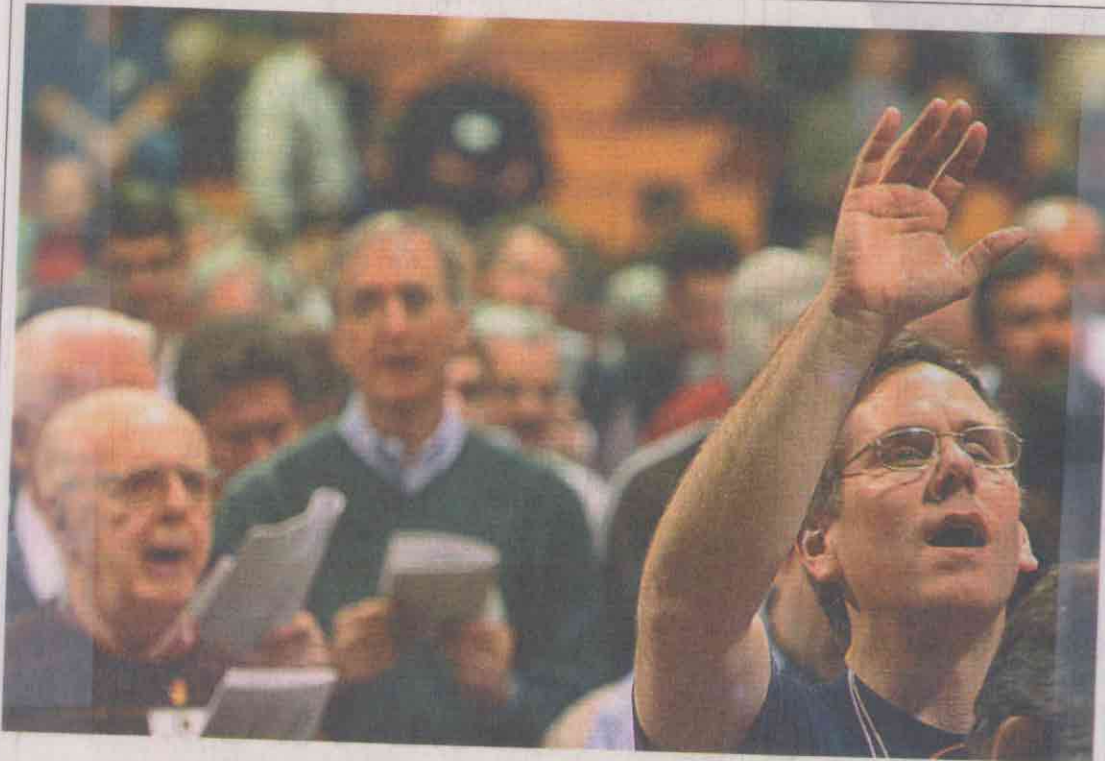


Boston Sunday Globe

MARCH 20, 2005

SPRING A LEAK

TODAY: Increasing clouds, rain in afternoon, highs 43-48
TOMORROW: Rain in morning, then partly cloudy, highs 38-45
HIGH TIDE: 7:04 a.m. 7:51 p.m.
FULL REPORT: PAGE E12



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/WENDY MAEDA

TAKING A STAND — John Crennan, a member of Holy Family parish at Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford, expressed himself yesterday during a song at the first annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference, held at Boston College High School. **B1.**

Catholic men hear encouraging words

Speakers aim to help them reexamine their faith, role

By Michael Levenson

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Some 2,000 Catholic men gathered in Boston yesterday to pray, sing, and listen to unusually frank speeches by clergy discussing contraception, pornography, adultery, adoption, and community service, with the goal of encouraging men to reexamine their faith and masculinity.

Catholic lawyers, retirees, youth workers, teachers, and others from across New England attended the first annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference, an event inspired by the gatherings of the Promise Keepers, a predominantly Protestant organization that has packed stadiums with Christian men who pledge to become stronger in their faith and personal lives.

James Towey, a Bush administration official, set the tone for yesterday's conference when he told the packed gymnasium at Boston College High School to reject what he called "militant secularism" and "reflect together on what it means to be a Catholic man."

"We are called to have a personal encounter with Christ," said Towey, a former legal counsel to Mother Teresa who was appointed in February 2002 as director of the White House

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Catholic men hear pep talks on faith

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Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. "I would encourage you to be godly men."

Other speakers included Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, Thomas Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza, and Jim Caviezel, the actor who portrayed Jesus in "The Passion of the Christ."

O'Malley celebrated a mid-afternoon Mass in the gymnasium, devoting his homily to the importance of prayer and of being part of a worshiping community, but also telling the men that "we need to celebrate adoption . . . it is the answer to abortion," and describing contemporary society as "a world where too often the father is absent spiritually, emotionally, and physically."

He also asked the conference participants to consider whether any of them are called to become priests "at a time when a priestly vocation requires great courage and great generosity."

Other speakers employed the sort of fiery rhetoric more commonly associated with television evangelists. Scot Landry, who organized the event with other lay Catholics from Boston, said the idea came first from a Procter & Gamble executive in Cincinnati who had seen his Catholic friends attending events hosted by Promise Keepers.★

A common thread in many of the speeches was what Towey called concern about "a culture that is hostile to the themes of God." He cited as examples gay marriage, abortion, and profanities uttered by radio host Howard Stern. He extolled the benefits of prayer to help heal marriages, saying it would help husbands examine their own faults before criticizing their wives. "It's just a purifying experience: the word of

Christ," Towey said.

The Rev. Larry Richards, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Erie, Pa., and counselor at Cathedral Preparatory High School for Boys, wandered from the podium to make his points. He was interrupted several times by applause.

Recounting his experience teaching high school boys, Richards, who has sold thousands of Catholic-themed tapes, said the meaning of life is not "to bed every woman" but to know and love God. But because most Catholics don't take their faith to heart, he likened their relationship to God to being "married to somebody but not having sex with them."

He received applause when he said, "You are called to be the spiritual leaders of your home, not your wife."

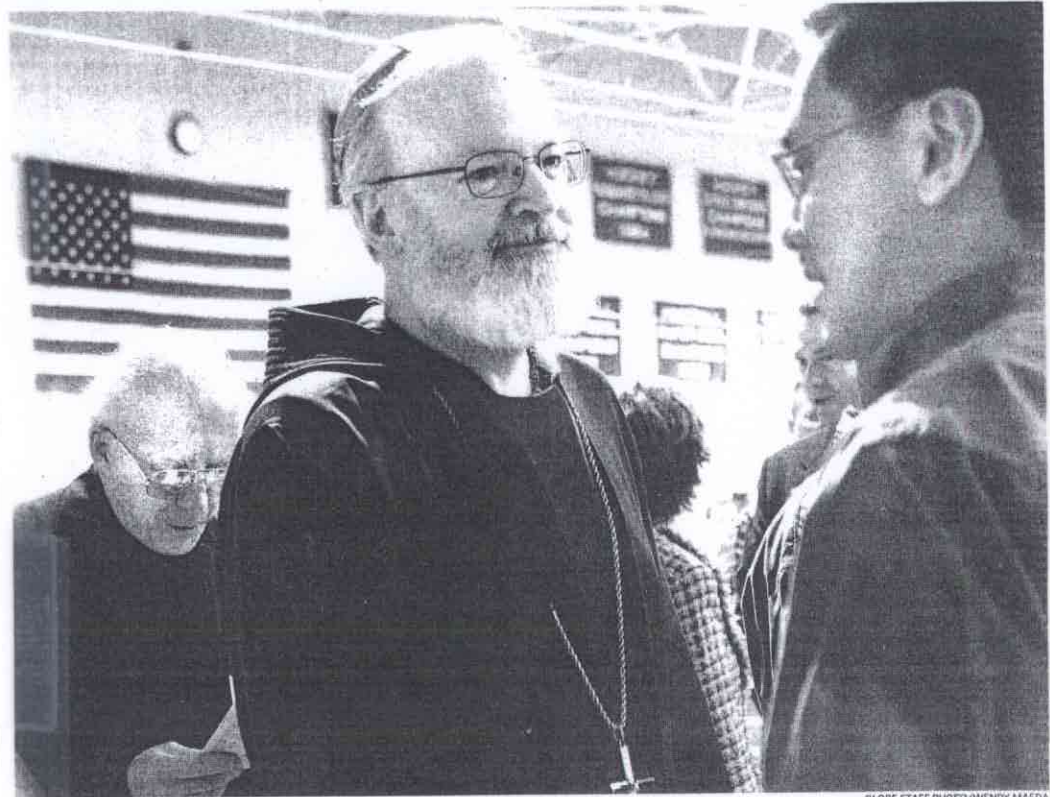
Richards attacked a culture that extols the male body.

"I have never heard anyone say once at a funeral, Did you ever see the ripples in that guy's stomach?" he said. "I'm not saying you shouldn't work out every day. But I'm saying if you're working out two hours a day on your body, you should work three hours a day on your soul."

Richards said the most important goal for Catholic men is to "do everything in your power to get your wife and children to heaven." He called the charge as much a Catholic duty as a masculine duty. "Gentleman," Richards said, "if you can't tell your [family] that you love them, you'd better look between your legs, because there's nothing there."

He promoted a website, www.settingcaptivesfree.com, that he said would help end "addiction" to pornography, masturbation, and homosexuality.

As for temptation to extramarital affairs, Richards said, "You can let that bird fly over your head;



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/WENDY MAEDA

Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley chatted yesterday with event coordinator Jo Tango (right) during the men's conference.

just don't let it nest in your hair," and he reminded the audience that the church forbids artificial contraception.

To avoid conception, he said, men would need to avoid sex for eight days a month. "Oh, suck it up, gentlemen!" he said. "Try not having sex for 45 years," he said, referring to his own vow of celibacy.

Steve Sanders, 50, a lawyer from Seekonk who was among 71 members of his parish at the event, called the speech "wonderful." The message, he said, "was to accept our responsibilities as

Catholic males and to not be afraid to be a leader." He added, "I think the speakers so far have been excellent. They don't speak in generalizations. They zero right in to who they're talking to."

Steve Cunha, 29, a graphic designer from Billerica who attended with 50 members of his parish, said he had discussed the men-only focus with friends and concluded it would allow more frank discussions.

"Men need to talk to other men," Cunha said. "I think we share things in common, that we don't share with women. We're

told by society to live up to certain roles. This can help us to question certain of those roles."

During a midday break, the men clapped and sang along to a band. They waited in a line to file into a room where 60 priests returned confessionals.

Monaghan spoke about Ave Maria University, where he serves as chancellor, now located at an interim campus in Naples, Fla. He called it one of the only Catholic universities to adhere to strict academic and doctrinal standards.

At other Catholic universities, he said to applause, "you have

'The Vagina Monologues' performed, you have pro-abortion speakers given honorary degrees — that's not going to happen at Ave Maria University."

Monaghan said in building a new college campus, he is looking for an "example we can set for the rest of Catholic higher education."

Reporters were barred from Caviezel's speech because, Landry said, the actor likes to speak "from the heart" and feels he cannot do so if his words become public.

Michael Paulson of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

NOTE:
BCMC organizers have never been to a Promise Keepers event. The Cincinnati men's Conf. organizers began their conference as a Catholic form of Promise Keepers. We learned from Cincinnati, Worcester & many other conferences in planning this event.

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