

Opera baritone lifts spirits at Baltimore Archdiocese schools gala

Seven years after he brightened the front office mood at one of the Catholic schools that helped form him, Eric Greene lifted the collective spirit of a considerably larger audience.

An opera star who has performed in London, Madrid and Sydney, Greene was the keynote speaker at the Archdiocese of Baltimore's ninth annual Gala for Catholic Education.

The event brought nearly 1,000 to the Marriott Waterfront Hotel Sept. 30. Some who did not see accompanist Lester Green on the piano figured they were listening to a recording of the baritone powering his way through Albert Hay Malotte's composition of the Lord's Prayer, until Greene walked in from the wings and onto the stage.

In remarks that followed his performance, Greene talked of the grandmother who changed the course of his life when she sent him to Catholic schools.

The first was Father Charles Hall School, on the campus of St. Claver Parish in West Baltimore. On March 4, 2010, when the archdiocese announced that it was being closed, an afternoon visitor encountered Green checking in on principal Kathleen Filippelli and her staff.

"There are teachers who forged so much self-esteem in us," Greene shared at the gala. "Much of what they managed to do, with limited resources and often salaries that did not match their efforts ... this never stopped them from giving us their very best."

Greene, a husband and father of three who now calls Howard County home, said he continues to live by some of the principles that were espoused at Father Charles Hall School and then Rosa Parks Catholic Middle School, another institution no longer open.

He recalled Filippelli constantly reiterating, "Remember who, and what you are." Then there was Joseph Campbell, the principal of Rosa Parks, whose slogans included "Learning is a self-imposed responsibility."

"These two statements," Greene said, "have deepened in meaning as I have grown into adulthood and now fatherhood."

Entertainment included the jazz combo from Loyola Blakefield, a fashion art show displaying the work of students at Notre Dame Preparatory School; a presentation from an archdiocesan Catholic schools choir directed by Kenyatta Hardison of Cardinal Shehan School; and a jazz quintet of alumni from Catholic schools.

John Patti of WBAL radio 1090 served as master of ceremonies. He recalled reporting from Rome in November 1994 on the consistory of Cardinal William H. Keeler, who died earlier this year.

Archbishop William E. Lori recognized educators from the four schools which earlier in the week received National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence honors - St. John the Evangelist School in Long Green Valley; St. John Regional Catholic School in Frederick, St. Louis School in Clarksville and St. Mary Catholic School in Hagerstown.

The archbishop reflected on the message sent by the keynote speaker.

"Imagine," he said, "how Eric Greene's life would be different had he not attended a Catholic school in Baltimore, had he not had those educators in his life (and) be challenged to stretch the limits of his mind and voice.

"There are countless Eric Greenes in the neighborhoods of our city and in towns throughout our archdiocese. I always leave this event reminded how much they need us and rely on us. And I hope you all do too."

The signature sponsors were BGE, Whiting-Turner, Conewago Enterprises Inc. and Lewis Contractors.

Also see:

Catholic education impacted life of opera singer Eric Greene

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