A New Pentecost, A New Evangelization

The Catholic Review

The Challenge of Pope Benedict

Our role at the Catholic Center, where the offices for the central services of the Archdiocese are located, is to provide the support that will allow the outstanding work of our parishes, schools and other institutions to continue for the benefit of those we serve. I have been extremely impressed by the dedication of the fine people who show up at 320 Cathedral Street each day striving to serve God by supporting the many valuable ministries of this Archdiocese. Seeking to better understand the efficiency and effectiveness of this support, as well as to bring a sense of definition and clarity to our local Church called "Archdiocese", led me to commission a study of the daily operations. The Mission Study, which involved interviews with dozens of people at the Catholic Center, as well as individuals from parishes, schools, and other institutions, indicated several areas for improvement. Most notably, communication, both among the various departments within the Catholic Center and with the institutions we support, as well as clearly defined expectations for success, are chief among them.

Recently, I shared a synopsis of the findings of the Mission Study (led by Mr. Chris Helmrath of SC&H Group) with the employees at the Catholic Center. After the study was presented, I shared my thoughts on the process and the context for the study, as well as my hopes for the success of our collective efforts to improve upon a strong and motivated operation. While some of what follows was reported in last week's Catholic Review, I present here my thoughts in a fuller context. I hope that it will give some insight to our Catholic people into the workings of central services. I suspect that it might lend sharper focus, as well, for all who are dedicated to the service of our local Church.

Basically, I sought to challenge each person working in the Catholic Center to examine his or her own vocation to determine how we can work together to foster a more cohesive and collaborative community of faith. For if we are to serve God and each other with the fullness of our love and ability, our local Church must first begin to see itself not as group of parishes and schools supported by an office building, but as a Church with no walls, no doors, and no ceiling; A Church called the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

A New Pentecost, a New Evangelization. That is what our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, called for during his recent visit to the United States: a New Pentecost, "a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church in this country." He praised the impressive legacy of the Catholic community in America, "outstanding in its prophetic witness in the defense of life, in the education of the young, in care for the poor, the rich and the stranger in your midst." He thanked all those who have taken up the Vatican Council's call for a New Evangelization.

Several times throughout his visit, the Holy Father cited the "Mother See" of Baltimore and the 200th anniversary of our being elevated to an Archdiocese. He singled out for special praise "the life and ministry of John Carroll, the first bishop of Baltimore—a worthy leader (whose)… tireless efforts to spread the Gospel in the vast territory under his care laid the foundations" of Catholic life here.

And in looking toward the years ahead, he prayed, "On these solid foundations the future of the Church in America must even now begin to rise!"

I could not have been other than personally challenged by these reflections of our Holy Father, coming as they did barely six months into my ministry as Archbishop of Baltimore. As you know, I have travelled the length and breadth of this Premier See, invariably impressed and even inspired by the goodness I have witnessed in our parishes, schools and works of charity. In addition, the contributions of time, talent, and treasure by our many generous benefactors—ever committed to the Church and to those we are called to serve—are evident throughout the Archdiocese and have given this local Church the strong support it needs to heed the Holy Father's call and begin to rise.

As I seek to build on these solid foundations as the Pope suggests, I take seriously to

heart yet another of his reminders:

"…all structures, associations and programs, valuable or even essential as they may be, ultimately exist only to support and foster the deeper unity which, in Christ, is God's indefectible gift to his Church."

Unity…God's indefectible gift to his Church…

To begin the journey toward a New Pentecost and a New Evangelization, all who work for the Church should be challenged to promote a greater unity of the Church in Baltimore. Since these central services offices are by definition central to the unity of this local Church, a New Pentecost and a New Evangelization must radiate from here to our parishes, schools and all Archdiocesan institutions.

"The Chancery", "The Catholic Center" (label us as you will) is the face and the voice of the Archbishop of Baltimore and Catholics as well as others should expect us to be one in vision, one in action. But to be evangelizers, we must first be evangelized individually and as the community of service that we are.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives a succinct and helpful definition of evangelization. It is: "The proclamation of Christ and His Gospel by word and by the testimony of life, in fulfillment of Christ's command": Go and teach all nations. If Pope Benedict would call upon the spirit of John Carroll and the nation's first diocese as an example for the New Evangelization of our whole country, how incumbent it is on us, Baltimore Catholics, again to lead the way, to again set the example of a local Church on fire to spread the Gospel. And if a New Evangelization takes hold here in central services, it will surely enrich our local Church at every level.

I called Catholic Center personnel together first to thank them for their dedication and indeed, their devotion to this Archdiocese and our mission. That goes for everyone, from the garage entrance I take daily and the offices of our very capable maintenance department, our mail workers and deliverers, to the main entrance and the ever smiling receptionists, up through the building to the dedicated services of our Church Ladies and others in the rarified atmosphere of the seventh floor. According to the results of our very thorough Study team, what we have here in our

building and throughout the Archdiocese are highly dedicated individuals who work very hard to bring about success to our Church's mission. Our people are conscientious and highly committed to what they do.

My next purpose in calling this unique community together was to ask: Do you see yourself—each of you—as playing a pivotal role in the Church's responsibility "to proclaim the Gospel of Christ"? Whatever your role, from garage level to the seventh floor, do you see your work as ministry, as a service or work of sanctification for yourself and through you, for the sanctification of those turning to you for assistance every day?

To put it another way, I asked: Is your work here complementing your own personal spiritual life (and I speak as well to those who are not Catholic), is your work here strengthening your family and social relationships?

If not, it remains my hope and responsibility to help all our co-workers to achieve a vision of what they do daily as much more than a job, but as a ministry and a vocation. And for our many workers who do approach the doors of 320 Cathedral St. with that noble and lofty sense of vocation, I want to build upon that.

Make no doubt about it, we in central services are minimalizing and failing in our purpose, we are cheating ourselves of the graced satisfaction that should rightly be ours if we refuse to see what we do each day—quietly and often anonymously—as a direct Christ-like service to that parish secretary in Cumberland, to the second-grader in Hagerstown, to our volunteers in the Esperanza Center and to the hungry hearts and souls in line at Our Daily Bread.

At this point, I felt it important to reveal my personal "ministerial compass" to the many workers, most of whom hardly know me. (God willing, that will change, now that my touch-and-go pastoral visits throughout the Archdiocese have been realized.) The quotes that follow would suggest healthy and helpful pastoral approaches and I presented them in the words and insights of two important mentors in my priesthood.

During very turbulent days of a divided Church of the 1970s and 1980s, Terrence Cardinal Cooke, Archbishop of New York from 1968-1983, would often plead his

goal, to move all the people of his Archdiocese forward, but together. The Church's unity is a grace–a gift from God– but we are instrumental in promoting the Church's unity. The word "silo" reappears in the Mission Study report suggesting that we will work more effectively when we better coordinate the many good programs emanating from the Catholic Center. We will be working on this in every department at every level.

John Cardinal O'Connor, Cardinal Cooke's successor, offered his priests and other collaborators great leadership insights. I will mention but two.

His ordination homilies will someday be published I hope. They are as spiritually enriching as any I have ever heard. His final words in every homily to newly ordained priests were whispered pleadingly and almost tearfully: "Above all, be kind to people, be kind to people, be kind to people." That goes for all of us, and I thank all those who work in our system for their daily kindnesses to the often-troubled hearts that turn to us. How many there are estranged from the Church because of an insensitive word or angry reaction by a Church representative.

A prayer I offer early each morning as did Cardinal O'Connor: "Lord, let me not stand in the way of anyone trying to do good today." Our Mission Study began with a summary of the extraordinary initiatives and accomplishments of Cardinal Keeler during his tenure as our Archbishop. I often state how privileged I have been to have inherited such a patrimony. I owe deepest thanks to the Cardinal and his many collaborators. We all know how responsible Bishop Malooly has been in carrying through the Cardinal's programs and I thank him as well as Bishops Rozanski and Madden for all that they continue to do in support of me and in their extraordinarily selfless ministry to our parishes.

I closed my comments with a quote of my own, one that served me well in working with a much smaller Chancery staff of the Archdiocese for the Military Services. We know how typical it is for some in any large Archdiocese to see the Chancery as an obstacle to the real work of our pastors and parish leaders, an administrative bureaucracy that simply "plays by the book," out of touch with and insensitive to the real needs and expectations of the people. I have not seen much of that in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, in spite of inevitable stereotypes which some would insist

upon.

Trust and respect go a long way where authority is at stake. The trust and respect I have for each member of our Archdiocesan family – their professionalism, their generosity, their good will – is deep and genuine. I hope we can presume to evidence the same kind of trust in those we serve in the field – our pastors, administrators and all who carry out local responsibilities.

And that's where my final quote comes in. I have confidence in the judgment of my collaborators, and in responding to their proposals and suggestions, I will always say "yes" when I can and when I cannot, I will try to give the reason for having to say "no."

In the months ahead I plan to meet with each of our department heads to explore the implications of the full report for that area of mission and for my priorities of vocations, defense of life and the City of Baltimore. Of course, our Presbyteral Council will be brought into the conversation as will the faithful of our three vicariates. Finally, I am combining our management and strategy teams into an Archbishop's Council. I will preside over this meeting every 10 days or so.

And so I offered a number of questions for the members of our Central Services staff to consider in the weeks and months ahead. I suspect that much of the following checklist might evoke some useful dialogue, vis a vis, for the staffs of our parishes and all who help us minister to the Church here in Baltimore.

- How can we bring about a greater spirit of unity in this community of the Catholic Center?
- How can we develop a sense of vocation, a call to do God's work, in whatever our daily responsibilities are?
- What can we do to highlight the good works of the good people who make up this community?
- Is each of us aware of his or her specific responsibilities?
- Are we aware of to whom we are accountable?
- Do I feel that I receive adequate recognition for the ministry that is mine?
- Can just "anybody" carry out the ministry that is mine? Or do I feel that I bring uniqueness to the task?

- Am I confident that new ideas or suggestions will be welcome by superiors?
- Do I feel a sense of responsibility in trying to change and improve what is not functioning properly or do I see any such efforts not expected or unwelcome?
- Do I feel I have the trust of my superiors and co-workers?
- How do I evoke trust in those whom I supervise?
- What can I as the Archbishop do to bring about a great sense of unity, of a realization that we are about God's work, of trust in this unique community?

I received some excellent suggestions in response to these questions in the dialogue that followed my presentation, and I appreciate this. As always, dear readers, I would welcome your comments.