

Preaching must attract, Archbishop Lori says at Mid-Atlantic Congress



Camp Glow attendees present the gifts during a Mass celebrated by Archbishop William E. Lori at the Mid-Atlantic Congress Feb. 13 at the Baltimore Hilton. (Karen Osborne | CR Staff)

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If the goal of the new evangelization is to gather people from every language and nation to be a “house of prayer for all peoples,” then preaching, formation and religious instruction must attract, Archbishop William E. Lori told more than 1,200 people gathered at a Feb. 13 Mass for Evangelization at the Mid-Atlantic Congress for Catholic Leaders in Baltimore.

Effective preaching is not the mere presentation of information or ideas, he said, no matter how important or profound such information or ideas may be.

“Effective preaching should be engaging,” Archbishop Lori said. “It should be brimming with the attractiveness of the Gospel, that is to say with the attractiveness of the person of Christ. It should engage the faith with the struggles and challenges of daily life, while offering hope, vision and fresh strength.”

Archbishop Lori noted that preaching should draw people not to a set of rules, “but to a wholly new way of life that can only be lived in communion with Christ, a communion that is achieved in and through the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist.”

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Church leaders offer formation and religious instruction not as requirements, he said, but “as those who seek to know, love and follow the Lord.”

The Feb. 12-14 congress at the Baltimore Hilton Hotel, co-sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Association of Catholic Publishers, in partnership with the National Leadership Roundtable for Church Management, was designed to deepen the zeal of church leaders at the parish and diocesan level while also expanding their knowledge.

To view a slideshow of the event, navigate the arrows below.

Participants heard from more than 80 speakers on wide range of topics covering everything from church management to Bible study, liturgy and the sacraments.

In a talk about trends affecting the Catholic Church, Matthew Pinto, founder of Ascension Press, said he sees a noticeable movement toward “intentional discipleship.” Pinto speculated that the leadership of Pope Francis will cause “progressive” Catholics to have a greater deference to the papacy in the years to come, while it simultaneously challenges “orthodox” Catholics to “come out of their comfort zones” in serving those in need.

“I think in decades to come, we are going to see doctrinal orthodoxy with a social justice emphasis,” Pinto said.

Other trends Pinto said the church must be aware of include the rising acceptance of homosexuality, shifting demographics, the emergence of new groups of lay people ready to serve the church, increasing challenges to religious freedom and the growth of the new evangelization as promoted by the last three popes.

Damon Owens, executive director of the Theology of the Body Institute, emphasized in his presentation that in helping people live by God’s law, church ministers must encourage a personal encounter with Christ.

“The cold objective law is received by the heart as a rebuke until it becomes personal,” he said.

Likening God’s laws to guardrails that keep people safe, Owens said it isn’t enough to “stay on the right side of the road.”

“Merely following the law is not a joy-filled life,” he said. “It’s about an encounter of the heart. Then we can see the law not as the restrictive restraint, but as protective guidance.”

During the Feb. 14 liturgy, Massgoers were greeted by smiling members of Camp GLOW, a summer program for people with developmental disabilities annually sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Shrines to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom and others were set up in a converted ballroom where the Mass was celebrated, each bathed in blue spotlights and flickering candlelight.

Congress participants, who hailed from across the East Coast and beyond, perused books and other resource material set up in a large exhibition hall. There were also opportunities for eucharistic adoration and the sacrament of reconciliation.

Helen Harris, a cantor, catechist, lector and extraordinary minister of holy Communion at St. Joseph in Martinsburg, West Virginia, said she attended the congress for the first time to learn more about her faith and ministry.

“I want to know what canon law expects of us when we are passing that faith to catechumens coming through RCIA process,” she said. “It’s important to learn how to do that in the way the church wants us to do it, and it is important to pass on the faith not only to people around us, but we have to continue to grow in our own faith.”

General session keynote addresses were scheduled to feature Buffalo Bishop

Richard J. Malone; Paulist Father Ricky Manalo, an expert on liturgical music; Brian K. Johnson, director of the Office Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston; and Sherry Weddell, co-founder of the Catherine of Siena Institute.

Hosffman Ospino, assistant professor of theology and religious education at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, was to give a Spanish-language presentation.

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