

August 13, 2025 at 11:03 a.m.

STEP UP!

Fourth annual conference tells diocesan men to prepare 'for spiritual combat'



Participants pray with the rosary during the Step Up Men's Conference on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025, at St. Edward the Confessor in Clifton Park, N.Y. Cindy Schultz for The Evangelist *(Courtesy photo of CINDY SCHULTZ)*

Nearly 270 men, spanning age groups and hometowns, assembled at St. Edward the Confessor Church in Clifton Park on Saturday, Aug. 9, receiving a priest's assurance that "you give a great gift to the Lord by being here today."

But he urged them to plan many follow-up steps — to avoid "sleepwalking through life" and instead to seize "powerful God moments" for deepening their faith and sharing it with others. Such moments, scheduled or sudden, point toward eternal life, said Father James Walsh, a speaker at the Diocese of Albany's fourth annual Step Up Men's Conference.

"There's an enormous prize waiting for us at the end of this life, and yet we get sloppy about it," according to Father Walsh, pastor of St. Pius X Church in Loudonville and Sacred Heart of Jesus in Albany.

He gave practical advice to be active parishioners who prioritize "serious interactions with our faith" over "worship at an altar of worldly success."

His fellow speaker, the internationally known evangelist Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, focused on personal encounters with God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and a confrontation with modern culture that requires "preparing for spiritual combat."

Deacon Harold, as he is called in his multimedia outreaches, cited Bishop Edward B. Scharfenberger's homily from the Mass that opened the conference.



Participants listen as Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers delivers a keynote address during the Step Up Men's Conference on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025, at St. Edward the Confessor in Clifton Park, N.Y. Cindy Schultz for The Evangelist

Catholics can have a "faith that moves mountains," he said, when we strive to be all that God created us to be, place his will above our own and put our total trust in him.

When God looks at your heart, Deacon Harold asked the audience, "Does he see the heart of a man who's willing, like his son, to die to himself and to live for his family? Or, as a priest or a bishop, to live for the Church? Or, as a single man, to live for the culture?"

Jesus, the Word that became flesh, reveals a God who wants to act and be seen in personal relationships, Deacon Harold said. Reconciliation comes by confessing to, and receiving absolution from, a priest whose authority is conveyed in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20.

Christ forgives us in an actual encounter because "God still wants ... to love us with his own heart. He still wants intimate, personal, loving, life-giving relationship, so he gave us priests."

The Sacrament of Reconciliation was offered throughout the conference, with 11 priests of the Diocese making themselves available to all individuals.

In a separate talk, Deacon Harold reaffirmed that Catholics will not fail if we love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength. "The problem is, men, we are failing today," he added. "We're failing our families. We're failing the Church, and we're failing the culture."

To evangelize amid society's secular distractions, he stressed that "the first line of defense is prayer." He urged husbands to pray with their wives and to seek out meaningful encounters with God in silence, especially in Eucharistic Adoration.

"Everything in my life got better when I trusted God," Deacon Harold told the gathering. "Give God permission to use you."

He also recommended joining men's groups, such as the Knights of Columbus or the "That Man is You" discussion program.

Father Walsh, in his talk, cited statistics to outline the grassroots need for evangelization. Generally speaking, he said, 7 percent of Catholics have a personal relationship with Christ yielding an all-in commitment to their faith.

Meanwhile, some 70 percent of baptized Roman Catholics are largely unchurched, he said. Many people are sleepwalking in their faith because they have overemphasized earthly accomplishments and allowed today's culture to repress "big-time questions" about death and life's enduring values.

Catholics should seek and share experiences of God in celebratory moments like weddings and times of trial like an illness, Father Walsh said.

At a time when "75 percent of the work of the Church is done by the women," he said men must be more active in their parishes.

"We've got to try and move people from being a consumer to a contributor" who invests time and talent to accompany others. "Men need other men to grow in faith," Father Walsh pointed out.

He advised finding ways to make one's faith more welcoming, accepting a leadership role for an event or being an "ambassador" showing hospitality to newcomers. Other ideas included participation in a bereavement ministry and using one's computer skills to post more materials on a parish website.



Patrick Towne prays with his son Nathan Towne during the Step Up Men's Conference on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025, at St. Edward the Confessor in Clifton Park, N.Y. The two men are parishioners at Holy Trinity in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Cindy Schultz for The Evangelist



George Krause, left, and Aiden Roldán, second from left, with the parish of St. John the Evangelist, meet seminarian Gilbert Kimaro, center, and Deacon Alexander Turpin during a break at the Step Up Men's Conference on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025, at St. Edward the Confessor in Clifton Park, N.Y. Cindy Schultz for The Evangelist

The Step Up Men's Conference, where attendance grew by 100 people from last year's total, offered its own encouragements for faithful follow-ups.

Men stayed for recitation of the Rosary and Eucharistic exposition and benediction after the talks. Leaders from the diocesan Hispanic Apostolate offered a program for Spanish speakers.

Breaks included lunch and time for attendees to meet with such groups as the diocesan Vocations Office, the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Knights of Columbus, and the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Thomas Cronin, diocesan director of evangelization and strategic planning, continued his role overseeing the annual conference and said there were many people who contributed to the endeavor — and they weren't all men.

“I am especially grateful for the help of Tara Moser and all the women volunteers that made the event run so smoothly,” he said.
