News



"Discover the Gift" keynote speakers, from left: Life Sr. Virginia Joy, Debbie Herbeck, Carmelite Mother Gloria Therese, Dr. Myma Albayda and Sonia Quintero (Given Institute)



by Sydney Clark

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In place of its annual leadership forum for young Catholic women, the Given Institute this year is hosting an online five-day event open to women of all ages titled "Discover the Gift," taking place June 10-14.

The institute had planned to welcome more than 100 young adult women ages 21-30 from 32 states and four countries to the Given Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C., this week. Additionally, 56 religious sisters and lay mentors were supposed to attend. Now, because of COVID-19 concerns, the in-person forum has been postponed to June 2021.

The forum serves participants who are seeking training in leadership, faith formation and mentoring to better discern and pursue their mission and vocation.

The online event provides an opportunity for wider engagement, said Rachel Harkins Ullmann, executive director of the Given Institute, in a press release.

In an email, Ullmann said the goal of "Discover the Gift" relates to the event's threefold theme, which is that women receive the gift that they are, recognize the gifts they have been given and discover the gift only they can give to the world.

"The world needs women's gifts so desperately right now in a time of great pain and suffering," she said in the email. "Our maternal love, both spiritual and physical, can heal so many wounds plaguing society."

"Discover the Gift" will be a retreat-like event, featuring daily keynote speakers, leadership training tips, reflection questions for discussion, networking and prayer opportunities.

Despite the decision to postpone the in-person forum this year, Ullmann said technology has become a helpful and resourceful tool for organizing this inaugural virtual event. She said she is most excited about the livestreaming of Morning Prayer and Compline from religious sister convents around the country.

"We are bringing the prayers and unique gifts of consecrated women religious right into our homes," she said. "To be able to engage in intercessory and contemplative prayer is powerful," she said.

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More than 800 lay and religious women have registered for "Discover the Gift," according to Ullmann. She hopes that all attendees leave the virtual event with a "fervor for the Gospel and their own unique part in salvation history as a Catholic

female leader."

Ullmann said that the dignity and vocation of women need to be released into the church and the world now more than ever to "protect the vulnerable, provide direction in a time of crisis and mentor the next generation of female leaders."

"Discover the Gift" will kick off Wednesday at 8 p.m. Eastern time with a live introduction from the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington hosted by Ullmann; Montse Alvarado, vice president and executive director of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty; and Sr. Maria Juan Anderson, a Religious Sister of Mercy of Alma, Michigan.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan will give the opening blessing. The night will conclude with a keynote address titled "Casting the Vision" from Sr. Virginia Joy, a Sister of Life and director of the Respect Life Office for the New York Archdiocese.

Portions of the event programming will be provided in both English and Spanish.

Registration for "Discover the Gift" is free. To register and to view a summary of the event schedule, visit the Given Institute's website.

When registration is completed, users will receive an email containing the full event program that includes a detailed schedule, event links, speaker information, prayer prompts and reflection questions. Each event element will be recorded, allowing participants to go back and view materials at their convenience.

To learn more about the Given Institute and its mission, view the video.

[Sydney Clark is in graduate school at the University of Maryland, College Park, studying multiplatform journalism. She is a student member of the National Association of Black Journalists and a multimedia freelancer with Catholic News Service, the Hyattsville Life & Times, and College Park Here & Now.]