

Archdiocese commits \$100,000 to city youth jobs

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Following the death of Freddie Gray Jr. and subsequent unrest, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has joined the effort of reaching out to the disenfranchised, pledging \$100,000 toward Baltimore's summer jobs program.

Earlier this week, Archbishop William E. Lori asked pastors of the archdiocese's 154 parishes to hold special collections at Masses June 20-21 to help the city provide nearly 8,000 youths with summer jobs.

✕ "The archdiocese is pleased to join with Johns Hopkins University and other leading institutions in Baltimore in addressing this need on behalf of the youth of our city," the archbishop said in a June 17 written statement. "This is an important first step in addressing a critical need and a critical time for Baltimore's leading institutions to come together for the good of our city, the good of God's children."

Brice Freeman, communications director of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, which is spearheading the youth jobs program, called the archdiocese's pledge a "terrific response."

"That's very significant, and, on behalf of Baltimore City and the mayor, we are really thankful," Freeman said.

The number of young people that YouthWorks - the city's program - hopes to place in summer jobs this year is significantly more than the 5,000 that has been the norm for the past few years.

"Because of the extra interest" from organizations such as the archdiocese, Freeman said, "we're fairly certain we'll have enough funding to offer all these young people jobs - if we can find enough work sites."

He said YouthWorks is "very close" but is still looking for about 1,000 more jobs to accommodate all the individuals, ages 14-21, who completed the program's application process in March.

YouthWorks is a five-week, 25-hours-per-week program in which participants earn the state minimum wage of \$8.25 per hour. The program begins June 29, but the city

has added a second cycle, beginning July 13, in order to accommodate more youths and allow organizations more time to sign on as job providers.

Freeman said that the youngest participants in the program are often placed in summer camps, churches or city government.

"As they get older and more seasoned, and their interests more refined, we place them in architecture firms, law firms, hotels and other places that offer valuable work experience," he added.

Freeman called YouthWorks a "mini economic stimulus for Baltimore City."

"The (youths) all earn about \$1,000 each," he said. "For the most part, that money will go back into the local economy."

With the cost of each YouthWorks job at about \$1,500, according to Freeman, the archdiocese's \$100,000 will fund more than 60 jobs.

Archbishop Lori said the archdiocese's commitment will not end there.

"The church remains committed to being actively involved in the public conversation about systemic issues such as poverty, racism, access to quality schools, jobs and housing..." he said. "The church is engaged in addressing these issues in a substantive way and is seeking partners to create vehicles for doing so," he added.

Any funds collected over and above the \$100,000 pledged will also be donated to the youth jobs program, according to Sean Caine, communications director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

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