

Welcoming Our New Shepherd

By Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien

Earlier this week, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, announced his appointment of a new shepherd for the Archdiocese of Baltimore: Archbishop William E. Lori, current Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

I have known Archbishop Lori for many years. He is a man whose reputation reflects his deep love of the Church and her people, and his extraordinary abilities as demonstrated countless times during his time as Bishop of Bridgeport and as a valued leader on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Archbishop Lori has ably pastored the priests and faithful of the Diocese of Bridgeport these past 11 years, solidifying the foundation of that local Church in many key areas, most especially Catholic education, vocations, service to the poor, and evangelization.

In 2004, Archbishop Lori announced a major restructuring of the Diocese of Bridgeport's 37 Catholic schools, which educate more than 11,000 children. Changes in governance, funding and curriculum have led to a resurgence in the diocesan school system, most notably in nearly a third of their schools receiving the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon designation, a recognition that diocesan student scores rank in the top 10 percent of all schools, public or private, across the nation. He also oversaw the formation of the Cathedral Education Cluster, a partnership of six inner-city schools aimed at ensuring continued access to Catholic education for families in Bridgeport's poorest neighborhoods.

Archbishop Lori's apostolic ministry in Bridgeport has been marked by particular emphasis on vocations, seeing 35 priests ordained and having 39 seminarians presently in formation. Further, eight orders of women religious and a new religious institute were all welcomed into the Diocese of Bridgeport during Archbishop Lori's tenure.

Under Archbishop Lori's leadership, Catholic Charities in Bridgeport dedicated 22 supportive-housing apartments for at-risk families. The agency now provides much needed housing to 225 individuals and its food pantries serve more than 1.2 million meals annually to the working poor, homeless and elderly.

And in 2006, the Diocese of Bridgeport launched "Following in the Footsteps of Christ," a pastoral plan for evangelization that serves as a roadmap for the Diocese by identifying key areas to make the Gospel better known to the people of Bridgeport: participation in the liturgy; support for family life and married couples; formation for young people; adult faith formation; and service to marginalized individuals.

Archbishop Lori's outstanding administrative abilities have also enabled him to serve the wider Church in areas such as marriage, religious liberty and the protection of children. Archbishop Lori has been an outspoken advocate for religious freedom, most especially these last several months, and for the preservation of marriage between one man and one woman.

As a member of the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, Bishop Lori was instrumental in drafting the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, a landmark document that still guides our Church's efforts to protect the children in our care, hold abusers accountable and promote healing for victims.

This Archdiocese has been blessed with many outstanding leaders through the years and our Holy Father has continued this tradition with the naming of Archbishop Lori as the 16th Archbishop of the Premier See. He assumes the helm of this Archdiocese with the support of many dedicated clergy, religious and lay faithful, as well as the prayers and encouragement of me, his predecessor. I look forward to watching as his God-given talents and gentle nature bear much fruit for the glory of God and the benefit of His people in this holy Church of Baltimore.