

# **Sen. DeGrange honored at ‘Catholics in Annapolis’ reception**

ANNAPOLIS – The choir from Cardinal Shehan School serenaded State Sen. James E. “Ed” DeGrange Sr. (D-Anne Arundel County) with a slide show of photos and thanks while they sang the song that brought them internet fame at a reception in the Senate Office Building here.

About 300 people from around the state converged Feb. 22 on the capitol for briefings on issues of interest to Catholics before meeting with local legislators or their staffs and then gathering for a reception with legislators and the bishops who serve the state.

After the choir sang “What a Wonderful World” and “Rise Up,” dedicated to the state senator who is retiring at the end of this legislative session, DeGrange shook the hand of each of the student-singers as they left the room. He was especially influential in the passage of Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST), which provides tuition assistance scholarships to income-eligible students, including 70 students at Cardinal Shehan.

As DeGrange started to walk back to his place during the annual “Catholics in Annapolis” lobbying day at the state capital, Archbishop William E. Lori caught his arm and said, “Don’t go away.”

Calling DeGrange a “wonderful friend” and “distinguished statesman,” Archbishop Lori noted that he was able to transcend the partisan divide. “Throughout his service to the state of Maryland, he has been a friend to the poor and needy, to business in Maryland and to all the people of the state, especially students,” Archbishop Lori said.

The archbishop presented DeGrange with the Archdiocese of Baltimore Medal of Honor “for his outstanding service to all Marylanders and commitment to upholding his faith in the public square.”

The archbishop said DeGrange took his faith and its values and applied them to

public service. “No one has done that better than you,” Archbishop Lori said.

DeGrange, who was choked up at the surprise honor, noted it takes a lot of people to govern well.

“It takes friendship and relationships to get anything done,” he said, “not just in Annapolis, but in life.”

He said he was especially proud of supporting education because all children deserve opportunity, adding that they will bring back to the state tenfold if given the chance to succeed.

In addition to Archbishop Lori, chairman of the Maryland Catholic Conference, other bishops in attendance included Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington; Bishop W. Francis Malooly of Wilmington, Del.; Bishop Mark E. Brennan and Bishop Adam J. Parker, auxiliaries of Baltimore; Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop emeritus of Baltimore; and Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville-Rodríguez, auxiliary of Washington. The Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington include parts of Maryland.

Barbara and Steve Gordon and their sister-in-law, Maria, of St. Louis Parish in Clarksville, met with staff members of their legislators to express their concerns about some of the key issues for the MCC, including human trafficking, fetal homicide, behavioral health and continued support for the BOOST program.

“They listened,” Maria Gordon said.

Steve Gordon added, “They said they would relay our message and the fervor we had with it to the legislators.”

Four people represented St. Mary’s in Hagerstown at the event, including Parish Council President Rhonda O’Malley and School Board President Patti James. They saw two of their delegates – another was still in a committee meeting – and one of their senators to discuss their list of talking points.

“We feel it’s very important (for the people in Annapolis) to know even in Western Maryland, we have a voice. Their constituents are concerned and (we explain) the

reasons why,” James said. “The Maryland Catholic Conference works hard to get a grassroots movement going. Getting people to come to Annapolis is very important.”

First-term Del. Brooke Lierman (D-Baltimore City) attended the legislators’ reception to chat with voters from her district and the city. She said the dire needs of the city – housing, education, crime and transit – grab her attention every legislative session. A civil-rights attorney, Lierman said she views her public service as an extension of her Catholic faith.

“It’s important to see the people who share those values put them into action by coming to Annapolis to tell their legislators,” said Lierman, a parishioner of St. Ignatius on Calvert Street. “There’s a lot going on in the world. Catholics need to stand up for the disenfranchised, especially immigrants.”

Mary Ellen Russell, MCC executive director, thanked the bishops, participants and approximately 40 legislators who attended the event, including Senate President Thomas V. “Mike” Miller, whose district includes Prince George’s, Calvert and Charles counties.

Miller said the real heroes of the state are the people doing the Lord’s work and sharing their opinions with their delegates and senators. “I promise you, we’re going to follow up on your good actions here today.”

*Email Christopher Gunty at [editor@CatholicReview.org](mailto:editor@CatholicReview.org).*