

Catholic Review Column: On Our Way

A few days ago, someone asked me, “How do you like being in the Archdiocese of Baltimore so far?” “Well,” I said, “It’s pretty good. The first weekend I went to a horse race and the second was the long Memorial Day weekend. What’s not to like?” Of course that’s not quite the whole story.

The joy I’ve experienced in my first days as your archbishop has come from taking my first steps in coming to know this new family of faith. For example, the day after my installation, I was privileged to visit Our Daily Bread. The executive director of Catholic Charities, Bill McCarthy, and his co-workers introduced me to the wonderful staff and volunteers who welcome hundreds of guests every day, not only to provide a warm and nourishing meal but also opportunities for a new and better life. Through the Christopher Place Employment Academy, which is located in the same building as Our Daily Bread, many have found employment and other skills for living.

Next we visited the Esperanza Center where the newly arrived and other immigrants to Baltimore are assisted in learning English and also receive medical attention and legal assistance. Both places were upbeat and joyful. It was easy to sense the presence of God’s love at work in our midst. And, as I am learning, Our Daily Bread and Esperanza Center are a part of a vast network of charitable and social services offered by Catholic Charities in conjunction with the charitable outreach of so many of our parishes and other Catholic organizations. In the coming weeks and months, I will continue my visits to Catholic Charities programs.

During these past days, I also began visiting with the priests of the archdiocese in small groups. I started with those serving in Frederick and Washington Counties and have subsequently met with two groups of priests who serve in the City of Baltimore. More of these informal discussions will take place in the next few weeks. Because priests are the closest co-workers with their bishops, I wanted to have the opportunity to come to know the priests who serve throughout the archdiocese with such great dedication. The format is simple. Prayer, a meal and a conversation about

those things that bring life, joy and strength, and those things that are impediments to priestly ministry. In the fall, I'll also meet with deacons, religious and lay leaders in the archdiocese simply to listen and to learn.

Among the greatest joys any bishop can have is to visit parishes. On the Solemnity of the Ascension - my first Sunday as Archbishop - I visited St. Louis Parish in Clarksville, and on Pentecost, Immaculate Conception Parish in Towson. Both parishes and their pastors welcomed me warmly and I enjoyed meeting parishioners informally after Mass. Happily, there is a stack of requests for me to celebrate Mass at various parishes in the fall and I look forward to spending most weekends doing just that. It will take some time, but I plan to visit all the parishes of the archdiocese. In the meantime, I am most grateful for the wonderful pastoral care which Bishops Rozanski and Madden provide through their dedicated ministry.

Schools are near and dear to me and I've already had the opportunity to visit Seton Keough High School and Holy Angels Catholic School. A group of juniors from the high school served as tour guides. I could readily sense the happiness of the students of both schools and the dedication of the school administrators, teachers and staff to providing for them and their families a high quality Catholic education.

In my travels, I also spent a most enjoyable evening with the women and men religious of the Neumann Vicariate where we gathered for dinner and for prayer. And on the eve of Pentecost, I was privileged to take part in former cathedral rector Monsignor Robert Armstrong's 50th anniversary of priestly ordination at which he preached so beautifully about the true joys of priestly ministry.

As I arrived in Baltimore for my installation, a reporter asked me about my plans for the archdiocese. I know there are pressing issues that will absorb my prayer, attention and energy. But it would be foolish for me to arrive with a pocket full of plans without taking some time to pray, listen and learn. As one wise priest told me, "Don't hit the ground running. Give it time!" He's right. The first step along the path to love is knowledge. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said: "I know mine and mine know me." With your prayers and God's grace, I pray to be a good shepherd.