

Baltimore bids farewell to Bishop Brennan

Approximately 300 people, mostly Hispanic immigrants, expressed their love and gratitude for the ministry of Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Mark E. Brennan during an Aug. 11 bilingual farewell Mass at Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Highlandtown.

Bishop Brennan, who will be installed as the ninth bishop of Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va. Aug. 22, has served in Baltimore since 2017. He previously ministered as a priest in the Archdiocese of Washington.

In his homily, Bishop Brennan urged those in the congregation to remain united to one another in faith and love, and to seek the spiritual sustenance found in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The bishop encouraged those who were born and raised in the United States to befriend immigrants and walk with them, noting that it would enrich the lives of both groups. He also encouraged immigrants to make friends of those born in this country for their “mutual benefit.”

“Never forget that this is your church,” Bishop Brennan told immigrants. “You are not guests in someone else’s church. You are Catholics. You belong here. You have the right to be treated as such and to take part in parish life, in our Catholic schools and other ministries and to contribute to their welfare.”

Bishop Brennan urged new immigrants to ignore insults thrown at them by “ignorant people.”

“Even in a country where some treat you badly,” he said, “you behave well and, by your work and energy, you make better the lives of all who live in this country. Keep working, studying, playing soccer, having fiestas and participating in your Church’s life. In God’s eyes, you are a treasure, for whom the Son of God offered his life on the cross and rose from the dead.”

During the farewell Mass, Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, who has served as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston since September 2018, highlighted Bishop Brennan's contributions to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including Bishop Brennan's help in expanding Hispanic ministries.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," Archbishop Lori joked. "In his life and ministry (Bishop Brennan) showed great love for Baltimore, including, I must say, the Orioles."

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston is about to get a "wonderful," "marvelous" new bishop, Archbishop Lori said, calling Bishop Brennan "a true shepherd of souls, a priest and bishop who will bring healing, hope and reconciliation to a diocese that has suffered greatly."

Bishop Brennan succeeds Bishop Michael J. Bransfield, who resigned in September 2018 amid allegations of sexual harassment and financial malfeasance. Archbishop Lori led an investigation into those allegations, sending a preliminary report to the Vatican.

As a result of that investigation, the Apostolic Nunciature to the United States sent a communique to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston that was posted July 19 on the diocese's website noting that based on the findings of the investigation into Bishop Bransfield, Pope Francis prohibited Bishop Bransfield from living in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and prohibited him from presiding or participating anywhere in any public celebration of the liturgy.

The communique also said Bishop Bransfield would be obligated "to make personal amends for some of the harm he caused; the nature and extent of the amends to be decided in consultation with the future bishop of the Wheeling-Charleston."

At a reception following Bishop Brennan's farewell Mass, many thanked him in person for his Baltimore ministry.

Bishop Brennan's words and work for the Hispanic community moved many, including Irlanda, who preferred not to share her last name.

"Many undocumented people have benefited from receiving identification cards as

parish members,” she told the Catholic Review in Spanish. “I wanted to thank Bishop Brennan and Archbishop Lori for their support.”

Alma Martinez remembered traveling with Bishop Brennan to the V Encuentro.

“He made us feel the accompaniment that was shown at the gathering,” she said. “He taught us to live the Gospel and showed us that we must imitate Jesus in our actions with others. We’ll miss him but we’re happy that he is going to another diocese.”

Karina Flores said Bishop Brennan often visited her parish, Sacred Heart Church in Glyndon, where there is a significant Spanish-speaking population. He got to know people in different ministries, including those of the youth group where she volunteers.

“It’s moving to be here saying goodbye to him,” she said. “We’re thankful to God too because he will help others.”

The farewell Mass was concelebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Denis Madden; Redemptorist Father Bruce Lewandowski, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús; and Father Louis Bianco, Archbishop Lori’s priest-secretary.