

NCDVD 2009 - Sunday Evening Address

Mrs. Rosemary C. Sullivan
Executive Director

St Francis de Sales once said, "Our business is to love what God would have us do."
I love my husband, I love and adore our four beautiful children, and I love the Catholic Priesthood, especially those who work in the ministry of Vocations. I like to think that St. Francis would say, "She gets it."

With me tonight, supporting me, is my wonderful family. My husband Gary and I just celebrated our 23rd wedding anniversary last Sunday. My two boys Patrick and Christopher both attend Loyola University in Baltimore, Maryland, where my good friend, Fr. Jerry Francik (Baltimore Vocation Office) keeps an eye on them for me. *Trust me it's not easy being a teenager when your mother has a priest friend in almost all 50 states, as well as several areas of Canada!*

Also with me tonight are my beautiful girls, Shannon who is in the 7th grade at our parish school, St. Patrick and Cathryn, who is a sophomore at St. John the Baptist High School, and who is celebrating her 15th birthday today!

We strive to be a strong Catholic family who refuses to hide our love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Gary is a 4th degree Knight of Columbus, the children have all been altar servers, and the boys are both Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and readers. We are active in our parish, at the children's schools, and in our community of Bay Shore, NY.

They are with me tonight but they are not always here. But let me be clear on this, when you see me, you see each of them next to me, because without their support I could not do what I try to do for each of you. They are even better than the Verizon commercial with the team of hundreds standing behind the Verizon customer.

You have been called to take on a tremendous ministry and for those of you, who are new to the work of vocations, do not for a moment think that it will be easy. But, in the words of St. Paul – whom we just celebrated in a special way this past year – and who we heard from this morning in the Office of Readings,

"I give thanks to my God every time I think of YOU- which is constantly, in every prayer I utter – rejoicing, as I plead on YOUR behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the Gospel from the very first day." (Phil 1:1-11)

I have been called to support you in that ministry and although I am both humbled and privileged to do so, I know my work will also not be easy. But if you take only one message away from this convocation tonight, I pray it is this – YOU ARE LOVED! And you are not alone.

Over the past few weeks, and more specifically over the past few days, and if I am really honest, the past few hours, I have been trying to find the time to sit and compose what I would like to say to you tonight. A funny thing though... time just seemed to keep evaporating. Finally I realized that the reason I could not find time to sit and write an address that would explain to you how much I want to support you in your work and that would tell you that you are not alone was because I was so busy

planning this convention, which I pray is a huge support for you! Still there are some thoughts I would like to share. They may sound simple, but they are sincere and come from the deepest part of my heart.

This is what I want you to know. I understand where you are because I have either already been there or are with you there now. In the spring of 2002, a priest friend of mine, Fr. Tom Coogan from the Diocese of Rockville Centre in NY was appointed to be the new vocation director. Tom had that “deer in headlights” look that so many new vocation directors have. I was a stay at home mom having left my Public Relations job to raise my kids. My youngest, Shannon, was set to enter kindergarten that coming September. Fr. Tom quickly pointed out that my “need” to be home no longer existed; so, would I consider coming to work in vocations with him?

Vocations??what did I know about vocations?! Prior to working for the Diocese of Rockville Centre my claim to fame had been that I worked as the Assistant Director of Public Relations for Lehrer/McGovern, Inc., which was the Construction Management firm hired for the renovation of the Statue of Liberty, back in 1986.*I was hired at a very young age...* Anyway, give me a construction project and I was your gal. Vocations, diocesan priesthood, that was way out of my league. Then I read a quote from our late great Holy Father John Paul II, “The world looks to the priest, because it looks to Jesus! No one can see Christ; but everyone sees the priest, and through him they wish to catch a glimpse of the Lord!” Right there I knew that next to my family, whatever little talent I had I wanted to offer to the Lord. If He wanted me to work in this ministry I would need to trust Him to show me how I could help. For those in this room who know me, they know how I can be a *bit* controlling, and so Jesus needed to keep whispering in my ear – Could you please just let me be in charge for a day?

Together Fr. Tom and I learned the language of vocations. As program coordinator I help planned vocation retreats, holy hours, and “Operation Andrews”. We designed prayer cards, posters, and flyers. We updated our application process and I learned about immigration requirements and psychological teams. Eventually I would be put in charge of the entire application process, under the direction of my new Vocation Director, Fr Brian Barr. Slowly but surely we began to believe we could do this. One advantage I had was the fact that I was a mom. A mom with two high school boys, one who was (and may still be) strongly considering the priesthood – *a side note: remember when you discerned? Now imagine discerning while your mom is not only involved in vocations in your home diocese but has a national position.*

Being a parent gave me credibility with the parents of our discerners. And so yes, over the years I have met with parents who are thrilled that their sons are considering priesthood, parents who were not so thrilled, some even adamantly opposed, but they let me into that conversation. The parents I felt most blessed to work with were those who were supportive but were frightened, because they felt inadequate. How can they be there for their son, how would they support his vocation when they themselves didn’t understand the priesthood or seminary? So I would try to demystify it for them.

In those first few years I would go to my spiritual director and ask: Am I really suppose to be here? Again and again he would ask me, what was I hearing the Lord say to me? And the truth was it was really Our Lady: “Do whatever he tells you to do.” And so I stayed.

In December of 2005 NCDVD was looking to the membership for a part time Events Coordinator, a 20 hour a week position. Patrick was getting ready to attend Chaminade HS and Gary and I were struggling to find the money to help pay for it; in our house Catholic Education has never been an

option. Fr. Tom suggested I consider applying for the NCDVD position. We talked it through and felt I could handle both positions, and so I applied. January 3, 2006, in St. Paul, Minnesota, I met with then NCDVD Executive Director Steven Covington for an interview. The interview lasted FOUR hours. My husband called, Fr. Tom called, my spiritual director called, each leaving a message asking why I had not called them to say how the interview had gone. Understandably none of them imagined the interview could have lasted that long. My spiritual director asked me, what could Steven possibly have asked me for four hours? And this one question was the most important of that interview:

If I hired you, and while you are at the convention, I as NCDVD Executive Director need you to do something, and Fr. Coogan, also your boss, needs you to do something at that same time, who would you listen to? I thought about my answer for about 4 seconds. I said that I would leave that up to the only one I really answer to, my Lord Jesus Christ. I was hired 4 days later.

Over the last few years as your Events Coordinator I have come to know so many of you. And what a privilege it has been. This past spring when the board approached me and asked me to consider accepting the appointment of Executive Director, I was shocked. I asked for some time to pray. And once again I heard Our Lady say, "Do whatever he tells you to do."

I do not have all the answers; I am still learning what all the questions are. But I promise that I will help you, and together we will find the answers.

You are not doing this alone. We are doing this together.

I am a part of NCDVD because I strongly believe that this organization is vital to every Vocation Office. Our resources, NCDVD Connect, which we are launching at this convention and which we hope you will find to be a useful tool in connecting with each other, our discernment journal, IS JESUS CHRIST CALLING YOU TO BE A CATHOLIC PRIEST?, which has sold over 55,000 copies since last September, the fellowship and fraternal support you find in each other, this conference – all of it; it is all so essential.

"Our business is to love what God would have us do." I love what I do. I love each of you. "No one can see Christ; but everyone sees the priest, and through him they wish to catch a glimpse of the Lord!"

I thank you for allowing me to be your voice; know of my daily prayers for each of you and I humbly ask for your prayers. Prayers for courage, wisdom, and guidance. Thank you