

Church management organization shares its progress

BALTIMORE - Leaders of an organization working to bring better financial and management practices to church operations shared their progress with more than three dozen Catholic bishops Nov. 13 during a luncheon reception at the bishops' fall general meeting in Baltimore.

The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, established in July 2005, has published three "Standards for Excellence" booklets outlining codes of ethics and accountability for Catholic dioceses, parishes and nonprofit organizations and has partnered with the Archdiocese of New Orleans to help restore Catholic schools following Hurricane Katrina.

"We have been able to reopen 86 of the 106 schools" in operation before the hurricane, including seven regional schools in the areas most devastated by the 2005 disaster, said Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans.

Because so many New Orleans public schools still remain closed, he added, "70 percent of our students after Katrina are not Catholic; most come from families living below the poverty level."

Archbishop Hughes said the National Leadership Roundtable helped the schools develop ways to pool resources and use their collective purchasing power more effectively. The organization is still working with the archdiocese on a national fundraising campaign for the schools, he added.

Bishop Dale J. Melczek of Gary, Ind., said that after his diocesan priests' council studied the organization's materials on finance, management and human resources practices for parishes it recommended using them to improve such practices throughout the diocese.

Geoffrey T. Boisi, a philanthropist, retired vice chairman of JPMorgan Chase and chairman of the group's board, said the organization is developing new materials each year to help dioceses and parishes look at best practices from the business

world.

"I think we're building a new era," said board member Francis J. Butler, president of Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities. He noted that Bishop Daniel F. Walsh of Santa Rosa, Calif., had urged his fellow bishops in a Nov. 12 presentation to undertake regular internal parish financial audits.

"The bishops are talking about audits for parishes; we're showing them how to do it," Butler said.

Kerry Robinson, executive director, said each of the National Leadership Roundtable's three "Standards of Excellence" booklets is based on eight principles and 55 standards.

"We have backed up those standards with all kinds of resources that we have gleaned from scanning the horizon of the Catholic Church in the U.S.," she said. "Where we find, for example, excellent conflict-of-interest statements and policies that have been implemented to wonderful effect, we are able to highlight those and promote them across the country."