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# Philadelphia: Is Help Coming?

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 14, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Finally, it appears that the Holy See is set to accept the resignation of Philadelphia?s embattled archbishop, Cardinal Justin Rigali and to name his replacement. A source tells me a press conference can be expected as early as tomorrow or, more likely, early next week.

The announcement can?t come soon enough: a chancery official described the situation in Philadelphia as ?quicksand?everything feels like it is sinking.? Ever since the release of a second Grand Jury report in February indicated that the archdiocese had failed to follow its own procedures regarding child protection, and the subsequent removal of some two dozen clergy from ministry, the clergy and the people have felt demoralized. Few dioceses have maintained the esprit de corps among their clergy as has Philadelphia. A friend joked, ?You know, they never needed lectures on priestly identity in Philly.? But, in addition to the sense of shock at the behavior of some of their fellow priests, the sense that the administration of the archdiocese was perfectly content to throw the innocent and the guilty alike under the bus to make it appear like the problems were being addressed has left the presbyterate deeply demoralized. The people of God, of course, feel betrayed by the hierarchy yet again.

The processes for naming new bishops are, understandably and appropriately, cumbersome and lengthy. But, no diocese should be expected to survive six months in quicksand. Rome must devise a policy: If a bishop is shown to be non-compliant with his own child protection policies ? or with those of the Episcopal conference to which he belongs ? he is removed immediately, and an apostolic administrator is named. There are plenty of fine senior pastors or retired bishops who could step in handle things for six months while a permanent replacement is found. I understand that, in this case, cardinal Rigali?s stature and influence in Rome may have slowed the process down as he tried to figure out where he would next hang his hat. But, a diocese in trouble should not have to wait.

We should all say a prayer for whoever will be named tomorrow. It is an unenviable assignment. In addition to needing to regain the confidence of the people and clergy regarding the policies designed to protect children, Philadelphia is slated to face a parish reorganization in the next few years, an always painful and difficult process. One thing I have heard over and over, however, is that the incomer can count on the fact that his new presbyterate is very ?docile.? I hope that the last six months have made them less so. I hope the last six months have shown that a culture of unquestioning deference inevitably leads to those at its apex thinking they can do as they please. I hope that the new archbishop realizes that the clerical culture in Philadelphia is part of the problem not part of the solution.

The four names that one hears most frequently these days are Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver and Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport. Of course, appointing Archbishop Gregory would immediately change the narrative in Philadelphia. Not only would he be the first black archbishop in a cardinalatial see, his reputation for confronting the sex abuse scandal when he led the USCCB is second-to-none. There is a persistent rumor that Archbishop Gregory declined the appointment but another archbishop told me that was ?literally unbelievable.? At this level of

Church politics, no one says ?no? to the Pope. To be sure, Archbishop Gregory could be forgiven for wanting to stay in Atlanta where he is building new churches and the Church is growing rather than come to Philadelphia and preside over parish closures. Still, his appointment would make the most sense.

Archbishop Kurtz also would be a fine replacement. He is well-liked in Louisville where the clergy find him approachable according to one pastor I spoke with. Archbishop Kurtz is also well-liked by his fellow bishops, who elected his as their vice-president last year. Friends who knew Kurtz when he was in Allentown say he has always had a keen pastoral sensibility and would be likely to spread some balm across the River City?s hurting Church. I fear that Archbishop Chaput and Bishop Lori are both more likely to throw bombs than to spread balm, and that is not what the archdiocese needs today.

So, stay tuned. This appointment is every bit as critical as Pope Benedict?s other major appointments and it will indicate something of what governs his mind in making these selections. Philadelphia is not as large as Los Angeles or New York, but this is the first appointment Pope Benedict XVI will have made to a major see in crisis. The appointment of Archbishop Gomez to Los Angeles showed that Rome understood the changing demographics of the U.S. church and the appointment of Archbishop Dolan to New York showed that Rome understood the need to maintain consensus among the hierarchy. Will the Pope, in Philadelphia, recognize the need to appoint someone with the right temperament for this assignment, someone who is pastoral, calm but also has that sense of personal authority that comes from a life of prayer? Someone who can provide a different narrative now and, just so, point the way to a more hopeful future for the Church in Philadelphia. And, most importantly, someone who will focus on the sex abuse crisis and change the clerical culture in ways that truly make children safe in the future and restore the credibility of the Church with its own clergy and people.

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