

# Archbishop O'Brien ordains father to priesthood

As the solemn chants of hundreds of people reverberated from the stone walls, Deacon Gregory Rapisarda laid prostrate on the sanctuary floor of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland June 12. Worshippers called on saints of all generations to pray for the 62-year-old father of four just moments before Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien would ordain him to the priesthood.

Overwhelmed by the power of the moment, Deacon Rapisarda removed his glasses and wiped away tears that rolled down his face. He was acutely aware of the spiritual presence of Carol Rapisarda, his wife of nearly four decades, who died in 2006. Father John Rapisarda, Deacon Rapisarda's youngest son, was just a few feet away – praying for the father who would soon become "Father."

Deacon Rapisarda then knelt silently before the archbishop, who placed his hands on the deacon's head in a sign that signifies the conferral of the Holy Spirit. One by one, dozens of priests repeated the ancient gesture before Archbishop O'Brien declared, "He's a priest."

The historic moment made the Rapisardas the first father-son archdiocesan priests in the 221-year history of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the first father-son priests since Jesuit Fathers Virgil and Samuel Barber who served the then-Diocese of Baltimore in the early 19th century. Father Gregory Rapisarda was among 440 men to be ordained to the priesthood this year in the United States.

Following the 90-minute liturgy, Father Gregory Rapisarda said he was deeply moved by the prayers of the celebration – especially the litany of the saints.

"I felt the presence of all those saints who have gone before us – including my wife," he said. "That was really an uplifting, spiritual moment."

Among the saints whose names were invoked was St. Thomas More – the patron saint of lawyers whose image peered out on Father Gregory Rapisarda from a side chapel. Before entering St. Mary's Seminary in Roland Park in 2008 to prepare for

the priesthood, Father Gregory Rapisarda wound down his longtime practice as an elder-care attorney.

During the ordination rites, Father John Rapisarda vested his father in the stole and chasuble that symbolize the priestly office. The father and son beamed at each other and embraced as brother priests.

“It was almost overwhelming,” said Father John Rapisarda, associate pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Essex, who was ordained in 2008. “It’s just an amazing thing to see the joy that Dad has, the joy that the church has for Dad and then receiving such an amazing man as a priest.”

In his homily, Archbishop O’Brien noted that on every step along Father Gregory Rapisarda’s “improbable journey,” he has “embraced the will of God – first as a husband and father, then as a permanent deacon and now as a priest and spiritual father to many.”

The archbishop announced that the new priest, who has spent his diaconal ministry at his home parish of St. Margaret in Bel Air, will serve as associate pastor of St. Louis in Clarksville. Archbishop O’Brien said Father Gregory Rapisarda will have many duties with his new parishioners.

“Your greatest gift and responsibility to them will be to pray for them,” he said.

Archbishop O’Brien, who anointed Father Gregory Rapisarda’s hands with chrism oil, called on the new priest to “witness personally and convincingly for them the power that flows from the Lord in your prayerful celebration of the sacraments.”

At the end of the liturgy, Father Gregory Rapisarda extended his first priestly blessing to a kneeling Archbishop O’Brien. The archbishop reached for the new priest’s hand after the blessing and kissed it. Father Gregory Rapisarda recessed from the church to thunderous applause – pausing often to embrace family members and well wishers as the Archdiocesan Choir led the joyous strains of “O God, Beyond all Praising.”

Gina Fritz, one of Father Gregory Rapisarda’s daughters, said she is “very proud” of her dad.

“He’s been a great father and I’m happy to share him because he’s going to be a great father to a lot of people,” Fritz said.

Father Rapisarda, who as a seminarian served at St. Francis de Sales in Abingdon and St. Joseph in Fullerton, said he is “eager” to begin his ministry.

“I’m ready,” he said.

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