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Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers



The eldest of four siblings in the family - two brothers and a sister, his early childhood in New Jersey was not easy. His family were first generation immigrants from Barbados, seeking a better life in the US. Every deep wrinkle on his forehead made for every cross that he had to carry for him

and his family in his early life. He had experienced the infidelity and erratic behaviour of his father and the sacrifices that his mother made working night shifts as a nurse and coming home to an abusive husband. This eventually led to the breakdown of his family. Both parents divorced in 1987 when he was relatively young. He explained, "Marriage is like carrying the cross of Jesus. Divorce is putting it down, and making your children carry it." Each of his siblings had to deal with his parents' divorce in their own way. He had the opportunity to live in a Benedictine monastery occasionally during high school and college. Finally in 1989, upon completing college followed by a year of work, Deacon Harold broke the news that he made a decision to discern to be a priest. His father didn't understand why he would forgo a potentially successful career in business for a life together with other men, focused on austerity and prayer. After all, his college grades were excellent and he could any career in business, finance or commerce. This further strained the already difficult relationship he had with his father, but nevertheless Deacon Harold went ahead with his decision.

In 1991, after spending two years with the community, his mother suffered a massive heart attack, which forced him to take three months from the community to take care of her and his family. It was during this time, when he was invited to a friend's wedding, that he met his future wife, Colleen. Then, he had made it clear to her that he was going back to the community and that he was not looking for a relationship. However, upon returning to the community, he was asked to take further time off, and that's when he started to ponder whether he was called differently – to married life instead. Love started to blossom between the two of them. At first, he was deeply troubled by the direction that he was heading towards. He had wanted to join the priesthood since high school, had already spent two years discerning to be a priest and now, he was feeling differently. In order to understand if this was indeed God's calling for him, he moved to California to join another monastic community, to discern his life as a priest or marriage. After four months, it slowly became clear that God's plan was for him to be together with Colleen. They were engaged and were

eventually married in 1994, moved to Oregon and began their matrimonial life.

His calling to be a Deacon is a story that he holds dear to his heart and seldom tells. He recounted the Easter Vigil of 1995 when they were attending the vigil mass. "I heard a voice calling me – Deacon! But there wasn't anyone behind us." Startled by this event, he approached his parish priest who encouraged him to follow this urging. He started the process to be a permanent Deacon in 1997 and after five years of study, he obtained a Masters of Theology and was ordained in Nov 2002. In retrospect, he viewed the early years with the Benedictine monastery as the foundation for prayer life that was essential in his ministry as a Deacon. "Deacons are living sacramental signs, permanent witnesses to God's love and truth to the world; we have one foot in the transcendent and one in the temporal. We have regular jobs and families. Our job is not to be priests, but to bring the entire community of God to see the beauty of the Catholic Church and bring them closer to the bishop and priests." Deacon Harold explains.

His public speaking life happened by the grace of God. While still in postgraduate studies, a colleague invited him to his parish to speak about a paper that he wrote about marriage and family life. One thing led to another and he found himself in a weekly series, Faith in Life, a radio show about integrating one's faith into everyday life on the local Catholic radio station. Noticed by a radio producer, he was then invited to a national Catholic radio talk show which focused on male spirituality. This caught the attention of the Eternal Word TV Network (EWTN), a Catholic television broadcast network. In 2004, he was invited to do a television show on EWTN. The response to the show was tremendous and the executive producer invited him back to do an entire series on male spirituality, called "Behold The Man". Eventually, this led to another popular TV series, "Made In His Image", this time focusing on family life spirituality, which garnered even more positive feedback from the public. It was after "Behold The Man" when he started receiving requests to be a speaker at various family conferences around the US and has kept him very busy.

Deacon Harold's full-time job for 11 years was the Director of Public Safety in the University of Portland, Oregon. In 2012, after a year of serious discernment and with the support of his wife, he embarked on a full-time career in public speaking, and developing family life and male spirituality programmes and resources. Among these are a marriage resource for husbands and wives called "The Greatest Commandments". And he has God to thank for leading him down this path and blessing him and his ministry. "When I was ordained as a Deacon, I never intended to go around the world to speak at conferences. God just opened doors and opportunities. And now I feel that God has called me to spending my every remaining time in this earth committed to promoting marriage and family life."

Santonio Hill >

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