POPE FRANCIS IN THE U.S.

Francis’ message focuses on
poverty, climate, migrants

By PETER BAKER and MICHAEL D. SHEAR
New York Times

WASHINGTON - Welcomed with a fanfare of trumpets and a chorus of amens, Pope Francis introduced himself to the United States on Wednesday with a bracing message on climate change, immigration and poverty that ranged from the pastoral to the political.

On a day that blended the splendor of an ancient church with the frenzy of a modern rock star tour, Francis waded quietly but forcefully into some of the most polarizing issues of American civic life. Along the way, he underscored just how much he has upended the agenda of the Roman Catholic Church and reordered its priorities.

Perhaps no one was more pleased than President Obama, who greeted him with an elaborate ceremony at the White House, where the pope explicitly embraced the administration’s efforts to combat climate change. At a later speech to bishops, Francis, the first pope from Latin America, pressed for openness to immigrants.

While the last two popes focused on traditional moral issues like abortion and homosexuality, Francis left those to the side in Obama’s presence. With the bishops, he spoke about the “innocent victim of abortion” but mentioned the issue as only one of a long list of concerns, including children who die of hunger or in bombings and immigrants who “drown in the search for a better tomorrow.”

“Humanity has the ability to work together in building our common home,” the pope told a crowd of thousands on the South Lawn of the White House in his first major speech in English. “As Christians inspired by this certainty, we wish to commit ourselves to the conscious and responsible care of our common home.”

Francis was greeted everywhere by joyful crowds. Catholics and non-Catholics alike juggled small flags of the Holy See with their cellphones as they craned for a glimpse of only the fourth to visit the U.S. and third to visit Washington.

The spiritual leader of 1.2 billion Catholics led a short parade around the Ellipse in his pope-mobile, waving and making the sign of the cross as Vatican officials brought him babies to kiss. He later celebrated mass for more than 20,000 people and presided over the first canonization in the United States.

In his first visit to the United States, Francis, 78, seemed eager to pass over his previous criticisms of a materialistic, capitalist culture and instead reach out to the world’s most powerful nation. He praised the country’s devotion to freedom of liberty and religion even as he cautioned that its vast resources demanded a sense of moral responsibility.

The pope arrived at the White House to find a crowd of 11,000 people. The White House rolled out its best color guards, including a five-and-a-half-hour drum corps, but opted against the 21-gun salute that is traditional for such ceremonies.

Obama thanked the pope for his help in restoring U.S. relations with Cuba and hailed him for speaking out for the world’s most impoverished. “You shake our conscience from slumber,” he said.

After meeting alone with the president, the pope went to the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, where the crowd swelled so deep that for many the only sign of the pope’s arrival was a cheer echoing through nearby streets.

Addressing nearly 300 bishops, whom he referred to as his brothers, the pope was warm and encouraging, but he also spoke with simple language that was unmistakable in its emphasis. He praised the bishops for their work on behalf of immigrants, and for the first time praised their “courage” in handling the church’s sexual abuse scandals.

Later in the afternoon, the pope traveled to the campus of Catholic University of America to celebrate his first mass in the United States and to canonize Junipero Serra, a Franciscan who founded missions across California in the 1700s.

HIS OWN WORDS

Mr. President, I am deeply grateful for your welcome in the name of all Americans. As the son of an immigrant family, I am happy to be a guest in this country, which was largely built by such families.

American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of good will, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty. That freedom
remains one of America's most precious possessions. ... I find it encouraging that you are proposing an initiative for reducing air pollution. Accepting the urgency, it seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to a future generation. When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history. We still have time to make the changes needed to bring about a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. Such change demands on our part a serious and responsible recognition not only of the kind of world we may be leaving to our children, but also to the millions of people living under a system which has overlooked them. Our common home has been part of this group of the excluded which cries out to heaven and which today powerfully strikes our homes, our cities and our societies. To use a telling phrase of the Reverend Martin Luther King, we can say that we have defaulted on a promissory note and now is the time to honor it.

... The efforts which were recently made to mend broken relationships and to open new doors to cooperation within our human family represent positive steps along the path of reconciliation, justice and freedom. I would like all men and women of good will in this great nation to support the efforts of the international community to protect the vulnerable in our world and to stimulate integral and inclusive models of development, so that our brothers and sis-

CONGRESSIONAL GUEST LIST

Sen. Amy Klobuchar: Tim Marx, president/CEO of Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis

Sen. Al Franken: Jacqueline Bernard of Pine City, a member of Immaculate Conception Church and mother-in-law of a state-based staffer

Rep. Tim Walz: Sister Alice Zachmann, of Mankato, member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Rep. John Kline: Longtime Chief of Staff Jean Hinz

Rep. Erik Paulsen: Chief of Staff Laurie Essau

Rep. Betty McCollum: Won't attend because she's going to her son's wedding in Japan

Rep. Keith Ellison: His mother, Cilda Ellison


ALLISON SHERRY
Pope Francis touched the forehead of a woman in a wheelchair as he arrived Wednesday at the Vatican mission in Washington.

GRANDEUR: With the Washington Monument as a backdrop and an honor guard at attention, President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama met with Pope Francis at the White House.
PAPAL PLEASURE: Pope Francis smiled as he was applauded when he walked into the basilica Wednesday.