NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Catholic school leaders honored in White House ceremony

Carol Zimmermann Catholic News Service | Jan. 27, 2012

WASHINGTON -- A group of Catholic school leaders, including a student, a few principals, diocesan education officials and other school representatives, were honored Jan. 25 at the White House for their innovation and dedication.

The group was recognized as part of the Obama administration's "Champions of Change" program, which highlights different groups each week for contributions they make to their communities. Past recipients have included inventors, artists, volunteers, chefs, farmers and health activists.

The attention to Catholic school leaders was timed to coincide with Catholic Schools Week Jan. 29-Feb. 5.

At the gathering, Joshua DuBois, head of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, praised Catholic schools for not only serving their own students but also local communities.

"You step up to the plate for everyone," he said, citing the example of how Catholic schools in New Orleans were the first schools to open after Hurricane Katrina.

Roberto Rodriguez, special assistant to President Barack Obama for education, thanked the Catholic school leaders for the work they do "day in and day out" with limited resources and budgets.

Although a handful of government officials took the microphone to praise the accomplishments of Catholic schools, the hour-and-a-half-long ceremony primarily gave educators the chance to speak about current challenges and successes.

Paul Krebbs, president of All Hallows High School in the Bronx, N.Y., was introduced as an innovative school leader, but he graciously dismissed the accolade saying instead that some of the school's practices were hardly groundbreaking. For example, school administrators begin and end each day by greeting students, shaking their hands and asking them how they are doing.

Krebbs said this practice is key to what the school is about: getting to know the students and working with them to help them succeed. He noted that the boys school is in the nation's poorest congressional district but typically 98 percent of its graduates go on to college. He also pointed out that 70 percent of the students need financial assistance to pay tuition and the school relies strongly on alumni to help with this.

Across the board, most of the honorees spoke of limited resources and creative ways of tapping into funds. Jesuit Father John Foley, founder of Cristo Rey schools, spoke of the successful work-study program at these 24 schools across the country where high school students help pay their tuition.

Sister Rosa-Maria Ruiz, a member of the Minim Daughters of Mary Immaculate, and superintendent of schools in the Diocese of Tucson, Ariz., said her diocese has a Cristo Rey school and also uses the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, known as ACE, which places college graduates as volunteer teachers

in Catholic schools. Annette Lentz, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, and former Catholic school administrator, spoke of the success of an archdiocesan consortium of schools which enables them to share resources and cut costs.

Joseph Womac, executive director of the Fulcrum Foundation in Seattle, is in the business of helping students pay for Catholic education. The foundation has raised $60 million to help more than 10,000 low-income students attend Catholic schools in Washington.

He said the other honorees show how Catholic schools succeed, what needs to happen now is to fill these schools.

"We need to preserve them" and think of new ways to do this, he stressed.

Other honorees included: Bertha Castaneda, recipient of the Opportunity Scholarship Program and senior at Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington; Jesuit Father Charles Currie, former president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities; Sister Jennie Jones, a Sister of the Holy Family and principal most recently at schools in New Orleans and Yvonne Schwab, principal at St. James the Less Catholic School in Columbus, Ohio.

Jesuit Father William Leahy, president of Boston College, was also an honoree but did not attend the event.

Denis McDonough, deputy national security adviser, concluded the session by reiterating the good work of Catholic schools and stressing that his own Catholic school experience in elementary school and at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., and Georgetown University, gave him the opportunities to do the work he does today.

He said the influence of the Sisters of St. Joseph and monks at St. John's enable him to "make well-rounded and just recommendations to the president" and remind him to combine prayer with work while wrestling with difficult policy decisions that deal with use of force, just war and dignity of all people.

"We admire the work you do," he told the group. He also acknowledged "there will be times you disagree" with the administration, referring to the decision announced five days earlier when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that nonprofit groups will not get a religious exemption to the requirement that all health plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-26 15:30*): http://www.ncronline.org/news/people/catholic-school-leaders-honored-white-house-ceremony