

Dinner guests, speakers support Visitation House



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Keynote speaker Kailee Perrin, and her daughter Reya, meet former Visitation House resident Maritza Castellano after the dinner.

BY TANYA CONNOR
THE CATHOLIC FREE PRESS

WORCESTER - Visitation House's new executive director, Rebecca Urban, met supporters and shared some of her story at the home's dinner April 27 at Assumption University.

At this annual fundraiser for the program for women with unplanned pregnancies and their babies, keynote speaker Kailee Perrin told how a simple outreach helped save her firstborn's life. Another of her children spoke briefly, as did former Visitation House

resident Maritza Castellano.

Maureen Coghlin received the Ruth V. K. Pakaluk Legacy Award, named for the late pro-lifer who is called the home's inspiration. Mrs. Coghlin, of St. Mary Parish in Shrewsbury, has been a friend of Visitation House since its inception in 2005, and served in other pro-life causes, according to a biography in the dinner program booklet.

Father Richard F. Reidy, the diocese's vicar general, gave the invocation about witnessing to the sanctity

of life. Father Michael J. Roy, Visitation House chaplain, closed with prayer, asking that the love at Visitation House expand our capacity to love.

A video called "Visitation House: A Rehab for the Soul," about the home's work and impact, was also shown.

The fundraiser's goal was \$125,000. Jill Bowman, board president, said Tuesday that \$70,000 had been raised to date, and more was expected to come in.

She introduced Mrs. Urban saying, "She puts God first; it was a prayerful

process for her to say 'yes'" to becoming executive director.

Mrs. Urban, who had offered childbirth education at Visitation House in the past, said she was invited to help plan this year's dinner. Impressed with how the board of directors was preparing for the dinner in the absence of an executive director, she agreed to help. Working with the dinner committee helped her decide to accept the executive director position which she began April

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3, she said.

She said she did not originally want to be a working woman. She wanted to raise her children, and did so for 10 years.

She also taught childbirth classes at her home and in 2009 became a certified doula.

In 2018 she became center director for First Concern Pregnancy Resource Center in Clinton. She said she was there three years and left when expecting another child. So she could work at First Concern, her husband, Benjamin, who is retired, began staying home with their seven children, which he continues to do.

Becoming Visitation House's executive director "seems like a natural fit," she said. Seven years ago she read *The Appalling Strangeness of the Mercy of God: The Story of Ruth Pakaluk, Convert, Mother and Pro-life Activist* edited by Michael Pakaluk using his deceased wife's letters and pro-life talks. Mrs. Urban saw similarities between herself and Mrs. Pakaluk. She and her husband even named their sixth child Ruth.

"I feel a connection with her," Mrs. Urban said of Mrs. Pakaluk. "Ruth's presence is very much felt

throughout" Visitation House. So is the presence of Eve Lindquist, who was executive director there from 2007-2020.

Mrs. Urban said theirs are "very hard shoes to fill," and added, "I don't plan to fill them, but to walk alongside." She wants to do God's will, she said.

God and the Blessed Mother are present at Visitation House, said Mrs. Urban, a Catholic convert who, with her family, attends Mass at religious communities in Still River. The family lives in Lancaster.

In the keynote address, Mrs. Perrin, a national speaker for pregnancy centers, who lives in Oneida, New York, told of learning, as an 18-year-old addict, that she was pregnant. Her boyfriend, a drug dealer, provided \$400 for an abortion.

"We live in a world today that says abortion is good," she said. At 18, you don't know any other way; "I was absolutely hopeless."

But her mother did not give up. Given a telephone number for a pregnancy center, she sent her daughter there.

"Immediately I felt a presence of peace," Mrs. Perrin recalled, attributing that to the Holy Spirit. "They loved me right where I was ... and it changed

everything." She noted that Visitation House also offers hope.

Sometimes people think they have to do big things, she said, but the man who gave her mother the pregnancy center phone number performed a simple act that changed many lives.

"There is no greater gift than being a mom," Mrs. Perrin asserted. On Oct. 3, 2008, she gave birth to her daughter. Later she married her daughter's father, who has become a wonderful father to their five children, she said. They are so blessed to have the life they do, thanks to people like you, she told dinner attendees.

Mrs. Perrin said she was asked to speak at a banquet for the pregnancy center that helped her. There, she and her family encountered the man who had given her mother the center's phone number. He and his wife had had an abortion and God was using him to help someone else, she said.

At Visitation House's dinner, emcee Cindy Dorsey, a longtime supporter of the home, invited Mrs. Perrin's

middle child, Reya, 8, to say something about her mother.

"She's great because she gave me this life I have right now," Reya said.

This was the first time she went with her mother on a speaking engagement: "I like that I got to come here and see what she actually does," she said.

Former resident Ms. Castellano told how she came to Visitation House pregnant, not speaking English, without family here. (She is from the Dominican Republic and had been in the United States about a month, she said.)

In September she is to marry a man she met at work, she said, and she is proud of what she has accomplished. Crying, she told listeners that everything she has done would not be possible without them.

- Those wishing to donate to the fundraiser can still do so online at visitationhouse.org or send a check made out to Visitation House Inc. to 119 Endicott St., Worcester MA 01610.

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