

# Organizers for meeting of families expect 1.5 million for papal Mass

**By Laura Ieraci**

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VATICAN CITY - More than 1.5 million people are expected for the Mass with Pope Francis in Philadelphia this September, said organizers of the next World Meeting of Families.

A high-level delegation from Philadelphia, led by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, was in Rome as of June 22 to meet with Vatican officials, review some of the planning and promote the weeklong congress.

At a Vatican news conference June 25, Archbishop Chaput said the highlight for the delegation was meeting the pope after the general audience in St. Peter's Square June 24. During their brief exchange, the pope noted that the World Meeting of Families was only three months away, the archbishop said, holding up three fingers in imitation of the pope's gesture.

As of June 15, about 12,000 people were registered for the Sept. 22-25 congress, which will feature dozens of speakers on an array of issues affecting family life, Archbishop Chaput said. Held every three years in a different city, this year's theme is "Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive."

However, the number of participants is expected to balloon Sept. 26-27, when Pope Francis is expected to be in Philadelphia, after his stops in Washington and New York, on his first apostolic journey to the United States.

Archbishop Chaput underlined that the 2015 World Meeting of Families, which is the first hosted in the United States, is the reason for the pope's journey to the nation.

Besides the papal Mass Sept. 27, which will close the World Meeting of Families, the pope is also expected to be at the Festival of Families Sept. 26. Organizers are expecting about 750,000 people for the festival, held on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway; it will include performances by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, Colombian pop star Juanes and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Archbishop Chaput said organizers expect 15,000 registered participants by the start of the congress, he said. Among those registered, about 11,000 are adults; about another 1,200 were registered for the "youth congress," organized for ages 6 to 17, he said. To date, the most represented countries among participants, besides the U.S., include Canada, Vietnam, Dominican Republic and Nigeria.

Auxiliary Bishop John J. McIntyre of Philadelphia, told reporters about the variety of themes — both theological and practical — that will be covered by congress

speakers, including talks that will address new technologies, ecology, fertility and dealing with marriage breakups. Some of the speakers listed include Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston and Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments. Father Robert Barron and Scott Hahn, as well as Rev. Rick Warren and Rabbi Abraham Skorka, are slated among the speakers.

Underlining the ecumenical and interfaith element of the meeting, Archbishop Chaput said 30 percent of the speakers are non-Catholic.

In response to a reporter's question, Bishop McIntyre said one session was planned on families with homosexual members; a man with same-sex attraction will speak and so will his mother.

Archbishop Chaput added that all people are invited to attend the congress, but it was not organized to "provide a platform" on any particular issue "for people to lobby."

The archbishop said the "most important thing that can happen" at the congress "is conversion," so that "families can become a force of change for good."

The event is operating on a \$45 million budget, of which \$30 million has already been raised, said Archbishop Chaput. A large portion of the budget was allotted for security and cleanup after the major events, he said.

In addition, organizers allotted \$1.5 million to fund poor families from Mexico, Canada and the U.S., to attend meeting, he said. The Pontifical Council for the Family was also expected to fund poor families from around the world, he said.

While thousands of hotel rooms available in Philadelphia, organizers have also planned a home-stay program for participants who prefer to stay with local families. The home-stay program is managed by an organization called Homestay.com. More than 1,600 people registered to offer home-stay during the World Meeting of Families. Prices start at \$1 per night.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, linked the World Meeting of Families with the working document of the Synod of Bishops on the family in October. He described the congress as an "expression of the synodal church that Pope Francis wants."

He also said the congress was a "precious opportunity to put families at the center of the church and of the world."

He told reporters that recent research on the family and its importance for society will be presented at the congress.

At the end of the papal Mass, Pope Francis is expected to give families, representing big cities on five continents — Havana; Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Hanoi, Vietnam; Sydney; and Marseille, France — a copy of the Gospel of Luke. Following the World Meeting of Families, one million copies of this Gospel are

expected to be distributed in these cities.

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