

# Business and humor in the church

**By Elizabeth Skalski**

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A dash of humor and sharp business skills are the prescription for successful parishes, Catholic leaders told hundreds gathered at the first-ever Mid-Atlantic Congress for Pastoral Leadership.

Jesuit Father James Martin, the unofficial chaplain to the “Colbert Report” show with Stephen Colbert on Comedy Central, wooed the crowd March 9 with humor, underscoring the way that humor can be used at church.

“Joy, humor and laughter feed hope,” said Father Martin, a New York-based priest. “(These are) unappreciated ways of showing people our hope. Humor evangelizes; joy shows your faith in that you believe in the resurrection. That is good news.”

The three-day conference, which kicked off March 8 at the Hilton Baltimore, works to strengthen pastoral leaders in their ministry and in the church from across the region. It offers classes, trend sessions and nearly 100 breakout sessions. The conference theme was “Witness Hope!”

Dr. Carolyn Woo, president and chief executive officer of the Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services, said CRS works to “give hope to a world in need.”

“It’s not good enough to have good intentions,” Woo said. “Business is a force for good and of course hope. When we talk about hope we have to understand the best case. It depends on the moral energies of people to make it happen.”

Father Martin, author of “My Life with the Saints” and “The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything,” said he believes that parish priests and staff need to have a fundamental understanding of business because they are running a business.

Beth Shaver, the director of liturgy for a parish in the Archdiocese of Richmond, said the conference is uplifting her in her ministry.

"I think it's so important that ministers get a pep talk," Shaver said. "Dr. Woo is just so impressive and the work CRS does is so important and it makes me proud to be Catholic. I'm a huge fan of Father Martin - he has a wonderful message."

Al Ptasznik, a member of the parish council at a parish in Virginia, said Father Martin's presentation was to the point, highlighting that "we need more humor in life."

"We are conditioned to hear only the presentation at Mass and that's pretty much it," Ptasznik said. "(People) don't realize there was humor in the Bible and there is."

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