

Altar servers, sacristans honored with inaugural Monsignor Valenzano Service Awards

Twenty-four young men, including three who intend to enter seminary in the fall, were among the inaugural recipients of the Monsignor Valenzano Service Award March 24.

The award honors high-schoolers who serve their parish as altar servers and/or sacristans, and the memory of the late **Monsignor Arthur Valenzano**, former rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

Father Steven Roth, director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, cited two reasons for instituting the honor.

“First, it’s a feat in this day and age, with all the distractions out there, for high school students to serve their church in a very public way,” Father Roth said. “Second, I could not think of a better priest than Monsignor Valenzano, who embodies the sacrifice of service ... if I think of a priest who loved the church, and in particular, the liturgy, it’s him.”

The recipients were acknowledged during a Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, which was celebrated by Archbishop William E. Lori. He too acknowledged Monsignor Valenzano.

“I don’t think there was ever a priest in the long history of the archdiocese who was better loved and more respected,” the archbishop said in his homily. “From the moment I met Monsignor Art, I sensed his friendliness, his goodness as a person and a priest.”

Monsignor Valenzano, **who died** in 2015, was already in treatment for leukemia when the archbishop met him three years earlier.

“Instead of feeling sorry for himself, he made every day of his life count,” the archbishop said. “As if there were no tomorrow and in a spirit of real joy, he prayed, preached and reached out to others in love and service. No matter how difficult the treatments were, he never complained.

“Soon his fellow patients and the medical professionals who treated him started coming to his Mass at the basilica every Sunday. Why? Because they were won over by his example of priestly love and care for those who were sick and suffering.”

During his homily, Archbishop Lori noted that three of the young men being honored, John Anderson, Sam Huffer and Joseph LeGare, were applying to enter seminary. He noted the importance of vocations.

“Tonight might be just that moment to start thinking, how can I best bear fruit for Christ and for the church?” the archbishop said. “As a husband and father? Or perhaps as a priest?”

The archbishop highlighted the contributions of all being honored.

“What you do in your parishes is not only of value to you personally but it also has a big impact on others, especially your peers,” he said. “When they see you serving in this capacity, whether they say so or not, your example causes them to reflect on their own lives and to ask themselves if they are really living in the present as Christ’s followers.”

Five of the young men hail from St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena. Monsignor Carl Cummings, its pastor, was among the clergy who witnessed their parishioners being honored at the celebration, the others being Father Kevin Ewing, Father Kevin Farmer, Father John Jicha, Father Isaac Makovo, Father Hector Mateus-Ariza, Father Donald Sterling, Father John Streifel, and Deacons Justin Gough and Phil Seneschal.

A similar Mass will be offered for female altar servers and/or sacristans in the fall.

The honorees, with their parish, follow:

John Anderson, St. Mary, Hagerstown

Jacob Borek, parish unavailable

Isaac Carder, St. Joseph, Hagerstown

Jasper Cavin, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena

Ben Codilla, St. Philip Neri, Linthicum Heights

Lawrence Cross, St. Mary, Pylesville

David Ezeala, New All Saints, Liberty Heights

Matthew Gallo, Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland

Stephen Horman, St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park

Sam Huffer, St. Peter the Apostle, Libertytown

Alphonsus Korie, New All Saints, Liberty Heights

Joseph LeGare, St. Joseph, Emmitsburg

Hunter Luers, St. Philip Neri, Linthicum Heights

Thien Nguyen, St. Philip Neri, Linthicum Heights

Michael Okwesili, Holy Family, Randallstown

Adam Peck, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena

Ryan Peck, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena

Joshua Ruley, Resurrection of Our Lord, Laurel

Matthew Sayles, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena

Brandon Sindjui, Resurrection of Our Lord, Laurel

Matthew Smolka, Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland

Alex Sohm, St. John the Evangelist, Frederick

Luke Sybert, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena

Michael Venit, Resurrection of Our Lord, Laurel

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Paul McMullen contributed to this story.