

# REGION II NEWS

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## Dioceses of Region II

### **New York State:**

Buffalo  
Brooklyn  
New York  
Ogdensburg  
Rochester  
Rockville Center  
Syracuse

### **Canada:**

Hamilton  
Kingston  
London  
Ottawa  
St. Catharines  
Sault Ste. Marie  
Toronto

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## **Archdiocese of Toronto**

### ***My Recent Experience in Guatemala***

**By Deacon Bert Cambre**

This past January, I spent eight days in Guatemala helping Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini in his efforts to restore the Permanent Diaconate in his diocese of San Marcos. San Marcos is a geographically large and very poor diocese which borders on Chiapas, Mexico. I had the opportunity to explain the diaconate to diocesan priests, consecrated religious, catechists and some deacons from the order of San Cajetan, which I did not know existed.

This initiative had started on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007, when we received his visit here sponsored by the Guatemalan community in Toronto. During a meeting of introduction with Archbishop Thomas Collins, Bishop Ramazzini asked whether I could help him with his efforts to restore the Permanent Diaconate in his diocese. Archbishop Collins, very generous and prompt in his support, approved and the trip was planned for January 2008.

My trip was unforgettable. Guatemala is small but very beau-

tiful mountainous country that borders on Mexico, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador and the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. I had never been in Guatemala before but was vaguely familiar with its recent very violent history. The eighteen-year civil war that started in 1954 as a consequence of the CIA engineered coup against Jacobo Arbenz had a devastating effect on the social fabric of the country. Guatemalans are normally fairly reserved and rather secretive people. Poet Wallace Stevens describes them as remoter than mountains ("A generation sealed, men remoter than mountains, women invisible in music and motion and colour. After that alien, point-blank, green and actual Guatemala") As a result of the recent history, they have become much more so.

It does not take long to experience Guatemala as a land of Martyrs. I arrived in Guatemala City and had to wait for Bishop Ramazzini who was at the Conference of Bishops. At the end of the meeting we would drive to San Marcos. During that time, I made a visit to the central square and the Cathedral. At the entrance of the Cathedral, there are pillars with the engraved names of those who died for their faith

during the civil war.

In those few days, in my conversations and observations, I sensed strongly the reality of how an elite of a few landowners, corporations and military keep a tight grip on exploiting the peasants for their benefit. I could observe with my own eyes the injustice and domination that crushes the poor. The followers of Jesus that speak on behalf of the justice and basic human rights are persecuted, tortured and killed.

There are hundreds of martyrs in Guatemala but a most noteworthy case caught my attention, that of Bishop Juan Gerardi. In 1980, while he was bishop of the Quiché, the most populous Indian province, he had narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. He almost became the second bishop to be murdered in Central America within a year. (During the preceding five hundred years, only one other bishop had been slain.)

Following the official end of the civil war in December 1996, Bishop Gerardi became the head of the truth commission sponsored by the UN. In April 1998, the commission's report *Guatemala: Never Again* was announced and copies of the first two volumes, "The Impact of the Violence" and "The Mechanisms of Horror" were made public. A few days later, on April 26, 1998 Bishop Gerardi was bludgeoned to death by the military as he arrived to the garage of his rectory beside San Sebastián's church.

I spent time praying in silence at that place besides the plaque that commemorates his death and also at the church right beside it. Francisco Goldman has written an interesting book "The Art of Political Murder" (ISBN-10;0-8021-1828-3) peeling the onion of the intrigue surrounding the murder of the bishop.

Another example of how dangerous it is to speak for your beliefs were the death threats Bishop Ramazzini, with whom I was staying, began receiving. He spoke on behalf of the peasants seeking proper environmental care. A Canadian mining company in his diocese was and still is destroying their habitat and poisoning their water. That death threat still hangs around him and those who work with him in San Marcos.

There is an interest and enthusiasm for the restoration of the Diaconate in San Marcos. We had well-attended, lively discussion sessions where the role of the Diaconate in Guatemala was explored as well as the difficulties of the undertaking for the very poor diocese and candidates. The conversations will no doubt continue. I introduced Bishop Ramazzini electronically to the people of CIDAL, the International Diaconate Centre in Latin America, which expands the resources and experiences available to him.

He drove me back to Guatemala City to catch my airplane along the "tourist" route (a seven-hour trip) going by the great volcanoes and lake Atitlan where I had further opportunity to experience Guatemala's breathtaking natural beauty.

## ***Diocese of St. Catharines***

### ***Employment Resource Program***

**By Deacon George Newman.**

In the St Catharines Diocese we are setting up an "Employment Resource Program" in the local jail to assist inmates to learn how to do a resume and write cover letters when applying for a job. We have obtained 6 laptops and memory sticks for 20 so that they can practice writing their resumes and take the information with them when they are released. In assisting them we will identify those who have literacy issues and help them with reading and composition. It is our hope, and that of the staff, that if the men can learn to read ads and do a decent application form, they will be able to get a job once they are released, and not have to return. We are just in the start-up stages, so I will keep you informed how it goes.

## *Diocese of Rochester*

### *Who are you, Deacon?*

by **George J. Welch**

In the past two years we have been asking ourselves that question “who are you?” Specifically we looked at the promises made at ordination that form us to be who we are. What does the promise mean to me today and what are the ways we live out those promises in our everyday life? Did we take them with us in our hearts as we walked out of Sacred Heart Cathedral on ordination day? Were the promises ready to spring into action? Do the promises help to answer the question “who are you deacon?” Now that formation is over, does the transformation continue?

An article by Father Thomas Keating helps to put the spiritual journey of “who are you” into context. His article was “The Four You’s”. He invited us to tune into the level of our being that is more us than we normally perceive ourselves to be. He did it with asking the same question four times with a different emphasis. The first time you ask who you are. Your answer is your general resume. Like going to a doctor’s office and giving your medical history or as deacons. I minister at St. Joseph’s Hospital, I was ordained 26 years ago, living in Pine City.

The second question has the emphasis, “Who ARE you?” This is more than your resume. It is your personality and character, your ego. I pray a lot in silence. I am drawn to the quiet and I love being with my grandchildren. Helping people who are wounded and prayer are my passions. These are the things that drive you and the values you live by.

The third time he asks the question he puts the emphasis on YOU. Here the deeper you seeks a relationship with God. This is you that people love even when they know your weakness and the things you don’t like about yourself. It is the place where you know that you

are dependent on God and cannot fix yourself. This is the true self in the Christian tradition. It is the confirmation that we are formed in the image and likeness of God. Here I know that I am in a relationship. I did promise to be open to the Holy Spirit. I am resolved to hold the mystery of faith especially through the praying of the scriptures, and I am resolved to deepen a spirit of prayer. Those promises of ordination are the third “you.”

The fourth “you” Thomas speaks about is the “you” of participating in union with God. It is the manifesting of God. It allows God’s love to manifest itself in our uniqueness. This is the part in our ordination when we resolved to shape our way of life always according to the example of Christ. We promised to imitate Christ and to put on Christ as St. Paul tells us. This is the stance of the person on the spiritual journey who says that I am God’s child and I participate in the life of the Trinity.

The challenge again is to be on the spiritual journey. The promise of diaconal ordination is one where you are called to a deeper relationship with God by serving the sick, poor and those who are not connected. This cannot be done unless your spiritual life is full. The diaconate is not a merit badge system where you have to earn your eagle award. You already are totally loved and are worthy of this service. God is simply there for you, and you only need to surrender to God’s love.

Last fall we gave out a questionnaire to the diaconal community gathered at Stella Maris for the retreat with Bishop Clark. We asked you if you were in relationship and, what was the relationship? Were you at the level of acquaintenship with God? Is your prayer more reflective using meditation and visualizing the good news? Are you more responsive in praying from your heart? Do you take time to just be with God? Who are you in your prayer? These are the elements that

define “who are you?” when it comes to your God.

The survey reflected many blessings of the diaconal community. We are a people of prayer. There were 40 people who returned the survey. The retreat had rooted us in our ordination promise to be a people of prayer. The survey reflected who we are as a people of prayer. The responses reveal a hunger for prayer, spirituality and diaconal service.

Defining prayer as a relationship with God the survey reflected images of God as Love, Creator, Friend and Father. These images are important on the spiritual journey. You cannot pray to someone who makes you afraid. The God who you know loves you invites you to prayer. The central prayer of Scriptures is the Our Father. This prayer grounds us in a relationship with a loving, comforting, forgiving, guiding Abba. The survey clearly indicated images of God that call us to prayer as relationship with a nurturing loving God.

The understanding of God is passed on to us by parents and family. The most intimate relationship of being family, being children teaches us how to pray. Being part of the family as church invites us into a relationship as prayer. Here the church answers the question of the disciples. “Lord, will you teach us how to pray?” The church teaches us how to pray as Jesus prayed. So beginning with the Our Father the family of God teaches us to pray. As we celebrate that we are God’s children our prayer life deepens. We consent to the presence and action of God. We surrender and accept we are the Beloved of God. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. The diaconal survey reflected that image and sense of God for our prayer.

When asked what was the greatest benefit in being a catholic, the top response was the sacraments especially the Eucharist. The sacraments are the public prayer of the church. They are directly connected to Jesus. They are models Jesus gave us of relationships in prayer where we are directly connected to Jesus’ life and ministry. We are directly connected to the Father. They reinforce in a living

way that we are connected and in relationship with God. We belong to God the Father, Abba. The spirit of God dwells with us. We feed on God’s very flesh. We are in an intimate relationship. We are as close as our very breath. Prayer is the connection to the Ultimate Source of our life. How wonderful that we connect to a God who wants to be with us. The God of Incarnation, Jesus, dwells with us and we access in prayer. The scriptures are foundational to the celebration of all the sacraments.

The responses also remarked that our history of faith is our greatest gift. We are connected over time. We are part of the communion of saints. Time is not only the chronological time, but it is kairós where we are all connected in the present moment. We are connected through kronos as we grow in our understanding of prayer from childhood to adulthood. At our Eucharist we are present at the Last Supper, we are with Jesus just as if it was two thousand years ago. We are in that close relationship that goes beyond time and thoughts. It is the now. Walter Cronkite used to say, “You are there”. For us believers in Jesus we are really there at our mass and history is the now.

The responses on personal prayer were as diverse as those who filled out the survey. They were wonderful in their diversity and their unity. Meditation or Contemplative prayer was the most indicated personal prayer followed by Liturgy of the Hours and Mass.

Praying the Scriptures or Lectio Divina was used frequently. The moments of Lectio enriches and centers all of our prayer as we move from spiritual reading, reflecting on our reading and experiences and then to responding in our prayer to how our God has touched us. The word of God in a special way is tied to our praying the Liturgy of the Hours. We are invited to a deeper relationship in our connecting through the Word of God. We are invited to be close to our Abba. As a diaconal community we are steeped in the scriptures, the Word of God.

Prayer methods used frequently are Centering Prayer, Mental Prayer, Rosary, Lectio and

Prayer of the Heart. Each reflects prayer that is of the heart. They are both of the Kataphatic and Apophatic tradition or the Discursive and Contemplative. Some are prayers where we are the initiator. We give praise, thanksgiving, contrition and supplication. We realize as children of God we give back. This is the time when we go to God. This also called Kataphatic prayer as we use our rational self enlightened by faith. It is further the use of our reason, imagination and memory to be in relationship with God. The Apophatic prayer is the exercise of pure faith; "resting in God" as Gregory the Great called it. We simply maintain our loving attention to the Divine presence. This prayer leads us into contemplation. The response on the survey indicated a fullness of contemplative prayer in the diaconal community.

Prayer draws us to see and hear the signs of the times. This is a process of conversion or transformation. Prayer has to be practiced. The relationship that prayer gives us is the foundation for action. Conversion comes out of a relationship with the source of all Goodness, Beauty and Truth. As Bishop Clark reminded us, "we cannot give hope to others if we are not connected to the hope of the Gospel." We proclaim the Word of God. The story is told about the student who goes to the rabbi and excitedly tells him that he has gone through the whole of the Torah. That is fine said the rabbi but has the Torah gone through you? Do we let the hope of the Gospel into our hearts? This is where our prayer comes in. This is where we let the scriptures go through us in prayer.

As deacons the survey reflected that in our prayer we open ourselves to hear the voice of those who are troubled. In these prayers you are present to the hurt and pain in the present moment. You are as Richard Rohr and Thomas Keating both say, "Present to the Presence." You are therefore with those whom you minister with and for. This practice of being with the poor and the hungry and disenfranchised in prayer is central to our ministry. The prayer of the present moment invites you to be present to those who are outsiders, overlooked. Your diaconal prayer is one of solidarity with the out-

sider. Your prayer enables you to be with them. There are several prayer practices that were not mentioned specifically that help in praying while in action. They are from the contemplative dimension of the gospel and include the Welcoming Prayer, Forgiveness Prayer, Breath Prayer, and Prayer of compassion. I would also include Lectio Divina and Active prayer sentences here as well.

The survey asked who your favorite saint was. There were no prompts. The reason for your selection was the only prompt. Out of those responding over half indicated Francis of Assisi, followed by Stephen, Therese of Lisieux, and Joseph the foster father of Jesus. Francis is a wonderful example of diaconal service and attitude toward the outsiders we are ordained to serve. Francis did not seek any clerical state for his followers. He did not want ordination for any. He agreed to tonsure to protect those who belonged to the little brothers, and he himself accepted ordination to the diaconate so he could preach and not be victimized by the local clergy. It wasn't until after his death that Franciscans were ordained to the priesthood. Francis spirit of prayer was one of presence among the wounded. He built the church of the people and the church of the heart. His most striking quality was his love of the Jesus the suffering servant.

Francis is a model for the deacon. He came to serve. He was attuned to the signs of the times and lived and preached the sacred word. His prayer life was rich giving him strength to serve others. Francis is a model for diaconal spirituality because he was a servant leader. He served others out of a deep relationship with Jesus. He saw the wounds of Christ in the people of Umbria. So we are called through prayer to see in the wounds of the people of the Rochester Diocese the wounds of Jesus.

The choices of Ss. Therese, Stephen and Joseph have both a contemplative and action connection to the Gospel. All of them expressed how they were totally in love with God. All of them faced tough decisions and chose love. They were servant leaders.

They gave their greatest messages in silence of Nazareth, Lisieux and martyrdom. So in following them, the deacon is called to simplicity, solitude and silence. The diaconal community is called to love in the midst of the unloved, unwashed and unwanted. Prayer then of the diaconal community is a model for us of awareness and consent to the presence and action of God inside ourselves and those with whom we make the journey of faith.

In looking at the survey the responses described where the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit come from. One respondent said that spirituality is our connection with God. It is realizing that the teaching of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit is for all of us. It is life lived in connection with a loving God. The image of the Trinity as a dance gives emphasis to the relationship. We are in constant union, and the love of God flows out to us. The deacon's prayer life is a call to be in relationship.

Forty percent of those filling out the form pray from 30-45 minutes in personal prayer time a day. Thirty percent pray 60 minutes or more a day. These responses indicate the given value of prayer and the discipline of prayer among the diaconal community. There were another thirty percent who did not respond to the question.

In looking at retreats and Spiritual experiences, Cursillio was the most checked off of the twenty different options on the survey. Marriage Encounter and Directed Retreats were the next, followed by holy hours.

The next set of retreats or prayer practices were more contemplative or Apophatic. Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, Ignatian Exercises and Life in the Spirit were all indicated as used by many respondents. While most respondents indicated their prayer was discursive or Kataphatic. There is some exposure to the Contemplative Prayer tradition of the church. While this is changing with the Spirituality course in formation and the centering prayer practices of Contemplative Outreach. The contemplative prayer practices are an attempt to respond to the hunger for prayer today. Father Thomas Keating said, "The Christian religion is about transformation of consciousness."

The last question was "what supports your relationship with God?" What are the spiritual dimensions of your life as a deacon? What spiritual dimensions support you as a servant leader? Spiritual direction, support groups and prayer groups were the top three responses. The community of faith's response to living a life of service is helpful. The diaconal community is awake to the reality that we need support to be servant leaders. Deacon Francis of Assisi is attributed with the following: "Proclaim the gospel and when necessary use words." Our prayer life is a way of transformation for ourselves and it is a way to proclaim the gospel.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace." The fruit of our prayer is the living out of our promises at ordination. We are called to affirm others. Prayer gives us the strength and peace to be servants in ministry. Prayer is the response to the busy, frenetic, non-listening world we walk about in.

Thomas Merton wrote, "The more I am able to affirm others, to say yes to them in myself by discovering them in myself and myself in them the more real I am. I am fully real if my own heart says yes to everyone." Our prayer life is critical to active ministry. Prayer is an invitation to awareness of the movement of the Spirit within each of us. The Spirit of love, the spirit of consent to the presence of God in our daily life is the foundation of service prayer. When we are open to transformation through our consent, surrender, acceptance of God's love in the promises made for us at baptism and by us at our ordination. We start by an awareness that we are called to be holy. We are awakening to the potential to be Children of God.

The purpose of this article was to provide a reflection on the goodness, truth and beauty of the spiritual dimensions of the diaconal community of Rochester as seen through our ordination, focus groups on prayer and the survey. All this reflects the experience of the diaconal community. All of these experiences reflect the person of Jesus and our experience with Him who is "the way the truth and the life." When we pray we are following the way.

