

# Giving thanks for Father Sam: Sons of Italy to honour local priest

By: Brenda Suderman | Posted: 03/14/2019 7:00 PM |

---

It's a good thing Rev. Sam Argenziano loves hanging out with people over good food and great wine, because this weekend he gets to do just that.

The spiritual leader of the city's Italian Roman Catholic community will eat dinner with 1,200 people on Saturday night when he is honoured with the inaugural Heart of the Lion Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual gala of the Sons of Italy.

"It's for just being there for anyone who needed someone to speak with and opening the doors of the church to anyone and everyone regardless of

denomination," explains gala chairman Mario Posillipo of the reason for recognizing the long-serving priest of Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church on River Avenue.

After years of cracking jokes as the gala's master of ceremonies, Argenziano will sit on the other side of the table as people honour him.



MIKAELA MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Rev. Sam Argenziano, from Staten Island, came to Winnipeg more than 40 years ago.

"They see something in you and just accept it with grace and humility," he says, adding he got teary-eyed when he first heard about the award.

Known in Osborne Village and beyond as Father Sam, the Staten Island native with the big smile and broad New York accent landed in Winnipeg on a cold winter day more than four decades ago. He was ordained to the priesthood on Feb. 15, 1979, at St. Edward the Confessor Parish on Arlington Street, and later served as pastor of St. Anthony of Padua in West Kildonan, before moving to Holy Rosary in 1995.

A second-generation Italian American, Argenziano only became fluent in the language when he moved to Winnipeg to serve the Italian community at Holy Rosary, where he still performs one Sunday mass in Italian.

"I speak Italian with a New York accent," he explains with a laugh. "That's never going to change."

What's also never going to change is his genuine interest in people, both in his parish of 700 families and beyond. The 71-year-old self-described extreme extrovert surrounds himself with his large adopted family of Winnipeggers, jokes with folks he meets in the neighbourhood, and engages in interfaith conversations across the city.



MIKAELA MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Argenziano still performs Sunday mass in Italian.

"If you see someone you don't know, just take the plunge and go" talk to them," he says about communicating in person in the age of digital devices.

"I want all of us to be ministers of welcome."

Argenziano models that sort of welcome by opening his second-floor duplex at the south end of the church parking lot to friends and acquaintances for holiday dinners or poker, explains a friend, Sister Michelle Garlinski, who first met him several decades ago.



"He generally is fully alive when he is with people," says Garlinski, director of mission at St. Mary's Academy, where Argenziano has performed mass regularly during the past 40 years.

"In my opinion, you see God at work when he is with people."



MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

describes himself as an extreme

Totally committed to the duties of the church, which include saying daily mass except on Mondays and officiating at about 70 funerals annually, Argenziano accepts people for who they are and where they are in life, says his colleague Tonina Fiorentino, pastoral assistant at Holy Rosary.

"If you don't go to church, he doesn't judge that," she says.

Although he hates using computers and prefers people telephone him — he will even have his secretary reply to incoming emails with a message to call him — Argenziano has embraced the smartphone and texts regularly with Fiorentino's two adult sons and other close friends. He also keeps in touch with former

parishioners who request his pastoral services, says Fiorentino.

## Want to get a head start on your day?

Get the day's breaking stories, weather forecast, and more sent straight to your inbox every morning.

"People from all over the world come back to get their children baptized or to be get married by him," she says.

Both Garlinski and Fiorentino have witnessed his generosity as he hands out a fistful of spare change from a spare dish on his kitchen counter, slips \$20 to someone obviously in need, and visits strangers in hospital who request a priest.

"When he sees somebody and they're asking for money or a prayer, he always responds," says Garlinski. "He always responds with dignity."

Proceed from the \$250-a-plate dinner, now in its 33rd year, will be directed to the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre. The evening features a five-course meal and entertainment by illusionist Darcy Oake, younger brother of Bruce. Bruce Oake died of a drug overdose in 2011 at age 25.

The service organization of people of Italian heritage voted late last year to open membership to women and will be rebranded soon as the Sons and Daughters of Italy, says Posillipo.

[faith@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:faith@freepress.mb.ca)

---

The Free Press acknowledges the financial support it receives from members of the city's faith community, which makes our coverage of religion possible.

You can comment on most stories on The Winnipeg Free Press website. You can also agree or disagree with other comments. All you need to do is be a Winnipeg Free Press print or digital subscriber to join the conversation and give your feedback.

## Have Your Say

DISPLAY 5 COMMENTS

By submitting your comment, you agree to abide by our Community Standards and Moderation Policy. These guidelines were revised effective February 27, 2019. Have a question about our comment forum? Check our frequently asked questions.

### **ABOVE THE FOLD**