

Young adult ministers speak each other's language

About 50 young adult ministers from across the archdiocese came together May 17 for a meal, prayer and conversation – in two languages. The bilingual Young Adult Contact Meeting was a first for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, which last year hosted English and Spanish versions of the same meeting.

Speaking in Spanish, Mark Pacione, director of the Division for Youth and Young Adult Ministry (DYYAM), welcomed participants in his opening remarks. An interpreter translated his words for English-speakers who listened with headsets.

“The Archdiocese of Baltimore needs to be speaking two languages beyond just the first reading at the Mass and the Prayer of the Faithful,” he said. “We need those who do ministry to be able to share ideas between cultures. Such understanding and sharing will make us stronger and richer.”

As the number of Spanish speakers in the archdiocese grows, reaching out in a bi-cultural manner to young adults, in particular, is even more important, said Pacione.

“This is the generation that has to negotiate both cultures,” he said.

Translation went in two directions in the dynamic presentation that included small-group discussions as well as four presentations (two in English and two in Spanish) by young adult ministers with successful programs. Written translation on an overhead screen and bilingual facilitators for the small-group discussions in addition to the interpreter on the headsets meant all were able to understand.

Olga Conteras of St. Mary Church in Annapolis, a coordinator for Fiat, the parish's

Hispanic young adult ministry, acted as a bilingual translator and facilitator for the small-group discussion. She hopes that the next step is not just to exchange ideas between Spanish- and English-speakers but to work together to implement the ideas.

“As young adults, we’re in the real world now. And I want us to learn that we’re all the same person within our church. The faith, the love we gain from our Lord is attained regardless of barriers like language or culture. We are just one church.”

Chris Welsh, pastoral associate of St. Charles Borromeo in Pikesville, said the two-way nature of the translation at the meeting, which required both Spanish- and English-speakers to listen to the translator, made him think about more than just the ideas for young adults being talked about.

“It’s not like just printing up brochures in two languages. That doesn’t force me, as part of the dominant culture, to change my approach,” he explained. “It doesn’t force me out of my comfort zone. And part of my job is to get people to trust God and move out of their comfort zone.”

Participants networked with one another and shared ideas on how to engage Catholics ages 18-35 during the four-hour event. DYYAM laid out some of its plans for the future, which include distinguishing between young adults in post high school years (ages 18-21) and those establishing careers (ages 22-30) and providing more resources for parents of 18-20 year olds. Perhaps the most popular event DYYAM has in the works is a conference/retreat for young adult ministers in Ocean City in spring 2010.

One of the efforts DYYAM already has up and running, a page on the social networking site Facebook, still needs to be extended to the Spanish-speaking community. The call to help set up a Facebook page for the Hispanic community was met with almost as many enthusiastic cheers as the mention of a trip to Ocean City.

Georgina Vaca, coordinator of Hispanic youth and young adult ministries and organizer of the meeting, summed up why a joint meeting for networking among young adult ministers was a needed and why it was a success. “It was just more complete with both groups there.”