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FALL RIVER, MASS.

Hundreds from diocese attend Catholic Men's Conference in Boston

BOSTON — For Tony Andrade, actor Jim Caviezel's speech at a men's conference last weekend was a life-altering experience.

Caviezel, who played Jesus in last year's movie, "The Passion of the Christ," challenged his listeners to become "warriors" for Christ, and to step into the world and express their faith in public.

"The words he had to say, without a doubt, will have an impact on me for the rest of my life," Andrade said in an interview afterward. "I will be more determined. I'm going to have to follow. I never, ever got the message more clear than I did today."

Andrade, 57, a Rehoboth resident, was one of more than 2,000 men who attended the first annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference March 19 at Boston College High School in Dorchester.

About 250 men from the Diocese of Fall River went — 71 from Andrade's parish, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Seekonk, including the pastor, Father George Harrison.

The conference, which took place on St. Joseph's Day, featured speeches and presentations aimed at encouraging men to deepen their relationship with Jesus and incorporate Christian values in their everyday lives.

"I came because Christian men, Catholic men, have to stand up — stand up for life, stand up for what's right," said John Miranda, an engineering manager from Seekonk, in an interview.

Miranda, 59, attributed the strong presence from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel to the parish's round-the-clock adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

"So it does not surprise me that we would have [71] men say, 'we need to go to that,' because it all comes from perpetual adoration," Miranda said. "Because where there's Jesus, there's everything."

Speakers at the conference included Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza and Ave Maria University in Florida; Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and former legal counsel to Mother Teresa; and Father Philip Merdinger, founder of the Brotherhood of Hope.

For many participants, Caviezel was the hit. In an emotional talk, Caviezel recounted his sufferings portraying Jesus, including two blows during the scourging scene that missed protective armor he was wearing and tore into his back. One of

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them resulted in a 14-inch welt.

He reminded those in attendance that these sufferings Christ bore out of love to save them and exhorted the men to imitate that manly love for God and others.

His speech, like most of the talks throughout the day, was interrupted several times by lengthy standing ovations.

Aside from inspiring talks, organizers said they hope the conference will encourage Catholic men to act for good in their families and community.

"It's time for men to speak the truth, no matter what the consequences are ... to bring Jesus into impossible situations, into impossible lives," co-organizer Jo Tango told the audience.

Marty Doyle, 46, a Rehoboth resident and commercial photographer who organized the two busloads of participants from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, said the high quality of the speakers made the conference a relatively easy sell not only for the gung-ho men of the parish but also men he described as "on the edge" of parish life.

He said many were also drawn by the presence of Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, a Capuchin Franciscan and current archbishop of Boston, who served as bishop of Fall River from 1992 to 2002. Archbishop O'Malley celebrated the Mass, and at the end he singled out Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and its pastor for their vitality.

Doyle said few of the men had heard of one of the speakers, Father Larry Richards, a priest of the Diocese of Erie in Pennsylvania, but

that many were impressed by his straightforward pitch to the live the good life.

"A lot of guys had never heard anything like that — just so cut-and-dried and in-your-face — 'you're a man of God, now get on your knees and do what God asks,'" Doyle said.

Richards exhorted his listeners to go to confession. Many did, to the approximately 80 priests who attended the conference.

Co-organizer Scot Landry praised the "phenomenal turnout" from the Diocese of Fall River. He singled out the organized efforts from Our Lady of the Cape in Brewster, St. Margaret's in Buzzards Bay, Holy Redeemer in Chatham, St. Mary's in Fairhaven, Good Shepherd in Fall River, St. Francis Xavier in Hyannis, St. Mary's in Mansfield, Christ the King in Mashpee, Immaculate Conception and St. Mary's in New Bedford, St. Julie Billiart in North Dartmouth, St. Pius X in South Yarmouth, Good Shepherd in Martha's Vineyard, and St. Patrick's in Wareham.

He said he was also grateful for the number of priests, permanent deacons and deacon candidates that made the trek from southeastern Massachusetts to attend the conference with their fellow parishioners.

Organizers, in addition to planning a second men's conference next year, are encouraging the formation of men's groups at Catholic parishes. They are also hoping to inspire a comparable conference for women. For more information, go to the group's Website, www.BostonCatholicMen.org.