

Catholic Men encouraged to 'Put out into the deep'

By Neil W. McCabe Pilot Correspondent

Posted: 4/25/2008



Men join in prayer during the fourth annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference April 19.

Pilot photo/ Neil W. McCabe

More than 2,200 Catholic men April 19 attended the Boston Catholic Men's Conference at Boston College and were joined by Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, who shuttled from papal visit in New York City to celebrate the closing Mass and meet with Boston media to describe the meeting between the Holy Father and five local victims of sexual abuse by priests.

The theme of the fourth annual conference was "Put Out into the Deep," a verse from Luke that many priests, especially young priests, have told him is their favorite passage, said Scot Landry, the director of the archdiocese's development office. Landry has led the organizing team for each of the last four years.

Having Boston College's Conte Forum and its ancillary accommodations was the product of the close relationship between the BC community and the archdiocese, Landry said. As the team was realizing that budget and scheduling concerns would prevent the conference from returning to the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, the college's president, Father William P. Leahy, SJ, reached out and offered facilities on his campus, he said. "Father Leahy knew that this was an important piece of the renewal of the archdiocese and he made it a priority of his office."

The general sessions were hosted on the floor of the arena with participants seating in the stands, seats where the ice rink platform and even some gravitating to the team benches and the penalty box.

The breakout sessions for workshops on organizing men's groups by Andreas Widmer, the conference's outreach and speaker's committee leader and the Brotherhood of Hope and "Bringing Catholics back to the Faith" by Tom Peterson, were held in the Yawkey Center. Adoration of the Eucharist was held all day at the Shea Room on the second floor of the arena, Landry said.

In his welcoming remarks, Landry said, "There are more than 100 priests hearing confessions in the Power Gym. Keep them busy."

This year's conference was put together with the help with 150 parish captains and more than 200 parishes for all over the archdiocese and as far away as Long Island, said Widmer. "The group leader from Long Island would even come to the meetings. One morning he called me to say he was not going to make because of traffic. I told him not to worry about it." The man was stuck on the Long Island Expressway.

Widmer, who was a personal security escort in the Swiss Guard for Pope John Paul II, said in past year's the conference focused on nationally-known speakers, but this year he and his team found local speakers.

Among the local speakers were Central Region Bishop Robert F. Hennessy, a South Boston native; Quincy's Jack Shaughnessy Sr., the owner of the crane and rigging company Shaughnessy & Ahern; Boston College professor Peter Kreeft, the author of "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven" and other books; Father Roger J. Landry, the brother of Scot and the executive editor of the Fall River diocesan newspaper; and Father Peter Grover, OMV, a former carpenter, who is now the director of Boston's St. Clement's Eucharistic Shrine, host to one of New England's largest young adult Masses.

"We have people here in Boston," he said. "In my opinion, Father Peter Glover is the best preacher in Boston. I have been to hear him and at the end of the Mass, people were crying."

The opening speaker was New Bedford's Tarek Saab, who was a contestant on the 2006 season of reality television "The Apprentice." Saab, who was fired in that season's 10th episode, released his first book March 1 "Gut Check: Confronting Love, Work & Manhood in Your Twenties," which describes his journey the living the life of a Catholic man in today's culture.

Saab said he was an altar boy for Cardinal O'Malley when he was Bishop of Fall River and he was hoping to catch up with him at the conference.

Landry said the cardinal called to explain and apologize that a private dinner with Pope Benedict Friday kept him from attending the women's conference that day. But he made a video greeting to let the attendees that his prayers were with them. The cardinal flew in to Boston for the men's conference while the pope was celebrating the youth Mass at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y.

At 3:10 p.m., the cardinal made his first remarks to members of the Boston news media about the meeting he arranged between five local abuse victims and the Holy Father sitting with Father John Connolly, his special assistant for the protection of children.

At that meeting, the archbishop presented the pontiff with a notebook with the first names of 1,500 known victims with blank pages at the end for those unknown.

After the Mass, the cardinal returned to New York City to rejoin the pope and prepare to join the 3,000 Boston-area pilgrims attending the papal Mass at Yankee Stadium.

Three men were honored with the Catholic of the Year awards by the conference committee. Father George E. Harrison, the pastor of Fall River's Holy Name Parish was presented with the award for priest. Deacon John Nicholson of Sudbury's Our Lady of Fatima Parish was given the deacon award and Robert J. Dunn from St. Mary of the Hills was given the layman of the year award.

Before announcing the awards, which were presented by Bishop Hennessey, Landry told the audience that the late Father Daniel Kennedy had received many nominations in the months before his Jan. 27 death.

In his talk, "Put Out into the Deep: As a Priest in the Missions," Bishop Hennessey shared many of his experiences as a missionary priest in Latin America, but he also made a direct plea to the attendees to be strong Catholic men for themselves and their families carrying with them the lessons and good feelings from the conference.

The bishop related his own struggles with a broken ankle. After weeks in a cast, the doctor finally told him what when he was ready he could decide to take his first step, but he should know that it was going to hurt, he said.

When the time came and he took his first step, it did hurt, he said. "It was another 36 hours before I took my second step," he said. "They always tell us that the first step is the most difficult, but they lied. It is the second step because then we know the pain that is coming," he said. "Take the second step, it is worth it."