

Social Ministry Convocation

focused on call to serve

Last Saturday I stopped by the Social Ministries Convocation at Seton Keough High School. Bishop Mitchell Rozanski accompanied me in the visit; Bishops Malooly and Madden came by later in the day. This gathering, organized by Monsignor William Burke with the help of a special committee, brought together hundreds of people from around the Archdiocese to focus on the Gospel call to serve the poor and those in need. Speakers and group meetings dealt with different areas of concern.

We began the day with a prayer service followed by a short welcoming ceremony. When it came time for me to speak, I mentioned four issues I thought particularly timely for the gathering:

1) The War in Iraq: I said that Bishop Madden had made an eloquent intervention at a press conference called by the area religious leaders earlier in the week. His statement was reported on in last week's Catholic Review. Our prayers must be with all who represent our nation, and we pray especially for the military, that they may be able to return home safely and swiftly.

2) Immigration: The present national debate was a reason why so many came to St. Patrick Church earlier in the year and later traveled to Washington, to make sure that immigrants are treated fairly. Our prayers are with our legislators that they achieve a reform of the immigration system that meets the needs of our national security while still protecting the dignity of immigrants, especially in allowing families to stay together. Our prayers are also with those immigrants who are striving to make a better life and provide for their families.

3) Catholic Schools: In Maryland there is a serious injustice in the way Catholic school children and parents are the objects of rank discrimination.

All the educational requirements are fulfilled, but only nominal funding is awarded. We pray that this injustice may be recognized and rectified.

4) Capital Punishment: It appears that the State of Maryland is coming closer to the

ideal stated by Pope John Paul II in St. Louis, when he said that the modern state has means to punish capital offenders without taking the individual's life. Our prayers go out that all may come to a deeper understanding of God's gift of human life at all stages and for all people.

In each of these areas, we pray the Lord bless this world with his peace and justice and strengthen each of us to live out the Gospel's call to discipleship following the example of Christ.

On Sunday, I celebrated the Annual Archdiocesan Scout Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was great to see the Basilica full for this Mass, which honors those scouts, both boys and girls, who have completed the requirements for their religious badges. This year, over 500 scouts from over 72 parishes throughout the Archdiocese were awarded badges. In addition, the Archdiocese was recognized by the National Committee for Scouting for the excellence of our program, which is under the direction of Monsignor Tom Phillips and his team on the Archdiocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting. Congratulations again to all those who earned badges and to all those who worked with them.

May this Lenten season be a blessing for you, drawing you deeper into the love of God.