

Longtime Social Ministry Convocation attendees say service is part of who they are



For nearly 60 years, Gerard H. O'Connor, a parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua/Most Precious Blood in Baltimore, has been serving at the parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society food pantry. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

By Elizabeth Lowe

elowe@CatholicReview.org

Ralph E. Moore Jr. doesn't think twice about serving others. It is part of his daily life. "I deliberately chose a career to work with people who are poor and the working poor," said Moore, a parishioner of St. Ann in Baltimore and the mentoring coordinator at The Adult Resource Center for the Living Classrooms Foundation in Baltimore. "As Catholics, (social ministry) is our history and for many people that's who we are."



Ralph E. Moore Jr. enjoys spreading the good news. He says the challenge is, "How do we make it meaningful to the people who are struggling?" (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

Moore was among the nearly 300 people who attended the 35th annual Archdiocesan Social Ministry Convocation March 8 at The Seton Keough High School in Baltimore.

The theme was "Care of the Earth, Care for the Poor: Listening to Pope Francis." "It's good to bring people together and to hear what other people are doing," Moore, 61, said of the convocation. "It's a nice shot in the arm for social justice concerns." Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori gave a reflection during the convocation's prayer service.

Pope Francis reminds Catholics that "we are the instruments, we are the channels through which God hears the cry of the poor," Archbishop Lori said. "We are called

not just to hear, but to listen.”

Franciscan Father Jacek Orzechowski, an associate pastor of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring and chairman of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Directorate for the Holy Name Province of his religious community, delivered the keynote. He spoke of environmental changes and economic discord.

“The price is ultimately born by the world’s poor,” Father Orzechowski said.

Pope Francis urges Catholics not to remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice and caring for the poor, Father Orzechowski said.

“The Holy Father calls us to be consistent in our care for the poor,” he said.

“Inequality is the root of social ills.”

Father Orzechowski noted Super Typhoon Haiyan, which devastated parts of the Philippines last fall, and Hurricane Sandy, which ravaged parts of New Jersey in October 2012, highlight the planet’s environmental crisis.

“These examples tell the story of lives and suffering,” he said. “The care of creation is integral.”

The convocation also featured presentations and workshops on topics such as “Parishes and the environment,” “Fair Trade: Creating a world of hope and opportunity” and “Become a voice for food justice.”

Moore, who is among those working for social justice, compared his social ministry work to a laborious commute years ago from Baltimore City to Loyola Blakefield in Towson.

“It’s almost like riding three busses to high school,” Moore said. “I just did it. It (social ministry work) has been good for me. I’ve gotten a lot out of it. It’s fun to see growth and development in people. To a great extent that’s the reward.”

Moore volunteers with a peace camp at the Drs. Camille and Bill Cosby Community Center at St. Frances Academy in Baltimore and various ministries at St. Ann.

“It’s about good news and the challenge to me is how do we translate all of this to the people on the street,” Moore said. “How do we make it meaningful to the people who are struggling? We have to take people where they are, what their needs are, and give them some real and concrete help. Then they’re ready to listen to whatever you have to tell them.”

Gerard H. O’Connor, a parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua/Most Precious Blood in Baltimore, has served at the parish’s St. Vincent de Paul Society food pantry since 1955.

“It’s not a big deal, you just help people,” said O’Connor, 82, who worked for about 30 years as a social worker for the Baltimore City Health Department. “I minister to people through the food pantry. He (Jesus) gives me the strength to do it.”

O’Connor draws inspiration from Pope Francis.

“What it is is his attitude toward the poor and the needy,” O’Connor said. “I’m one of

many. That's why Pope Francis says we have to spread the good news."

A native of Belfast, Ireland, O'Connor credits his upbringing with shaping his attitude toward service.

"The way I was brought up was to help a person, love a person and never turn your back on a person," he said.

Three special awards were given, including the John Hook Award, presented to Gerard O'Connor; the Doris Johnson Award, presented to Ralph Moore; and the Peace and Justice Award, presented Dominican Sisters Carol Gilbert and Ardeth Platte.

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