



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Bishops, business leaders discuss best church management practices at reception

BALTIMORE, MD, November 14, 2007: About 40 Catholic bishops who stopped by a luncheon reception hosted by the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management Nov. 13 got a chance to discuss ways that better financial and management practices can help the church advance its mission more effectively.

They met with Leadership Roundtable staff and board members, including Roundtable chairman Geoffrey T. Boisi, a philanthropist and retired vice chairman of JPMorgan Chase, and board member Paul C. Reilly, chairman of executive recruitment firm Korn/Ferry International.

The reception was held at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel between sessions of the annual fall meeting there of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

New Orleans Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes said that after Hurricane Katrina, the Leadership Roundtable offered his archdiocese free consulting services "on whatever issue we wanted."

He said he asked for help restoring Catholic schools and the Leadership Roundtable sent experts to help assess the challenges and develop ways for the schools of the archdiocese to pool resources, especially in the most devastated areas, and to use their collective purchasing power more effectively. He said the Leadership Roundtable is still working with the archdiocese on a national fundraising campaign to provide the resources needed to keep the schools going for the long haul. "The Leadership Roundtable has been very helpful to us," he said.

"We have been able to reopen 86 of the 106 (pre-hurricane) schools" he said, including seven regional schools in the areas most devastated by the 2005 disaster. Because so many New Orleans public schools still remain closed, he added, "70 percent of our students after Katrina are not Catholic; most come from families living below the poverty level."

The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management was sparked by a 2004 meeting in Philadelphia at which a dozen bishops met with more than 160 Catholic business leaders, educators, priests, religious and professionals in various fields, including leaders of various Catholic institutions.

From that brainstorming session came the Leadership Roundtable, formally established in July 2005, to draw on the experience and talents of Catholic leaders in the business, academic, philanthropic and nonprofit world to help Catholic dioceses, parishes and other institutions to promote excellence in the fields of finance, administration and human resources.

Resources developed by the Leadership Roundtable, including its "Church in America" DVD and its newly published "Standards for Excellence" booklets, were given to bishops who attended the reception. The three "Standards for Excellence" booklets spell out a code of ethics and accountability for Catholic dioceses, Catholic parishes, and other Catholic nonprofit organizations.

Bishop Dale J. Melczek of Gary, Ind., said after his diocesan priests' council studied the Leadership Roundtable's "Standards for Excellence" materials on finance, management and human resources practices for parishes, the council recommended using them to find ways to improve such practices throughout the diocese.

"In our diocese we found much inspiration from a presentation from Kerry Robinson (the Roundtable's executive director) last spring," he added.

Boisi said that each year the Leadership Roundtable has developed more materials aimed at encouraging dioceses and parishes to look at the best practices out there. He said more and more bishops have taken an interest as they hear from fellow bishops about the positive results of interacting with the Leadership Roundtable.

Reilly said he was attracted to the work of the Leadership Roundtable by the quality and passion of its board, "lay people, priests and religious wanting to use their time and talent to help the church" fulfill its mission better.

He said one concern the Leadership Roundtable has been addressing is the aging of church leadership and where the next generation of leaders will come from to continue the church's mission. The report on this year's annual meeting was titled, Give Us Your Best: A Look at Church Service for a New Generation, which was given to each bishop

"I think we're building a new era," said another board member, Francis J. Butler, president of Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities. He noted that in a report to the bishops the previous day Bishop Daniel F. Walsh of Santa Rosa, Calif., urged regular internal parish financial audits as a means not only of preventing fraud but of fulfilling a bishop's responsibilities under church law.

In the report Bishop Walsh noted that during its study of the parish audit issue his Ad Hoc Committee on Diocesan Audits had received a draft version of the Roundtable's newly published "Standards for Excellence" which is in line with the recommendations of the bishops' conference and diocesan fiscal managers conference.

"The bishops are talking about audits for parishes; we're showing them how to do it," Butler said. He said the excellence standards were based on the ethics and accountability code for nonprofits developed by the national Standards for Excellence Institute, but adapted by canon lawyers to put them in complete conformity with church law.

Robinson said in the two-and-a-half years since the Leadership Roundtable was formally established, "the most notable difference is the number of bishops who are actively engaged."

"Initially bishops may not have been fully aware of the Leadership Roundtable's goals and intentions, she said. "We now have a track record of working with bishops and church leaders across the Catholic sector. She said the Leadership Roundtable identifies excellent practices that already exist in the church and "promotes them across the country as models worthy of emulation. In addition, resources are created by the Leadership Roundtable to meet current challenges and to enable the church's human and financial resources to be managed in an exemplary and effective manner, befitting the stewardship to which we are called."

She cited the three "Standards for Excellence" booklets, each based on eight principles and 55 standards, as a practical example.

"We have backed up those standards with all kinds of resources that we have gleaned from scanning the horizon of the Catholic Church in the U.S.," she said. "Where we find, for example, excellent conflict-of-interest statements and policies that have been implemented to wonderful effect, we are able to highlight those and promote them across the country."

Information about the Leadership Roundtable and its resources can be found at www.nlrcm.org. Recently it has established a new Web site, www.ChurchEpedia.org, with freely available resources on church management, finances and human resources organized by topic.

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The Leadership Roundtable mission is to promote excellence and best practices in the management, finances and human resources development of the Catholic Church in the U.S. by greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity.

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