

A Special Occasion for New Jersey's Deacons

More than 170 participants attended the 2016 National Diaconate Convocation organized and hosted by the Center for Diaconal Formation of Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. In collaboration with the Archdiocese of Newark and the dioceses of Camden, Metuchen, and Paterson, the Center welcomed individuals from 10 dioceses. Coinciding with the concluding month of the Year of Mercy, the November 5 convocation explored the theme of the *Vocation of the Permanent Deacon: Encountering and Embracing Mercy*.

Monsignor Joseph Reilly, S.T.L., Ph.D., Rector/Dean and Missionary of Mercy, opened the morning with prayer and welcomed the deacons, diaconal candidates,

and the wives of the deacons and candidates, expressing his gratitude for their attendance and commitment to mercy and service. Later in the day, the president of Seton Hall University, Dr. Gabriel Esteban, also addressed the audience, and welcomed everyone to the campus. Midmorning Mass at the university's Immaculate Conception Chapel was celebrated by the Most Reverend Dennis J. Sullivan, D.D., Bishop of Camden, who reflected on the various and important roles of deacons.

The three main speakers of the convocation were: Steven Smith, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Sacred Scripture, Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, MD; Deacon James Keating, Ph.D., Director of Theological Formation, Institute for Priestly Formation, Creighton University,

Omaha, NE; and Dianne Traflet, J.D., S.T.D., Associate Dean and Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology.

Dr. Smith, author of *The Word of the Lord, 7 Essential Principles of Catholic Scripture Study*, delivered an inspiring keynote focused on "Embracing the Merciful Heart of Jesus." Exploring the "Merciful Heart of Jesus," he discussed the Servant Heart, Joyful Heart, Kerygmatic Heart, Exorcistic Heart, and Nuptial Heart. Dr. Smith also identified three aspects of the "mystery of nuptiality" applied to the diaconate: a lively ministry to married couples; a witness to the sanctity of marriage; and the witness of the deacons' own marriages.

Dr. Keating, a frequent speaker on the topic of the diaconate, and the author of several books, including *The Heart of the Diaconate*, *Spousal Prayer: A Way to Marital Happiness* and *A Deacon's Retreat*, delivered two presentations, one to deacons and candidates where he emphasized that the ongoing formation and spiritual direction for the deacon allows him to remain "competent, free, and aligned only with the truth for the sake of the needs of the church." In his afternoon presentation to all attendees, Deacon Keating discussed "Diaconal Sloth and Its Effects on Ministry and Prayer." Combining serious insight into sloth as a "debilitating vice" that challenges the deacon's ministry with humorous asides, Deacon Keating discussed how "listening to God and to those encountered" is an important part of the diaconal ministry.

Simultaneous to Deacon Keating's talk was a presentation by Dr. Dianne Traflet, J.D., S.T.D., author of *Edith Stein: A Spiritual Portrait*, to the wives of deacons and candidates. Citing women in Scripture and in current times, Dr. Traflet explored their "merciful journeys" and delved into ways that their lives could be inspirational for the wives of deacons. Julia Persinger,



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— Deacon Peter Barcellona, '15

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Archdiocese of Newark, shared, “Being a deacon’s wife is a privilege, an honor and most importantly, a blessing. Dr. Traflet spoke so beautifully about the gifts of a wife’s individual spirituality and her shared love and joint prayer time with her husband.”

The Convocation concluded with a panel discussion for deacons and candidates moderated by Deacon Andrew Saunders, M.A., Director, Center for Diaconal Formation, and a Wives’ Session moderated by Kimberly Mailley, Assistant Director.

Deacon Saunders closed the convocation with a prayer and statement of appreciation to all participants. The Convocation delivered a day of deep reflection and inspiration. One participant, Deacon Joseph Wrabel, Diocese of Harrisburg commented, “I was greatly impressed by the deep spiritual content of the presentations. I honestly feel that we were gifted to experience this convocation.”

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Above: Dianne Traflet, J.D., S.T.D., presents to wives of deacons and deacon candidates.



Left: Steven Smith, Ph.D., presents the keynote address.



Below: Mass celebrated by Most Rev. Dennis J. Sullivan, D.D., Bishop of Camden.

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