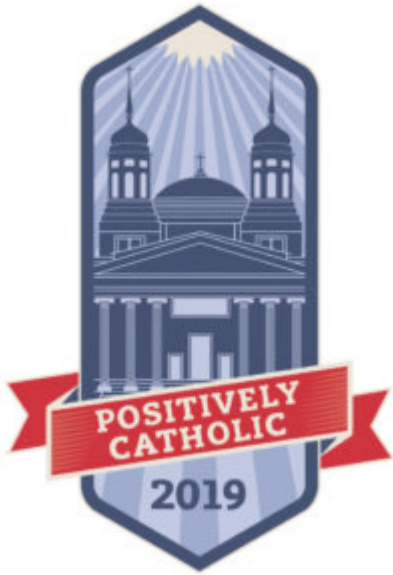


Parishioners make Harford Region's Faithfest go



Editor's Note: The October 2017 issue of the Catholic Review explored the theme of "Positively Catholic" through Education, Health Care, Parish Life and Service. Each Review print issue in 2019 will explore one of those aspects of being "Positively Catholic." The following looks at parish life.

BEL AIR - The orange T-shirts were ubiquitous.

On the back, they identified the wearer as a VOLUNTEER at Faithfest Maryland 2019, an ambitious undertaking of faith and family activities sponsored by the Harford Region of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Guests turning off Tollgate Road into the Harford Equestrian Center Sept. 14 were waved along by parking attendants in orange. There were long queues at the zip line and face painting station, all managed by orange T-shirt people. There was less action at the First Aid station, where one of the eight volunteers in orange stifled a yawn near the dinner hour.

With the sun setting a few minutes after the start of 7 p.m. Mass, the people in orange were again out in force, using small flashlights to illuminate the distribution

of holy Communion.

By then, Monsignor James Barker, pastor of St. Ignatius, Hickory, in Forest Hill, was in white vestments on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. A few hours earlier, however, he too was in an orange Faithfest shirt, a display of unity with his people – and the intended audience.

“Faithfest,” he said, “is a wonderful opportunity for our parishioners to be missionary disciples, by inviting friends who have left the church to come back and experience the beauty of our faith in an enjoyable event.”

Less talk, more action

One of the more telling aspects about the men and women who coordinated Faithfest Maryland 2019 is that they were too deep into preparations – or too humble – to take time to talk about their good work.

Father Gerard Francik, chairman of Faithfest, was pastor of St. Mark in Fallston when one of his parishioners, Steve Lozinak, and two from St. Margaret in Bel Air, Dan Webster and Tom Wiegand, told him of a long-running evangelization event in Ohio.

“They saw this event that brought families together,” Father Francik said. “It started with 1,200 people, and drew 40,000 in 2018. We saw it (the model) as a great way to celebrate the energy in our community.”

They brought on board the pastors of the two largest parishes in Harford County, Monsignor Barker and Monsignor Kevin Schenning of St. Margaret in Bel Air, then went about organizing a one-day event where, Father Francik said, “No one gets paid.”

Lozinak coordinates the stage and concluding fireworks show, Webster the location and logistics, and Wiegand the involvement from the 11 parishes in the Harford Region.

They rely on existing expertise. Who better to run corn hole and other young adult activities than 22-year-old Andrew Schmidt of St. Joan of Arc in Aberdeen, where he

is a cantor and helps with confirmation preparation.

Anita Cain, a project manager for Baltimore-based Optomi Consultants, took on the same role with the inaugural Faithfest in 2018 when plans to hire an outside vendor for the job fell through. Since taking that on, she has also accepted a spot on the new Archdiocesan Pastoral Council advising Archbishop William E. Lori.

“All of the pieces in place make it look effortless,” Cain said of Faithfest. “It isn’t.”

Bounding spirit

The Holy Spirit - the part of the Trinity, not the Joppa parish - helps.

St. Mark parishioner Jim Hunter was emcee for the 2018 inaugural, but the voice of the Baltimore Orioles was in Detroit this year. Enter Cain’s husband, Rich, who manages Vaccaro’s in Little Italy. John Patti, the WBAL-AM news anchor, came in for a cannoli and was recruited for the task.

His credentials include attending the former parish school at St. Charles Borromeo in Pikesville and graduating from Mount St. Joseph High School. Patti, however, is in the office at 2:30 a.m. weekdays and worships on the other side of the archdiocese, at Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City. Wasn’t there something else he could be doing on his day off?

“It’s better than my normal hours,” Patti said. “Seriously, when I’m in a position to give back, I do.”

Nicole Kalinosky, among those helping spread the word about St. Stephen, Bradshaw, in the Tent of Parishes, was on its Evangelization Committee even before she came into full Communion with the Catholic Church in 2017.

She’s an avid gardener, and likes to hike with her husband, Jim. With those options, why give up her Saturday?

“This is where I need to be,” she said. “I love the spirit here. I invited friends who are not Catholic. They’re faithful people, and this is something I know they would enjoy.”

Across the main path, under a smaller canopy, the Knights of Columbus from Father Maurice J. Wolfe Council #11372 at St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon manned a station selling bottled water for \$1.

The group included Lee Eder, past grand knight of the council and still its faithful navigator. He planned to spend the following day manning the pit beef fundraiser that is a staple at the parish on Ravens Sundays.

“What goes around, comes around,” Eder said. “I’m a strong believer that you give back to your church. Everyone is so nice and down to earth here. Wouldn’t the world be a better place if it was like this everywhere?”

Men in Black

The “Fun Zone” included a dunking booth where seminarians took turns getting wet in what is a staple on carnival midways. By the time Jim Bors signed up to take a turn, he said, “there were no spots left.”

He’s spending his pastoral year in Carroll County, at St. John in Westminster, but came out to support an initiative of Father Steven Roth, director of vocations for the archdiocese.

“You see all of the orange shirts,” Bors said, “and think, ‘They don’t really need us,’ but when we wear our clerics, at a minimum, we’re sharing our presence. We’re letting families see that we’re real people, too. A lot of parishes don’t get to see the process of being a seminarian.”

Seminarians were among those handing out 4,000 welcome bags – in orange, of course – that contained assorted materials. They included a rosary, to the gratitude of Bors, who’s active in the Ranger Rosary program. In addition to a rosary tent, there were opportunities for reconciliation and blessings.

There is no admission fee to Faithfest. Organizers estimated that 5,500 attended this year’s event, among them Archbishop Lori, who presided at Mass, and more than a dozen concelebrants, among them Bishop Adam J. Parker.

Father Francik’s gifts include a constant smile, which was wider than normal as he

greeted old friends. He was assigned to Sacred Heart in Glyndon and St. Charles Borromeo over the summer, but stayed on as chairman of Faithfest one more year, to assure continuity.

It was an equally long day for his successor at St. Mark, Father Michael Foppiano, who had an early wakeup in order to make the 8 a.m. “Nun Run” at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

He was impressed with all aspects of Faithfest.

“The generosity of the people who put this on is remarkable,” Father Foppiano said. “They all have lives to live. They’re doing this on the side, and for some, with the effort they put in, it could be a full-time job. So often we focus on our own territory, and it’s nice to come together.”

Also see:

Archbishop Lori’s Homily: Faith Fest

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