

Summer Thoughts

With this, my last column prior to a bit of a summer hiatus, I thought I would use the occasion to tie up some loose ends by commenting on a number of topics that have been on my “to-do” list for some time.

eserving of our recognition

Catholic history abounds in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, especially Baltimore City, where the first Catholic Cathedral and Seminary in the nation call home and where the good works of well-known Catholics such as Mothers Seton and Lange took root.

Other lesser-known Catholics with equally important historical ties to our Archdiocese have failed to receive the attention and recognition their sacrifices and service deserve. Josephite Father Charles R. Uncles is one such individual.

The first African-American priest ordained in the United States, Father Uncles was a member of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Baltimore prior to his entry into the seminary and ordination by Cardinal James Gibbons in 1891. He would go on to establish the Josephite Fathers religious community in 1893. The Josephites continue to serve the people and parishes of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the order’s “headquarters” are still located in Baltimore.

As you may have read in The Catholic Review earlier this month, the 600 block of Baltimore’s Pennsylvania Avenue was renamed “Fr. Charles R. Uncles Way” on June 10, a fitting tribute for a man well-deserving of our recognition and thanks.

even million and counting

On the first of this month, Catholic Charities’ Our Daily Bread hot meal program celebrated its 30th year of serving the hungry in our Archdiocese. For people in Baltimore, especially, ODB has been an oasis in a desert of poverty and despair ever since it first opened its doors next to the Basilica June 1, 1980.

For those keeping track, the volunteers and staff at Our Daily Bread have been faithfully serving people with dignity and compassion for over 11,000 consecutive

days – through blizzards, including last year’s multiple snowstorms, and holidays – demonstrating all that is best about our Church and an understanding that hunger takes no days off. Over the course of its existence, ODB has served more than 7 million hot meals!

Considered the “crown jewel” of the more than 80 programs of Catholic Charities, ODB is the perfect witness to our faith, our call to serve others and to reflect God’s love to those who most need it. I am enormously proud of our Catholic Charities operation, most especially this program, which owes much of its consistent presence to the generosity of its donors and parishioner-volunteers.

Young Church

As we prepare for World Youth Day in Madrid, where young Catholics from our Archdiocese will join with millions of others to celebrate their love of Christ and our faith with Pope Benedict XVI, I am encouraged by the powerful witness of the young people in our local Church.

Displays of the faithfulness of our youth are abundantly evident. Whether at our annual Palm Sunday weekend Youth Pilgrimage, the summer work camps taking place throughout the Archdiocese and beyond, the many Masses for youth and young people that involve their active participation or the countless youth-oriented programs and ministries taking place in our parishes and schools, young Catholics in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are modeling Christ through their generous service to the Church and others.

One such group, Drop of Clear Water, was featured in a recent edition of The Review. The group is made up of mostly home-schooled Catholic teens and is committed to prayer, charity and chastity. Such a radically selfless witness in today’s self-centered society is rare and deserving of our support.

We have young people who are generous and unapologetic in their faith, and who need the support of their families, pastors and others in the Catholic community to continue to grow in their love of Jesus and possibly even contribute to the spread of his word through a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated religious life. Please offer them your encouragement.

As has been my practice in recent years, I will take a break from my regular columns over the summer months and instead will give way to a guest columnist or two, though I do plan to write occasionally and as timely issues arise.

In the meantime, I pray, dear readers, that you will have a safe and restful summer!