

Youth must be served? No, it serves

By Paul McMullen

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With one recurring exception, I rarely engage in social media rebuttal. An acquaintance will occasionally vent his frustration with the demeanor and work habits of millennials on his Facebook page, and then I come to their defense.

Yes, way too many of my sentences are prefaced with “In my day,” but fewer of those complaints have come in 2015, in part because the 40 days leading up to the 40 days of Lent abounded with encounters that showed the future is in pretty good hands.

Researching some Catholic Schools Week articles, Jan. 8 took me to four K-8 schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Wherever I went, the greeting was the same: a smile and “Can I get you a bottle of water?”

Whether it was math teacher Heather Cucuzzella at Immaculate Conception in Towson; Julia Rogers, archdiocesan grant-writer and interim principal of St. Agnes in Catonsville; or Casey Buckstaff, the principal of Monsignor Slade in Glen Burnie, sharp ideas were explained by sharper people.

Rather than exhausted upon leaving my fourth stop, I was inspired in Glyndon, where a 31-year-old is in charge of Sacred Heart School. My coat rack holds wool blazers older than Zak Coyle; his earnestness and faith would silence most skeptics about the future of Catholic education, family, etc.

Three weeks later, Archbishop William E. Lori visited The Catholic High School of Baltimore to bless its renovated gym. There was barely a sound coming from 325 students as he ascended a stairwell, paused out of their sight and remarked on cue, “It has to be a Catholic school, if they’re that quiet.”

Manekin Construction in Columbia made that old space look new. It figured that Jimmy Benton, the young assistant project manager who oversaw the job, went to St. Ursula School in Parkville and Calvert Hall College High School in Towson.

Having never seen an elephant fly and curious to see something seemingly even more improbable, Feb. 4 had me following Our Lady of Mount Carmel, then the Baltimore area’s new No. 1 team in boys’ basketball, to its game at Mount St. Joseph High School.

The Cougars have talent and tenacity that belies their recent entry into the Baltimore Catholic League, and a lot of small colleges would envy the Gaels’ 58,000-square-foot athletic complex, but what was most affirming was the reception for an unsung hero.

It was Senior Night for the Gaels, who have none on their roster, and the only guy honored was manager Joey Chambers, cheered as if he were a two-time BCL Player of the Year. His schoolmates recognize service, and its value.

More evidence is found back home, where our refrigerator is being overtaken by save-the-wedding-date postcards.

There is one for April, another for June, ditto for August and September, all from the daughters of dear friends. Eight young people will commit themselves to another - and all will do so in a Catholic church.

Lament millennials?

Save your energy, and feed off theirs.

McMullen is managing editor for the Catholic Review.