

# CHURCH CHAT

BY

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## MEET BISHOP SCHNEIDER

I can't tell you how I got a copy of his journal but I will say that Edward Snowden had nothing to do with it. On the other hand, I do have some related advice: don't keep a journal on your computer. Write it out the old-fashioned way.

In any case, I have access to the almost-real Bishop Herman Schneider's on-going personal journal. He is the Bishop of the fictional Mt. Vernon, IL diocese, late 50's, personally connected with Cardinals both in the USA and in Rome, articulate defender of the faith, somewhat stern publically but pleasant enough privately, conservative, and, as his journal shows, willing to accept a higher ranking position in the Church – immediately!

But since Francis became Pope, Herman has lost some of his confidence and direction. Well, some entries in his journal paint the picture:

3/13/13: They elected a guy from Argentina as Pope, Bergoglio. Never heard of him. But something didn't seem right. He came out in a plain white cassock, smiled a lot, and then asked the people to bless him. That's strange. It should be the other way around. Everyone is trying to figure out who he is and what he's like. Jesuit, of all things. Picked the name of Francis; the first one who dared to do that. Called Bernie and even though he is my Vicar General and has lots of connections, he didn't know anything about this Bergoglio either. Wait and see, is all he could say. Anyway, I have a new boss and I guess the Holy Spirit is involved, but something doesn't seem right.

3/28/13: Holy Thursday and Francis washed the feet of some young Muslim woman in a prison. What am I supposed to do with that? His living, his dress, his whole style – it's not appropriate for the Pope. I call it "commonizing" the Papacy. I admire his commitment, in a sense, and the people seem to be with him all the way but there is a certain decorum that goes with the Papacy and he is undermining that. And I am not able to do what he does. I'm not moving into an apartment and I need a driver so I can keep up with my correspondence and grab a nap. I never thought I would have these kinds of issues.

5/14/13: Had Confirmation in Marion tonight and an eighth-grader asked me what I thought of the new Pope. Caught me off-guard, actually. I was tempted to

say “No comment” but knew I couldn’t get away with that. Said the right things: different approach, humble, speaks for the poor, teachings haven’t changed, etc. But what do I really think of Francis? Honestly? Serious reservations. Not enough emphasis on Church teachings. A key role of Bishops, and the Pope, is to teach authentic doctrine. We must stick with that as our foundation. Without changing doctrine, he is changing everything. I fear what’s coming. I’m sticking to my agenda and I will try to smile more and learn some jokes. But I’m not sure where I stand anymore. I can’t talk about this in public, not even to Bernie - especially not to Bernie or other Bishops. I have to work this out myself.

10/10/13: Every day I get comments or questions about Francis. Everyone seems so eager to praise him. I have my stock answers now – remarkable and admirable style but the teachings remain the same. What disturbs me the most is that Francis doesn’t seem to care about Church teachings too much, even though he hasn’t denied anything. He seems to think that other things are more important. I don’t get it and I am convinced he is making some big mistakes. Frankly, he is making my job harder. People are beginning to expect me to be more like him. Well, I am not moving out of my house and I am not changing my style or teaching. Pretty soon people will lose interest in him and we’ll be back to the way things used to be.

1/15/14: This guy is a disaster! Every day, it’s something else. His popularity keeps growing and he keeps insisting on helping the poor. It’s not that I disagree; I read the gospel too. But my whole career is going backwards. I studied canon law, worked in the chancery back in Cleveland, met the right Bishops and two Cardinals who assured me I was on the right path, became the youngest Auxiliary Bishop in the country, was made bishop of Mt. Vernon and now I’m ready for a bigger diocese. Then Francis changes things so that now I am an outsider instead of an insider. Depressing. And I am still young. How can I handle this? I don’t want to be bishop here for the rest of my life. What can I do?

See what I mean? I’ll keep you posted. It’s a long journal and it keeps going.