

# The Pope, a historic visit and ‘a deep desire to change the world’

Paul A. Long 9:48 a.m. EDT September 17, 2015



(Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Next week, three cities — Washington D.C., New York City and Philadelphia — will host Pope Francis as he makes his first visit to the United States. The pope will arrive to a rather high level of energy and excitement, as people from coast to coast are intrigued by his visible model of service and humble manner of speaking.

During his time in the U.S., Pope Francis will become the first pope to address a joint session of Congress, the third to meet with a president while visiting the States, and the fourth to address the United Nations. He will end his American journey in Philadelphia at the World Meeting of Families, a worldwide Catholic gathering held every three years to celebrate and promote families.

Pope Francis' visit will also highlight the important role faith plays in public life.

Communities and individuals of differing faiths have significantly contributed to the development of society, bringing together diverse perspectives that seek to advance the common good. Along with the contributions religion makes to the development of culture and debate, faith also brings its mandate of service to others. Religious communities and organizations have been active in American public life for hundreds of years. For these organizations, practicing their faith and serving others are not two separate duties, but rather both are part of their full exercise of being religious.

The Catholic Church in Michigan, for example, maintains an extensive record of serving those in need. Last year, Catholic schools educated 53,364 students, teaching the importance of service, critical thinking, and faith values; Catholic social services agencies assisted 931,554 individuals with counseling, refugee resettlement, and personal needs assistance; Catholic hospitals and health care centers served 6,801,015 patients, many of whom could not afford the service; and 640 Catholic parishes — together with their parishioners — provided vital spiritual, financial, and material support across their community. Beyond the numbers, Catholic entities continue their presence for the underserved in society, providing care with dignity and respect.

The impact of Michigan's approximately 2 million Catholics, 20% of the state's population, is deeply engrained in society, and has been since Father Gabriel Richard, Bishop Baraga, and Jesuit missionary Pere Marquette first ministered in the Great Lakes region beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

To address issues that impact poor and vulnerable persons, the state benefits from the presence of a variety of organizations that recruit volunteers and care for those on the margins. Society is well served by this diverse engagement of citizens, including those of faith. Through their charitable service to others, religious communities promote a positive vision for every human person.

Pope Francis has written that an authentic faith “involves a deep desire to change the world.” He has also urged the faithful to “leave this earth somehow better than we found it.” May this historic visit further inspire individuals to enrich public life through faith and service.

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