

Seminarians to visit parishes to boost annual collection

Maryland parishioners will have an opportunity to help educate the future priests of the Archdiocese of Baltimore when the second-collection plate is passed to them the weekend of May 5 and 6.

Last year parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore raised more than \$300,000 to help pay for the education of the seminarians enrolled in the six-year program, and members of the archdiocesan vocations office are hoping to top that record-setting figure this spring.

“The money we collected last year will pay for about a third of the educational expenses for our seminarians,” said Patti Phipps, administrative assistant for the vocations office. “Last year was a record for us. Luckily, the collections have gone up steadily over the last several years.”

A contributing factor in the rising annual special collections may be linked to the office of vocations sending each seminarian to two different parishes the week before and the week of the collections to speak to the congregations.

“Typically, we get more money from the parishes that we send them to,” Ms. Phipps said. “So, we believe that it does make a difference.”

While the office of vocations tries to get the 27 seminarians to as many large parishes as possible, they also try to get them to some of the smaller and urban churches on a rotating basis.

“The goal is to cover every parish in the archdiocese at least once every five years,”

Ms. Phipps said. "It allows the parishioners to see the seminarians firsthand and know they are contributing to the future leadership of the church."

One of the larger annual collections comes from St. Louis, Clarksville, a parish nestled in the rural section of Howard County - home to some of Maryland's wealthier residents.

"Our parishioners have been very generous, but they understand that our seminarians are part of our family," said Father Arkadiusz Ochalek, associate pastor of St. Louis. "We've always been lucky to have great seminarians with us, and our parishioners realize the importance of educating them."

As members of the class of 2009, Gonzalo Cadavid-Rivera, 32, and Hector Mateus-Ariza, 35, will each speak to congregations for the third time as seminarians and express their gratitude for their educational experiences.

Mr. Cadavid-Rivera will visit the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, April 28 and 29, and St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea, May 5 and 6.

Mr. Mateus-Ariza will speak to the congregations of St. John the Evangelist, Frederick, April 28 and 29, and St. Joseph, Fullerton, May 5 and 6.

Most seminarians in the archdiocese are educated at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Roland Park and Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Ms. Phipps said.

The archdiocese has been holding the annual spring collection for the seminarians for the past 25 years to help it pay for the education of its future priests, she said.