

“Which Comes First: Being CEO or Being Shepherd?”

What is it like to run a \$1B organization as CEO – and be a shepherd of those you are entrusted with in the organization and beyond?

This is what The Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, S.L.D. Metropolitan Archbishop of Atlanta, wrestles with each day in his role as the Archbishop of Atlanta.

On Tuesday, March 11th Archbishop Gregory shared his thoughts on how he tries to lead an organization as a CEO devoted to Christ on a daily basis as he led a discussion at BELIEVES on “I am not just the Archbishop, I am also a CEO.”

“Which comes first, CEO or pastor?” Archbishop Gregory shared with the 50+ business leaders in attendance at BELIEVES. “This is what I wrestle with.”



“When I was a senior in the Chicago high school seminary, I distinctly remember asking a professor about the need for developing some business expertise skills in the seminary curriculum,” Archbishop Gregory recalled. “He doubted that I might ever need formal training in those proficiencies – since he, as a high school seminary priest professor, had not found them to be necessary!”

Archbishop Gregory said that in 1965 the seminary program simply did not envision including business/management training a necessary part of the preparation for the priesthood.

“Now, we see things differently,” said Archbishop Gregory. “There is a focus on developing better business acumen through program’s like the ‘Pastor’s Toolbox’ which is done in conjunction with Wharton Business School.”

The business part of the Archbishop’s job is certainly not trivial.

“Clearly, it is not as important as the pastoring dimension of my service as the Archbishop of Atlanta,” shared Archbishop Gregory. “Nonetheless, I am a CEO of a billion dollar corporation and I do need some help!”

All in attendance found it interesting to learn from the Archbishop that when a bishop gets invited by the Pope to be archbishop of a diocese, there are two choices – accept or decline.

If the bishop accepts the appointment, he must write a letter to the Pope accepting the role, but generally speaking he receives little or nothing by way of background or any specific needs of the local Church that he is expected to serve. The status of the diocese is only discovered when the new bishop arrives and begins to meet with the people.

“Many new corporate CEO’s take up their responsibilities by putting together a brand new team,’ commented Archbishop Gregory. “Dismissals and staff reductions are not uncommon – in fact, many folks expect them to occur soon after there is new leadership in place and some even anticipate such changes by looking for new positions at the announcement of a new CEO.”

Archbishop Gregory then provided the following contrast.

“Bishops, who come into a new diocese with that type of an approach, generally do not succeed because the people of his staff are also the people that he must shepherd,” he said. “The bishop as CEO must remember that he is shepherd first and corporate leader second.”

Just like a CEO in the business world, Archbishop Gregory said he tries to be a steward of his flock by working through consultative bodies and seeking guidance from mentors.

“One example of this is how we’ve revamped the investment committee for the archdiocese,” he shared. “We have invited a number of people from the archdiocese to sit on the committee – and I do listen to them.”

He added, “I’ve tried to surround myself with people who are both competent in areas that I am not, and are people of faith. I couldn’t fulfill my duties without them.”

Even with the support and counsel of the committees and mentors, Archbishop Gregory said that in the end, ‘the buck still stops here’ drawing from President Harry Truman’s famous quote as he referred to his role as Archbishop and CEO.

As important as his business responsibilities are, Archbishop Gregory said that by far the most important part of his role is to be a pastor.

“This is the life-giving part,” he said. “It’s more important to develop as a pastor because you can get support for the other areas, but as Matthew 5:13 says ‘... if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted?’”

Sharing more with a smile he said, “I love being with our kids. Sometimes I feel like I am the Archdiocesan Grandpa” making the audience laugh. “I can spend time with our kids, getting them all riled up, and then leave.”

Becoming more reflective, the Archbishop began wrapping up his planned remarks by drawing from the words of Pope Francis.

“Pope Francis has on several occasions written about the smell of the sheep,” he said. “I think what Pope Francis is saying is, ‘You’ve got to be in the mix with your people, so they know you and you know them.’”

The Archbishop then illustrated the same point recalling a story from his first trip to Ireland where he ran across several flocks of sheep.

“When I went on my first trip to Ireland, at one point I saw a flock of sheep while driving,” he recalled. “I told Bob, I want to take a picture with them. When I came near them – they ran.”

A little later, Archbishop and Bob drove by another flock of sheep and stopped once again to try and take a picture with the sheep. This flock also ran away.

“What I finally realized is, this wasn’t my flock,” he said. “They didn’t know me.”

“We have to know our flock and they have to know us – knowing one another’s foibles, fears, and more.”

With the conclusion of his planned remarks, Archbishop Gregory invited the attendees to discuss a few questions placed at each table to discuss the reactions everyone faces to their faith witness in their work environment, and what each person finds is the best approach to introduce one's deeply held convictions in the office and boardroom environments.

The discussion quickly got lively for the 50+ business leaders present.



Jay Wolverton, CEO of Wolverton & Associates said, "I think we're called to expand His Kingdom. Following the January BELIEVES session with David Salyers, VP of Marketing at Chick-Fil-A, I sent out an e-mail to everyone in my company with several nuggets I noted from his presentation. In the days that followed, I had 3-4 folks come by and talk about it. I think our job is to plant the seed, and then we can see how God makes it grow."

Wolverton added further that in addition to sharing Salyers' book with his management team in recent weeks, he and his team have since been spending the last 6 weeks truly and honestly focused on creating value for clients.

"You truly separate yourself when you do this," he stated.

Michael Boutros, an Associate at Krevolin & Horst law firm, commented that one of his biggest challenges is to think about how to live and show his faith at work without coming across as higher than thou.

"There is one guy at work who I encounter fairly regularly, and I try to fellowship with him by asking more open questions," Boutros said. "Since we are in Lent now, on Friday, I said to him, 'Oh, those lentils, that's good for Lent.' and this guy replied, 'What's Lent?' So I tried to share with him the reasons for Lent."

Another attendee, Joe Fernandez, a Financial Services Professional for the Piedmont Financial group, said that in his office, there are various faiths – Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, and more. He and his peers don't often get into in-depth discussions on faith – it's more of an acknowledgement.

"I am not sure how to take the next step to open the discussion with one colleague who is Muslim, but there is a dialogue going on there that down the road will become more involved," said Fernandez.

Wolverton then followed Fernandez's comments with a question.

"Do you feel you can see those who have faith in their life, versus those that don't?" he asked.

The one differentiating factor everyone agreed is the best sign of faith – which often can be seen without words even being spoken – is the peace and calm that some colleagues and peers have, and others do not, when they encounter any type of situation.

Archbishop Gregory allowed the table discussion to continue a bit more, and then opened up the session to take questions for the last five minutes.



The two main things asked about were: the current survey for pastoral planning in the archdiocese, and how Archbishop Gregory deals with conflict management.

“I have taken the survey,” shared Yovany Jerez, a Corporate Training Manager at AT&T, “but there is nothing in there about IT, social media, YouTube, and technology like that. This is important in our society to communicate with everyone, especially the younger generations.”

Archbishop Gregory responded by saying he appreciated the feedback, and committed to bring this up in the next few days with staff so that it would be added to the survey more intentionally.

When Patrick Moore, Account Executive for HP Enterprise Services, then asked the Archbishop how he dealt with conflict management, the Archbishop responded by drawing from his experiences in dealing with the abuse scandals the church has faced.

“From 2001-2004, I made 13 trips to Rome on this issue as President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,” he recalled. “The message I continually communicated was, ‘there is room for forgiveness, but there is no room for returning someone’s child to an environment where there is danger.’”

“I was told by many during these trips that my career as a bishop is over because I kept pushing that there has to be non-tolerance for this abuse,” he said sternly.

Despite being told this repeatedly, the Archbishop said a few days after his 13th trip, Pope John Paul II made him Archbishop. He felt this was the Pope’s way of saying ‘You’re right.’”

George Koenig, Principal at the Koenig Law Group, then asked the final question, “As a CEO, you get all kinds of advice. How do you discern when it is flat wrong, like in 1994 when all the ‘experts’ were saying a person or priest who committed sexual abuse was cured and could be returned to the same environment as before?”

Archbishop Gregory responded, “It is more the shepherd side. Sometimes I have to reject what attorneys say.”

He added that throughout the abuse scandals, those who were harmed simply kept saying, ‘all we want is to be treated as part of the flock, and instead we were treated as an adversary.’”

In all situations, the Archbishop said as he closed, “Ultimately, I have to meet ‘The Man,’” as he pointed up in the air towards God.