


The man behind the clerics

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, a former U.S. Army chaplain and former head of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, certainly can come across as a no-nonsense, "get to the point," efficient sort of gentleman. 

But as my coworker George Matysek pointed out in a recent [blog](#), the priest of 46 years also has a humorous side. Even during the press conference announcing his appointment by Pope Benedict XVI to Pro-Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, he concluded his speech by looking to the room full of reporters and quipping "Alright, if there are no questions, I'll leave."

What I have witnessed of Archbishop O'Brien during his brief tenure in the Premier See, in addition to decisiveness and a no-nonsense approach, are warmth and compassion.

Whether it's the direct eye contact and warm handshake he offers as he makes a point to meet as many as he can in a room, or the kindness of extending personal phone calls, as he did to all his secretaries before making his new appointment public, he has a way of making people feel important and valued.

When he said at his Aug. 29 press conference, "It is with a heavy heart I will be departing the Premier See of the United States," I believed him.

The archbishop has been a proponent of the work of Catholic Charities, which has some 80 programs in Maryland, since his arrival. I appreciate how during his press conference, he took the time to speak of the agency.

"I'm just sometimes curious and disappointed that Catholic Charities does not get more attention," he said. "It's the largest social service provider in Maryland, over

80 programs - quite substantial. We know some of them obviously in Our Daily Bread, but there are many others - touching people, reaching people and lifting people up (in a way that) no other institution in the state is doing or even can do.”

The archbishop has been a strong supporter of The Catholic Review as well, attending numerous meetings and working to help create a strategic plan for the organization.

I have received two handwritten notes from the archbishop, both of which were tremendously kind, and one of which I carry with me in my appointment book.

I had made the archbishop chocolate chip cookies, which I heard were a favorite of his.

The note read:

“Dear Jennifer,

The chocolate chip cookies are gone, but not forgotten. They were the best - so good, in fact, that I ‘forgot’ to share them with Father Adam! Thank you for your thoughtfulness and thank you for your impressive commitment to our Catholic Review.

In the Lord,

+Edwin O’Brien”

I know everyone will have different impressions, but this is how I will remember the 15th archbishop of Baltimore.

P.S. More cookies coming soon, Archbishop O’Brien!