

St. Louis couple say papal meeting boosted philanthropic goals

WASHINGTON – St. Louis residents Charles and Shirley Drury planned what they wanted to say to Pope Benedict XVI weeks before their April 16 meeting with him in Washington, but when the moment arrived, the gregarious couple found themselves tongue-tied.

“Most people never get a chance to meet the Holy Father, so we wanted to make our time with him really count,” said Charles Drury, an 80-year-old hotel magnate who with his wife of 53 years represented the Papal Foundation during a meeting the pope held with delegates of Catholic charitable foundations at the Vatican Embassy in Washington.

“The Holy Father of course looks straight at you and you get terribly nervous. It stunned us. You come prepared to talk and then can’t think of anything to say,” he told Catholic News Service April 17.

After an awkward moment, Mr. Drury said, the couple managed to utter a few words of thanks to the pontiff for meeting with them and representatives of the Knights of Columbus, Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums and the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land.

“We told him whatever we have done in the past we are going to try and continue to raise even more funds for him so he can take care of the sick and poor of the world,” said the father of seven, a parishioner of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis. “That excited him. You could really seem him perk up when he heard that.”

The Midwestern couple’s Washington jaunt also included the official White House dinner held in the pope’s honor April 16. The custom of placing husbands and wives at separate tables jarred Shirley Drury, 73, when she learned of it as she prepared to dine in the same room as President George W. Bush.

“The president said a few words and made a few jokes and we all had a big laugh,” she said with a slight giggle. “We got to meet new people and I think we were all

honored to be there.”

But, the experience paled in comparison to their meeting with the pope, Charles Drury said.

“It was truly inspirational and it made us even more determined to raise more money for him to help the poor people of the world,” he said. “Now we have to get down to serious business and do what we promised the Holy Father we would do.”