

# Retired Sister's Legacy Seen in the Deacons She Groomed for Ministry

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — After 20 years as director of the Office for the Permanent Diaconate, Sister Carlotta DiLorenzo leaves behind quite a legacy.

The 75-year-old, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, had been responsible for overseeing the formation of the diocese's permanent deacons, both before and after their ordination. She retired on June 27.

Jose Ernesto Gonzalez, associate director of the Permanent Diaconate Office, described her as "industrious" and "visionary."

"The diocese was like a second home for her. She was here 24/7, basically," he said with a chuckle, as he recalled her dedication.

But those long hours bore much fruit.

Under Sister DiLorenzo's direction, the diocese's formation program came to be seen as one of the best in the country, Gonzalez said. As its reputation spread, her counterparts in other U.S. dioceses, as well as in Ireland, Australia and elsewhere, reached out to her for advice in designing their own programs.

"Sister Carlotta was lively in the office; her energy and drive filled the day," said Kate McKenzie, her administrative assistant. "Her work on behalf of the diaconate wasn't just a job. It was a vocation; it was her very person."

Sister DiLorenzo's co-workers and collaborators will miss her deep spirituality, her no-nonsense demeanor and her personal warmth.

Noreen McInnes, director of the diocesan Office for Liturgy and Spirituality, noted that the cross necklace that Sister DiLorenzo always wore around her neck wasn't just an accessory.

"That beautiful, simple cross was what she stood for in every way," said McInnes, whose office collaborated with Sister DiLorenzo's on preparing the annual diaconal ordination liturgy.

Sister DiLorenzo became director of the Permanent Diaconate Office in early May 1998, after having previously taught at local

Catholic schools and having served in administration at the University of San Diego and in the priestly formation program at the diocesan seminary.

She was never one to whitewash or sugar-coat truths that needed to be said, McInnes recalled. But when she spoke the truth, she did so in love — and often attributing her straightforwardness to her Sicilian ancestry.

Deacon Chuck Navarrete, who was ordained last year to serve St. Margaret Parish in Oceanside, agrees.

"Sister Carlotta was a no-nonsense type of person," he said. "She told you exactly what was on her mind all the time. That characteristic is what made her so genuine and easy to like, because you knew that you were always getting the truth from her."

The value that Sister DiLorenzo attached to the people in her life took tangible form in the personalized birthday cards that every diocesan Pastoral Center employee could expect to receive from her annually. But it was also seen in the compassionate way in which she guided deacon candidates and their wives through their discernment and five years of formation.

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"Sister Carlotta loved her deacons, loved them like they were her children, but they loved her even more," McInnes said.

"The diaconate community was her life, and her commitment was round the clock," said Deacon Mike Daniels of St. Brigid Parish. "She ate, slept and breathed her ministry to the Church and her deacons. Long



COURTESY OF THE OFFICE FOR THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

**A MATERNAL FIGURE:** Sister Carlotta DiLorenzo, seen with Deacon Bill Turner, had a mother's love for the deacons she helped form.

hours, little recognition and great sacrifice were okay with her."

Deacon Stephen O'Riordan of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish recalled how he and his wife had felt "welcomed ... from the very first time we met her" and were "lovingly supported" throughout the years that followed.

Bonnie Curtis, whose husband Deacon Adam Curtis was ordained in 2015, recalls not only Sister DiLorenzo's compassion but also her perceptiveness. Curtis and her husband, uncertain whether the diaconate was right for them, had resolved to remain "poker-faced" during their initial interview, not giving away their own feelings but simply seeing what Sister DiLorenzo had to say. Curtis was astonished at how well Sister DiLorenzo was able to read them.

Being so perceptive enabled her to recognize and admit many quality deacon candidates into the formation program, and those men now serving in parishes throughout San Diego and Imperial counties represent her legacy.

"I think the diaconate ... will carry the impact of Sister for a whole generation,"

said Bernadeane Carr, director of the Diocesan Institute, who worked with her on the theological formation of deacon candidates.

"She's formed a generation of deacons," Curtis agreed.

Deacon Federico Drachenberg, of Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado, credits Sister DiLorenzo with modeling what a deacon's spirituality should look like through her "life of prayer, service and pastoral commitment."

"She leaves big shoes to fill," said Deacon Navarrete.

In announcing Sister DiLorenzo's retirement to her fellow diocesan employees, Bishop Robert W. McElroy described her years of ministry as a blessing for the Local Church.

"In her resignation letter, Sister Carlotta said, 'I am grateful to God for having ministered in the Diocese of San Diego for over 30 years, including as director of the Office for the Permanent Diaconate,'" the bishop said. "It is we who have been blessed, and I know all of us join in prayer for a wonderful retirement for her in the coming years."

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