

THE WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES: WHAT YOU CAN DO

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This past weekend, March 21-22, many of our parishes included a letter from me that was read during Mass. It highlighted some of the needs we face in preparing for the World Meeting of Families (WMOF) this September. We have exactly – and *only* – six months left before the event. The pace of getting ready to welcome visitors from around the globe and Pope Francis himself is speeding up quickly.

A great deal of work has already been done. The generosity of major donors, and Philadelphia's business community and civic leaders, has been wonderful. Advance teams from the Holy See have already visited Philadelphia. They've been very pleased with the professionalism and zeal of the WMOF staff, and the appeal of Philadelphia as a city.

All of this is well-earned good news. Having said it though, we need to remember the counsel we heard from one of the Vatican veterans of other WMOF gatherings: From this point on, the pace of preparations for the event will double every month. So we can't afford to skip any opportunity to ask for help. And that's the purpose of my column this week.

Here's what we need in these final months to make WMOF 2015 a success.

First, World Meeting of Families is a very expensive event. Much of the heaviest fund-raising for WMOF is being done by generous corporate and major individual donors, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, because WMOF will be a boost for our whole region. But many parishioners have also asked how they can personally help. And that's a blessing, because we can use all the help that we can get.

Donating financially is the best way of ensuring that September's family gathering and welcome for Pope Francis will be worth remembering for a lifetime. Every donation, no matter how large or small, counts. And there's no better time than now to contribute. We all have a stake in renewing Catholic life in Philadelphia. So please consider a donation to the World Meeting of Families 2015 as we enter these last days of Lent and start the Easter season. Tax-exempt financial donations can be directed to: worldmeeting2015.org/get-involved/donate; or World Meeting of Families/Philadelphia 2015, 222 N. 17th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Second, WMOF will need 10,000 or more volunteers for the event. This is crucial, since volunteers will be the face of the local Catholic community throughout the meeting. Volunteer registration will open soon on the World Meeting of Families website at www.worldmeeting2015.org. All volunteers must be a U.S. citizen, at least 18 years old, and they must complete an online background check. The WMOF website has information on the wide variety of volunteer opportunities available.

Third, we've had many generous families step forward, especially in the last few weeks, offering to host WMOF visitors in their homes. But we need many more. Philadelphia-area hotels are rapidly filling the available rooms for the World Meeting of Families and papal visit. As I've said previously, we've partnered with Homestay, a global organization with a strong reputation and tourism track record. Homestay connects visiting families and individuals with local families willing to host them during events like World Meeting of Families. I strongly encourage families across the archdiocese to consider this kind of generosity. You can learn more on the "Host a Family" page at www.worldmeeting2015.org.

Fourth, don't forget to ready your own hearts by spending time with the excellent and very readable World Meeting of Families catechesis, *Love Is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive*, from Our Sunday Visitor at www.osv.com. This is a wonderful, engaging text. It lays out the Catholic approach to marriage, family, sexuality and the essentials of human dignity with beautiful simplicity.

Finally and most importantly, register and attend the World Meeting of Families with your own loved ones. Registration for both the Adult and Youth Congress sessions is now open on the WMOF website at www.worldmeeting2015.org. You'll find a variety of registration package options, and detailed information about each session.

It's hard to believe that time has passed so quickly since Philadelphia was first selected for the World Meeting of Families more than two years ago. It will pass even more rapidly in these last few months before September. Please keep our WMOF organizing team in your prayers, as well as all the good people who will come to Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families.

In so many different ways, the success of this life-changing event depends on your support.