

US Papal Visit 2015

Pool report: St. Charles Borromeo Seminary Wynnewood, meeting with bishops in St. Martin's Chapel September 26, 2015

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6:30 a.m. Quiet, windless dawn at seminary with its 19 stately buildings on park-like 75-acre campus. It was home to more than 500 candidates for priesthood 50 years ago, with a chapel constructed for 800. Currently 146 are enrolled as seminarians. Many are from other dioceses and religious orders, but Philadelphia had its largest entering class in years this year, with 20 new candidates. That is more than triple last year's entering class of six men.

Laity attend a graduate school of theology on campus and married men also study for the permanent diaconate at St. Charles Borromeo, but much of the campus is currently unused. In 2013 the archdiocese announced plans to lease 45 acres of the property and use the income to support the renovation and updating of the remaining buildings and facilities for a student body of 200.

Pope Francis is staying at the seminary during his visit to Philadelphia. He is the second reigning pope -- including Pope John Paul II in 1979 -- to visit the school. Pope John Paul also visited as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Krakow. Three other future popes also visited: Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (Pope Pius XII), Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini (Pope Paul VI) and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

The seminary was founded in 1832 and moved to its present site in 1871. The exterior of St. Martin's Chapel, constructed in 1928, was modeled after the Church of Santa Maria della Pace in Rome, with a soaring portico supported by massive columns and an imposing belltower. Inside the Moller pipe organ has more than 2,500 pipes. The interior vault soars high above the pews, with the arched ceiling painted in pastel blues and turquoise. Brass chandeliers are suspended from gilded florets that decorate the ceiling.

7:45 About 300 bishops and cardinals file in, accompanied by organ and female soloist, although it is not a formal procession. They take their seats in traditional monastic choir pews that face each other across the aisle, rather than face the altar. This is an international group that has attended the World Meeting of Families but no information is available on how many dioceses or countries they represent. Media spot prelates from nations as diverse as Belarus and the Philippines and Haiti.

Other seats go to those who work at or have close ties to the seminary, including many laity.

A large white chair in which Pope Francis will sit is at center in front of the altar. Two small red chairs are to the right and the left, for Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and auxiliary Bishop Timothy Senior, rector of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary.

8:13 am -- Seminarians are lined up on both sides of long hallway leading to chapel, roped off from the center of the hallway by a bright red cordon. Most appear to be in their twenties, all are wearing long black cassocks. Some are smiling broadly, one dances briefly, but many appear solemn.

8:20 sacred music continues, with female soloists in the choir loft singing a range of Christian music from "Ave Maria" to the African-American gospel classic "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."

8:38 -- the helicopter that Pope Francis will depart in lands on grounds and roar of rotors fills the chapel. As the noise continues, men in dress military uniforms rush down from choir loft. Shortly afterward the rotors are silenced.

8:57 Seminarians burst into applause as Pope Francis enters the hallway leading to the chapel. He pauses at times to greet some, raising his hand somewhat shyly in greeting as he passes by others. He is smiling broadly. At the very end of the line, as he enters the chapel, he stops for a conversation with two young men in black cassocks. One, age 17, is the youngest seminarian and speaks to the pope briefly. The pope replies and gives him a pat on the cheek.

8:59 -- the organ crescendos as Pope Francis enters the chapel, accompanied by Archbishop Chaput and Bishop Senior. Everyone in the packed chapel rises and applauds vigorously. He greets some bishops as he moves down the aisle.

9:02 -- The applause grows even louder as Pope Francis takes his seat. Archbishop Chaput gives words of welcome and thanks for the World Meeting of Families, and also receives strong applause.

9:05. Pope Francis begins to speak. He speaks in Spanish with simultaneous translation via headset. He is standing in front of his chair. Instead of his prepared remarks he gives his unscripted feelings and convictions following a meeting he has just had with survivors of child sexual abuse by priests. "Very very deeply, God weeps," he says. The bishops and others listen to this part of his talk in absolute silence. Bishop Edward Burns of Juneau, Alaska, chair of the U.S. Bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, is live-tweeting the pope's words.

9:08 -- The first audible response to Pope Francis' talk is when he jokes about why he is speaking Spanish: "Because you all know Spanish." That marks the beginning of his prepared remarks, but he departs from them at times during delivery. All audible reactions during the talk are in response to humor:

9:19 - Laughter in response to him saying he sounds "a little bit Argentinian," before he addresses the issue of how bishops should respond to young people whose lives reflect the culture they were raised in.

9:23 -- Laughter when he speaks of women in Buenos Aires who complained of sons in their thirties unmarried and still living at home. "I'm not going to iron his shirts anymore."

9:29 -- Vigorous applause in response to his humorous take on a passage in the Book of Acts in which the apostles -- the first bishops -- were too busy to care for the widows and orphans. "They invented deacons to do it!" the pope said.

9:31 -- Laughter after he continued that the primary work of bishops is to pray and to preach, "and everything else if there is time."

9:36 -- He concludes his talk and receives a standing ovation.

9:37: He begins speaking again, explaining that the bishops of Cuba gave him a copper image of the Virgin to present to a Cuban community in the United States. There is laughter as he says, "I'm not going to get into that problem. You are going to figure it out, he said, giving it to Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

9:39: Bishop Senior presented Pope Francis with the gift of a chalice.

9:40: The organ resounds again. Pope Francis begins walking down aisle, chatting with Archbishop Chaput. He stops to greet many bishops, including his old friend Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop emeritus of Washington DC. He also greets the laity as he reaches their seats in the rear of the chapel.

9:47: Pope Francis exits the building to sustained applause. The steps are lined with seminarians and faculty. He poses for a formal picture with them, Archbishop Chaput and Bishop Senior as the music reaches a final crescendo.

9:49: A golf cart pulls up behind him as he continues to talk with those on the steps of the chapel portico. After 2 minutes he gets in the golf cart. Archbishop Chaput and the pope's translator hop onto the outside bench seat on the back of the cart, facing away from the pope, with their legs hanging off the back

9:54: Pope Francis boards the green military helicopter, with a marine in dress uniform standing guard at the door. At 9:57 it lifts off.

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