

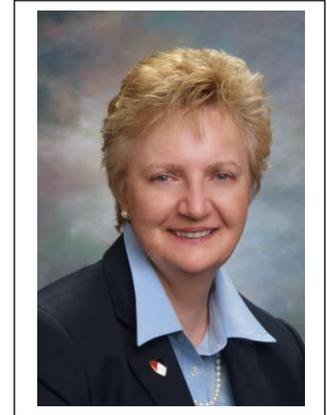
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Lenten speakers offer thoughts to define contemplative season

BY MELISSA MCNALLY

Staff Writer

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On April 24, the solemn, contemplative Lenten season reveals the joyful celebration of Easter. In order to fully illuminate the message and meaning of the Resurrection, Catholics gather together in groups for communal introspection and closer examination of the Gospel.

Two people who have helped to guide that introspection and examination in the Archdiocese of Newark are Sister Marilyn Minter, C.S.S.F., and **Sister Donna L. Ciangio, O.P.** Sr. Marilyn and Sr. Donna served as speakers in this year's archdiocesan "Lenten Reflection Series."

The associate director of parish outreach and training for the archdiocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Sr. Marilyn, leads parish missions throughout the archdiocese and the Youth Retreat Center in Kearny. Titled "Extreme Makeover: Catholic Edition," she has brought her unique vision to parishes such as Saint Elizabeth, Wyckoff, and Saint Leo, Elmwood Park.

By using dramatic reenactments, music and prayer, the three to four-day mission allows the parish community to delve deeper into Scripture. Sr. Marilyn named the program after the popular reality television show because "we are the house of God." Renovating and reinventing how faithful receive the message of God is one of the mission's goals.

"The parish mission is an opportunity for us to touch the depth of our Catholic tradition. We examine the wonderful power, presence and symbolism of Catholic tradition. The program also builds relationships and helps to bring people back to the gifts of the sacraments. We dramatize the conversion of Saint Francis of Assisi and re-enact Lourdes, France; we are very interactive with both the parish community and the priests. I try to make the mission family oriented so everyone can get involved," Sr. Marilyn explained.

Lent is a time for prayer, fasting and service, Sr. Marilyn noted, and participating in a retreat or parish mission helps facilitate a more rewarding Easter. "We are Easter people and are always preparing for the Resurrection. Lent is a time to recognize your own sinfulness and brokenness. We need to do penance and look beyond our own little space. We should see Jesus in the poor, or even in someone in the neighborhood who recently lost their job. Lent is about being available to God as Catholic Christians; that can be hard."

At the Archdiocesan Youth Retreat Center, Sr. Marilyn participates in confirmation retreats for young adults led by peer ministers Kingdom Builders from Queen of Peace High School, North Arlington. "Confirmation kids are not the future of the Church, they are the Church. The retreat

is about the power of the Holy Spirit and living with passion. Our first retreat had 160 participate and the latest had 88 kids. Young people want to hear the truth and so does the Church.”

The retreats include contemporary Christian rock music performed by Sr. Marilyn, prayer and dramatization of the gospels. Pope Benedict XVI’s call to “live and be from the word of God” centers heavily in the program, with Scripture a focal point. Having young people being led by their peers is a powerful experience, Sr. Marilyn explained.

“The Church uses the gifts and talents of all people, of all ages. Being Catholic is about being universal in relationship with others and with the Church. Young people realize that through peer ministry, we all work together. They also love when priests participate. Kids love priests; they want to see priests who are in love with the Church,” she said.

On the last Saturday of every month at the retreat center, candlelight Eucharistic Adoration is held and the response has been encouraging. “We have had up to 80 people from all ages attend and it is growing. Everyone sits in the darkness in a very meditative state and acknowledges that the Eucharist is the center of our lives. With text messaging, social network sites and technology, people are hungry for real presence and connection. In Eucharistic Adoration, you sit face-to-face with your chaos and lay your burdens before the Lord,” Sr. Marilyn explained.

On April 6, as part of the Lenten Reflection Series at the Archdiocesan Center in Newark, she led the presentation “We Are Raised Up.” The session centered on Jesus’ resurrection. Sr. Marilyn noted that all Catholics should have a deeper connection with their faith. “Every Catholic has the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are the new Pentecost; we all need to have an experience with our faith.”

Sister Donna Ciangio, O.P., led the Lenten session “Lord, That I May See,” at the Archdiocesan Center March 30. She also organized a six-week program at Saint Rose of Lima Parish, Short Hills, where small faith sharing-groups met during Lent. Sr. Donna leads two out of the 21 groups who reflect on the upcoming Sunday Gospel. The groups use the text “Open Our Hearts: A Small Group Guide to an Active Lent” and applies its reflections and questions to better prepare for Easter.

“We have all ages in the groups—from teens to 90-year-olds. Those who participate say they listen to the Gospel in a different way and really understand it. They take time during the week to practice the Gospel and live it out everyday. At Sunday Mass, they come to church having already done their homework. Those in the small groups are more in tuned with the homily,” Sr. Donna explained.

Acting out the Word of God, dissecting the gospels and prayerful meditation enhance the spirituality of each participant during Lent. The weekly sessions have “opened people up” and made a difference in the lives of the parish, Sr. Donna believes. Lent is a season that lends itself to introspection, enlightening the true meaning of Easter.

“Lent is a journey. I like to think that the whole Church is on a 40-day retreat. The season is a time to take a good look at ourselves. We are fasting from negativity and feasting on affirmation. It helps people focus to get out of their routine and interact with the world,” she said.

By placing significance on more in depth contemplation of the Gospel and traditions of the Church during Lent, Easter should be a revelation. “At Easter, you should feel that you participated in changing yourself. We move out of the darkness and into the light.” Sr. Marilyn Minter