

Friends celebrate Cardinal Keeler's life

Mark J. Potter

Executive Director, Basilica of the Assumption Historic Trust Inc.

"Cardinal Keeler recognized early on in his episcopacy the responsibility that he had as steward of the Basilica of the Assumption. The cardinal realized that by concentrating on the basilica's rich history, he could give the church a bright future. Through the recently completed restoration, the repaired and restored basilica has once again become a beacon for the faithful from around the United States and indeed the world. For the more than 500,000 pilgrims who have passed through her doors since the reopening, the cardinal's vision has truly provided for a unique and awestruck spiritual experience.

Father John "Jack" B. Ward

Pastor, Prince of Peace, Edgewood and former secretary to the cardinal

"He was always very kind, always a gentleman and very respectful of my time off. He's a master of the one-liners. He's really rather funny. The hardest part of the work was hours, but the man kept an incredible schedule. He just seemed to do it. He was direct. He knew about everything and dealt with everything. He was incredibly fair."

Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot

Pastor of Holy Family Catholic Community, Middletown

Former vice chancellor and secretary to Cardinal Keeler

"I had gotten to know Cardinal Keeler as a student at the North American College in Rome. He would come as president of the USCCB (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). He looked out for the students from Baltimore and would take us out to dinner.

My mother always appreciated it when he got back to the United States and called to say, 'I saw Rob, he's doing well.' The day (in 1994), when it was announced he

would become a cardinal, he landed in Newark, and still called my mom to give her an update, before he flew on to Baltimore for a press conference.”

Deacon Rodrigue Mortel

Director, Office of Propagation of Faith and Baltimore Haiti Project

“In 1983, I became chair of the OB/GYN department at Penn State (medical center in Hershey, Pa.). Twelve abortions were being performed there every Tuesday. I told the person doing it, ‘it has no place in my department.’

I was threatened with a lawsuit by Planned Parenthood, if I went ahead with my plans to stop the abortions. I stopped it. Nothing happened (no lawsuit).

The Bishop of Harrisburg had died, and Cardinal Keeler was about to become his successor. He called me up and said he was impressed with what I had done.

In 1983, I introduced Cardinal Keeler to a friend of mine, Bishop Emmanuel Constant, of the Diocese of Gonaives. Cardinal Keeler developed a love for the people of Haiti and the work Bishop Constant was doing in Haiti. He’s always wanted to help the people of Haiti as much as possible. He really facilitated us in getting the funds for the Good Samaritans School.”

Mark Pacione

Associate director for Catholic Schools Planning and Implementation and former director of the Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

“He made youth events a part of his calendar in a regular fashion and looked forward to those encounters, particularly the annual pilgrimage, as opportunities just to do something he thought was very important.

The night we came back from the overnight vigil and Mass in Rome, for World Youth Day, he came over to the hotel to see the delegation. When he walked in the room, the young people there gave him the warmest welcome I ever saw. They were on their feet, they were applauding, they were cheering – they were visibly moved to be with him that night. It was a really wonderful moment to have seen that.”

Harold A. “Hal” Smith

Former executive director of Catholic Charities

Harold A. “Hal” Smith recalled when Pope John Paul II had a meal at Our Daily Bread in Baltimore during his 1995 visit to the United States.

“We had Mass and then had lunch at Our Daily Bread with about 20 people representative of a variety of programs, from Esperanza to Head Start. The pope had just finished saying the Mass so when he arrived at Our Daily Bread, he was ready to eat. So he blessed the meal and sat down. We selected people we thought would be comfortable, but the reality was everybody froze. Nobody knew what to say. The cardinal had a wonderful moment of hosting the group when he spearheaded the conversation by asking the pope a question. The people would ask the cardinal a question, who would then address the Holy Father. It took about 10 minutes before they realized they could talk directly to the pope. The cardinal made it all work.”

Mary Jo Hutson

Former associate superintendent of Catholic schools

“I first met the cardinal soon after his arrival in Baltimore. He made a pastoral visitation to St. Anthony of Padua where I was principal. Being a weekend, school was not in session, but he wanted a tour of our very large school facility.

That initial conversation eventually led to his blessing and support in the early 1990’s for the PRIDE program for children with special needs – a program that has been recently validated for expansion by the Blue Ribbon Committee for Schools.

For me, his greatest legacy is his gift for making people feel recognized, known and remembered. This, I think, is the hospitality that must precede all of our efforts to evangelize.

Wilmington Bishop W. Francis Malooly

Former auxiliary bishop of Baltimore

“He was delightful to work for. He was a mentor to me, so I was always learning from him. I was struck by how thoughtful he was. For someone who was involved in so many things locally, nationally and internationally, he always took time to be conscious of the people around him. I’m hoping I learned a great deal from him and

also Archbishop Borders and Archbishop O'Brien. I came to Wilmington a lot better off than I would have without that. There's no question that spending 20 years with him. He was able to lead me and guide me.

He brought so much pride to the Archdiocese of Baltimore because we were able to be singled out with the papal visit, the redoing of the basilica, and the visit of the Greek Orthodox patriarch. Some of my confirmation groups go down for a day of reflection at the basilica and everyone. You look at the capital campaign he did - at one time there were 70 building projects going on at the same time in parishes. There are lots of big picture things that he did that helped the archdiocese."