

Promoting peace is focus of Social Ministry Convocation

The Iraq War, building peace in Baltimore City, and being faithful citizens were among the topics navigated during the 29th annual Social Ministry Convocation March 1 at The Seton Keough High School in Baltimore.

“Building for peace in a violent world” was the theme of the event, which included a number of workshops and attracted some 400 people from across the archdiocese.

“All of this together is a celebration of your good and your good works,” said Monsignor William F. Burke, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, Baltimore, and head of the local chapter of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, one of the sponsors of the event.

Father John Donahue, S.J., a distinguished Bible scholar, author and homilist, was the keynote speaker for the event, and Christine Tucker, Catholic Relief Services’ U.S. regional director for the Mid-Atlantic, addressed the Spanish-speaking attendees.

Father Donahue began by quoting civil rights militant H. Rap Brown, who said “Violence is American as cherry pie.”

“Groups such as yourselves work constantly and courageously to confront violence,” said Father Donahue, noting that “peace building is an unending challenge.”

He shared the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke and quoted Thomas Merton, among others.

St. Bernardine, Baltimore, parishioner Deborah Jones serves as head of social ministry at her parish and helped to lead the workshop, “Peace building in the city: one step at a time.”

She thinks the social ministry convocation is effective because it’s a way to develop new ideas, and it offers practical tips.

"I think that's what people are looking for," she said. "It's a great learning environment and networking opportunity. People share ideas and make suggestions."

Bishop W. Francis Malooly, western vicar, greeted participants early in the day, and Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar, distributed awards to those committed to social justice.

St. Clare, Essex, parishioner Madge Slocum said she thinks one of the benefits of the Social Ministry Convocation is that it "gives you a more world-wide view of what social ministry is as well as a local perspective."

Geena Stith, an 18-year-old St. Mary of the Assumption, Govans, parishioner and a senior at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute said she enjoys the convocation because "it gives people a way to learn more about how they can help."

Geena volunteers with the Students Sharing Coalition and is one of two student representatives serving on its board of directors.

A volunteer at The Baltimore Station, Geena said she is concerned with the social justice issues of homelessness and addiction.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Crofton, parishioner Aidan Surlis described the event as "a wonderful day all together," because "people of like minds are coming together to discuss the issues of the world."

Mr. Surlis attended a workshop discussing how and when troops should be withdrawn from Iraq and how the people of Iraq should be treated.

Catholic Charities Answers for the Aging, St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, alternative Christmas charities and a booth promoting Fair Trade items were among the many exhibits at the Social Ministry fair.

Following the workshops, a panel discussed practical parish tips, and awards were presented.