

**Address Given by His Excellency
Most Reverend Vincenzo Paglia
President of the Pontifical Council for the Family**

My Dear Brother Bishops, Dear Friends,

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the Two Thousand Fifteen World Meeting of Families together with Archbishop Chaput. These Meetings began in 1994 when St. John Paul the Second wanted a Church event that would parallel the United Nations International Year of the Family. Many cities have hosted Meetings since then, but the World Meeting in Philadelphia will be special. It will be held between the two Roman sessions of the Synod on the Family, it will be the first in a city where English and Spanish language and cultures are flourishing side by side, and, if we're lucky, it will be Pope Francis' first ever visit to the United States.

The Church knows, and civil society knows too, that family questions are crucial today. It wasn't by chance that St. John Paul and Pope Francis both chose the family as the theme of their first Synod. It wasn't by chance that Pope Emeritus Benedict, in his homily at the Opening Mass of the Synod on New Evangelization, said that there is a clear link between the crisis in faith and the crisis in marriage. To that, I would add that there is also a clear link between the crisis in families and the crisis in society at large. Cicero, a brilliant pagan thinker in ancient Rome, explained that link long ago when he wrote that the family is "*principium urbis et quasi seminarium rei publicae*" ("*the foundation of the city and, as it were, the seed-bed of the commonwealth.*") De Off. I, 17

As we prepare for Philadelphia Two Thousand Fifteen, I ask all of you to consider today's family challenges in the following hopeful context: Read *Evangelii Gaudium* and you will see that Pope Francis clearly wants us bishops, full of Gospel joy, to face those challenges squarely, without fear and without delay. As bishops, as evangelizers, our task

is to support the Synod's work and to share *"the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties"* of the families whose pastors we are.

That support will include our prayer and cooperation, not only for the two sessions of the Synod, but for the World Meeting in Philadelphia as well, so that, as Pope Francis said in his February 25 *Letter to Families*, *"through these events the Church can undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel."*

A paradoxical Situation

The family today is living out a paradox. On the one hand, great value is given to the bonds of family. The family is described as the key to happiness. All over the world people think of the family as a safe place, a refuge. On the other hand, the family today is an institution whose every weakness is magnified. We see and hear of families that lose their way, that split, that create new unions, and all to such an extent that the breakdown of families is generally considered the world's number one social problem.

The crisis in families is above all cultural. The prevailing tendency is to put the "me" first, to worship "me," to direct all our efforts toward self-realization. As one French philosopher puts it, what we are facing is a "second individualist revolution" where the individual views societal institutions, and society itself, in a self-referential context. The "other," even a family member, is seen as a rival if not an enemy. More and more, society is becoming simply a gathering of "me's," where the "me" prevails over the "us," the individual prevails over society and the rights of the individual prevail over those of the family.

In such a context it is obvious why "no-commitment" cohabitation is becoming preferable to marriage and individual independence prevails over committed interdependence. The family's meaning is turned upside-down to the point that is no longer the "basic cell of society" but rather the "basic cell of the individual." Even

husbands and wives think only of their own individuality and not about the creation of an “us” that transcends their separate personalities without destroying them and makes them more authentic, free and responsible. “Me” the new measure of reality, has become the measure of marriage as well.

Moreover, just about everywhere in the developed world, our laws reflect the primacy of the individual over the family. In this context, it is easy to understand how the family, as it has been understood for thousands of years, is ignored or is, worse yet, vilified and persecuted. Sadly, however, we don’t realize that the weakening of the “culture of the family” has brought with it a weakening of society as a whole, and the principal strategy for survival in our contemporary megalopolises has become not “looking out for others” but rather avoidance of the other and keeping them from getting too close. We are in the middle of a serious societal crisis, a crisis of the many forms of community that up till now we have taken for granted, including the family as central phenomenon of our human existence. We are building a society that has fewer families and more people who choose to remain alone or to live in “no-commitment” unions. We even see a new demographic classification, “monopersonal families.”

In addition, people today are convinced that they can “be family” in all sorts of different ways. Any type of “living together” can be called a family as long as there is “love.” With that approach, the family is not rejected, it is simply grouped among various other ways of living, with forms of relationship that might seem compatible with the family as the Church understands it but that in reality demolish the family piece by piece.

The Family is Central to the Church, and to Culture, Public Life and the Economy

This dismal situation, however, cannot leave us discouraged. In spite of the very difficult circumstances that it is facing, we know that the family will always be the most important resource for society. Especially in times of crisis, we see that without the family - father, mother, children, grandparents and grandchildren -- society just couldn’t survive. No other form of living can create the positive relationships that are found in the family.

No other form of relationship has such societal potentialities, or such economic potential. Nowhere else can humans fully learn and experience the solidarity that family ties provide and the mercy without which the other virtues lose much of their meaning.

The family is an indispensable resource for society. But it is also at society's beginning: The family is the natural home of the fruitful relationship between man and woman and of those intergenerational relationships that create history and culture of a people. Marriage is an alliance that helps to build a solid house, that family, and with the family, all of society.

My brothers, we are at a divide that history has never before encountered. On one side is the biblical affirmation, “*It is not good for man to be alone,*” (Gen. 2:18) which is the origin of the family and of society itself, but on the other side we hear the exact opposite: “it is best for individuals to go it alone,” a belief that forms the basis of social and economic individualism. According to Eric Klinenberg, author of “*Going Solo*”, in US there are more than 32 million people living alone, about 28 percent of all households. The same tendency is also clear in Europe and the formation of big cities, megalopolis, is making the trend expand all over the world.

Pope Francis was right when he told the Charismatic gathering two Sundays ago that “the Devil doesn't like families.” Today, the serpent from the Garden of Eden is a dividing spirit that attacks families first, because the family in fact is the beginning of a world where “us” prevails over “me”; and the family, particularly the Christian family - which in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony receives a love that always reaches outward -, is the source of that family spirit that in time embraces all of society.

The Gospel of the Family goes out from Philadelphia

Again in his homily at the Mass that opened the Synod on the New Evangelization, Pope Emeritus Benedict said that “*marriage itself is a Gospel, a good news for today's world.*” In a world where loneliness has been globalized, we Christians must globalize family love. The Synod will bring forth a new spring for families, and their joyous witness can overcome the individualism that is poisoning our lives. The Synod's real document will

not be words, it will be witness, and we must invite to that witness all in the world who see in marriage, and in the family it produces, the perfection of our humanity and of society.

What is my dream? I want Philadelphia Two Thousand Fifteen to be a wondrous celebration for all Catholic families, but for Hispanic families in particular. We see in their love for each other, their solidarity -- their mercy -- toward those in need, their respect for the elderly and their joyful welcome of new life a model for the whole Church. We know that up to forty percent of American Catholics are Latinos, but that number is not keeping pace with the total percentage of Latinos in the United States, and the risk of their falling away as they enter a new culture is significant. My Brother Bishops, as you welcome these new sisters and brothers in Christ, remember that only the joy of the Gospel, the Gospel of the Family, will protect the Catholicism of this vital part of the Church in America.

I also want our Meeting to include Eastern Catholic and Orthodox families, and all communities of Christians—evangelical, Protestant and unaffiliated—as well as families from the world’s other religions, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and nonreligious families of good will. My brother bishops, please make that happen!

The moment, my brothers, is ripe, not because the joy of the Gospel comes easy, but because the Gospel is always the only answer to the crying need, all over the world, for love. The Gospel of Jesus, and of the Family, must overcome the loneliness that excludes real love and that is suffocating humanity today. Please believe, and preach to your flocks, that it is most surely in the family that we see that our destiny is not loneliness but rather love, mutually sustaining and fruitful; growth, hopeful and wise, and joy, earthly and eternal.

This appeal to you is the same as the one I made at the United Nations last May 15, the International Day of Families. At that gathering, however, I made sure that on the speaker’s dais with me were a rabbi and an imam so that the international community would see all three of us in agreement that the family is at the heart of human development.

In that context, my hope for Philadelphia Two Thousand Fifteen is not only that the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia will ring out a new spring for families, but also that in nearby New York the United Nations will hear that sound and realize that lasting peace will be found only if nations believe that all peoples of the world truly are one human family.

In closing, my dear brother bishops, my friends, our task ahead will not be simple, but with great confidence let us together entrust the Synod, the Philadelphia Meeting, and all families, to the loving care and protection of Jesus our Lord, of Mary, our Blessed Mother in Heaven, and of Joseph, our model for all fathers, and ours two newest saints Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II.

Thank you very much.