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- Burke-Sivers brings the fire to annual men's conference

Burke-Sivers brings the fire to annual men's conference

By Deacon Kyle Eller

The Northern Cross

After a year when attendance at the annual diocesan Men of Faith conference, hit by winter weather and illness, had fallen well below normal, this year's conference made a rebound that might make an NBA power forward proud.

The Feb. 29 conference had 439 pre-registered, second only to the first year of the conference, perhaps drawn in part by a fiery, passionate speaker — Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers.

The Oregon-based deacon, who travels the world giving talks and is well-known for his appearances on Catholic television and radio, delivered, his booming voice seeming to fill the auditorium at Marshall School all on its own.

Beginning with the Gospel passage in which Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39), who begins naked and living among the tombs and ends up fully clothed, in his right mind, and at the foot of Jesus, Deacon Burke-Sivers said, "We are stripped naked by this culture!"

He noted the "demons" that afflict men in an age of relativism: pornography, masturbation, pride, anger, and more.

"Let's get something straight — hell is real!" he said, adding that those who think just being a nice person gets you into heaven should "stop kidding yourself."

It all formed an excellent invitation to go to confession at the conclusion of the talk.

Deacon Burke-Sivers said often people don't go to confession out of a sense of shame that the priest might know who it is.

"How do you think I feel?" he joked. "I'm on the radio!"

But he said "don't worry about that. Priests have heard it all."



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers gestures as he delivers an address to this year's men's conference Feb. 29. He is a sought after speaker who had to be booked three years in advance. (Deacon Kyle Eller / The Northern Cross)

Calling on the parable of the prodigal son, he said God the Father is always looking for us, and in the sacrament of confession, "Jesus still wants to touch us with his own hands" through the ministry of the priest.

His second of four talks on the day involved courageous men of the Bible, particularly Solomon and Joshua.

With Solomon, he spoke both of his asking God for wisdom to be a man for others. He said many fathers today have "outsourced" the job of teaching the faith to their children, not praying at home or going to Mass.

As a result, people "don't know how much God loves them," he said, nor do they know the true meaning of freedom, thinking it is only the ability to do what you want, rather than living in the truth.

"That's true freedom, when you are becoming the man God created you to be," he said.

He noted he is sometimes called names, like "bigot" and "homophobe," and some retreat into silence because of this. But he showed little sympathy for those who take that route, noting that Jesus was whipped, beaten, and scourged. "There's another name for you: coward," he said.

"We need to stand up for our faith, men!" he said.

He noted that Solomon had also fallen at the end of his life, "because he loved the ladies." He said Satan makes pleasure an end in itself rather than a means to an end, to the point that for many it becomes a god.

"The rules and commandments don't actually hurt us, they free us," he said.

In his third talk, "Co-Workers with Christ," Deacon Burke-Sivers talked about the parable of the talents, noting that the biblical currency was actually a lot of money, more than \$27,000 in today's currency.

He urged the men in attendance to put theirs to use. "Go out into the world and show people Jesus," he said.

He shared his own story of his vocational call and his transition from working in law enforcement to making a living speaking about his Catholic faith.

He said the men should add value to whatever they do. God "doesn't want you to be good men, he wants you to be great. He wants you to be great men," he said.

For his final talk, on spiritual combat, Deacon Burke-Sivers drew from the last words of King David to his son, Solomon, to "be strong and show yourself a man."

"There is no way we can fail if we follow the ways of the Lord," the deacon said.

He urged a regular prayer life, with particular emphasis on praying with one's wife, on Eucharistic Adoration, and devotion to the Blessed Mother. He said husbands are the priest of their home, and

the head of the household because they are to be the chief servant in the home.

The deacon was still talking about his trip to Duluth the next Monday, on the EWTN radio show Morning Glory, which he co-hosts with Gloria Purvis and Msgr. Charles Pope. He told his co-hosts the event had brought him in touch with a “great group of men” and “great men of God,” adding that he had had a chance to meet Father Mike Schmitz, who he had only seen at events in the past.

Next year's conference is already booked for Feb. 20, 2021. The keynote speaker will be Bob Rice, a musician, author, TV personality who works as a professor at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

Women's conference this month

There is still time to register for this year's women's conference, which will be held March 28 at Marshall School. This year's conference has the theme “Worthy,” and the main speaker is Deby Sansone Schlappizzi, a nationally acclaimed motivational speaker, television contributor, radio host and life activist. Among other prestigious awards and recognition, the Wall Street Journal recognized Schlappizzi for her policy changing work. Also presenting will be Nic Davidson, a convert to the faith, from the Diocese of Duluth, an energetic and funny speaker who is on fire for his faith. Having personally had his life and marriage transformed by Theology of the Body, he spends his days trying to offer the same transformation to those around him. Nic lives in International Falls with his wife and five children.

Early bird registration ends March 13 (materials and lunch are not guaranteed after this date) and online registration ends March 26. Cost is \$30 and includes light breakfast, lunch, snack, and materials (\$10 late fee added after March 13). See [www. dioceseduluth.org](http://www.dioceseduluth.org) for more information or to register.