

# City parishes can flourish, Bishop Madden said

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden believes now is a time for “great spiritual opportunity and great spiritual abundance” in Baltimore City.

“I believe God’s grace is very strong right now,” he said. “We are given an opportunity to respond to that grace and move forward. The fruit is ripe. I think it’s time for us to look at what God is calling us to do in the city.”

Bishop Madden led an all-Baltimore City region meeting at St. Mary’s Seminary and University for parish leaders June 21 called “Vision and Vitality: Gospel Growth in the City.” The meeting brimmed with passion as attendees discussed how to thrive in the 21st century. The city has four regions that meet regularly individually.

“One of the big things we’re trying to emphasize is this idea of evangelization – a living Gospel community in the city,” Bishop Madden said.

Bishop Madden asked Monsignor Edward M. Miller, pastor of bustling St. Bernardine, to address evangelization. Monsignor Miller cited city churches innovatively reaching out to minorities, the poor and immigrants.

“We all must stand together as one urban church community striving to serve, challenging the entire archdiocese to stand with us,” Monsignor Miller said. “We are not independent agents.”

Attendees discussed a sheet that defined the differences between a dying and thriving parish (i.e. in love with the past vs. looking forward, absence of youths vs. presence, a resistance to change vs. willingness, lack of evangelization zeal vs. an abundance and lack of energy among leaders vs. inspired leadership).

Father Joseph G. Bochenek, pastor of St. Brigid in Canton, and Monsignor Arthur W. Bastress, pastor of St. Alphonsus, said older parishioners who love their parish and long-standing traditions might be overlooked according to the sheet’s standards.

“Don’t forget us,” Monsignor Bastress said.

“There is always the possibility for growth,” Bishop Madden told the group before the discussion. “There is always a possibility for change because God is alive. Creation continues.”

Many said successful outreach to young people is crucial for parish survival and success.

Bishop Madden recognized that some in the city have felt underappreciated following Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien’s decision to close nine city schools. Forty percent of the schools in the school system from a decade ago have closed.

“I believe that had he not done what he is doing now, in 10 years we might have closed another 40 percent and then you might as well kiss it goodbye,” Bishop Madden said.

Father Joseph L. Muth Jr., supported an urban commission that would bring together delegates from the four quadrants of the city to meet with Bishop Madden.

Bishop Madden would like a representative body, but would like to know what the parishes want that group to accomplish and how much they will support that commission.

“It might be a great opportunity for us to see what all this new stuff is going to be about,” Father Muth said.