

Study Guide: Interview with Deacon Andrew Saunders

Deacon Andrew (Andy) Saunders was interviewed for The Wisdom Figures of Preaching Interview series (a part of Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology's Preaching as Hospitality Formation Program) on March 24, 2026, in Lewis Hall.

Ordained a permanent deacon in 2011, Deacon Andrew Saunders is currently a deacon at St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Wyckoff, New Jersey. He previously served at St. Luke's Church in Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey. He also oversees the formation of deacons for the four Northern Diocese of New Jersey; a service he's gladly held for 14 years.

How have you prayed with the Scripture in preparation to form your homily?

- Deacon Saunders preaches at St. Elizabeth of Hungary every 4th and 5th week. He preaches every Mass (a total of 6 homilies).
- Homily Preparation/ How he writes his homily:
 - He practices Lectio Divina
 - He spends time praying with Scriptures
 - It is a dialogue of praying and listening to God's voice
 - When he is praying- A word or phrase that speaks to him
 - He asks: "What is God telling me to preach?"
 - He prepares 3 weeks in advance, praying over Scripture
 - He uses resources.
 - During the 2nd week, he will look at resources: the resources emphasize what he is feeling.
 - He asks for feedback (to strengthen his homilies).
 - He reviews his homily with his wife and parish members.
 - His wife hears the first version. She gives him feedback, and the "stamp of approval."
 - Parishioners hear him preach on the Wednesday before he preaches that Saturday.
 - It is an interactive experience.
 - It provides an opportunity for feedback, and to understand what others are learning from his homily.

What lessons have you drawn from the Gospel reading that helped you invite, welcome, share, and offer compassion?

- He preaches in different circumstances/settings:
 - The Sunday homilies
 - The "High ticket" and "high pressure" homilies
 - In these homilies, he is trying to "hit a home run" because he preaches every four to five weeks.
 - He also preaches homilies at a local nursing home
 - He likes "preaching in smaller venues because they're intimate and very close."
 - He has fostered a good relationship- and has an 8-9 year relationship with the nursing home.

How would you describe your relationship with parishioners? What compelling stories have you heard from parishioners testifying the impact of your hospitable preaching?

- He has a good relationship with parishioners:
 - He developed a good relationship because he lives with his community.
 - He is in “a pretty unique position in many respects” because he lives in the same neighborhood as his parishioners.
 - “Being in that neighborhood as a deacon, married with children and a grandchild, it gives me a unique position with parishioners” he said.
 - He is active in the church and runs four different ministries (including a Bible study ministry, and Stewardship committee).
- The uniqueness and importance of a Deacon is based on their life experiences:
 - His reflections on his life experiences as a deacon:
 - “I think as a deacon, we are in a very unique position in terms of preaching [...] And as a deacon in particular, we are the eyes, ears, and hands of the bishop and the community.”
 - “It's true that we share the Word of God with priests, but we preach from our own life experience. Most of us are married. We have children. We're out on the front lines going to the grocery store, mowing our grass, on the ball fields with other parishioners.”
- He hopes his preaching reaches everyone who attends Mass.
 - “When we preach, we're not preaching to just one audience, to adults, but we're also preaching to those that have special needs, whether they are children or adults.”
 - He tries to connect with the CCD children after Mass.
 - Every week, the CCD children listen to the homily, write the homily's theme, and show it to Deacon Saunders. “If they have it, I have a lot of fun congratulating them and telling them what a good job they did. I stamp it, and they go away with a great big smile on their face” he said.
- Compelling Stories:
 - Deacon Saunders received an email from a young man, personally touched by his homily:
 - “One item that really touched me deeply is a young man, probably in his 20s with some disabilities, had attended Mass with his mother. And several days later, out of the clear blue, I got an email from him. He had to do this all on his own- and wrote such a beautiful email telling me how much he was inspired and touched by my homily. It was so heartwarming in his email to me, really touched me to the core” he said.

What three lessons of prayerful preparation and/or hospitality might you have for those preparing for ordination and for those preparing to give retreats, days of recollection, and spiritual presentations?

- For prayerful preparation, Lectio Divina is critical.
- More recommendations:
 - Spend time with Scripture, listening to God, and what He has to say.
 - “Enter into the Scripture, imagine that you're actually there.”

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- Use images to connect to the homily:
 - “If you have an image or a phrase that could connect your homily to or your mission that you're giving to I think is very important. People can remember images and connect with images.”
 - For Palm Sunday, his image is the palm.

To view the video of Deacon Saunders as a Wisdom Figure of Preaching, click [here](#).