The Permanent Diaconate Community—Diocese of Rochester

Deacon News

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Volume II Issue I

Fall 2006

Key Dates to Remember

- **February 4, 2007** Formation Sunday
- **March 16-20, 2007** Canonical Retreat
- **March 23-24, 2007** Phoebe's Friends Retreat
- **April 18, 2007** Ministerium Meeting
- **April 22, 2007** Formation Sunday
- **April 28, 2007** 25th Anniversary/ Convocation
- **June 2, 2007** Ordination
- **July 27-29, 2007** Region II Convocation in Toronto

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During these past three months, our community has mourned the passing of two of our long-time members. Deacon Al Bergeron was called home by the Lord on September 17. He was a member of the class of 1987 and had just celebrated his twentieth anniversary of ordination. As many of you know, Al worked in journalism for many years. Before his death, Al wrote an article about a personal meditation experience and submitted it to *Deacon Digest* for publication. That article was accepted and published in the November/ December issue of the magazine. It is a wonderful tribute to Al and a thought-provoking Christmas gift to the community. The article is reprinted in this news letter.

On November 8, Kathleen Zierle lost her long and courageous battle with Alzheimer's disease and joined her husband, Deacon John Zierle, at the heavenly banquet. I will always remember the first time that I visited Kay, and she did not have a clue to my identity. It was a vivid reminder of the insidiousness of this disease. The community will not soon forget this vivacious faith-filled woman who showed us how to confront something terrible with a deep sense of peace and trust in the Lord.

Early in November, Deacon Ray Dupelchain, the Assistant Diaconate Director of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, spent a couple of days visiting with and thanking the deacons of the Rochester diocese for their generous support during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He explained to us the difficulties that folks in the region have encountered since the hurricane and the fact that they will need help far into the future. The deacons he met with assured him that our community will continue in their efforts.

Please put the date of Saturday, April 28, 2007, on your calendar and circle it. The community will gather that day for a convocation that will be designed to celebrate 25 years of diaconal service in the Diocese of Rochester. It will be a very special event!

Juli and I would like to take this opportunity to wish the diaconate community a joyous Christmas and a blessed New Year! You will be in our thoughts and prayers.

Peace, *David*

DEACON PERSONNEL BOARD NEWS

"It ain't over till it's over"

By Deacon Larry Van Etten
(Chair of the Deacon Personnel Board)

What does that mean? Clearly it's about the game of baseball! But of course, we know this is a maxim that can be applied more broadly than just to sports. In our church, we have two great sacraments of service – Marriage and Holy Orders. Both matter greatly to God. Both have "innings" that go well with lots of "runs and hits" and some that are a filled with "errors". But every inning is an opportunity to learn and improve. And in the end, with God's help, if we keep stepping up to the plate, we will win! And for those of us who are both married and ordained, we get to win two games at the same time!

But the key to winning lies in our relationship with God, our never ending efforts to learn and grow, and our willingness to keep stepping up to the plate. So what does this have to do with anything?

In the last issue we talked about the need for ongoing growth in our Spiritual lives. Read the article in this issue by George Welch! The conversation continues. Now we'd like to expand the topic a little bit and talk about the four ways we are called to learn and grow until the "game is over". Those four ways are: Human, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Pastoral. My sense is that all of us are always growing in all four areas. Life in ministry provides ample opportunity for growth.

At the same time, it is good to take the time to stop and ask ourselves two questions. And the best time to ask these questions is on our anniversary of Ordination or Marriage. And the two questions are these. How did I grow last year in all these areas? When thinking about our Ordination we might ask ourselves if our prayer life has deepened, if we have come to know ourselves better – our strengths and weaknesses, if we have learned something new about our faith, and if we have further honed our skills for ministering to those in need.

That's looking back. Then we look forward. Rather than leaving our growth in the coming year to unfold by itself, God asks us to take an active role in the process. For example, what form of prayer would you like to learn more about and then practice? What pastoral skill would you like to work on and apply? What intellectual/theological subject interests you right now? Are you ready to exercise a little more? The latter is my nemesis.

If we can do this "look back – look forward" once a year, it will change what we do. Maybe only in subtle ways, but it will change things. If we ask God in prayer what he wants for us in the coming year, I think he will point us in the right direction in each of these four areas. He will do so because He loves us and wants to draw us more deeply into Himself. He will also do it because He sees the needs of others who will come to us in the coming year and He wants us to prepare. This will be true in every year we have left until He calls us home.

And so, "It ain't over till it's over". How have you grown in the past year? Where does God call you to grow in the year to come? Make a plan! Then watch it unfold with God's help.

Deacon Personnel Board
2005-2006

Deacon Robert and Katherine Burke (585) 288-2592
Deacon Paul and Barbara Clement (585)335-8221
Deacon Don and Mary Germano (585)223-3843
Deacon Roger Loomis (585) 367-9414
Deacon Mike and Cathy McGuire (585) 229-5359
Deacons Brian and Lynne McNulty (585) 328-4494
Deacon David Palma (Ex officio) (585) 328-3210
Deacon Tom and Barbara Schrage (585)637-6612
Deacon Larry and Margot Van Etten (585) 426-1149
Deacon Carlos and Ceferina Vargas (585) 328-9816
Deacon George and Paula Welch (607)732-5023

SAINT STEPHEN'S DIACONAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

www.ssdca.org

SSDCA PRESIDENT'S NOTES

by Deacon Dan Pavlina
(President, St. Stephen's Diaconal Community Association)

"Be Not Afraid". I don't know if this applies more to me, having to fill Larry Feasel's shoes, or you, the community about to undergo a change of leadership. I have to admit that I understand the call to lead this august group about as well as I understand the call to the diaconate, that is, not at all, but know that you will receive my best efforts.

I believe two things; we preach out of our experiences and we lead out of our own needs. That being said, let me lay out my vision for the Association for the next couple of years…barring any unforeseen events, like my impeachment.

Be Not Afraid. You won't be seeing wholesale changes in SSDCA. I feel this group has become very successful at bringing to reality the mission stated in the Constitution, to build and nurture community. Going back to my own personal needs, one area I would like us to focus on is in Article III Section III that says one of the purposes of SSDCA is to foster the education and spiritual growth of our members. Other groups are doing an amazing job of the educational component. What I would like to do is offer additional opportunities to come together to foster a deeper, more profound love for our brother, Jesus. I welcome any and all suggestions for how these opportunities may shape up.

Be Not Afraid. I intend, like my predecessor, to be visible and available. That visibility and availability will also extend to the formation community. I want, and indeed need, to know your thoughts, needs, hopes and desires for SSDCA. I will try to attend at least some of the regional meetings to gather your thoughts. I also want your constant feedback on how I am doing as President. Don't worry about hurting my feelings. Be honest with your feedback. As one who officiates high school football in the fall, I am used to hearing opinions that may not agree with my own.

I think Article III, Section IV holds a real opportunity for our group. It states that another of our purposes is to foster understanding among the clergy of the Diocese. As we continue to experience a decline in the number of priests, it will be critical for us to keep closely in touch with them to understand their needs, fears and vision. Again, I welcome all input.

Be Not Afraid. I took on this position, not out of any desire for myself, but because I saw an opportunity to give back to a group that has given so much to me since the summer of 1999. I want SSDCA, and through it, all of us to reach our fullest potential for service to the people of God in the diocese of Rochester. Know that you, your families and your parish families are constantly in my prayers. Your prayers for SSDCA, and me, would be greatly appreciated. I remain your humble servant.

SSDCA Officers for 2005-2006

President: Dcn. Dan & Jeanne Pavlina (607)243-8460
Vice President: Dcn. Peter & Maureen Niche (315) 986-3818
Secretary: Dcn. Tom & Margaret Cleary (585) 223-4310
Treasurer: Dcn. Tom & Nancy Beck (585)621-5570
Coordinating Regional Vice Presidents-
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Southern Tier
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Monroe East
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Monroe West
Vacant
Eastern Lakes
Dcn. George and Elaine Spezzano (585) 243-3781-
Western Lakes
Past President: Dcn. Larry & Anne Feasel (585)381-6604
Dcn. David Palma (Ex officio) (585) 328-3210

Deacon Community News - General Updates

***Deaths in our Community*:**

(Please keep the following families in your prayers during their difficult journeys.)

Pete Drobach—(brother-in-law of Deacon Brian McNulty) went home to the Lord on August 20, 2006.

Joan Hurley—(mother of Deacon Dan Hurley) went home to the Lord during the morning of September 7, 2006.

Deacon Al Bergeron— (Class of 1986) died peacefully surrounded by family on Sunday evening, September 17, 2006, at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Leoncio Pacete—(brother of Candidate Al Pacete) of Manila, Philippines, went home to the Lord on October, 16,2006.

Virginia Voltmer— (mother of Monette who is the wife of Deacon Mike) went to the Lord October 12, 2006, at 92 years of age.

Rose Koch—(mother of Nancy Kohlmeier who is the wife of Candidate Ed) passed away peacefully on October 16, 2006.

Kathleen Zierle— (widow of Deacon John -Class of 1984) went home to the Lord on Thursday, November 9, 2006, at St. John's Home.

Jeff Briggs— (brother-in-law of Candidate Robert and Pam Colomaio) went home to be with the Lord after a 16-month struggle with lung cancer on November 11, 2006.

Walt Smith— (father of Sue Behe who is the wife of Candidate Tom) went to his eternal rest on November 24, 2006.

Bonnie Girvin—(sister-in-law of Deacon Peter and Maureen Niche) passed away suddenly on December 5, 2006.

The following people have asked for the prayers of the community— Kevin Dziuba, Ray Henry, Belinda Brasley, Mark Neroni, Susan Douglas Doyle, Bonnie Wilson, Emily, Al Correira, Mary Kiley, Rose Kohlmeier, Michelle Steiger, Rose Marie Sergeant, Jeremy Lyon, Deacon Dick Gaebel, Warren Ingham, Frances Zastrow, Brenda Neroni, Deacon Bill Lenhart, June Schug, Joan Workmaster, Tomandl Family, Mary Colomaio, Karen Prave, Grace D'Amico, Sam Palma, Catherine Bergeron, Deacon Mike Krupiarz, Pearl Henry, Kaitlin Girvin, Stephen Mahoney, Walt Smith, Heather Loiacono, Jennifer Huley, Mary Hess, Deacon John Prave, Barbara Lacy, Bettie von Hagn, Keith Lohouse, Christopher Lawson, Debbie and Glenna Antenucci,

(Continued on page 6)

REPORT OF THE OUT-GOING PRESIDENT

By Deacon Larry Feasel

Anne and I have completed our sixth year on the Saint Stephen's Board and are concluding our two years as President. We thank all of you and especially our fellow board members for this opportunity to serve you. Together we have made changes in how the organization functions, handles its finances and provides services to the membership. SSDCA tithes its membership dues for the *Saint Lawrence Fund*, pays the costs for the retreat master, provides an organizational web site and free e-mail for all members, and helps other organizations with expenses. It is also our privilege to recognize diakonia through the *Zawacki Award*. Central to our mission is ***Community.*** It is a commitment in our very name All of the events SSDCA sponsors - the picnics, the breakfasts before ordination, the listening sessions/ regional meetings, and the retreat - have provided occasions to build community through gathering and enjoying each others' company. Our only regret is that more members of the order have not been able to be present and share in the spirit. Communication among deacons is probably at its best. However, the face to face gatherings to share experiences and prayer need to grow.

We are particularly concerned that so many missed this year's retreat. We invited Father Sebastian Falcone to serve as our retreat master for the opening of the twenty-fifth year of the diaconate in the Diocese of Rochester. Sebastian shared with us four models for diaconal service from scripture - Nicodemus from John's gospel, the Good Samaritan from Luke's Gospel, the Servant from Isaiah 40-52, and our Mother Mary. In each of these models he also integrated the history of the establishment of the diaconate in our diocese, what the Catechism says about the diaconate, and the National Norms for formation and continuing growth of deacons. His presentations were inspiring and challenging. Hopefully, a way will be found to bring Father's message to those who couldn't participate.

Once again, thank you for your support and have a blest Christmas.

FORMATION NEWS

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Introducing the Class of 2006

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Deacon Murray Henry

I was born and raised in Canandaigua, NY, and have been a lifetime member of St Mary's Parish, attending grade school there through the 60's. In 1974 Pearl and I married and soon found ourselves to be the parents of a beautiful little girl. That little girl, Dixie Lynn Henry, is now 31 years old and she is an archaeologist for the State of Maryland. She and her husband own an old row house in Baltimore. I am very proud of the fact that Dixie is the youngest person to receive a Ph.D. is archaeology in Cornell University's history.

For the past 28 years I have been a member of the Ontario County Sheriff's Department where I currently serve as a division chief. As such I am responsible for the county's 911 Center. Along the way, with Pearl pushing and shoving, I have received an Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice and a Bachelor's Degree in adult education and communication. The Masters from St. Bernard's pretty much rounds out my formal education. I don't want our daughter to think I am trying to compete with her.

Five years ago, I was approached by my longtime friend and teaching associate, Deacon Larry Feasel, and he suggested that I should give some thought to the diaconate formation program. I can remember telling Larry, "You should know that my Catholicism was very important to me for my first 18 years, and it is very important to me now but there was a very large chunk of time in between when that was not the case." Larry's response was that my years of struggle would one day make me a better deacon. I felt that God might be calling.

I went home that day and told Pearl that we needed to take a walk. As we made our way around the yard, admiring all of the trees that we have planted over the past thirty years, I told her about the conversation with Deacon Feasel. I told her that I thought I might just do this thing that he had proposed. Pearl said, "I was wondering how long it would take you to figure that out." Again, I felt that God might be calling.

I think the next conversation that I had about this decision to apply to the formation program was with my pastor, Father Tom Mull. Once again I received great support and affirmation. Father Tom assured Pearl and me that he would walk this journey with us. By this point I was sure that God was calling me to serve him and his people through the ministry of the diaconate.



So, here I am almost five years later, about to experience the Sacrament of Holy Orders. As Bishop Clark lays his hands on me and calls upon the Holy Spirit, I will be grateful for many things. One of those things for which I will forever thank our Creator is the friendships which I have formed with Paul and Frank and Mark, my diaconal classmates. These men and their wives have supported Pearl and I when we needed support. They have prayed for us when we needed prayer. And they have just been there for us when we needed someone to be there. God has blessed Pearl and me in many ways, but he has especially blessed us with these friends.

I have no idea where I will be asked to serve. I

leave that up to Bishop Clark and the Holy Spirit. I do know that wherever it is, I shall work to welcome people to our faith community. There were many years when I did not feel welcomed in the Catholic family. Then, one day, I walked into St. Mary's and I walked into the confessional and I had a heart to heart talk with God through the priest that was offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That priest literally said to me, "Welcome back." I hope that in my service as a deacon I can reach out to those on the edges, to those who just need to see a welcoming smile, to those who somehow have been left behind and I will say to them, "Welcome back---we need you---we love you"

During these four years of formation, Pearl and I have not taken a vacation. It seemed as if every day was filled with going to class, or reading some books, or writing some papers, or working in my summer field assignments. We will spend a week this fall in a cabin, hidden high in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. We will spend the time relaxing. We will spend the time unwinding. But mostly we will spend the time thanking God for the four years in formation and for the opportunity to serve God, to serve our fellow human beings, to serve our Church in the Permanent Diaconate.

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(Continued from Page 4.)

Gene Cleary, Madison Raheb, Deacon Ed Smith, Paul T. Norman, Deacon Leo & Helen Kester, Mary Opper, Lew Corsaro, Katherine Behe, Fr. Sebastian Falcone, Mary Hess, Deacon Tony Mercadel, Zack Lohouse, Mary Mahany, Matthew Oliveri, Jeanne Hook, Marge Connor, Mark Kershner, Marjanne Crino, Deacon Ken Arnold, Trish La Fortune, Amy Kluchko, Jeanne Pavlina, Peggy Brown, Kathie Lenhart, Deacon Charles Dispenza, Clara Solan, Bonnie Haber, the Habers' daughter, Deacon Eugene and Marie Fuerst and all those who are in need of our prayers during this Fall.

(If you have any news to share or would like to ask for prayers, please call the Deacon Personnel office: (585)-328-3210; or e-mail at Palma@dor.org)

Deacon Frank Pettrone

"As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God" (Ps 42:1). As I look back on my life, it seems that this was the mantra of my heart; even at those times when I had no idea that was the case.

I grew up in Rochester and attended St. Anthony's Elementary School, Aquinas High School and St. John Fisher College, finishing my BS degree in Chemistry at R.I.T. I was active in the Church as a youth but fell away completely when going to college. I had no idea of what I was giving up back then.

The turning point of my life was marrying my beautiful wife Elizabeth. I just love the name Elizabeth! It means "Consecrated to God", which she truly is. There were certainly many people in my life whom the Lord worked through to bring me back home to the Church; but there has been only one that God used in such a profound way to open my heart. Liz pointed the way and the Holy Spirit did the rest. It was as though Liz started a snowball down a snowy mountain and the end result was an avalanche. Once I started delving into the Faith, I found what my heart had been searching for all along. I started going to daily mass, making holy hours, and reading everything I could get my hands on. Finding faith and continuing on this faith journey is like falling in love over and over again.



I remember well the first time I started getting involved in the Church in my adult life. I was at daily mass, and a young priest came out to ask if anyone would like to volunteer to lector. I was sitting toward the front of the church, and I looked around behind me on my left and then behind me on my right. When he was about to give up, since no one raised their hand, I sheepishly raised mine. From that point on in my life, I just kept raising my hand. I was involved in too many activities to even

mention at that point. Much later, in the year 2000, someone approached me and said, "You should really consider becoming a deacon." In 2001, before I made my application to the program, I remember praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament, asking the Lord for some guidance as to whether I should apply or not. That very day, three different people (who didn't even know I was considering the diaconate) came up to me and told me I would make a good deacon and that I should consider applying. I took the hint! The day that I received my letter accepting me into the program, I found myself in front of the Blessed Sacrament again, speechless.

I have met so many wonderful people during the formation program and my time at St. Bernard's. I can't even believe that those four years are behind me now as I anticipate ordination this Saturday. I am so very grateful to my wife Liz, my children: Stephen, Daniel and Christine, my parents, Liz's parents, all my family and friends and everyone that has supported me in word, deed, and prayer. On Saturday, I will be humbled to process in with my beautiful wife Liz, and with my good friends, Paul & Leslie, Murray & Pearl and Mark & Barb. I am so very grateful for God's gift of their friendship. "A friend loves at all times." (Prv 17:17)

As I write this article, I am struck by the fact that today is the Feast of the Visitation, three days before my ordination. In Luke's Gospel today we hear Elizabeth exclaim "And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" I know that the Blessed Mother has led me to her Son, Jesus. And I also know that I am truly in awe that this has happened in my life. There are absolutely no words of joy, thanksgiving or praise that would express the awe in my being to know that the Lord graces me with His mercy. How does this happen to me? I find myself asking the same question as Elizabeth and I am so very humbled by the circumstances surrounding it. I can only echo Mary's Magnificat in which she proclaims, "he has remembered his promise of mercy." God didn't choose me because my life had been exemplary or because I was found worthy in that sense. God chose me because He has made me aware of the depth of His love and mercy. I can only respond with gratitude and in my lowliness. It is my prayer that God gives me the grace and strength to be a good servant and to learn to love as Jesus loves.

Looking back and looking forward from this point in my life, the words of the psalmist seem most appropriate. "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready. I will sing, I will sing your praise. Awake, my soul; awake, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn. I will thank you, Lord, among the peoples, among the nations I will praise you for your love reaches to the heavens; and your truth to the skies. O God, arise above the heavens; may your glory shine on earth!" (Ps 57)



Deacon Paul Virgilio

Originally from East Rochester, with a short term stay in Jamaica, NY, my parents Andrew and Sue and my three siblings David, Andrea and Anita migrated to Brockport where I attended public grammar school. Brockport has been my home since then (except for a short few years in Hamlin). I attended Aquinas Institute for four years and graduated in 1972. In 1977, I married my wife Leslie, and in 1980 we celebrated the birth of our only son Brian. Brian now resides in Delaware with his wife Monica. I am currently an employee of Hahn Automotive Warehouse in Rochester, NY, where I have office responsibilities that include maintaining the electronic data files to support pricing for auto parts stores within our distribution chain, which includes the East Coast and Midwest. Additionally, I oversee many customer database maintenance concerns.

Much has contributed to where I find myself today, that is, soon to be ordained to the permanent diaconate in the diocese of Rochester. I find it most interesting that the things that brought me here include my Catholic upbringing – I am the

beneficiary of wonderfully rooted Catholic grandparents and parents, whose patience and guidance were both beyond measure. I also credit my wife and son, and a group of three wonderfully loving siblings, who always encouraged me to be who I am and never judged me unworthy of anything. I consider myself fortunate to have been repeatedly invited to participate in many goings on at Nativity Parish (my spiritual home since 1961). Each invitation led to something new; each invitation brought me to a deeper awareness of my calling to the diaconate. I am blessed to have known great Spiritual leaders in my community; the latest is my present pastor, Fr. Peter Enyan-Boadu. The contributors to my spiritual journey would be less than complete if I failed to mention the closeness of my Godmother Thelma, my Spiritual Director, relatives and friends who have prayed for me and continue to encourage me in every way; not least among others is my parish family.

Today I find myself at the end of four years of formation and study. I recently completed the academic requirements and graduated from St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. With four years of careful discernment and academic preparation behind me and an ordination and a life long discernment ahead of me, I must now open a new chapter of my life - as an ordained deacon within the diocese of Rochester.



While I have taken part in many different ministries (Catholic Worker House, Mentoring, Hospital visitation and urban parish ministry) I am particularly interested in ministering to the infirm or those confined to their homes. I gravitate toward the very powerful presence of God that I experience in this unique and critical ministry. Ministry to the sick and home-bound contributes to the building-up of our community. In the words of my pastor, it is the "building of the kingdom of God on earth".

I am very excited to be serving the diocese of Rochester. My family and I anxiously await ordination day.

SPIRITUALITY

Transformation and Spirituality in a Ministry of Service

By Deacon George Welch

Our baptism and our order call us to continuous conversion. We are called to a relationship. As a deacon in my twenty-fifth year of ministry I have found the Wisdom sayings of Jesus call us to a continuous growth in spirituality. "…But when you pray go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matt. 6:6) So from this contemplative practice I hope to share with you why contemplative prayer is nourishment for active ministry.

The deacon is called to a rich spirituality that calls for the integration of the head (formation) heart (conversion) and hand (service). In relationships it is important to notice when someone shows up for us. Yet the truth is that we become preoccupied with all we have to do that we look right through people and neglect even those we love. Being open and present for others doesn't happen because you wish it. It requires attention and intention. If we cannot develop human relationships on the fly we cannot expect to develop a relationship with the Di-

vine without intention and attention. Learning to notice when God shows up is a huge part of the spiritual journey. Opening ourselves to the presence and action of God in our life leads us to a life in the Spirit and an opening of our crowded lives to the movements of the Spirit.

The ordination for deacon provides insight into diaconal spirituality. Before the deacon's promise of obedience in the ordination rite the Bishop asks four questions that shed light on the spirituality of prayer, study and action. He asks if the candidate *is willing to be open to the Holy Spirit* by the laying on of hands. This Spirit is the Spirit of love and life. It is the timeless call to transformation. It is a call that asks: are you open to an intimate relationship with God? You are invited to open yourself to the Divine Presence.

The second question asks "*are you resolved to hold the mystery of faith?"* We hold that mystery through the Scriptures. The gospel is seen as the transformative word that brings us into this life in the spirit. Are we grounded in the word? Do we pray the scriptures and invite that living word into our resurrected life with Christ not just resuscitated life? The second examination calls us to be spirituality grounded in the scriptures.

The third examination asks "*are you resolved to maintain and deepen a spirit of prayer?*" This is yet another call to deeper spirituality. Prayer is a relationship. Our call therefore is to a deeper and continuing transforming relationship with the reality of the God in our lives. Our prayer is grounded in scripture. Our promise is to celebrate those scriptures in our life by celebrating the liturgy of the hours. We find ourselves pulled into the loving embrace of Abba, Father who is waiting for us to respond to that relationship. A spirit of prayer shows itself through our consent to the presence and action of God. Prayer is the language of love. It is a way of being in love with God. This contemplative prayer does not replace other prayer, but it enhances and draws us back to prayers that enhance our relationship with God.

The last examination challenges us in our spirituality to put on Christ. The bishop asks, *"Are you resolved to shape your way of life always according to the example of Christ?"* This is the foundation of our spirituality of service to not only follow the example of Jesus but to put on Christ. The contemplative dimensions of the gospel are therefore integral to diaconal spirituality. We are speaking of here, "You must be born from above" (John 3:70, or "Unless a grain of wheat fall into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24) or more strikingly, "for whoever wants to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). As Christians in ministry we are called to transformation of the human person.

In the liturgy the candidate prostrates for the Litany of the Saints. Then the Bishop concludes the prayer for the candidates, "*we ask you to bless them and make them holy*". We are reminded just before the laying on of hands that we are called to be holy. We are called to put on Christ. We are called to live the Paschal Mystery by letting go of our false self and to put on Jesus. We are called to be in a relationship with a God who loves us and calls us to serve. Holiness is being aware of the spiritual. This relationship goes beyond the ordinary awareness of life. Our awakening is to greater self knowledge. We are not plagued by a sense of isolation and anxiety that is so prevalent with the ordinary level of seeing the world. Jesus the healer and person of prayer is our model.

The question from those who seek a deeper spirituality is: what is your method? The answer Basil Pennington gave is that our whole life is our method. As deacons we are called as the early Christian to enter into "The Way". Jesus is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," He was clear that "greater love than this no man hath than he lay down his life for his friend". The way for us Christians is to love the Lord our God and one another. We are called to be the grain of wheat.

When we started on this Way of service our spiritual dimension was at the personal level, and we gathered information on how this life would affect us and the choices we were to make about this way of life. The formation program continued to

give us information as we began to form ourselves. We began to pay attention to the unfolding of the spirit in the lives of those who believe. Yet there are so many obstacles to paying attention in our culture. The movement of the spirit needs to be addressed in retreats and liturgies

The Spiritual life never stops to be addressed in this rite, mainly to be transformed. We are called to continue to grow in our life with Christ. This may also be referred to as a conversion. Our lives are cluttered with the material. Conversion is yet another name for this process of transformation. It may also be called Contemplation which again is simply paying attention. Contemplation is simply reading reality from the inside out. It is prayer that transforms, and brings us to an awareness of the sacred. All of us have our inner work. We are all called to Contemplation.

Spirituality is not achieved overnight. It is our growing experience of the sacred. The vocation to diaconal ministry calls us to the contemplative dimension of the gospel. The path of contemplation was described by Guigo II as a ladder that helps us ascend to the heavens. This was referred to as Lectio Divina and the progressive steps lead to a contemplative life. The Ladder of Monks suggested that Spirituality was achieved by the following of four acts. First there was *attentive reading of the scriptures*, then meditation to probe them for their hidden truth, then prayer that turned the heart from the scriptures to God, and finally contemplation as the transcending of self in union with God.

The most striking point said Basil Pennington about this practice of transformation is its simplicity. All we need to do is open ourselves. God does the rest. It is not easy, but it is a clear path. Openness is the main ingredient plus making a space and time in your hearts. This is the way to make the first great commandment to love God with your whole mind, our whole heart, our whole soul and our whole strength real in our life.

Understanding that we are in conversion throughout our whole life is a key to diaconal spirituality. We are called to a conversion of heart. Are we in love with God? What does that relationship look like? What are my loving practices? Because the contemplative practices invite that intimacy with God, they are ways for those in ministry to grow stronger and receive comfort and peace.

Each member of the community comes to his or her walk with God from a diversity of culture, experience and commitment. The richness of this community has many spiritual practices to share. The contemplative prayer practices include the following as examples:
1. Centering Prayer 2. Praying the Scripture (Lectio Divina) 3. Prayer of intention and Attention. 4. Welcoming Prayer.

In Second Corinthians 3:18 we are invited to transformation. "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." We are simply called to move into our hearts. We are called to be like Mary the first contemplative who pondered these things in her heart. What we are called to is a Divine encounter. That is what enlivens these relationships.

When you responded to the examination questions on ordination day you were not at the end of process but at the beginning. You were invited to be in relationship and pray from your hearts. The prayer is not specific words or even actions. Prayer is a way of life. We are not in this relationship alone. God is for us. Abba, Father is waiting for us to respond.

In the prayer of Consecration the Bishop is our Abba, and he prays, "*Lord, send forth upon them the Holy Spirit, that they may be strengthened by the gift of the sevenfold grace to carry out faithfully the work of the ministry. May they excel in every virtue: in love that is sincere, in concern for the sick and the poor, in unassuming authority, in self-discipline, and in holiness in life.* We are called to holiness, a relationship with God.

Do you desire a closer and more intimate walk

with Christ? We are called to that relationship and the practices that will help us get there. Our next step is to say amen and to find the spirituality that sustains so that you can put on Christ."

This short essay is a knock on the door of our hearts. It is an invitation to self discovery and to realize that there is such richness in the Christian life. You are invited to share what strengthens your ministry and to open up to those practices that may sustain you as you give to others. We are like the caterpillar that must yield up the life it knows and submit to the mystery of interior transformation. Formed in the Spirit of Service and Love we are called to pay attention to the life within.

Integrated Spirituality Plan
For Body Mind and Spirit

1. Have listening sessions where we increase awareness of the spiritual practices and life of those who serve in ministry. Particular attention is paid to the experiences, practices and spiritual development of the individual deacon, spouse and family.

2. A spirituality survey is developed to capture the understanding and practices of the community. The intent is to enhance a community of spirituality. All dimensions and experiences are to be valued.

3. A summary of practices, understandings and experience is developed for sharing with the diaconal community and the Personnel Board. A look at how we sustain ourselves in the Spiritual Life. The Spiritual dimensions will include head, heart and hand (social gospel)

4. A recommendation is made to the Board on a plan to develop a transformational based Spirituality Process for the Diaconal Community of the Diocese of Rochester.

References:
Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, 2004
Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart Continuum,* NY, 1986
Thomas Keating, *Manifesting God, Lantern Books*, NY 2005
Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Crossroads Publication, NY, 1994
Basil Pennington, *Lection Divina: Renewing an Ancient Practice*, Crossroads, NY 1998.

Christian One Liners

Many folks want to serve God, but only as advisors.
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It is easier to preach ten sermons than it is to live one.
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Some people are kind, polite, and sweet-spirited until you try to sit in their pews.
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MINISTRY TO DEACONS

Deacon Bill Coffey

The church has long understood that we are an advent people, so it with great joy that I write this column in the season of Advent. As a community we have seen Christ walk among the people we serve, and have had the opportunity to listen to Him through the people of the Rochester diocese.

One of the wonderful opportunities this year in the retreat for the diaconate was the reflection on the diaconate by Fr. Sebastian Falcone. Fr. Sebastian called the service of the diaconate **proclaimed availability.** It was a wonderful reflection on where we have been and the direction forward. Sebastian listed four models of service for this "proclaimed availability": Nicodemus in the gospel of John, in Isaiah (40-52), the gospel of Luke (the good Samaritan, 10, 10-29) and the slave of the Lord (Mary in the Magnificat Luke 1, 46-56). Fr. Sebastian thought these models were the foundation of the diaconate and could help us as we continue forward. It was a wonderful sense of the spirituality of the diaconate. In another part of this newsletter be sure to read the good article on centering prayer by Deacon George Welch.

I continue to offer my help to anyone who is trying to get a spiritual director. I believe that in trying to keep that strong sense of prayer, which is essential to the diaconate, one of the best ways forward to that is to have a spiritual director and regularly meet with that person. I would also be glad to help people join with others in a support group. Contact me at home (315) 986-8411 or on the road (585-261-7128) or by e-mail wcoffey2@rochester.rr.com. I would be glad to meet with anyone at anytime if I can be of help.

A final comment, the late Deacon Al Bergeron had a wonderful article in the latest *Deacon Digest*. *Deacon Digest* is a magazine devoted to the diaconate. The magazine is wonderful, and I would highly recommend it. I am sure that Deacon David Palma is trying to get a hold of it for the whole diaconate in Rochester.

I wish everyone the peace of child Jesus in Bethlehem and please call or write if I can be of any assistance to you in the days ahead.

Please remember we need help building the St. Lawrence Fund

Donations may be sent to the Office of Deacon Personnel.
Please make checks payable to the Diocese of Rochester. Note on the check that the donation is for the St. Lawrence Fund. All donations are tax deductible.

The Diaconal Community thanks you!

Phoebe's Friends Committee

Kay Nelson	(585)342-1591
Peggy Kershner	(585)254-2445
Pat Defendorf	(607)426-1150
BetsyMcDermott	(585)264-1608
Marjanne Crino	(585)381-9663
Kathie Lenhart	(585)964-2383
Rose Marie Lombard	(585)225-9502
Barb Meyer	(585)671-5275
Paula Welch	(607)732-5023
Elena Kiley	(315)923-7440
Elaine Spezzano	(585)243-3781
Peg Cunningham	(585)293-3337
Pat Crego	(585)464-0596

PHOEBE'S FRIENDS

A "State of the Phoebes" Report

By Kay Nelson

We have just begun a new liturgical year and in a few weeks will begin a new calendar year. This seems like a good time to look back over what Phoebe's Friends has accomplished in the 3 years since we created our mission statement and set goals.

Mission Statement: Recognizing the unique vocation of women married to men ordained to the diaconate, we seek to journey together. Our mission is to support, to cherish, and to lift up one another's lives and spirits by sharing our joys and our burdens.

At the time we created this mission statement, we set goals in three areas: **Spirituality**, **Companioning**, and **Connections**. At a recent planning meeting, we evaluated our progress in these areas.

Spirituality

We set the goal of having an annual retreat for all wives of ordained deacons and wives of the men in formation. We are currently in the process of planning our **fourth** Phoebe's Friends Retreat (March 23/24). The participation in the first three retreats has been between 20 and 30 wives. We are pleased to have successfully implemented this goal, but would like to see even greater numbers participate.

Companioning

We set the goal of reaching out to the wives of the men in formation by participating in the 4 Formation Sundays each year and by inviting and including these wives in all planning meetings and events. We have had 2 to 4 wives from the ordained community lead discussions for the wives in formation for the past 3 years. Many of the wives in the formation community have attended the retreat, and some have assisted in the planning process. Phoebe's Friends has also hosted a reception after ordination for the past 2 years.

Connections

We set the goal of keeping in touch with wives who may need support through cards, notes, and phone messages. One member of the planning committee has been sending notes of support in response to messages in Deacon Updates sent out by Dave Palma's office. We also wanted to reach out to wives who are homebound or in hospitals or nursing homes. This has happened on a limited basis. Our Advent and Lent prayer cards have kept us united to one another in prayer even though great distances separate us. Each of these mailings has included a newsletter with dates of upcoming Phoebe's Friends events.

So, we have made progress in attaining the goals we set. Yet much remains to be done. One of the greatest challenges is the distance separating us. We had hoped to organize regional support through regional hostesses. There have been a few attempts to gather regionally, but this has not taken off as we had hoped.

We also need to identify those who are homebound or in health care institutions so we can keep in touch more effectively. We need people who live close to these wives who would volunteer to visit and represent Phoebe's Friends to our sisters who are unable to join our gatherings.

We also want and welcome more people to participate in the leadership and planning of Phoebe's Friends. Watch the Deacon Updates for dates, times, and places of these meetings. We also want to know what types of events or gatherings people would like to have. If you have suggestions or want to help in any way, please call Kay Nelson (585) 342-1591.

FROM THE COMMUNITY

A Parable: Speak Humbly to God

BY DEACON AL BERGERON
(REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM *DEACON DIGEST*)

I never imagined I'd find myself in Jerusalem about the year 32 AD perched on a temple step. Certainly I never would have placed myself there disguised as a beggar – ratty gray beard down to my chest, wearing a dusty brown cloak and sandals rescued from a trash heap.

Yet there I was – being taken on a journey in my mind by the Holy Spirit to help me better understand what Jesus wanted me to hear in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. *(Lk 18:9-14)*

It happened during my weekly holy hour on a Tuesday morning at Holy Spirit Church. For a few weeks I had been reading and studying about the parable. This day I decided to ask the Holy Spirit to lead me further. That's how I got to the temple steps.

As I slouched there, I tried not to miss anything. It was a bright, sunny day. A young mother and father were hurrying into the temple with a pair of pigeons and a crying newborn son. Men were haggling with money changers over at one of the porticoes. Men, women and children from all walks of life, and even different countries, were streaming in and out of the dusty courtyard.

Suddenly, I caught sight of another beggar. He was hanging on to one of the temple pillars as if he had just been sick from something he ate. I ambled over to see if I could help. After a cup of water he settled down and we began to talk.

To our joint surprise, my new friend was also a deacon from the United States. He came from Cleveland. Even then he was actually on a Jesuit retreat. He, too, had been attracted to learn more about the Pharisee and the tax collector.

We decided to pool our efforts. He would watch for the tax collector. My eyes would be peeled for the Pharisee. Later we'd compare notes.

As I waited for the Pharisee, I recalled he was famous for being self-righteous and supremely self-confident that he knew the right way to worship the Lord. In a way it could have been expected. For at least 200 years men in his family had considered themselves well above average, separated from the masses by their rigid observance of the Jewish Scriptures – our Old Testament.

They figured they worshiped the Mosaic Law better than anyone else – but with emphasis according to their own versions of the Law of Moses, the prophets, and other so-called Writings in the scriptures. Theirs was a more literal interpretation. Not the spirit of the Law.

But, alas, by the time Jesus placed him in the parable, he was in more of a pickle than he realized. He felt that he and other Pharisees could choose on their own what God ought to want from them. Not what God really wanted!

My deacon friend knew the tax collector did not dare take that attitude. He had too many fences to mend. Other Jews considered him unclean because he did business with the hated Gentile – Roman conquerors. What really scalded the Jews was that he collected taxes from his own people for the Romans and could skim some off the top for himself. He was branded a traitor.

When the Pharisee arrived for prayer, it was easy to see he was a man on a mission – to tell the

Lord what a great life he was leading.

I slipped into the temple and found a place where I could be inconspicuous but still see and hear.

As Luke describes it, "The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer with himself – 'Oh God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – extortioners, unjust, adulterous or even like this tax collector.'" (The tax collector had arrived and the Pharisee caught a glimpse of him.)

The boasting continued "I fast twice a week and give tithes of all that I get."

Hearing this, I knew these sacrifices showed him to be serious about his worship. The Law stipulated that he fast once a year, on the Feast of Atonement. Twice a week was admirable. As for tithing, the Law asked that he give only 10 percent of the products of his agricultural lands to help maintain the temple and the priesthood, with some going to the poor.

The thing was, over the last 200 years or so his family had accumulated other properties from which they collected profitable rent. By contributing 10 per cent of that income as well, the Pharisee exceeded what was expected.

Therefore, the Pharisee felt his relationship with the Lord should be in outstanding shape. In his mind, the Lord should b glad to hear he was doing so well by himself – on his own. Of course, he expected people on the streets of Jerusalem to give him plenty of accolades as well.

Sadly, by ignoring the spirit of the Law he was failing to show mercy to poor families from whom he collected rents. He was failing to help all people receive just treatment in every aspect of their lives. He also was failing to contribute from his resources to raise the poverty level so all could enjoy their God-given dignity as human beings. He preferred to focus on himself.

Because his life was so self-centered, confident that he was performing well by himself, he had not won favor with his Lord. (Off to the side, I prayed that God would remove the shell of rigid self-absorption so the Lord's Spirit could get through to him to help set up a partnership with God.)

The tax collector had trouble making it into the temple. He didn't think he was worthy. But fortunately, my beggar-deacon friend sensed this. After a few words of encouragement as they walked in together, he persuaded the tax collector to focus on God's mercy.

"Just tell the Lord in your own words how helpless you feel because of your predicament and how much you need his help," the deacon coached. "The Lord will respond to humble sincerity."

Inside, as Luke says, "The tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven. He beast his breast and prayed 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'"

Later, the other deacon and I met outside.

We hardly had a chance to begin comparing notes when we heard the Pharisee shouting at the tax collector. The Pharisee had come out of the temple first and was waiting to intercept the unsuspecting man.

"You there, tax collector, come here. I want to talk to you."

Confused, the tax collector hoped the Pharisee didn't want to pile on more insults about his disloyalty to his people.

The Pharisee barked, "I don't understand it. Each time I tell the Lord how well I'm doing in obeying the Law, I never know if he hears me, although he should."

"But you – your life is despicable. You're not worthy to come into the temple like I do. Yet today you have a wonderful look of peace about you that I've never felt. I demand you tell me where that peace comes from."

The tax collector glanced over to us for reassurance. Then he replied, "God receives those who are aware of and sorry for their sins and appeal to his great mercy. Those who miss that point will never really know His peace."

And there it is. The secret to an intimate, peaceful relationship with God is to speak humbly in our own words. God respects the words we pray to him, however feeble they might seem. He gave us the gift of speech after all. Why wouldn't he listen to what we say!

We two beggars watched as the tax collector walked away – head held high a new spring in his step.

Then, we turned to each other, smiled, shook hands and wandered off – one back to retreat in Cleveland and me back to my holy hour.



The Class of 2006 presented a beautiful icon as a gift to St. Bernard's.

