

Basilica gift shop offers Maryland gifts, including deacon's spice rub



The Baltimore basilica gift shop features various gifts from Maryland including "The Deacon's Poultry Rub," which was created by Archdiocese of Baltimore Deacon Kevin Reid. (Christopher Gunty | CR Staff)

By Christopher Gunty

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If you're looking for a unique, Maryland-related gift for Christmas, perhaps the place to start is at a parish gift shop, such as the one nestled into the Sexton's Lodge at America's first cathedral.

Next to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a small gift store beckons visitors to the historic church. In addition to the CDs of the basilica's choir, and authentic "Baltimore Basilica" baseball caps, shoppers can find a poultry spice rub created by a deacon.

Deacon Kevin Reid, who splits his time between duties as deacon liaison for the Office of Clergy Personnel and as chef de cuisine for archdiocesan events, developed "The Deacon's Poultry Rub," a blended spice that when rubbed on the outside of poultry to be roasted, grilled or pan-fried infuses the flavor into the meat.



Archdiocese of Baltimore Deacon Kevin Reid (Courtesy Baltimore basilica)

"These days a lot of chefs are coming up with their own rubs," Deacon Reid said. "In essence it's a dry marinade. I've taken a bunch of different herbs, including parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. They're all in there."

Deacon Reid, who along with a crew of helpers does the cooking, serving and clean-up for big dinners hosted by Archbishop William E. Lori and other archdiocesan departments, has been cooking for more than 45 years. He plans the menus, and prepares everything from appetizers to desserts.

Trained at the Culinary Institute of America, he was a personal chef for Celine Dion

when she lived in Florida, and has worked up and down the East Coast. He also served as executive chef for the medical center at Johns Hopkins University, overseeing the service of 10,000 meals a day.

These days, he loves the fact that he can combine his diaconal ministry with his skills in the kitchen. During Mass, he said, after the creed, "The deacon prepares the table at the altar. ... I administer at both tables - the table of God and the table of man."

"The work I do for the archdiocese is my attempt to be part of the new evangelization by helping contribute to the fellowship at the table," Deacon Reid said. "Almost all of St. Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus speaking with his disciples at table. I'm the guy cooking for those meals."

"The Deacon's Poultry Rub" was part of the basilica gift shop manager's effort to bring more locally sourced items to the store. Jennifer Caine, who has managed the shop since August, was distressed to find a lot of the inventory was made in China, a country that's not very hospitable to Catholics and other Christians. Some of the statues and Nativity sets are made in Italy or Colombia, and they're beautiful, but she wanted to add some Maryland products.

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In addition to convincing Deacon Reid to come up with a product exclusive to the basilica, Caine now features signs hand-painted by a local Catholic school mom, and Mouth Party caramels made in Maryland. The "OMG" branded chocolate-covered caramels with sea-salt are sold individually and in bags. She admits the name is a little irreverent, but they are so good, "People buy one for a snack and come back 35 seconds later to buy them by the bag."

The shop was originally intended to pay back the Basilica Historic trust for the mid-2000s restoration of the basilica, but that could take decades. In the meantime, the shop offers a chance for people to make their faith their own, by learning more about their name saint, or other items to help them connect their faith to their life. Shoppers query the cashiers who staff the store, and get solid answers to questions about the church and a recommendation for an item to meet their needs.

"They don't just come in and pick up something and buy it and walk out. They are looking for something special. Sometimes they teach us," Caine said.

Christmas items, including "Santa Comes to Maryland," a children's book featuring the basilica, will be coming off the shelves in a few weeks. Then it will be time to get ready for Lent and the sacramental season of first Communions, confirmations and weddings.



The shop, at 409 Cathedral St. in Baltimore, is open Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Saturdays 8 a.m.-5:30, and Sundays 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

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