

Lobby Night is Feb. 15

More than 600 Catholics are expected to converge on Annapolis Feb. 15 to spend their President's Day Holiday learning about legislative issues and meeting with lawmakers during the 26th annual "Lobby Night."

Sponsored by the Maryland Catholic Conference, the event will begin at 3 p.m. at St. Mary's High School, where Maryland's bishops will welcome Catholic voters, pray with them and commission them to be the voice of the church. Participants will then listen to briefings on legislative concerns now under consideration in Annapolis, including a business tax credit benefiting public and nonpublic schools, poverty and budget issues, preserving marriage and providing support for pregnant women.

Participants will then shuttle to legislative offices to meet with the representatives of their district. There will also be a legislative reception for state lawmakers.

"We have increasing numbers and standing-room-only crowds," said Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, "which is a very exciting sign of the increased involvement of the lay faithful and their recognition of the important role they play in making laws that affect everyone in the state."

The theme for this year's Lobby Night is "Testimony of Charity."

Russell called Lobby Night "by far" the best-attended advocacy event of the 90-day legislative session. Recent Lobby Nights have seen an increase in the number of participating pastors and young adults.

"We have been reaching out to the college campuses through the state," she said.

Russell said having a presence in the capital makes an impression on lawmakers.

"With so many issues to talk about and so little time with our legislators, it isn't always possible to get into a detailed conversation on every issue," she said, "but participants really need to be aware of the dramatic impact that their time and physical presence has simply to say we are here to support particular issues."

Registration is required to participate. Visit www.mdcathcon.org to watch a video on

Lobby Night and to register.