

Coffee & Doughnuts with William J. McCarthy Jr.

The Catholic Review sits down with William J. McCarthy Jr., executive director of Catholic Charities of Baltimore and parishioner of Church of the Nativity in Timonium.

CR: What, and where, are your Catholic roots?

McCarthy: As a child, I thought everyone was Catholic. It wasn't until I started school, playing sports and engaging in other activities that I began to realize the diversity and richness of faith, in my neighborhood and in our community and world.

I grew up in St. William of York Parish and attended its grade school, where we were taught by the Holy Union Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who were loving, challenging and faith-filled. We had two incredible pastors, the late Monsignors John Albert and Art Valenzano; Art and I became lifelong friends. Both were important to my formation, in faith and as a person.

At Loyola High School, the Jesuit brothers and priests and lay faculty taught me that faith without action was not complete, that we should live with a purpose beyond ourselves. I attended Seton Hall University.

When Maria and I married, we joined my second parish, The Catholic Community of Hunt Valley (now St. Francis Xavier). For the past 25 years, we have been parishioners of Church of the Nativity in Timonium. Our son, Ryan, attended Loyola Blakefield and Marquette University.

CR: What led you to move from the banking industry to head up a nonprofit?

McCarthy: I've always tried to live with a purpose beyond myself. I was a lawyer in private practice specializing in tax law and transitioned into banking. I was able to

volunteer and serve on nonprofit boards and led, along with Maria, a couple of capital campaigns.

I was looking for a way to better align my professional, family and faith lives, when Hal Smith retired eight years ago and Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien and the Board of Catholic Charities gave me this life-changing opportunity.

CR: How did the 2007 death of your daughter, Erinn, at 14 of bone cancer, shape your ministry?

McCarthy: Erinn and her heroic 3½-year battle with osteosarcoma forever changed our lives and hearts. She lived every day with courage, grace and purpose. She modeled for me how to live with purpose and how to make each day matter. She both challenged me and gave me the courage to strive to do more. She continues to challenge and motivate me.

CR: Political rhetoric appears to be fostering open hostility in America. Is Catholic Charities encountering decreased empathy in the populace?

McCarthy: Sadly, I think it is more than political rhetoric. The anger, distrust, hatred and bigotry in our country is real and it is heartbreaking. The mission, vision, values and work of Catholic Charities, however, are unifying and healing. My 2,200 colleagues and our 23,000 volunteers from all faiths, circumstances and backgrounds come together each day with the common purpose of helping to improve the lives of people.

We see a common humanity, and recognize and cherish the Divine in each person. Through this movement and work, hundreds of thousands are helped each year, one encounter at a time.

CR: Favorite saint?

McCarthy: St. Francis of Assisi is a person whom I greatly admire and who challenges me. His conversion and his love and deference for the poor are inspiring. He truly sought and recognized the Divine in every person. He met people where they were. He also is a beautiful reminder that there is always more to be done and that we always have more opportunity for personal growth.

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