

# Dorchester Reporter

"The News and Values Around the Neighborhood"

## At First Annual Catholic Conference, Men's Amens

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By Chris Harding

Special to the Reporter

The communal singing was kind of shaky, despite the best efforts (and fine saxophone-playing) of the 10-man Brotherhood of Hope band. But Catholic men are often ornery when it comes to hymns, even rousing contemporary ones.

Otherwise, the first annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference (BCMC) held last Saturday, March 19, at BC High was a joyous success. Over 2,000 men (double the organizers' original goal) and 80 priests (including Dorchester pastors) packed the folding chairs and bleachers at the new McNeice Pavilion to hear challenges and encouragement from a lineup of five nationally known speakers, including "The Passion of the Christ" star Jim Caviezel.

The BCMC, one of five new Catholic men's events in the US this year, is modeled on the 30 extant large-scale Catholic men's gatherings across the country, particularly Cincinnati's "The Call" that went from 500 to 10,000 participants in the course of a few years. The BCMC came about as an "if them, why not us?" response to such events on the part of Jo Tango, Scot Landry and five other members of a Cambridge-based men's group with advice from Cincinnati organizers as well from the leaders who put together the Worcester's Catholic Men's Conference, now in its fifth year.

Lots of laughter and self-deprecating humor as well as sports metaphors characterized the talks in which embattled Catholic men were told that "the game has changed from defense to offense."

Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, described how cleaning patients' bodies in Calcutta led to his becoming Mother Teresa's legal counsel. Fr. Larry Richards, well aware that "most men at church look bored or defeated," tore even the yawning high-schoolers away from checking their cell phones with his hilarious, high-energy, but deadly serious dare to adhere strictly to the obligations of conservative Catholicism.

Domino's founder Tom Monaghan explained how an Irishman became a pizza king. His current project is building Ave Maria, "the best Catholic university in the world" and the neighboring all-Catholic, no-condom town near Naples, Florida.

Fr. Philip Merdinger, founder of Somerville's Brotherhood of Hope, spoke on healing the father wound and the multiple blessings and benefits of the Christian men's movement.

Jim Caviezel, who portrayed Jesus in the wrenching Mel Gibson's movie, requested that the press be excluded from his speech so that he could speak to men "from the heart." Some men came just to hear Caviezel, and most rated his the most memorable and moving address of the conference.

Archbishop Sean O'Malley concluded the day with a concelebrated Mass of St. Joseph in which he praised adoption as "the answer to abortion" and called for more vocations to the priesthood and more conferences like the BCMC.

The BCMC organizers are offering to help their female counterparts put together a Boston Catholic Women's Conference. Cincinnati has spun off successful Women's and Family Conferences from its "The Call" gatherings. Another goal of the BCMC is to have 100 parishes throughout the Archdiocese form men's groups like the Cambridge team that spearheaded this event.

A few men put the ideals of the conference into action immediately. Volunteers brought leftover box lunches to the Missionary of Charity Sisters in St. Peter's Parish for distribution. Others settled for working on being better dads, better parishioners and better all-around Christians.

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