

## **Husbands, dads challenged to defend marriage, unborn**

**By GAIL BESSE**

***Anchor* Correspondent**

BOSTON – The game plan targeted at 3,100 men at the Boston Catholic Men’s Conference was direct: this is the place, now is the time, and you’re one God drafted for a special job.

“Especially in this state, you as Catholic husbands and fathers have a great challenge to defend the institution of marriage and the right to life of unborn children,” said Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the 1.7-million member Knights of Columbus.

“We may run from the challenge, but we may not run from the responsibility. Each of us can do something important, and together all of us can do something great. If we don’t do it, who will?”

A standing ovation erupted in the cavernous hall of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. Despite a major snowstorm that had gripped New England hours before, men of all ages responded to this third annual event March 17.

Anderson stressed the urgent need to defend religious freedom. “The Bill of Rights has meaning only as long as we insist that these rights are enforced,” he said. “Our right to practice our religion exists now because Catholic men in the past did not sit back.”

Attacks on the right of religious conscience, especially in health care, are increasing, he said. “There is a need for a universal right of conscience. But our conscience must be more than sincere conviction; it must be informed and well formed.”

Men’s role now must be to join Christ’s construction team to rebuild His Church, said Scot Landry and Father Roger Landry, identical twins who took turns speaking.

“New England is our mission territory,” said Scot Landry, a co-founder of the lay-led event aimed at enabling men to grow in their Catholic faith.

“Some Catholics here have chosen to remain as distant from the Church as they were five years ago,” he said. “If we haven’t invited someone back to church in five years, we’re not carrying our weight.

“Others need to learn from us the true character of the Church,” said Landry, who is chief development officer for the Archdiocese of Boston.

“We need to focus on the vast majority of priests who are good. We’re called to defend them, to befriend them and to thank God for them,” he said to enthusiastic applause.

“It’s not enough for us just to be following Christ. Our concern must be for others,” said Father Landry, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in New Bedford and editor of *The Anchor*.

Men can and should be a support - for each other, for their wives, their families, their parishes – with Christ’s grace in Mass, in confession and in Scripture.

He suggested they join in fellowship through a men’s prayer group, and give at least one hour of their time and one hour’s salary a week to their parish.

“This is a great time to be Catholic,” Fr. Landry said. “When the stream’s flowing against you, it takes a real man to swim upstream.”

Andreas Widmer, of St. Catherine of Genoa Parish in Somerville, shared the lessons he learned from Pope John Paul II about being a Catholic businessman. Widmer first met John Paul in 1986 as a young soldier in the Swiss Guard, the pope’s elite bodyguard unit.

It was Christmas. Widmer was homesick for his family. The Pope walked by, stopped to look him in the eye, then touched his elbow.

“He said, ‘You’re new, aren’t you? What’s your name?’ He told me he would pray for me at Mass. You cannot imagine the comfort I felt at that moment in the compassion he showed me,” Widmer said.

Later as he came to know John Paul through his writings, he learned lessons that served well in business: live a life based on prayer and evangelize others in a positive way; plan for the future but focus on the moment; enjoy life, be humble, be yourself.

“Have dignity. State your opinions publicly and act on them,” Widmer said. “Give yourself completely to your vocation. You’re on a mission from God. If your work isn’t building you up this way, stop and evaluate it.”

Catholic man-of-the-year awards were given to men whose work modeled the best of their chosen vocation: for layman to Dr. John Bratton of Christ the King Parish in Falmouth; for religious to Brother Rahl Bunsu, director of Brotherhood of Hope in Somerville; and for priest to Father David Barnes, pastor of St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish in Beverly.

While hundreds sought out the sacrament of Confession, thousands more – a virtual sea of green sweaters on this St. Patrick’s Day - knelt in Eucharistic Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Martin Doman of Christ Music ministry led them in praise and worship.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, shared the story of how the Church in Africa has successfully evangelized by showing the analogy between God’s family and African family traditions.

First people learn the history of their clan. Then they’re given a role to play, a responsibility to assume to help the family perpetuate itself. “We don’t talk about rights, only obligations,” said the Cardinal. “In carrying on our obligations, everyone’s rights are assured.”

And the obligations of Catholics here are equally clear, concluded Boston Cardinal Sean O’Malley. “I ask every man here to live the ideals of our patronal saint, St. Patrick,” he said. “Forgive those who’ve hurt you. Love Christ and look for ways to share Him with others. We’re here today because generations of disciples passed along the faith to us. You must tell our story.”

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