

Papal ambassador's visit promotes unity

Pope Francis is a new note in the symphony that is the Catholic Church, and his call to each of us is to take up our instruments in harmony with that symphony, says the Holy Father's representative in Canada.

"What is new with Pope Francis, in a few words, it is to witness, to transmit, to participate, so that the humanity of today experiences the mercy of God through the mercy of the Church," Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi told a luncheon gathering of clergy, sisters and archdiocesan employees.



Apostolic Nuncio to Canada Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi meets with Archbishop Richard Smith. Grandin Media file photo

"Our mission, given by Jesus Christ, is to make visible this unique characteristic of God, which is mercy, to be creative interpreters and witnesses of the mercy of God. It is easy for me to be in sympathy with Pope Francis – I love him. But some people have problems understanding what he says and what he does."

Archbishop Bonazzi made the comments during a jam-packed two-day tour of Edmonton, part of his first visit to Alberta since his appointment as Apostolic

Nuncio in December 2014.

He encouraged all those who work for the Church to share the gift of the Lord's love with the people they serve.

"The Church is a living body, so it is important for each to bring passion to their ministry and to perform this with love, because love keeps us creative, continually searching for new and different ways to interpret love."

For those who weren't quite sure what a nuncio does, he explained his mission this way: "to be someone who makes visible the charism of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, who is the centre of unity of the faith, and unity of love. My task is to transmit this desire, promoting unity, which is always a unity in diversity."

Archbishop Richard Smith assured the nuncio that Pope Francis has the prayers and support of the people of the Archdiocese and that when the Western Canadian bishops see him during their upcoming ad limina visit, "we'll tell him what a great nuncio he has sent to Canada!"



Fr. Kris Schmidt takes a selfie with Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi. Grandin Media file photo

Despite a gruelling tour schedule, the 68-year-old nuncio, a native of Italy,

managed to disarm everyone with his easy smile and rapt attention. And he happily agreed to pose for selfies and was generous with hugs as well as handshakes.

As a longtime Church diplomat, he meets a lot of people. And he has a simple philosophy for dealing with each one that Providence places before him.

“The real way to understand someone is to empty the self,” he said. “And the other is able to enter into us – and then we are really ourselves.”

That philosophy shone as he visited St. Joseph Basilica late Friday afternoon.

Father Martin Carroll was highlighting the building’s features when Archbishop Bonazzi suddenly bolted. He had spotted a young couple with a baby, and he just had to bless them.

“It was the baby girl’s first birthday, and they were there to present her to Our Lady of Guadalupe, to entrust her to the Mother of God,” he said later. “And the expression of the mutual love between them, you could see it. Those are the signs that give joy, that give hope.”

Mina Angotti, a student at Newman Theological College, was delighted by the nuncio’s impromptu visit to her Synoptic Gospels class on Thursday.

“What a gift! He was absolutely beautiful to the students,” said Angotti, who enjoyed a short chat in Italian with the visitor. “I was a little surprised, but not overwhelmed. I was just taking in the gift of his presence.”



Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi meets with parishioners at St. Joseph's Basilica. Grandin Media file photo

Ed Stelmach, the former Alberta premier who serves as board chair of Covenant Health, called it a privilege to meet the nuncio on his visit to the organization's administrative offices.

"He talked about how we are reaching out to the margins, and we're taking that leadership role not only in palliative care but in addictions and some of the programs we're involved in with homelessness," Stelmach said.

"It was a good feeling in the heart, and we're going to try and convey the same message from him to all of our staff. That it's recognized by the Church in such a strong way gives us extra strength and in many ways endurance to continue the work of reaching to the marginalized, because it is always a challenge."

Others who got face time with the nuncio included representatives of four Catholic school districts, consecrated women, archdiocesan clergy and seminarians, and staff of Catholic Social Services. There were also visits with Archbishop Emeritus Joseph McNeil and Auxiliary Bishop Gregory Bittman, and with Bishop David Motiuk of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton, including a look at the magnificent iconography of St. George's Ukrainian Catholic Church.

The nuncio's visit to Alberta began in Calgary, where he joined in celebrating

the installation of Bishop William McGrattan as successor to the retiring Bishop Fred Henry. Before that, the only thing he knew about Calgary was that Italian skier Alberto Tomba won gold at the 1988 Winter Olympics there.

Asked about his impressions of the Alberta visit, Archbishop Bonazzi said he was still processing it all.

“It is well known that here in Alberta the population is composed by people coming from every country, every race, every nation, and many different cultures,” he said. “But what was a deep impression for me was to see a fertile amalgamation of people of such different origins. It was for me a special, unique experience to see how the faith, the Gospel, is really capable to produce unity, community, family out of such very multicoloured diversity.

“I think the Canadian family should treasure this successful experience in bringing people together, not only people of different countries staying respectfully one next to the other, but really uniting, and in this sense enriching each other. This is very important.”

Archbishop Bonazzi said he also became more aware of the challenge the Church faces in a society that seems increasingly hostile to any mention of faith in public discourse.

“I think it is important to respect and to try to perceive the value of religious belief, which has at its core the call to promote the dignity of every human being, simply because he is a human being. And not only that, but if a preference is to be given, it is to those more fragile, to those more in need, to those more without defence.”