

ERIE SERRA CLUB HONORS OUTSTANDING DEACON, LAY PERSON, PRIEST AND RELIGIOUS OF THE YEAR

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ERIE — It was an important week for vocations in the diocese of Erie: in addition to hosting the relic of the heart of St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests, the Erie Serra Club, dedicated to supporting and praying for vocations, held its annual installation dinner. The event included the announcement of the organization's deacon, lay person, priest and religious of the year. This year, the honors went to Sister Kathleen Dietz, FSO, Ron DiVecchio, Deacon Frank Pregler, and Msgr. Bernard Urbaniak.



The 2019 Erie Serra Club honorees, left to right: Msgr. Bernard Urbaniak, Sister Kathleen Dietz, FSO, Ron DiVecchio and Deacon Frank Pregler, M.D.

Photo by Anne-Marie Welsh

Calling her “a ball of energy,” Serran Dave Wayman pointed out that Sister Kathleen Dietz, vice chancellor of the Diocese of Erie, has a great love for her patron, St. Catherine of Siena.

“Our sister of the year has a lot in common with that saint: Her ardor for the church, her trust in God’s providence and her readiness to suffer for Christ and for the unity of the church,” he said. Sister Kathleen accepted the recognition on behalf of what she said were “two groups of people who loom large in my life.” She then spoke of her community, The Spiritual Family, The Work, as well as the people with whom she works in the Chancery. She also thanked Serra Club members for their dedicated service to the priests and religious of the diocese. “You give great witness, especially to the complementary role of lay people and clergy in the life of the church,” she said.

Ron DiVecchio, who retired after 35 years of service with the City of Erie, was introduced as lay person of the year by Serran Donna Carlino. A lifelong member of St. Paul Parish, he is president of its Holy Name Society and active in the St. Anthony Society. He is well-known as chairperson of the St. Paul Italian Festival, a role he has had for 39 year.

“It’s difficult to reduce Ron’s life of service, his love of family and his faith in the Lord to words on a paper,” Carlino said, summing it up by quoting the Gospel of Matthew: “And the master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant.’” DiVecchio credited the late Msgr. James Peterson for having lit the fire of his faith by inviting him to make a Cursillo. “I went back to St. Paul’s and I really got involved,” he said. Remembering his wonderful childhood in the neighborhood, he said the parish remains “the most important place in Little Italy.”

Dennis Deiner, who will serve as president of the organization for the coming year, introduced Deacon Frank Pregler, M.D., noting that he was a member of the first class of permanent deacons to be ordained in the diocese. A 1994 graduate of Gannon University, he has served as a deacon at Our Lady of Mount Carmel for 21 years. Deacon Pregler reflected on the important role his parents played in his faith, describing how they went twice to the Carmelite Monastery to ask for prayers when he was faced with life-threatening situations as a child. He also noted the important role the Sisters of Mercy played in his life. “It takes a family for vocations,” he said, “it also takes a village. When we pray for vocations — which we do — we need to pray for priests, deacons, religious and for family life.”

The final honoree of the evening was Msgr. Bernard Urbaniak, recently retired pastor of the partnered parishes, St. Stanislaus and Holy Trinity, both in Erie. In introducing him, Serran Dan Schaaf read a letter from the Most Rev. Mark Bartchak, bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, who spent many years in residence at St. Stan’s prior to his episcopacy.



Dennis Deiner, incoming president, and Judge Stephanie Domitrovich, who has just completed her term as president.

Photo by Anne-Marie Welsh

“In my opinion, they made a good choice,” Bishop Bartchak wrote. He then mentioned St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests, who said, “Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” “ I know first-hand that the people of St. Stan’s and St Bernard’s in Fall’s Creek years earlier, think of you as having the heart of Jesus,” he said. In accepting the honor, Msgr. Urbaniak insisted he had never done anything in his priesthood to be recognized. “This is a heartfelt gesture, and to say that I’m humbled, is not adequate,” he said. He introduced family and parish staff members and concluded by asking club members to continue praying for vocations, which he said are “so needed and necessary.”

Members marking significant years of service to the Erie Serra Club also were recognized at the event, including Richard Martin, with 59 years, and William Bloomstine, with 60 years of membership and service to the club. Bishop Lawrence Persico offered grace before the meal and a blessing at the end of the evening.