

Holy Name Society looks to future

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There's still a lot of life left in the Holy Name Society.

Even though numbers are smaller than the days when the group boasted 40,000 members in Baltimore, the organization is as active as ever – supporting parishes, raising money for Catholic education and religious vocations and encouraging reverence for the names of God and Jesus.

Thanks to a renewed focus on recruitment, Holy Name leaders believe membership is on the upswing as the current total stands at more than 700. There are 30 parishes with Holy Name chapters, and at least five new chapters are expected to be formed in the near future.

“We’re not a dying organization,” said William Harris Jr., president of the Baltimore Archdiocesan Holy Name Union and a parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville. “There’s definitely a lot of interest out there. People want to learn more about what we’re all about.”

The Holy Name Society traces its roots to the 13th century when Pope Gregory X commissioned Blessed John of Vercelli, a Dominican preacher, to encourage devotion to the holy name of Jesus and combat a heresy of the time that held that Christ was not divine. Pope Pius IV formally established the Confraternity of the Holy Name in 1564.

The Holy Name Union was established in Baltimore in 1911 at Corpus Christi in Bolton Hill.

The Holy Name Society in Baltimore is considered among the most active in the country and Harris is reaching out to younger generations and encouraging them to join.

Sharing the faith with young people was the theme of the 98th annual Holy Name

Convention, held in May at Our Lady of the Fields. Father Gerard Francik, vocations director, spoke about the role adults play in serving as examples to children. Mae Richardson, youth ministry coordinator for Sacred Heart in Glyndon, also gave a presentation on how to talk with younger generations and gave lessons on text messaging, Harris said.

“We learned all about text abbreviations for words,” he said with a laugh. “It really helped us gain a new perspective on communication.”

Although founded as a fraternity, the Holy Name Society has opened its membership to women in recent years. Cardinal William H. Keeler, retired archbishop of Baltimore, granted permission for individual chapters to include women – a policy continued by Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien. There are currently eight parishes that have women in their membership.

The Holy Name Union is made up of leaders from parish chapters who offer support to the ministries of Archbishop O’Brien. During the convention, union leaders announced the awarding of 10 \$500 Holy Name scholarships for children to attend Catholic schools. At a special “Holy Name Night” at Oriole Park at Camden Yards on July 10, they plan to distribute several \$500 awards to help seminarians studying to become priests for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Throughout the year, the Holy Name Union also raises money to help fund Archbishop O’Brien’s discernment dinners for men considering a religious vocation.

Father Michael Carrion, Holy Name spiritual director and pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary in Baynesville, said the society is placing great emphasis on its spiritual mission.

“They see that as their primary goal,” said Father Carrion, noting that service is the other key part of the mission. “They’re looking for ways of promoting spirituality that will appeal not only to older people, but to younger Catholics as well.”

In an age of loose language, Harris agreed it’s more important than ever for the Holy Name to remind others to treat the name of Christ with respect. That is often accomplished by being good role models, he said.

All members pledge to protect the name of Jesus and parish chapters meet every second Sunday of the month for Mass – often reciting the Holy Name pledge and singing the Holy Name Hymn.

During the Holy Name Convention, the society's Circle Medallion Awards were presented to William O'Berry of Our Lady of the Fields, Joseph Powell Sr. of St. Clare in Essex and Dennis Smedberg of Holy Rosary, Fells Point. Joseph O'Connor, a parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields was this year's convention honoree.

For information about the Holy Name Society, call 410-987-5059.