

Baltimore Jesuits rejoice in election of Jesuit pope

By Catholic Review Staff

Jesuits in the Archdiocese of Baltimore can't help but feel some pride that Pope Francis has become the first Jesuit pope in the 2,000-year history of the church.

"It's really great that finally a member of the best order in the Catholic Church is on the throne of Peter," deadpanned Jesuit Father Brian Linnane, president of Loyola University Maryland.

"The Jesuit way of proceeding - our own form of governance - depends a great deal on prayerful discernment and discussion," Father Linnane said. "I'm sure that will impact the way he leads the church."

At St. Alphonsus Rodriguez in Woodstock, Jesuit Father Joseph Lacey, pastor, keeps hearing congratulatory messages from parishioners of the Jesuit parish.

"I told everyone that it was all my doing," Father Lacey said with a laugh, joking that the new pope would elevate all Jesuits to become monsignors.

The priest said a big element of Jesuit spirituality is finding God in all things, a charism Father Lacey believes will benefit the new pope.

"I heard that Pope Francis was a (Jesuit) provincial and novice master," Father Lacey said. "He was editor of their spirituality magazine. It's a very rich background. He brings a rich tradition of simplicity."

Father Linnane and Father Lacey were impressed that Pope Francis named himself after St. Francis of Assisi, a much-loved saint respected for his commitment to the poor and promotion of peace.

"I think it's really interesting that he took the name Francis," Father Linnane said. "That's the first time that's happened, and obviously, you think of Francis of Assisi as one of the great Christian saints for well over 1,000 years. I wonder if it's a nod to another great Catholic order, the Franciscans. He could have chosen Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuits), but he has a broader vision than that."

Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien told the Catholic Review that Pope Francis indicated to his brother cardinals that his name was meant to be associated with St. Francis of Assisi. Some wonder if it might also be a nod to other great saints with that name - St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary; and St. Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva, doctor of the church and patron saint of journalists.

"He needs more than one Francis," Father Lacey said. "He especially needs Francis de Sales - the best administrator of the three."

Jesuit Father William J. Watters, pastor of St. Ignatius in Baltimore, said St. Ignatius

Loyola “was very clear” about priests in the Society of Jesus serving the church, but not as bishops or cardinals. Very few serve in that capacity today.

“He was really keen on the Society (of Jesus) serving the church in simple ways,” Father Watters said. “We have to obey, and we do become bishops and we do become cardinals, though Jesuits are usually uneasy with that. It’s God saying something to us as well as to the whole church.”

Father Watters said the door is “wide open for this man to work as God’s ambassador in the church and the world today.”

On April 14, the parish’s 10:30 a.m. Mass will be celebrated in honor of Pope Francis “as he continues to serve in his new role,” Father Watters said.

Father Linnane hopes the new pope will help make the church “more relevant in a time where we see such greater secularism.” He also hopes Pope Francis can help bring about healing within the church from the church’s handling of the sexual abuse crisis.

“That’s a huge scar that we need healing from, and many people feel disappointment,” Father Linnane said. “I hope this pope can really be instrumental in moving us forward on that issue, too.”

Robert Robinson, director of communications at Loyola Blakefield in Towson, said many students at the Jesuit middle and high school delayed their after-school activities to remain in classrooms with teachers March 13 to watch the introduction of Pope Francis.

“As word quickly spread after his introduction, there was a tremendous sense of pride across our campus, as if Pope Francis was one of our own,” Robinson said. “We even noticed that many of our alumni were expressing their pride via social media in the wake of the news. As a Jesuit institution, we’re proud to know that the Society of Jesus and its influence has and will continue to have an impact worldwide.”

Elizabeth Lowe, George P. Matysek Jr. and Maria Wiering contributed to this story.

See also:

Baltimore students in Rome among eyewitnesses to Pope Francis’ introduction