



“The Ministry of Catholic Secondary Education”

Once again, another year has begun by offering a series of ‘conversations’ at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, MA. Continuing the Center’s commitment to be a place where in word and action “we can learn together and discuss what it means to be Church.”

This first conversation of the academic year focused on the theme of “The Ministry of Catholic Secondary Education.” Following the Sunday’s liturgy, the community, residents and guests gathered in the living room to hear this topic addressed by our BC sabbatical resident Bro. Chris Brady, a De La Salle Christian Brother who has been involved in Catholic secondary education for more than 30 years in California and Mrs. Sheila Vargas who has been part of our full community for several years and is currently teaching in a Catholic school in Dorchester.



The topic was chosen, not only because our presenters and discussion leaders came with a profound knowledge and vast experiential backgrounds in the field of secondary education, but because at this time, after a very long history of service to the Church and country, it has become difficult for parishes and even diocese to support our Catholic schools, especially at the

secondary level.

Bro. Chris began by giving a brief description of how his congregation pioneered the ministry of classroom secondary education in 1680, which specifically modeled tuition driven of which we are most familiar. He spoke of his 23 years as a principal in California following the peak of the Catholic school system in 1965. Today schools are facing many challenges which include the steep increase in tuition, the issue of federal assistance and the decrease of religious available to staff our educational institutions among others. In light of these realities, he posed the question to the group, "How then can we continue to serve the poor, the marginalized and disenfranchised from an educational, moral, religious and social perspective?"

In contrast to Bro Chris' experience, Sheila comes to Catholic secondary education most recently in the U.S. by way of her initial experience of teaching physics in the Philippines and special education in the Newton public schools. Today she is on the faculty of the Jesuit Christo Rey, work/study model in Dorchester, MA where Catholic identity is integral and manifested throughout the day and in all curricula. She especially appreciates the freedom now to teach, blending science and religious values. The Christo Rey model, of which Sheila spoke, combines a 4 day study week for students and a one day employment experience at an entry level job in the corporate world. It began in Chicago and has grown to the number of 24 schools in the country. The salary the students earn greatly reduces the cost of tuition.

Both Bro. Chris and Sheila agreed that perhaps the greatest challenges facing our Catholic secondary schools is the progress that needs to be made in the areas of marketing, development and fundraising, philanthropy and endowments, so that Catholic education will be accessible and possible for all who wish it no matter what economic realities exist for families.

After an animated discussion recognizing the challenges and extolling the strengths of our schools as they develop the whole person, stretch students academically, re-enforce Christian values, provide moral and faith development in a structured, safe and disciplined environment, we moved into the dining room for a five star brunch to continue the conversation.