

**Heraldic Achievement of
Most Reverend Charles Joseph Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., D.D.
Archbishop of Philadelphia**



Argent on a pile azure a mullet in chief of the field, overall on a fess sable three plates each charged with a cross throughout gules, impaling Azure a feather palewise Or surmounted by two hands clasped in fess argent, in chief issuant from a fillet Or a Tau Cross of the last surmounted by two cubit arms in saltire, the one bendwise sinister garbed, all argent, the palms of both hands wounded and voided of the field.

In designing the shield — the central element in what is formally called the heraldic achievement — an archbishop has an opportunity to depict symbolically various aspects of his own life and heritage, and to highlight particular aspects of Catholic faith and devotion that are important to him. The formal description of a coat of arms, known as the blazon, uses a technical language, derived from medieval French and English terms, which allows the appearance and position of each element in the achievement to be recorded precisely.

An archbishop shows his commitment to the flock he shepherds by combining his personal coat of arms with that of the archdiocese, in a technique known as impaling. The shield is divided in half along the pale or central vertical line. The arms of the archdiocese appear on the dexter side — that is, on the side of the shield to the viewer's left, which would cover the right side (in Latin, *dextera*) of the person carrying the shield. The arms of the archbishop are on the sinister side — the bearer's left, the viewer's right.

The tradition of impaling was first used to combine the coats of arms of married couples, and later applied to the arms of bishops and archbishops. This is a natural and fitting usage, because, as the Rite of Ordination instructs a newly-ordained bishop when he is given the ring that is one of the signs of his office, he must "preserve unblemished the bride of God, the holy Church." This reality is also conveyed by the motto that Archbishop Charles has chosen for his coat of arms, which comes from the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians. There, the Apostle is speaking to married couples, and says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her" (Eph 5:25). Here, the archbishop acknowledges that his love for the archdiocese entrusted to him must be like that of a husband for a wife—a permanent, faithful, generous gift of self in imitation of Christ.

The coat of arms of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia contains symbols of both the secular and the religious history of this local Church. The white background and the black horizontal stripe bearing three white circles (Argent, on a fess sable three plates) were the arms of William Penn, the founder of the City of Philadelphia, and the first Proprietor of the Commonwealth that bears his name. To signify the Christian Faith, the three white circles are marked with the Cross of Christ in red (gules). Behind the stripe appears a blue pennant-shaped section (a pile azure) marked with a white star. This is a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is invoked, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, as the patroness of the archdiocese.

The personal arms of Archbishop Charles were designed with the assistance of Deacon Paul Sullivan, a permanent deacon of the Diocese of Providence (Rhode Island), when the archbishop was

ordained as Bishop of Rapid City in 1988. The lower part of the shield contains elements that refer to the families of Archbishop Charles's parents, Joseph and Marian DeMarais Chaput.

At the center of the shield appears a feather. It alludes to the Native American heritage of the archbishop and his maternal relatives, the DeMarais and Navarre families, who are members of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribe. The feather is painted gold (Or) on a deep blue (azure) field; these colors recall that the archbishop's maternal relatives also share a French heritage. The Navarre family in particular traces its roots to the family of Saint Louis IX, who reigned as King of France from 1226 to 1270, and whose coat of arms consisted of gold fleurs-de-lis on a blue field (Azure, semy de lis Or).

Atop the feather is a pair of clasped hands, joined horizontally across the middle of the shield (in fess) in a universally-recognized sign of friendship. This charge comes from the coat of arms of Nicolas Chaput, who migrated to New France (modern Quebec) in the 1680s and was one of the pioneers of the island of Sainte-Thérèse, now part of the town of Varennes, a suburb of Montreal. In French heraldry, these clasped hands are sometimes simply called *une foi*, literally "a faith"; that is, a sign of loyalty and faithfulness. For this reason they may serve as a reminder that the Faith must be translated into loyal and active charity for one's neighbor as well as for the Lord, who extends to his disciples the gift of his friendship (cf. John 15:15).

The shield is divided by a gold horizontal line (fillet), which alludes to the Republican River that runs through Concordia, Kansas, the archbishop's birthplace. Above this line is shown the insignia of the Capuchin Franciscan order, which Archbishop Charles joined in 1965. The sacred wounds that appear on the palm of each hand make it easy to identify the arm of the Lord Jesus and that of Saint Francis of Assisi, with whom the Lord shared the Stigmata in 1224. Behind the arms, which are crossed like an "X" (in saltire) appears a particular type of Cross, shaped like the Greek letter Tau, similar to the Roman capital "T". Saint Francis often marked his own letters with a Tau; his biographers suggest that the practice may have started after he heard a homily given by Pope Innocent III, at the opening of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The pope referred to a passage in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (9:4), in which the prophet has a vision of the Lord preparing to purify his holy city, and ordering an angel to mark with a Tau all the people who separate themselves from corrupting influences and who pray and do penance for those who are affected by the evil in the world. For Saint Francis and for his spiritual children, the Tau remains an important call to conversion, and a reminder of the prophetic mission to work for the evangelization and renewal of the world.

Every coat of arms also includes external elements that identify the rank of the bearer. A gold processional cross appears behind the shield; its two crossbeams indicate that the coat of arms belongs to an archbishop. The galero or "pilgrim's hat" is used heraldically in various colors and with specific numbers of tassels to indicate the rank of a bearer of a coat of arms. An archbishop uses a green galero with four rows of green tassels.