

Rosary project uniting faithful for law enforcement personnel

By Debra Stevko Miller

In these turbulent times, some people have marched in the streets, took a knee at sporting events and started initiatives that advocate for the dignity of all people.

Law enforcement personnel have been at the center of much of the turmoil as they face increased suspicion and ill-will. Many communities have attempted to quell the discord by introducing various proposals.

In the diocesan Office of Family Life, a new project seeks to bring a prayerful respite to these anxious times and for the men and women who may need it most. Cristina D'Averso-Collins, director of the office, began exploring the idea of a small pocket rosary containing a single decade — one bead followed by a group of 10. A typical rosary has 50 beads separated into five groups each with 10 beads. Being much smaller the pocket rosary will be easy for the officers to carry, D'Averso-Collins said.

"It's a very difficult time for law enforcement," said D'Averso-Collins, whose brother works in the sector. "This is a crucial time for outreach from the Church."

She was similarly motivated by the recently released inspirational documentary film, "Pray," about the

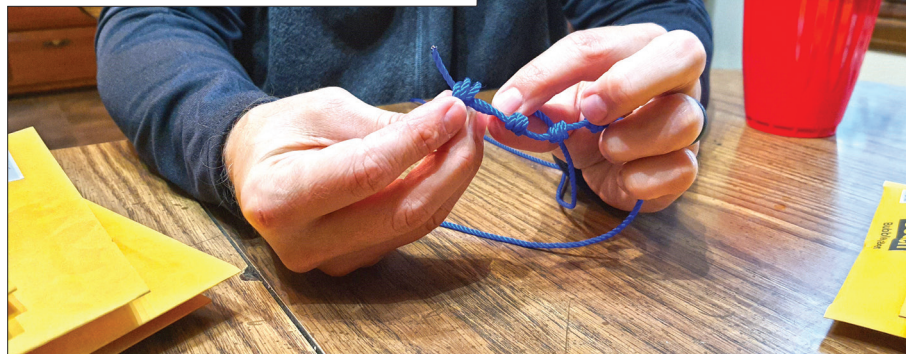


Left, members of the South Plainfield Police Department hold pocket rosaries consisting of a single decade after receiving them from the newly formed Blue Army Guild at a Blue Mass at Sacred Heart Church. Below, Cristina D'Averso-Collins, director, diocesan Office of Family Life who came up with the idea for the rosaries, shows how to make one. The officers also received a copy of the "The Police Officer's Prayer" and a prayer card of St. Michael the Archangel, their patron saint.

— John Batkowski and Cristina D'Averso-Collins photos

Venerable Patrick Peyton. Father Peyton, a great advocate for family prayer, and recognized worldwide as "The Rosary Priest," coined the maxims: "A world at prayer is a world at peace" and "A family that prays together, stays together."

She soon discovered that a similar effort was underway at St. Simon Stock Parish in Berlin in South Jersey. This gave D'Averso-Collins the added impetus to present her plan of the Blue Rosary Guild to the diocese. The project was approved in August, and soon she was buying materials and spreading the word in search of volunteers interested in



learning the craft.

Her initial goal was 100 rosaries, but with sign-ups from more than 45 people, including a nurse at Marquette University, Milwaukee, and a military spouse in Germany, along with others in Pennsylvania and New York, that number could easily reach 500. Some Altar Rosary Societies throughout the diocese are also getting involved. "School teachers, too, want to do the project with their students, so we are now on track to have 700 rosaries made," she added.

"I've had parents contact me who have children of pre-teen age, some of them are confirmation candidates, who want to do it with their children and I think that's wonderful," she said. "I really want to use this as an opportunity to bring families together, to bring communities together, and spread devotion to the rosary."

D'Averso-Collins and her husband, Brian, will be making the small rosaries as well and have offered to provide printed instructions, along with one-on-one training via phone, to anyone without Internet access to view the online recorded instructional session.

"Once people learn and they feel comfortable, it might be something where they just want to continue and they like doing it as a hobby," she offered.

Full length rosaries are also encouraged for those whose dexterity is limited.

"I don't want this to be so standardized that I'm deterring anyone from doing it their way," she said.

Initially, officers within the diocese who receive communications about the diocese's annual Blue Mass will be approached as rosary recipients, but she hopes that interest will eventually grow to encompass many other dioceses. She hopes that State Troopers and other groups who want to pray the rosary, or be included in diocesan prayer services, will welcome the opportunity to engage, too.

"That's also the goal here," she said. "Connecting the community with our law enforcement officers and helping them to see that they are supported and they are loved and being prayed for by the Church. That's a very big component (of the project)."

Since 1571, the month of October has been dedicated to the Holy Rosary to coincide annually with October 7th which celebrates the memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary.

To make a rosary, or to send in a donation toward the purchase of materials, send an email to Cristina D'Averso-Collins at: cdaverso@diometuchen.org

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Center of Attention

Oct. 17 at Merrill Park, Iselin, was enlivened by DJ Steve Penk and numerous walkers who participated in the annual walk for Life for Life Choices Resource Center, Metuchen. Among the participants were student groups from St. Francis Cathedral School, Metuchen; St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Edison, and other area schools to earn service hours; The Knights of Columbus; pro-life families and others. New participants included a group from Spotswood Chapel. Life Choices, which was founded by Rose Mary Lyons, is celebrating its 35th year as a pregnancy help center. It provides free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, counseling and material support for mothers, their children and their families.

—photo courtesy of Christine Riggio