

Mother Lange Banquet brings good news

By Therese Wilson Favors

When I gazed into the crowd of 600 people who filled Martin's West for the 15th celebration of the Mother Mary Lange Awards Banquet Feb. 10, my heart became full with the truth that we must always "take God at His word."

God always hears our prayers and sees our hearts. Within each one of our parishes, the people of God prayed for workers in God's vineyard - and workers were received. Forty-nine leaders, servants and youths stood up among their faith communities and answered, "Here I am Lord, send me." Surely, this is reason for celebration.

The crowd gathered to affirm and recognize the strength of leadership, service and youth participation within the African American Catholic Community. Sixteen parishes participated.

Sheldon F. Dutes, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and general assignment reporter for WBAL-TV, served as master of ceremonies. Dutes guided the crowd through the program with a sense of faith, joy and sparkle. Most marveled at his ability to keep 600 people engaged and his engaging spirit as he individually interacted with the crowd.

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden welcomed the crowd and extended words of appreciation to the honorees. Quoting Blessed Pope John Paul II, Bishop Madden spoke about the motivating force of faith.

"It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation," Bishop Madden said, quoting the pope, "and makes one willing to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true."

Recognizing the acts of leadership and service rendered by the honorees, Bishop Madden lifted another wise expression of Pope John Paul II in saying: "Through faith, man achieves the good of his rational nature because faith is always demanding and because faith leads us beyond ourselves."

On behalf of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Sister Alexis Fisher, superior general of the Baltimore-based religious community, provided greetings and shared good news about the status of the canonization process toward sainthood of Mother Mary Lange.

"In October of this past year," she said, "after conversations with Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien, Bishop Madden, our urban vicar and Father Gilbert Seitz, judicial vicar of the Metropolitan Tribunal here in the archdiocese, who are all great supporters, we, the general administration of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, decided to have, as Rome mandates, the superior general nominate a new postulator for the cause of Mother Mary Lange. The nomination was sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome where the appointment was then made. We ask your prayers for God's guidance of our new Postulator, Dr. Waldery Hilgeman. He will now write the positio and once it is accepted by the congregation, Mother Lange will be declared venerable."

With this news, a thundering applause rose from the assembly.

This year's banquet also marked the reunion of the "Harambee Choir" under the directorship of Kenyatta Hardison. Twenty-five young adults lifted their voices in song, praising God and inspiring God's people. Howard W. Roberts, coordinator of Harambee Youth Organization, gave a history of the evangelization efforts rendered by the Harambee Choir in years gone by. His account reminded us that the Harambee Choir paraded with Pope John Paul II when he came to Baltimore in 1995. All of the members of the choir, as well as the celebrated honorees, were given a replica of a cross. As the crosses were distributed, Roberts reminded the young adults that the Harambee Organization was established so that young people's faith would be formed under the cross of Jesus Christ, saying "the cross has won, it always wins."

With that, it became an unforgettable night of celebration and thanksgiving to God.

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