

Dear Friends,

Forty-five years ago Monsignor Burke and a group of local Catholic leaders held the inaugural Social Ministry convocation. Since that time, thousands of people have attended the annual meeting and left inspired to lead social justice efforts throughout the archdiocese. Monsignor Burke said that the goal for that first convocation was to tie widespread parish social ministry activities together and to encourage parishes without ministries to join in. We, as the planners of the convocation, and you, as attendees and practitioners, have strived to be faithful to that mandate over many years. However, as with everything in human history, changes eventually do occur. During a time of a change, we as faithful Christians rely on the Holy Spirit for inspiration and guidance.

The convocation over these many years has been sponsored by, led by and largely financed by the Archdiocesan Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). Our local CCHD receives the majority of its funding and direction from the national CCHD, a ministry of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). During the past year, USCCB has reiterated its strong support for CCHD, but has mandated some changes in its funding and operation. Grants to local organizations, including ours, have decreased. These changes have necessitated a reevaluation of how those resources are utilized.

Our church and our world are changing. Church membership is increasingly comprised of people born after 1980. A higher percentage of our parishioners are foreign born and have cultures and traditions that are different from those in our past. Growth in the church is now happening away from the urban areas and stretches into suburban and exurban areas. The local CCHD is cognizant of these changes and feels a greater need to meet its educational mandate by shifting its focus toward these areas. Unfortunately, outreach to those audiences often must take a different format than that of the traditional day-long annual meeting. So, although CCHD will continue to partner with other archdiocesan groups engaged in social ministry, it can no longer provide the leadership and funding necessary to host an annual conference.

Given these challenges, we have decided not to hold a Social Ministry Convocation this year. Instead, we are asking you to join us for a half day meeting of prayerful reflection on the past and insightful preparation for the future. We invite you to join us at **Calvert Hall High School on March 8th from 9:00 am – 12:00 noon** to discuss what has been and to plan for what will be. We need to continue to grow and remain relevant to the Archdiocese of Baltimore and we need your help to do so. We need your ideas and insights. We also need volunteers who are willing to lead and to make those ideas a reality.

How does this start? Being mindful of the inspiration that led Monsignor Burke and others to initiate the convocation, we invite those who are interested, and especially, those who have participated and benefited from previous convocations to come together in March to help develop the plans for future gatherings of social justice ministers throughout the archdiocese. Those events could be like the previous ones or they could be strikingly different. Regardless of format, the goal will continue to be to INFORM and to INSPIRE.

Much work needs to be done. Will you join us on March 8th to lend your support?

Sincerely in Christ,

The Social Ministry Planning Conference Team