

Archbishop praises Legatus members for sharing faith with others

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien thanked a group of Maryland Catholic business leaders for the centrality of their faith Jan. 27 after a Mass and dinner for the Baltimore chapter of Legatus.

"Your faith is very important to you, a driving force in your life," he told the members of the group, which brings together Catholic CEOs and their spouses for spiritual formation and fellowship.

The archbishop said Jesus was in marked contrast to the other teachers and rabbis of his time, in that he chose his disciples. Others set about preaching, and if their message was welcomed, they gained followers, like some preachers today.

"When Christ said, 'You have not chosen me, I have chosen you,' that was revolutionary." Calling Peter, James, John and the other apostles to follow him was unprecedented, but they answered the call.

"Not only does he choose the disciples, but he sends them out," after they learn at the feet of the master, Archbishop O'Brien said.

He likened the Legatus members, who practice their faith in the business world, to the apostles and disciples. "The hallmark of your faith is that you give your life by sharing it with others. We're disciples and then we're apostles. We're called and then we're sent" to do the work Christ has taught his followers to do, the archbishop said.

Archbishop O'Brien took some time during his address to the Legates to brief them on the situation of Catholic schools in the archdiocese. He said the term "Catholic education" is misleading or shallow, because we should be talking about "Catholic formation."

“Anyone can educate,” the archbishop said, but to impart the knowledge and experience of the faith requires a healthy Catholic school system. He said the Blue Ribbon Study currently preparing to make recommendations represents “the most profound and thorough study of anything I’ve ever been a part of.”

He noted that, as has been previously reported, consolidation plans for schools will be announced March 4. The hope is that the schools that remain available will be to provide a seat in a Catholic school for any student who wants one.

Archbishop O’Brien noted that in the study groups and listening sessions around the archdiocese, time after time, “the first concern of anybody, even in the city where most of the kids are not Catholic, is they want Catholicism taught. So the first thing is Catholic identity, then strong academics, then stewardship, and management,” or governance.

He said the easiest thing to do would be not to accommodate some areas, especially in the city, that have limited or declining enrollment. However, the plan is to consolidate some schools to better meet needs, and maybe even open a new school.

“We have a commitment to (educating) minorities in Baltimore that goes back 200 years,” he said, emphasizing that a commitment to that mission will continue.

He said he thinks the plans being formulated will be innovative and could be the benchmark for other school systems around the country.

“We really think we can do it,” he said. “ I think we have the obligation to shoot for the mark.”

Responding to questions from some of the approximately 40 members and guests present, Archbishop O’Brien noted that Maryland is fourth from the bottom in the U.S. in state aid to private schools. “We are doing work in this city that no one else is doing for these kids.”

He urged people in the state to help the state Legislature pass the Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers (BOAST) tax credit bill, so that a mechanism will be in place for funding when the economy recovers.

The archbishop said there are challenges to face if the Catholic school system is going to thrive. "It's going to be strong; it's going to be better."

Before his formal remarks, he challenged the Legatus chapter, one of about 70 in the country, to grow its membership, currently at 20 couples. Commenting on an incentive being offered by the organization's national office to provide a free registration and accommodations at the 2011 Legatus Summit in Florida for a chapter's chaplain if six new members join by June, Archbishop O'Brien spontaneously offered to celebrate the Masses at Monsignor Richard E. Cramblitt's parish so the Baltimore chapter's chaplain can attend if the chapter meets the goal. Monsignor Cramblitt heads Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Mount Washington.

The name "Legatus" comes from the Latin word for ambassador. Its mission is to help Catholics who are CEOs, presidents and owners of companies "to study, live and spread the faith in their business, professional and personal lives." Information on the organization is available on the Web at www.legatus.org.

Editor's note: Christopher Gunty is a member of the Baltimore Chapter of Legatus.