

Celebrating 40 years, Social Ministry Convocation seeks more from young Catholics

The urgent call to bring young Catholics into the social justice movement was clear March 2 at Mercy High School, site of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's 40th annual Social Ministry Convocation.

With a theme of "Seek Justice, Win Peace," the event began by honoring two men instrumental in its development. Monsignor William F. Burke is the archdiocesan director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' domestic anti-poverty program; Glyndon L. Bailey is its local chairman.

"He has been the constant for 40 years, inspiring all of us and challenging us, making it such a joy," Nancy Lee Conrad, a parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua/Most Precious Blood Parish, said of Monsignor Burke.

The pastor of St. Francis of Assisi in Mayfield will mark the 60th jubilee of his ordination this year. Bailey, meanwhile, will turn 96 March 7.

Who will carry on their cause?

Among 14 workshops, held in both English and Spanish and addressing issues such as civic engagement, hunger in Maryland, and depression and suicide, was one titled "Connecting Social Justice with Young Adult Catholic Communities."

That workshop was led by Rudy Dehaney, coordinator of youth and young adult ministries for the Northeast Catholic Community, a collaborative of eight churches, including the pastorate of St. Matthew in Northwood and Blessed Sacrament, his home parish.

"Something is wrong with what we are preaching, or what young people see from the church and what they actually believe is important," Dehaney said. "There's a disconnect there."

He mentioned the generation gap, a descriptive first popularly applied in the 1960s.

“The youth need to be acting on it (social justice) now, need to be a part of the church and be the ones who continue the ministry,” Dehaney said. “Gen X and Baby Boomers are getting older, and they have been carrying it on for a long time, but the young people also have fire for these issues. We just have to figure out a way to connect them together to walk in solidarity.”

The audience at his morning session included Deacon Ray Van Pelt of St. Joan of Arc in Aberdeen and Gina Merkel, one of its parishioners.

“We can’t possibly get to these other (social justice) issues in just our homilies,” Deacon Van Pelt said. “What other workshops, efforts, and activities are we doing?”

To that end, Merkel said “We need to look into Bible study and education where we can actually do something. ... We need to listen more to our young adults, and they have to trust us because we do have some experience.”

The morning began with an opening prayer from Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar, who said that the “teachings of Christ will work in a new way, with a new spirit.”

The keynote address was offered by Ana Grande, organizing director of the Monsignor Oscar Romero Center in Los Angeles, who urged participants to find different ways to both make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate, and to mobilize them.

“Change and charity are both needed at the same time,” Grande said. “If people are given the opportunity, they are going to stand up. They are going to fight.”

Awards honored the memory of auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy, a Cumberland native whose ministry included interfaith dialogue and securing housing for the poor in Western Maryland, as well as laypeople who also promoted social justice.

The Doris Johnson Award went to Lin Romano, a parishioner of Corpus Christi in Baltimore, for her work with the homeless and poor.

The John Hook Award went to Laurentina Takovich, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist in Columbia who welcomed Hispanic Catholics and a priest from Baltimore into her home in the mid-1970s for Mass, an early step toward her parish celebrating three weekend Masses in Spanish for nearly 1,300.

“My heart is filled with joy because I see so many young people who are the future of our church,” Takovich said. “When God gives you a vision, follow the light. We are privileged because we have so many ways for these young people to learn and evangelize.”

Deacon Scott Rose of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick received the International Peace and Justice Award for his work representing undocumented immigrant youths.

In addition, 26 men and women from 15 parishes were recognized for their service (S) or their advocacy (A).

St. Anthony of Padua, Baltimore: Sharon Edwards, S; Felix Opara, A.

St. Cecilia, Baltimore: Joan Scott, S; Sandra Spears, A.

St. Dominic, Hamilton: Larry Snyder, S; Cherisse Manning, A.

St. Edward, Baltimore: Emily Henry, S; Robert Hunt, A.

St. Francis of Assisi, Mayfield: Anne Marie Brennan-Zelenka, S; Elizabeth Martin, A.

St. Francis of Assisi-St. Mary, Petersville: Rose Elfrey, S.

Holy Family Catholic Community, Middletown: Deborah Crews, S.

Immaculate Conception, Baltimore: Melvin Lewis, S; Florence Valentine, A.

St. Joan of Arc, Aberdeen: Sabina Acquah, S; Shirley Kern, A.

St. John the Evangelist, Columbia: Deacon Paul Gifford, S; Mary Pat Donelan, A.

St. John the Evangelist, Frederick: Bob Frucella, S; Don Koza, A.

St. Joseph, Odenton: Kathy Gauthier, S; Charles and Cathy Klinger, A.

St. Matthew, Northwood: Angela Dumouchelle, S; J. Stephen Cleghorn, PhD, A.

Most Precious Blood, Baltimore: Joe and Jean Green, S.

Shrine of the Little Flower, Baltimore: Bernard Miles, S.