



Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Office of the Archbishop  
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December 8, 2011  
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Dear friends in Christ,

Exactly three months ago, on September 8, I was installed as Archbishop of Philadelphia. In the weeks since, traveling the archdiocese, I've been struck by two things I encounter again and again: the reservoir of good will in our people, and the fidelity of our priests.

The Church in southeastern Pennsylvania has deep roots and an extraordinary legacy of saints, service and public witness. These are profound strengths, built by the faith of generations of Catholic families. But all of these good facts depend on our willingness to sustain them by our actions in the present. Advent is a season of self-examination in the light of God's word; a season of conversion and looking forward in hope to the birth of a Savior at Christmas. There is no better time to speak frankly about the conditions we now face as a community of believers.

Complacency is the enemy of faith. To whatever degree complacency and pride once had a home in our local Church, events in the coming year will burn them out. The process will be painful. But going through it is the only way to renew the witness of the Church; to clear away the debris of human failure from the beauty of God's word and to restore the joy and zeal of our Catholic discipleship.

In the year ahead, we have a grave and continuing obligation to help victims of clergy sex abuse to heal; to create Church environments that protect our young people; and to cooperate appropriately with civil authorities in pursuing justice for both the victims of sexual abuse and those accused.

At the same time, we need to remember that many hundreds of our priests -- the overwhelming majority -- have served our people with exceptional lives of sacrifice and character. Since arriving in September, I have pressed for a rapid resolution of the cases of those priests placed on administrative leave earlier this year. The first months of 2012 will finally see those cases concluded. Whatever the results, the confidence of our people and the morale of our priests have suffered. The hard truth is that many innocent priests have borne the brunt of the Church's public humiliation and our people's anger. The harsh media environment likely to surround the

criminal trial which begins next March will further burden our lay people and our clergy. But it cannot be avoided.

Finally, the resources of the Church do not belong to the bishops or the clergy; they belong to the entire Catholic people, including the faithful generations who came before us. The Church is a community of faith alive in the present but also connected across the years through time. The Church holds her resources in stewardship for the whole Catholic community, to carry out our shared apostolic mission as believers in Jesus Christ. This means that as archbishop, I have the duty not just to defend those limited resources, but also to ensure that the Church uses them with maximum care and prudence; to maximum effect; and with proper reporting and accountability.

In the coming year we will face very serious financial and organizational issues that cannot be delayed. They must be addressed. These are not simply business issues; they go to the heart of our ability to carry out our Catholic ministries. The archdiocese remains strongly committed to the work of Catholic education. But that mission is badly served by trying to sustain unsustainable schools. In January, the archdiocesan Blue Ribbon Commission will provide me with its recommendations on Catholic education. The Commission has worked for months on this difficult issue with extraordinary sensitivity and skill. It will likely counsel that some, and perhaps many, schools must close or combine. It will also offer a framework for strengthening our schools going forward.

Over the next 18 months the same careful scrutiny must be applied to every aspect of our common life as a Church, from the number and location of our parishes, to every one of our archdiocesan operational budgets. This honest scrutiny can be painful, because real change is rarely easy; but it also restores life and health, and serves the work of God's people. We cannot call ourselves good stewards if we do otherwise.

These words may sound sobering, but they are spoken with love as a father and a brother. They are a plea to take our baptism seriously; and to renew our local Church with Christian charity, justice and zeal. As Scripture reminds us so frequently: *Do not be afraid*. God uses poor clay to create grandeur and beauty. He can certainly use us to renew and advance the work of his Church -- and he will.

On this great feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception, may God grant you and those you love a holy Advent; and lift your hearts; and make you ready for the joy of Christ's birth. And please pray for me, as I pray for all of you and your families every day.

Gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,

+ Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
Archbishop of Philadelphia