

Boston Men's Conference is April 18

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FALL RIVER — As Catholic men prepare for the feast of St. Joseph, anticipation is growing throughout the Fall River Diocese for the fifth annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference on April 18 at Boston College.

The theme of this year's conference is "In the Footsteps of Christ" and key speakers for the day-long event will include Jerry York, hockey coach for Boston College; Curtis Martin, founder of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students; Jim Stenson, author and one of the Church's foremost experts on Catholic men's issues; and actor Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus Christ in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," and is making a return appearance after speaking at the inaugural conference back in 2005.

The annual gathering — which piggybacks with a Catholic Women's Conference counterpart on April 19 — evolved out of a meeting of a Catholic Men's Group at St. Paul Parish in Cambridge in the fall of 2004 and was established to help then-Archbishop Sean O'Malley rebuild the Church in Boston. But similar interest in reinvigorating the faith eventually spread to areas outside the archdiocese and the first conference drew more than 2,200 men on March 19, 2005 — the feast of St. Joseph.

In subsequent years, interest and attendance in the two-day conference has steadily increased — to as many as 5,200 men — and organizers are looking forward to another impressive turnout for this fifth outing.

Following the format of a one-day retreat, the conference includes the aforementioned keynote speakers along with music and video presentations, exhibitions and group discussions, prayer and

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worship with confession, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and a closing Mass celebrated by Cardinal O'Malley.

"It's just a great opportunity to get together and share my faith with other Catholic men," said John Gregorek of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Seekonk, who has attended past conferences and is looking forward to returning this year.

"The opportunities are few and far between for men to express their faith together," he said. "The speakers are a big part of it, but it's the whole experience including celebrating Mass with Cardinal Sean O'Malley and attending confession. It's sort of a call to action for Catholic men to take positions of responsibility in the family and in society."

Marty Doyle, also a parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, has faithfully attended the conference every year since its inception and was single-handedly responsible for bringing 150 men — the largest number from any one parish — to that first year event. Still

a month away, he already has approximately 40 signed up for his annual bus excursion into Boston that includes the praying of the rosary en route.

"The biggest thing I really enjoy is the chance to be with many other Catholic men and spend the day with them," Doyle said. "I enjoy the idea of getting a group of men together on a nice spring day to think about God and contemplate his love for them instead of working around the house or doing something else."

"It's great to attend a conference where you're surrounded by 3,000-plus Catholic men, all sharing the same faith and belief," agreed Edwin Aldorando of St. Kilian's Parish in New Bedford. "It's even better to listen to the speakers and hear what they have to say; it's one way of God communicating with us."

In addition to listening to scheduled speakers and celebrating the sacraments, the event also includes an opportunity for attendees to simply share in each other's company and discuss their faith.

"There's so much to see and so many people to talk to," Aldorando said. "At St. Kilian's Parish, we don't only invite adults to attend, but also those who have just been confirmed in the hope of getting them ready as they continue growing in their faith."

Fellow St. Kilian's parishioner Ervin Ramos actually brought his 12-year-old son to the conference for the first time last year and this year he's taking him back along with two of his older nephews.

"Last year I was able to take my son with me — he's going to be 13 this year," Ramos said. "I wanted him to have the experience and introduce him to a new way of seeing the Church and learning from different people. He thought it was great. This year I'm also going to be bringing my two nephews. They're all teen-agers and it should help them out tremendously."

Describing his first conference back in 2006 as "an eye-opening, unbelievable experience," Ramos said it's a great way to share in the faith with other Catholics outside the context of weekly Mass.

"There are always different experiences that you have when you go to a conference," he said. "The enthusiasm of hearing different people talk about their own experience with God and their religion and Church just

motivates and energizes me and my whole family."

Gregorek likened the conference to a mini-retreat but said what sets this one apart from others is the caliber of the speakers involved.

"They're all fantastic speakers — whether it's a priest speaking on vocations or hearing laypeople offering a witness to their faith; they're all from different backgrounds but with the same message," Gregorek said. "They all bring a great gift of faith to the day."

"They're always class-A speakers," Aldorando agreed, noting that past standouts have included popular EWTN person-

ality Father John Corapi and the aforementioned Jim Caviezel.

"Jim Caviezel is not a professional speaker and he does not prepare his speech, but he prays and fasts beforehand," said Doyle, who first heard the actor speak in 2005. "But his witness is just unbelievable and it gives us all an example of how to live our lives and follow Christ."

"For the price, for everything the conference has to offer, it's definitely worth it," Aldorando said. "I would say it's an opportunity for anyone and to just jump on the bus and just go."

For more information about the conference, visit www.catholicboston.com.



MESSAGE FOR MEN — Actor Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" and is seen here speaking during last year's Rosary Bowl in California, will be returning to speak at the Boston Catholic Men's Conference next month at Boston College. Caviezel previously spoke at Boston's inaugural conference in 2005. (CNS photo/Tim Rue)

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