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What a mess in the Philadelphia archdiocese

Tom Gallagher | Apr. 19, 2013 NCR Today

Don't take my word for it. Just read Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput's own words [1] given at a recent award ceremony [1]. The grand old archdiocese is a skeleton of its old self. And it's only going worse.

From CatholicPhilly.com:

> "In his acceptance speech it became clear that if you ask Archbishop Chaput a question he is not apt to sugar-coat the answer. Although he is happy to be Philadelphia?s Archbishop, he said his answer as to how he has enjoyed the past 19 months is, ?I haven?t liked it at all.?
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> Quite honestly, ?It has been an awful time,? he said. ?We?ve had huge problems with the clergy which has been a great sadness to the Church, a great sadness for the priests and a great sadness for all of you here. I have had to make decisions about the future of their lives that have been extraordinarily difficult not only for them but for their families; their moms, their brothers and sisters.?
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> Coupled with this, he said, ?I have had to close about 50 schools and will be closing parishes in the next couple of years in a way that will be disappointing to a lot of people. We have financial problems that are unimaginable.?

?This is an extraordinary place,? Archbishop Chaput told his archdiocesan news outlet. ?But things have changed immensely.?

He pointed to the practice of faith, with Mass attendance hovering around 20 percent when it once was about 75 or 80 percent. The church and schools were built on the assumption that the high numbers would always be there.

?Things have changed,? he said. ?The problems we have financially are not admitting we have to change. Not in terms of our values and enthusiasm but in terms of how we look at our structures. We can?t keep open parishes that are empty; we can?t keep schools that have only 80 kids in them, we just can?t.?

Change, he said, is going to be awkward and difficult, but ?if we are going to be the Church that Jesus Christ wants us to be, we have to be different.?

The archbishop reminded his audience that the early church as established by Jesus had no buildings. The first Christians continued to worship at the Temple and synagogues until they were expelled and then the churches they built were very small. The church, he said, ?is not a building it is the people of God, all of us together.?

Dealing with all of these problems that have built up over the years is a distraction. ?I spend all of my time trying to figure out how we are going to do the next thing,? he said. ?I ask your patience.?

As an archdiocese, ?we have a lot of work to do,? he said. ?I hope that when I turn 75 and the Pope says it is time to retire and get out of here you will have a reason to give me an award. You don?t have any yet. But we

will do it together because I know you love the Lord and love His Church. Let?s do it together.?

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Given the incredibly shrinking Philadelphia archdiocese and the fact that Catholics are migrating south and southwest, perhaps there really is no current reason to make Chaput a cardinal, as there was years ago for the archbishop of Philadelphia.

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[1] http://ncronline.org/catholicphilly.com/2013/04/local-news/local-catholic-news/archbishop-gives-stark-frank-assessment-of-archdiocese-at-philos-dinner