

Archbishop O'Brien's installation is 'proud day' for military

Kevin Walling, director for special projects for the Archdiocese for the U.S. Military Services, has worked closely with Baltimore's new archbishop.

"He's flown all over the world, but at the heart of his mission he's an excellent priest," said Mr. Walling of Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, who was installed as the 15th head of the Premier See Oct. 1. "At his heart is a love of the chaplains, a love of the priesthood and a love of young people."

Monsignor Gerald D. McManus, a U.S. Air Force chaplain who returned Sept. 14 from a four-month stint in Iraq, said he's "very proud that one of our own is going on to share his amazing talent and ability to shepherd such a large and diverse archdiocese."

He recalled that at a recent gathering of Washington-area priests during which Archbishop O'Brien was recognized, the group spoke about future get-togethers hoping the prelate would come down from Baltimore.

"He was visibly moved by that," said Monsignor McManus. "And just to see the love that he has for the military, for us priests while we've gone through a struggling time with declining number - again, it's just a proud day for us. He's really been a brother priest to us. He will do the same for Baltimore. He will make himself available."

During his homily, the archbishop thanked military members and their families and those who serve the U.S. Veterans Administration.

"You and the chaplains in your midst have never ceased to inspire me," he said. "You will always share a place in my heart and in my prayer."

Ensign Doug Gates, a 2007 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis who served as an intern for Archbishop O'Brien at the Archdiocese for the U.S. Military Services, said the new archbishop "loves the military and his favorite part of this job

has been working with the troops and visiting them and serving as their shepherd. He's never home. He's constantly traveling."

He and Mr. Walling have often served as a driver for the archbishop and said they enjoyed this "one-on-one time with the bishop."

"He's brilliant," said Mr. Walling. "And he's so humble. The airport lost his bag (recently) and he just stopped by my office and said 'You busy, Kev'?' And then we drove together for two hours in rush hour traffic to get his bag."

Bishop Richard Higgins, archdiocesan administrator for the Archdiocese for the U.S. Military Services and a retired U.S. Air Force chaplain of 30 years, said he thinks Archbishop O'Brien will be a "superb" leader for Baltimore.

"You heard from his homily, he's brilliant," said Bishop Higgins, who has known Archbishop O'Brien for 10 years. "I don't know where he gets his absolutely bottomless energy. From our perspective from the Archdiocese for the U.S. Military, he's been a phenomenal ambassador for us and he'll do the same for Baltimore. He'll go out and there will not be a priest he will not know."

He said the new archbishop has seen firsthand the sacrifices of military members and has empathy for them.

"His own active-duty time and his time with the cadets at (the U.S. Military Academy at West Point) - you can't get away from that," Bishop Higgins said. "It takes a part of your heart."