

What's public higher education have to do with Catholic Charities?

When it comes to the Maryland General Assembly and Annapolis and use of taxpayer monies, a popular portrayal paints a deep schism, between public and private entities. Forgotten are the many partnerships that defy that conception, one example being bumping into Brit Kirwan at the 30th annual Catholic Charities Leadership Breakfast Celebration Dec. 8.

William E. "Brit" Kirwan is the chancellor of the University System of Maryland, the face of public higher education in the state. He was president of the University of Maryland College Park from 1988-98, when I covered Terps' athletics and had the good fortune to get to know him. Born in Louisville, Kirwan remains a Kentucky gentleman, and when we saw each other for the first time in years he offered a warm greeting at the Our Daily Bread Employment Center.

Kirwan was there as a guest of Kathleen M. Ryan Lakin, who is his senior advisor and a member of the Catholic Charities Board of Trustees. Before the breakfast, he was already well-versed in the good works of Catholic Charities and the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"I'm close to Rick Berndt," Kirwan said of the man who did legal work for the archdiocese. "It was a chance to be with people I know and like. ... One of the great strengths that we have in Maryland is that the various sectors of higher education work so well together. I meet regularly with MICUA (private colleges) and the community colleges. Their (state) funding is tied to our funding level. We're all truly in this together."