His policies might divide his flock in the US

Charisma, positivity and a caring social nous.

That's why his papal visits so special to Americans

by Edward J Lordan

PONTIFICE Francisco is making his first visit to the United States this week, and it's a three-city whirlwind tour that captured America's imagination. The Pope's six days in America are packed with speeches and events, with his 'Shepard One' plane whisking him between states and his modified Popemobile shuttling him between crowds. The trip has all the trappings of a U2 tour, including a 30-person entourage, massive crowds and exhaustive media coverage.

So, how are Americans responding?

Well, it depends on who you ask.

One in five US citizens is Catholic, and 71 per cent of them approve of Francis's performance as Pontiff. That's a higher approval rating than that of any of his predecessors, but 18 points lower than it was a year ago.

The drop has been most significant among Catholic conservatives, reflecting some of the more controversial papal pronouncements from the Vatican over the last 18 months.

Americans have responded to the dichotomy in Francis's philosophy with a form of 'catholicism in America,' cheering him when they agree with his positions, and rejecting or ignoring his pronouncements when they disagree.

Traditional marriage? The clashing of the rings. Global warming? The same old thing as before.

Most Americans do agree, however, that they are excited that he's in America. This is such a great opportunity for the United States, says college professor Michael Boyle from Prospect Park, Pennsylvania.

'Pope Francis has brought new energy to the Church and it is great for our region to be a part of this experience.'

With people coming from all over and the world watching, it truly will be an international event.

Francis's US tour kicked off on Tuesday with his arrival at Andrews Airforce Base outside of Washington, DC. In the first of many unprecedented moments, President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle met him at the Tar- maic, Washington is a city that's accustomed to hosting dignitaries from around the globe, but the arrival of the worldwide leader of 1.2 billion Catholics has been hailed as something very special in recent years.

The Pope's advance team has been working hard to get the White House and other venues ready in time. The large lectern on which Francis will speak has been specially designed and ordered to come by, even when Francis didn't even consider for hosting the Pope's open-air appearance.

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The Pope even took a moment to encourage legislators, who have become increasingly fractious in recent years, to work toward common goals and find areas of co-operation.

Predictably, the political response to the speech broke along party lines. Both sides praised the remarks by declaring their excitement and gratitude for the Pope. Conservatives then emphasised their agreement with his pro-life sentiments, while liberals chose to talk about his comments on economic disparity.

The Pope's popularity, however, is part blessing, part curse. Ticket sales for every papal event are hard to come by, even when Francis appears in massive forums.

The largest public arena in the DC metro area is FedEx Park, home of the Washington Redskins football team and a stadium comparable to Croke Park, but the facility was not even considered for hosting the Pope's open-air appearance.

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but Francis’s humble humanitarian nature has united them