



Called To Serve

The Journey to Diaconal Ordination

A Newsletter by the
Permanent Deacon
Formation Class
of 2011

Volume 2

November 2007

The Rite of Admission to Candidacy

Edwin Christmann, Ph.D.

On August 5, 2007, the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for Aspirants in the Deacon Formation Program took place at Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish in Glenshaw, PA. The Most Reverend William J. Winter, S.T.D., Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Pittsburgh, was the Principal Celebrant and Homilist. Accordingly, the Rite of Admission to Candidacy is explained below.

"Since entrance into the clerical state is deferred until ordination to the diaconate, the Rite of Admission to Candidacy is to be celebrated as soon as possible after the aspirant is admitted. In this rite, the one who aspires to ordination publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the Church to exercise a sacred order. In this way, he is admitted into the ranks of candidates for the diaconate. Enrollment among the candidates for the diaconate does not constitute any right necessarily to receive diaconal ordination. It is a first official recognition of the positive signs of the vocation to the diaconate, which must be confirmed in the subsequent years of formation.

Because of its public character and its ecclesial significance, this rite should be celebrated in a proper manner, preferable on a Sunday or feast day. Special consideration should be given to the inclusion of the candi-

date's wife and children, as well as the cultural traditions represented.

Those accepted for candidacy-and, if married, their wives-should prepare themselves for the reception of the rite through a spiritual retreat.

It will usually be helpful for wives to participate in the retreat, although during portions of the retreat it will usually be helpful to provide the opportunity for separate treatment of the respective roles of each in the vocation of the husband to the diaconate. After the celebration of the Rite of Admission to Candidacy, a certificate indicating the reception, date, place, and the name of the presiding prelate must be prepared and signed by the chancellor and officially sealed. This document is to be maintained carefully in the candidate's personal file and recorded in the diocesan book on ministries and ordinations." (National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.)

The Rite of Admission to Candidacy for ordination is celebrated when the aspirants have reached a maturity of purpose and are shown to have the necessary qualifications. During the ceremony, the candidates were asked about their resolve to complete their preparation for ordination and to prepare them-

selves in mind and spirit for faithful service to Christ and the Church.

After the celebration of the Rite of Admission to Candidacy, the ceremony concluded with a reception for the candidates hosted by the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The next formal ceremony is scheduled for September 2008, when the candidates will receive the Ministry of Lector.



The Most Reverend William J. Winter, S.T.D., Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Pittsburgh, celebrates the Rite of Admission to Candidacy Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish in Glenshaw, PA.

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A Note from the Director: *FROM ASPIRANCY TO CANDIDACY*

Rev. James A. Wehner, S.T.D. Director, Diaconate Program

The journey to ordination involves a very long process of discernment, prayer, study, discussion, family support, and personal perseverance. The Church in Pittsburgh is blessed to have a class of men who are dedicated to their formation and so trusting of the Holy Spirit in their discernment. From May 2006 through December 2006, the men in the deacon formation program participated in the Propaedeutic Period. The Church acknowledges the men in this stage of formation as aspirants. The aspirant is one who has committed himself to a program which introduces all the elements of the diaconal formation program. The aspirants officially began the formal formation program in January 2007 participating in

weekly lectures regarding sacred scripture and the sacraments. The aspirants also were engaged in spiritual direction and formation advising beginning the whole process of formation that challenges and demands the aspirants to grow in their holiness in order that they can be true ministers of the Church.

nized as a candidate. The aspirants, for their part, responded to questions that were asked by the bishop. At this moment during the celebration of Mass, the aspirants were recognized now to be candidates.

This simple yet profound ritual of the Church brings accountability to the candidate who now is in the public realm of our diocesan Church as well as to the formation team which is responsible for preparing these men for ordination.

On a personal note, seeing these men become candidates was truly an inspiration for me. With their families and friends who attended in great number, the future of Church leadership has been once again assured.

The Deacon Formation Board was convened in June 2007 to ascertain the readiness of each of the aspirants to be publicly acknowledged as "candidates" for ordination to the diaconate. In a beautiful celebration of the Mass in August at Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish, Glenshaw, Bishop Winter called forth each aspirant to be recog-

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Deacon Class Bonds at First Annual Retreat

William G. Batz, Ph.D.

To prepare canonically for the Rite of Admission to Candidacy, the Deacon Class of 2011, together with wives, assembled for its first annual retreat, held this year at St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center on Pittsburgh's South Side. Benedictine Father Ralph Tajak, O.S.B., and Sister Ann Winschel, C.P.D. presented conferences and led discussions throughout the three-day weekend of June 22-24, 2007.

The retreat itself was organized by a committee of aspirants and their wives with the guidance of Sister Pat Rogan, O.S.F., Assistant Director of the Diaconate Program. Candidate Al

Heiles from St. Alphonsus Parish in Wexford was outspoken in his appreciation for fellow committee members. "You could just feel the Spirit moving in the group," said Al, "as these men and women from all over the Diocese gave of themselves so freely. This was a true 'community of faith' working to minister to one another.

Music for the weekend liturgies was inspired by an impromptu choir of class members, led by the "Musicians from Mars," guitarists Jim Fuchs and Bob Marshall, diaconal candidates from St. Kilian Parish in Mars, and cantors Tom Krulikowski and Bill Batz, candidates from St. Louise



Parish in Upper St. Clair. "It was uplifting to hear the deep, sonorous voices of so many men singing together," said Donna Palamara, wife of candidate Bill Palamara, Jr., from St. Athanasius in West View. "You don't often hear a chapel resounding with the hearty voices of men who sing so enthusiastically." In addition to the formal conferences and liturgies, the weekend included an opportunity for the Sacra-

ment of Reconciliation and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in an all-night vigil. Candidates and wives prayed together from evening until dawn in the monastery chapel perched on the slopes overlooking the City of Pittsburgh. During the daytime, many found time to become better acquainted while sharing common meals, chatting around the coffee pot, or in leisurely strolls through the monastery gardens. At one week-

Retreat (continued from page 2)

end gathering, participants were especially moved by a reflection shared by Kathy Mackin, wife of candidate Jim Mackin from Ss. Simon and Jude in Scott Township. *(Kathy's reflection, I AM, adjoins this column.)*

As the adjacent photos suggest, a key benefit of the weekend was the ability of the deacon class to pause from classes and semester exams in order to spend time bonding as a community. Sharing stories of their families and their lives, musing together on the meaning of this diaconal adventure, while eating, laughing and praying together, candidates and wives discovered a cohesive sense of community

developing among the group.

"What an amazing grace," said candidate Gerry Como and his wife Sandy of St. Patrick Parish in McKeesport, who echoed the sentiments of many. "The deacon formation program has become an opportunity to develop new friendships with a remarkable community of men and women. How rewarding to be part of a community that is so like-minded in faith, values and commitment."

Prior to installation in the Ministry of Lector next year, Sr. Pat and the Retreat Committee are already planning the next annual retreat to be held at the Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center in Lawrence County, PA.



I AM

A Retreat Reflection

By Kathy Mackin

Ss. Simon & Jude Parish, Scott Twp.

STOP. Take time to become aware of how often during the day you say or think the words, "I am." I am getting up. I am going to work. I am going to eat. I am going to the store. Because of the retreat, these two simple words, "I am," have changed my attitude on how and why I do the many simple tasks of each day.

For most of the retreat weekend, deacon candidates and wives had separate conferences. At the beginning of the wives' first session, Sister Ann Winschel asked the question: "Who are you?"

As we answered, saying such things as "I am a wife," or "I am a nurse," or "I am a Christian," I wondered how God would have answered that question. Our group answered the question with the words "I am." Perhaps God too would have answered by saying, "I AM."

Throughout the weekend, I reflected on how I thought God would have answered that question, and about the universal call given to every baptized person. We are called to serve and to make visible the invisible God. We are to be the hands of God here on earth. Later, I realized a connection between our words, "I am," and our call to serve. Each day as I am going to do something, I need to be open to the presence of I AM in my life. I need to invite I AM to be with me to accomplish my tasks. Then at the end of the day, I need to find time to reflect on how often I included I AM into all my daily Iams.

Parish Summer Assignments

Father Joseph Mele

(Over the summer of 2007, each deacon candidate was assigned to a pastoral experience in his home parish. Father Joseph Mele is the Pastor of Saint Sebastian Parish in Ross Township, and was responsible for coordinating the summer assignments of the three deacon candidates at his Parish. Father Mele agreed to share his reflections on the deacon candidates' summer assignment.)

The ministry schedule for most parishes normally slows down for the summer. This was not the case at Saint Sebastian Parish this year. Things were more active than ever thanks to the *Deacon Candidates Summer Parish Experience 2007 Assignment*. As the pastor of a parish that is blessed to have three candidates, I was

Summer Assignments

(continued from page 3)

delighted to work closely with Cliff Homer, Steve Kisk and Jeff Ludwikowski. The Saint Sebastian Parish Family is very proud of these men.

The *Parish Experience* started off with an initial interview with each candidate to determine their ministerial interests and the needs of the parish. I was pleased with the willingness of each candidate to talk through his interests in light of the parish needs. This demonstrates to me not only their good nature but also the caliber of formation they are receiving. Each candidate was willing to adapt a little if it meant they could better serve the parish.

Once an agreement was made, these men hit the ground running. Cliff and Steve wanted to accompany our priests to Kane Regional to assist at Mass in the Nursing Home. The senior residents at Kane loved meeting them and learning what a deacon will eventually do in his ministry to the Church. It was great watching these men interacting with the elderly, making them laugh and then praying with them.

Jeff requested learning how to complete pre-nuptial marriage forms. With the consent of two of our bridal couples, Jeff was able to sit in on actual interviews.

He also wanted to assist at a few summer weddings so he could become more familiar with the Nuptial ceremony. He assisted at a rite within the Mass and a rite outside of the Mass,

so he really experienced a rich variety of ministerial events.

All three candidates also became familiar with the weekend chores that take place in the Priests/Servers sacristy.

I do not know how next summer's experience will be conducted. I am extremely pleased that Cliff, Steve and Jeff could serve this summer in their home parish. I sincerely hope all the deacon candidates did as well as these good men.

"The Test"

Max Weisentein (no S.T.D.) , aspirant. (now, candidate, or not).

On a day that we will never forget, all the diaconate aspirants had the wonderful opportunity to demonstrate what we learned in our first official semester.

As the test date approached, we were getting nervous, if not outright fearful of what to expect. Would it be an essay? Would it be an easy essay? True or false? Multiple-choice? Why are we being tested anyway? To get rid of us? To make us sweat? Corporal punishment for sins of our past life (before the diaconate of course)? All of the above? Keep in mind, most of us have not taken a test in 20+ years - some longer!!

Finally, two weeks before the fateful day, Fr. James Wehner, S.T.D. , diocesan director of the deacon formation program, broke his silence. Some speculated that he was enjoying the suspense a bit too much. He revealed that the

test would be a few simple essay questions, reflective of the material presented. The test would "definitely NOT be open note or open book because open book tests only reflect how well you take notes, and not what you know."

The following week, however, Fr. Wehner, S.T.D., mentioned that test would be open notebook. We attribute the change of heart to divine intervention. Thank you Jesus (no initials). Thank you Fr. Jim, S.T.D.

Speculation has it that had the test not been open notebook, only Edwin Christmann, Ph.D., Robert Koslosky, M.A., and Bill Batz, M.A., C.P.A., M.B.A., Ph.D. would have passed. How silly it would have been to witness the three remaining aspirants arrive an hour early at the induction Mass at St. Mary's to practice the profound bow.

Meanwhile, back at the test- "a few" essay questions became 49, yes, ONLY 49!!!! After the allotted three hours, only one aspirant was finished.

Calendar of Events:

- November 2007 – December 2007: *Christology Class*
St. Paul Seminary
- December 15, 2007: Semester Exam
St. Paul Seminary
- January 2008 – February 2008: *Ecclesiology Class*
St. Paul Seminary
- February 16, 2008: Workshop - *Integrated Skills for Ministry*
St. Paul Seminary
- *Liturgy of the Hours*: Every Thursday before class.
St. Paul Seminary

Some were only half finished. Then, in strolls Fr. Wehner, S.T.D., smiling and chatting away while the aspirants struggled, sweated, hurried to finish and tried to plug their ears (no offense S.T.D.). He offered some "encouraging words", anchors thrown to drowning men. If looks could kill, most of us would have committed serious sin (grievous matter, sufficient reflection, full consent of the will) and the Diocese would have needed a new director, S.T.D. Most of us were still writing after four hours, some after five. Rumor has it that Jerry Como was still writing seven days later (confirmed?). By the way, has anyone seen Jerry since the test? Comments in the parking lot ranged from "unprintable" to very "unprintable". Of course, each aspirant was sure to make a visit to the confessional that afternoon. Now we know why we were required to take a physical before admission into the program. Weaker hearts would not have survived. (Poor John Ragan). This would have been the first test in history with a mortality rate. . .an interesting way to screen!!!

Miraculously, we all passed. Praise be to God!!!