restore confidence. Restoring confidence takes time. I will do all I can to focus on this issue as it affects the people and priests of the archdiocese. That has to be a very important part of what I do. People are going to make judgments about whether they can have confidence in me by what happens over the course of time.

All I can do is promise the people as well as the priests, who are hurting too, that I'll do all I can to be a source of healing. I hope that as people come to know me and as I make decisions, they'll come to have trust in my judgment in terms of service to the church.

Have you read the Grand Jury report?

I haven't yet, but I assure you that I will.

People seem to be saying contradictory things about its findings. Some say the report documents a massive failure to apply the bishops' charter. Others say that in some cases the charges in the report were investigated and found to be impossible to verify, or that the incidents involve "boundary violations" which don't rise to the level of sexual abuse and/or criminal activity. Have you heard anything?

Honestly, I haven't yet had the chance to hear from those who know. Until I do that, I don't think it's prudent for me to make comments. I intend to read the report before I'm installed, and I also want to listen to the conduct response team of the diocese and its review board, as well as the bishops and priests. Only after I hear the facts will I be in a position to make any kinds of judgments about what was done, and what should be done.

I'm aware that many people are critical of how the church has responded. I know that sometimes people are critical without cause, and I also know that the church has made mistakes in the past, and I'm sure we'll continue to make mistakes in the future, because we're human beings. The bottom line is that we have to do our best to make sure that kids are protected, that the rights of priests are protected, and that the church membership has confidence in its leadership.

In response to the inevitable question of what you're going to do about the priests who have been suspended, is the answer that you need to time to study their cases?

I hope I'll do what's right, which means I have to have time to study the situation. Some of what needs to be done, however, is already determined by the charter the bishops have accepted as our obligatory way of acting. I will follow the charter, whatever it says. I'll also depend on my conduct response team and those who are involved to help me understand how I apply the charter in these particular cases.

Cardinal Rigali hired a former prosecutor with the D.A.'s office, Gina Maisto Smith, to conduct an investigation. Is it your intention to allow that investigation to continue?

Absolutely. We have to follow through on all our commitments. I have to follow the decisions that have been made by my predecessors, in terms of how to begin to engage this. I can't walk into a diocese and turn that upside down. I'd be foolish to do that.

Reportedly, there's a serious morale problem among at least some priests in Philadelphia. What do you need to do quickly to reach out to the priests?

What I need to do very quickly is to get to know them, to meet them and spend time with them, to hear what they have to say. I intend to do that.

Have you thought about what the venues for that might be?

I hope to do it as soon as possible. I have to talk to Cardinal Rigali and the auxiliary bishops and the priests themselves in order to find out how best to do it. I really can't do anything until I'm the bishop, although I can think about it and maybe propose some directions.

Fair to say that priestly morale will be a top-shelf concern?

It always is for any bishop, and in this particular case because of the circumstances, it's very clearly so.

Do you have any thoughts about the criminal case against Monsignor William Lynn -- the first such case in the country, in which a church official has been criminally indicted for covering up abuse rather than directly committing it?

I don't know enough about it to make a judgment.

For instance, you're not prepared to comment on whether the archdiocese will continue to pay his legal bills?

No. I'll look into it, but that's all I can say. Part of those answers may be provided by the tradition of the church. If a priest doesn't have money, for instance, who is going to pay those legal bills?

In principle, if there's an administrator in the church who is not directly guilty of abuse, but who had responsibility for responding and failed to do so, do you have any problem with the civil authorities putting that person on trial?

I think it's important for the church to follow the law of the land, wherever the church is, and to do so generously. We shouldn't just comply minimally. I'm in no position to judge this specific case, but in general, if any of us break the law we have to pay the price. If people in the church break the law, that has consequences which have to be borne.

The church shouldn't try to evade those consequences?

We shouldn't. We have to accept the consequences of our actions. Of course, it's also reasonable to examine the law for its fairness. Laws can be inadequate. They can be crafted to be selective and unjust. Catholic clergy, laity and the general public need to be equally accountable under the law, and no one should fear that -- but of course, that requires that the law is just and is applied with equal force, equal implications and equal penalties for everyone.

Some have suggested that Cardinal Bevilacqua ought to be prosecuted. Without commenting on his specific situation, in principle, would you have an objection to seeing a cardinal indicted?

All of us in the church share an equal dignity as the children of God, and an equal responsibility to be faithful to the Gospel. The fact that I'm a bishop doesn't excuse me from that responsibility. Clergy and the laity share the same baptism. In the church they're treated differently in some cases because of canon law, with different kinds of rights and obligations. In terms of civil society, however, we're all citizens, and the fact that I'm a bishop doesn't excuse me from my responsibilities as a citizen or the consequences of not accepting those responsibilities. The law should be reasonable and just, and then it should be applied to all of us equally.



What about the issue of the accountability of bishops inside the church itself? Critics often argue that recovery from the crisis can't happen until bishops who covered up the abuse are punished as severely as the priests who committed it.

I understand that, and I think it's a legitimate concern. We should have accountability for our actions in the church, and bishops should be as accountable as priests and laity. I'm sympathetic to the idea that there should be real consequences, with teeth, to acting contrary to the law of the land, the discipline of the church, or the moral law of God.

Do you think there are sufficient accountability provisions for bishops right now?

I'll say something that many people in the church aren't saying, which is that we ought to study this question and reflect on it very seriously. We should take up the issue of accountability, including accountability for bishops, in a formal, clear, and decisive kind of way.

Any sense of what that might look like?

No, because we haven't done the study yet. In terms of the disciplining of bishops, that's traditionally under the responsibility of the Holy Father. Since the question has been raised, I think the details of how someone can be held accountable ought to be developed and the Holy Father ought to give his approval when the appropriate time comes. I think it would be useful to him, and to all of us in the church, if there were clear principles and procedures.

Do you hear any conversation about what those principles and procedures might be?

No, but I wouldn't yet be in the circles discussing it. Maybe someday I will be.

On a spiritual level, what is the crisis telling us?

Spiritually the problem is always the same, which is a lack of fidelity to the Gospel without excuse. I think the crisis is telling us that we had many excuses for not being faithful to the Gospel. I remember hearing people articulate those excuses, such as finding 'new ways' of being chaste. There's only one way of being chaste, which is the one it's always been. People would talk about 'new ways' of being celibate. Those were all silly discussions from the 1960s and 70s. It really was a confusing time for leadership. I'm sure glad I wasn't in a position of leadership at that time, because I may have made some of the same

foolish mistakes. Again, St. Francis calls us to embrace the Gospel fully, without excuses and without compromise, and that's what I hope to do and to invite others to do.

One risk about Philadelphia could be that policy questions and putting out the fires created by the Grand Jury report could become all-consuming. Have you given any thought to how to protect your spiritual life?

It certainly will extinguish me if I'm not spiritual. That burden will suffocate me. The way that I will gain clarity of thought and energy in terms of responding to the need is by being a person of prayer. Prayer really does double our energy. It doubles our insight, and it more than doubles our capacity for work. You get things done more quickly if you see them more clearly. Prayer is where you give yourself over to God, so God can tell you clearly what your responsibilities and obligations are. I really do think that the heavier the burden, the greater the necessity for prayer.

Also, I'm a firm believer because of personal experience in the grace of office. That's what enables me to enter into this without an overwhelming amount of fear, because I believe that God will give me the clarity and strength to do it if I'm faithful.

What about your role as a spiritual leader for the archdiocese? Is there any particular devotion or practice of prayer, for example, that you want to promote?

I'm firmly convinced by a lifetime of being in the church that the traditional practices of the church are the ones we need to follow, and if we follow them, we really will be able to engage in all these issues in an appropriate way. The first thing is regular prayer, and for priests that means the divine office and the daily celebration of the Mass. Beyond that, we should embrace the sacramental life, which means personal confession as well as encouraging others to enter the sacrament of confession. There's also fasting ? Jesus tells us that 'some devils can't be driven out without fasting.' We need to find time for spiritual reading, especially the reading of the scriptures. I don't think adding new devotions to the traditional practices of the church is necessary, and sometimes it's confusing and end up sapping away time.

Many people find praying the rosary daily to be a very important thing. Certainly devotion to the Blessed Mother is an intrinsically necessary part of Catholic life, because Mary is the mother of the church and our mother personally. Christ gave us Mary as our mother, and we should take that seriously. If we believe these things and faithfully apply them to our lives, we'll work our way through this.

I think devotion to the saints is also an important part of this. As a bishop, I have a huge devotion to St. Augustine and to St. Charles Borromeo. I've been blessed to have Charles Borromeo as my personal patron. His feast day is my name day. I really do depend on them a lot in the Communion of Saints. Also, St. Francis is in some sense the foundation of my spirituality.

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