



# BECAUSE *we are* CATHOLIC

## End of an Era at the Maryland Catholic Conference

Last week, the Maryland Catholic Conference announced that Mary Ellen Russell will be leaving her role as executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference in June. She has served as executive director of the Conference for 10 years, and has been on the Conference staff for close to 25 years. She is leaving to pursue her interests in supporting the efforts of the Church to minister to disadvantaged communities, particularly in Baltimore City.

Under Russell's tenure, the Conference has been a lead agent in successfully advancing a number of initiatives, including the creation of the Nonpublic Schools Textbook and Technology Loan and Aging Schools programs and the BOOST scholarship program for low-income students.

"I truly believe that giving students an opportunity to have an excellent education is life-changing," said Russell, who began working at the Conference as associate director for education in 1995. "It is one of the most important ways that we can provide children and their families a pathway out of poverty and into a successful future."

Mary Ellen's commitment to education issues is recognized by many in the state, including legislative leaders with whom she has worked.

"It has been a pleasure to work with Mary Ellen Russell throughout my time in the General Assembly," said Senator Ed DeGrange (D-32). "In particular, I am proud of our shared advocacy for the nonpublic school community and the BOOST program. Her professionalism and friendly approach have made her a strong and respected advocate for the positions of the Church. She has always exhibited an incredible passion for the issues of her faith and that passion will be greatly missed and hard to replace."

In addition to the many legislators, staff, and fellow lobbyists who know Mary Ellen and consider her a trusted friend, confidante, and policy leader in Annapolis, those in Church leadership from across the

three (arch)dioceses represented by the Conference have much to say about Mary Ellen and the work to which she has devoted her life over the past two decades.

"Mary Ellen's service during her years at the Maryland Catholic Conference has been exemplary and has benefitted the Church in Maryland in countless ways," said Archbishop William Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore and Chairman of the Maryland Catholic Conference. "Ever conscious of the ways in which the Church seeks to be present in the communities we serve, especially those that are impoverished and in need, Mary Ellen has carried out her work with missionary zeal, a blessing that will continue to bear much fruit as she continues her service."

Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C, adds to the sentiments being heard in Annapolis and among those in the Church. "The Archdiocese of Washington is grateful for Mary Ellen Russell's service, not only in representing us in the halls in Annapolis, but for serving as a voice for those in Maryland who otherwise might not be heard in the realm of public policy – from those who strive to defend the inherent dignity of every human life, to those who seek the opportunity for every child in Maryland to gain a quality education."

"I have known Mary Ellen since she first came to the Maryland Catholic Conference," added Bishop Francis Malooly, Bishop of Wilmington, Delaware. "She is effective, professional, knowledgeable, and always good-natured. She is the epitome of a Catholic who lives her faith every day. She has earned the respect and admiration of those in the Maryland General Assembly, as well as those in the Catholic Church in Maryland."

As if her work hasn't kept her busy enough, Mary Ellen and her husband, George, a permanent deacon at St. Mary's Parish in Annapolis, have four grown sons, four beautiful grandchildren, and recently just celebrated



*Mary Ellen Russell has spent nearly 25 years with the Maryland Catholic Conference, including the last 10 as executive director. She is considered a trusted friend, confidante, and policy leader in Annapolis by legislators and the state's Church leaders.*

36 years of marriage. She serves on the board of Archbishop Spalding High School, helps direct the statewide Racism Task Force for the three Catholic (arch)dioceses in Maryland, and has served on the Board of Project Bridges, Maryland Citizens Against State Executions, and several Committees at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Anybody who is involved in this work knows that they couldn't do it without the support and patience of their family. I certainly had that in both my husband and my children," she explained. "I don't think this is a job that you can do without a very deep prayer life. That's been a staple of my day. It has given me the strength and the peace to know that the outcome of so much that we do is not in our hands and that we have to trust we are doing the best we can do and let God do the rest."

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