

# **New Baltimore archbishop has served soldiers and seminarians**

BALTIMORE – The new archbishop of Baltimore has had a career that has run the gamut from soldiers to seminarians, from Marines to media.

But through it all there's been a common theme, said Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, 68, at a press conference in Baltimore July 12: "It's all about the people, and serving people with the love of Christ."

As head of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services since 1997, he has directed a worldwide archdiocese that includes 1.5 million Catholics serving in military installations around the world or at Veterans Affairs hospitals in the United States, as well as the approximately 300 Catholic military chaplains who minister to them.

It was not an easy time to head the military archdiocese. Less than two years into his assignment, Archbishop O'Brien said in a Catholic News Service interview that there was general concern in the U.S. military about what was going to happen next, after the Gulf War and Kosovo.

"If we're going to respond – and I'm not saying we shouldn't," he said, "but if we are going to respond in this new world politic arrangement to every major confrontation in the world, it's going to deter people from staying in the military or from thinking of joining the military."

Since the current fighting began in Iraq and Afghanistan, Archbishop O'Brien has raised moral questions about the U.S. involvement but stressed that he was in no way questioning the integrity of those in the military.

Born April 8, 1939, in New York, Edwin Frederick O'Brien describes himself as a typical "Bronx Irish Catholic" whose schooling, sports and social activities centered on Our Lady of Solace Parish there. He attended St. Joseph's Seminary outside New York, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1961, a master's of divinity in 1964 and a master's of arts in 1965.

"There wasn't a day in my life that I didn't want to be a priest, and not a day in my life that I've regretted it," he said at the Baltimore press conference. He was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of New York on May 29, 1965.

For his first five years as a priest he was a civilian chaplain at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., as associate pastor of the academy's Catholic Chapel

of the Most Holy Trinity. He became an Army chaplain in 1970 and over the next three years served in Fort Bragg, N.C.; Vietnam; and Fort Gordon, Ga.

From 1973 to 1976 he studied at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, earning a doctorate in theology. On his return to New York he was named archdiocesan vice chancellor and assistant pastor of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Appointed archdiocesan director of communications in 1981, he helped launch Catholic New York, the archdiocesan newspaper. Two years later he was named secretary to New York Cardinal Terence Cooke, who was succeeded in 1984 by Archbishop John J. O'Connor, who was made a cardinal in 1985.

Then-Monsignor O'Brien was made rector of St. Joseph's Seminary in Dunwoodie, N.Y., in 1985 and rector of the Pontifical North American College in Rome in 1989. On his return to New York in 1994, he was again made rector of St. Joseph's Seminary.

He was named an auxiliary bishop of New York on Feb. 6, 1996, and ordained a bishop March 25. He was named coadjutor archbishop of the military archdiocese in April 1997. He took up the post in May and became head of the archdiocese in August when Archbishop Joseph T. Dimino resigned for health reasons.

From September 2005 to June 2006, Archbishop O'Brien served as the papally appointed coordinator for the visitation of U.S. seminaries and houses of priestly formation. He was named to the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education this spring.

A member of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars and the Canon Law Society of America, Archbishop O'Brien also chairs the board of trustees of the Pontifical North American College and serves on the boards of St. Joseph's Seminary in Dunwoodie and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. In March, the military archdiocese moved to a newly renovated 40,000-square-foot building just blocks away from the basilica.