

Deacon Talk

COUNCIL of DEACONS NEWSLETTER | ARCHDIOCESE of MILWAUKEE



DIACONATE FORMATION
Where love becomes service.

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Deacon Mike Chmielewski

As we reflect this Easter season on the story of the early church as recorded by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, it is amazing to me to reflect on the strength and perseverance of the first disciples. For Peter and the Apostles, Stephen and

Phillip, as well as Paul and Barnabas, it seemed that the grace and the energy of the Holy Spirit were at its best. But, without the disciples trusting in God's hand, little would have been accomplished.

As I pray over the recent passages from Acts, two verses stand out to me, and I offer them for your reflection as disciples and deacons. "They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in faith, saying, 'It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,'" (Acts 14:22-23).

Our vocation as disciples and deacons was never meant to be easy and simple. We are called to be light to the world and an instrument of God's

peace. It is light and peace that the world often refuses to recognize or honor.

Most of us complained through formation about the studies, the energy needed or the time required. However, if we take our calling seriously, we need to give even more time, more energy, and more study in not only what we do but also, more importantly, in who we are as "Christ-Servant."

Whether we are at the altar, the nursing home, the food pantry, the ambo, or anywhere the Holy Spirit sends us, we are to be His servants and thus prepared for hardships and challenges. In all our callings, disciple, deacon, married, our goal is not long-term comfort and ease. Our time in this earthly journey is to be filled with joy and happiness. However, our ultimate goal is persevering in the faith, transforming our world, and entering the eternal light of God's kingdom. It will include hardships. It will require challenging the culture. And it will require trust in God's grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

— Deacon Mike Chmielewski

DIACONATE FORMATION

Greetings, Brother Deacons and Wives:

It is hard to believe that nine months have already elapsed since I began my new role as director. I just finished providing feedback to the 24 men on their second trimester.

Beyond those who we already have in formation, we need to focus our



attention on all the activity that surrounds vetting a new group of men for the Aspirant Class of 2020. I have already expressed my hope that we will have another large group starting then.

Currently, we have eight men (and wives, if they are married) who have finished the discernment sessions to date. There are nine others in the

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DEACON WIVES RETREAT

April 5-7, 2019 at the Redemptorist Retreat Center

Carol Sullivan led our three-day retreat. This is the second time she has led our retreat, which is a testimony to her excellence as a leader. The topic was “Fresh Eyes,” meaning seeing familiar things that we know so well with a new outlook, or “fresh eyes.” The topics were Joy in Lent, Angels, Psalm 23 and Forgiveness. The new approach to these topics certainly made you think outside the box.

We had a nice balance of sessions and time to ourselves. We could socialize with other deacon wives, spend time outside walking trails, pray the Way of the Cross or even enjoy rocking in chairs in the sun as we reflected. We even had a movie night with popcorn and watched “The Shack.” It was a wonderful

weekend of reflection, renewal and rejuvenation. What a great group of women!

The picture below was taken after our Sunday Mass.

Front row: Lynne Gonzales, Jane Kornburger, Naida Reyes, Kathy Bitante, Rocki Lazaga, Anna Marie Filipiak, Mary Martinez, Cheryl Snyder, Carol Sullivan (leader)

Back row: Meriel Christensen, Linda Klingseisen, Carla Kempka, Mary Copson, Laurie Stodola, Sandra Lowe, Catherine Gundlach, Lynn Ponec, Marla Gavin

Not Pictured: Nang Thao, Colletta Cody and Karen Brah



► DIACONATE FORMATION

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discernment session in progress here at Mary Mother of the Church Pastoral Center. Of course, it is unclear at this stage how many will ultimately apply.

That said, we will have more discernment sessions in the fall, including one for our Hispanic brothers. In order to be sure these last sessions are well attended, we are planning to hold information sessions about an hour in length in seven key locations throughout the Archdiocese

of Milwaukee. The locations are being finalized, and will be available very soon.

Once the information sessions are set, I will need your assistance by making personal invitations to those you see possessing qualities aligned with diaconal ministry. We know first-hand that encouraging vocations occurs more through this method rather than limiting communication to the often-used broadcast method, which is a necessary support, but is secondary to actually naming someone's gifts. My thought

is that when it comes to increasing diaconal vocations, we do best to adhere to St. Augustine's approach: “Pray as if everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.”

So, while you continue praying for the entire formational community, including: aspirants, candidates and their wives, and all faculty and staff, I also ask for your prayers and actions for the future of the Order of Deacon here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

— Deacon Dale Nees

REFLECTIONS OF DEACON DAY 2019

I attended my first Deacon Day on May 4, just a few days short of eight months since ordination. I was looking forward to catching up with my brother deacons from my class and their wives. We have had sporadic success in getting together. When we do, we quickly share some of the experiences we have had, the difficulties we have run into, and the awesome privilege it is to be a deacon serving God and His people. Deacon Ted Faust told me that he felt the sanctifying grace received at ordination that gave him both the courage to go beyond his personal boundaries and the wisdom to share Christ's message of salvation. I can personally attest that the Holy Spirit has emboldened me and imbued me with a grace for diaconal service. The first eight months involved more learning and a few mistakes, but no regrets. The hard work of formation is well worth the joys of being a deacon.

The day was hosted by St. Martin of Tours Parish, and Deacon Chuck Schneider served as our emcee. After morning prayer, we started presentations with Anne Haines. Anne is the Executive Director of Urban Ministry for the Archdiocese, and she spoke about serving in the inner city. She asked for deacons and volunteers to work as the Catholic Emergency Response Team (CERT). This would be a team of people who would provide a Catholic response to various needs in Milwaukee. The presence of a Roman Catholic collar has proven to have a positive impact in times of crisis and need. If you are interested, you can still contact her via email

(hainesa@archmil.org), or by phone at (262) 339-0367.

Deacon Jorge Benavente spoke to us on behalf of Catholic Cemeteries. He stressed the necessity of pre-planning your funeral and some of the financial advantages of making funeral purchases ahead of time. He offered to visit parishes to speak to about Catholic Funeral and Cemetery services.

Burial vessels for miscarried babies were on display as part of the "Hearts of Hope" initiative by the archdiocese and Life's Connections. These vessels are available to parishes along with a beautiful kit to be given to families who experience a miscarriage. It also comes with a pastoral guide for priests and deacons on ministering to those who have lost a child. Parishes are encouraged to place regular bulletin articles so parishioners know that help is available within the parish. It also spreads a pro-life message that life begins in the womb, and even these small ones are loved and cherished. For more information or to obtain a kit for your parish, please call Life's Connections at (262) 290-5433.

Mass was celebrated by Fr. Jerry Herda. His homily spoke of "expecting the unexpected," and that was quickly put to the test when there were no written petitions. Deacon Chuck did a wonderful job of improvising and the Mass continued. Several men received stoles celebrating their service as deacons. Lunch was served and stories were shared.

— Deacon Jim Matthias '18

Deacon Day ANNIVERSARY DEACONS

Eight Deacons were honored at Deacon Day 2019, celebrating their 25th anniversary of ordination. The eight included two men ordained elsewhere, Mike Burch (Rockford) and Steve Kramer (Rockville Centre), and six men ordained in Milwaukee on June 11, 1994. Those six were: Rick Brown, Tom Filipiak, Ralph Horner, Steve Przedpelski, Joe Wenzler, and Dan Zozakiewicz. Only Rick and Dan were unable to attend Deacon Day on May 4, 2019.



Dcn. Steve Przedpelski (left) and Dcn. Joe Wenzler (right) receive their stoles from Fr. Jerry Herda, Vicar of Clergy.

REST IN PEACE

† **Deacon Claude V. Kennedy** died on March 7, 2019. Dcn. Claude was born on December 24, 1944, in Fond du Lac. He spent some time at St. Lawrence Seminary High School but eventually graduated from St. Mary Springs High in 1963. Claude's additional educational background includes earning a B.S. in Law Enforcement from Marquette in 1975, completing Chaplaincy Certification (CPE) from St. Joseph Hospital in 1979, and earning a Masters Certificate in Religious Education from Cardinal Stritch in 1983. Claude's work history focused on security and safety. He was a Milwaukee Police Officer (1969-80), a public safety officer for Milwaukee Housing, a bank security officer with First Star, and was most recently employed as a security officer for Aurora Hospitals.

Claude has four children: Dan, Kristie, Ryan, Molly and their spouses. He is also survived by 12 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, a brother and sister, extended family, and many friends.

Claude began his diaconate formation in 1976. He was ordained a Permanent Deacon on June 16, 1979, at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist by Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B. Claude's first covenant was with St. Agnes Parish, Butler. In his nearly 40 years as a Deacon, he served at multiple parishes including Sacred Heart, Franklin (1987-90), Old St. Mary, (1992-99), Holy Assumption, West Allis (2001-05), and St. James, Franklin (2005-11). He retired from covenanted service in 2011 but returned to become the Director of the Archdiocesan Marian Shrine for 5 years, (June 2012 to May 2017). In September of 2016, he entered into a Senior Covenant with St. Charles Borromeo, Milwaukee where he served until his death.

Funeral services for Deacon Claude took

place on Thursday, March 14, 2019, with visitation and Mass of Christian Burial at St. Charles Borromeo, Milwaukee. Pastor, Father Brian Holbus was the presider at the Mass with Fr. Norberto Sandoval, Associate Pastor, concelebrating. Deacon Ron Lesjak, Claude's classmate, was the deacon assisting at the altar. Fr. Brian's homily, following the Gospel proclaiming the Beatitudes, described Claude's diaconal ministry as "serving the Lord with gladness." Claude's care of God's people was often directed at "making life less sad" for people. Fourteen deacons, three wives, and one widow gathered in solidarity to pray for Claude and his family. Claude was laid to rest on Friday, March 15 at the family plot in Fond du Lac. *May He Rest in Peace!*

† **Deacon Charles (Chuck) J. Kustner** died March 11, 2019. Dcn. Chuck was born on April 26, 1931, in Evanston, IL. He graduated from Lane Tech High Chicago in 1949, earned a B.S. in Engineering from the University of Illinois in 1957 and attended graduate school for business administration at New York University. He served his country in the US Army Corps of Engineers (1953-1956) and was honorably discharged as a First Lieutenant. Chuck's work history included serving as Vice President of Eaton Corporation (1958-1983), President of Corporate Investments International (1985-1991), and Vice President of Frederick and Co. (1991), until his retirement in 2002.

Chuck married the love of his life, Martha on August 21, 1954, at St. Patrick Church in Pana, IL. They have three children: Catherine, Thomas (Carmela), and Anne Haser (John) as well as 8 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Chuck began his diaconate formation in 1974 at St. Francis de Sales Seminary. He was ordained a Permanent Deacon

on December 26, 1975, by Archbishop William E. Cousins at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist as part of Milwaukee's first class of Permanent Deacons. He served at St. John Vianney, Brookfield (1975-1980) and then served the remainder of his covenanted Diaconate ministry at St. Mary Visitation, Elm Grove until his official retirement on March 5, 2019, just six days before his death. Chuck was a very active deacon, both at St. Mary and the within the deacon community. He was regularly present at the altar, preached, witnessed Marriages, and baptized. He had a special devotion to marriage preparation and guiding engaged couples. He was also very active in the Opus Dei prayer group.

Funeral services for Dcn. Chuck took place on March 18, 2019. Visitation and Mass of Christian Burial were held at St. Mary Visitation, Elm Grove. Pastor, Fr. Peter Berger was the presider at the Mass with 5 other concelebrants, including Fr. Dave Filut and Associate Pastor Fr. John Gibson. Deacons Richard Niggemann and Richard Piontek, both assigned to St. Mary, assisted at the altar. Following the Gospel proclamation of "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28), Fr. Peter gave a homily that offered a beautiful image of Dcn. Chuck's life in parallel with the vestments of the deacon. He reflected on the alb as a symbol of Chuck's calling to marriage and family, the diaconal stole as a sign of diaconal service, and the dalmatic as the sign of Chuck's faith which covered all he did in life. Bishop Emeritus Richard Sklba offered the final commendation on behalf of the archbishop and the archdiocese. Following military honors in the entrance of the church, Chuck was laid to rest in the St. Mary Parish Cemetery.

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DEACON PERSONNEL BOARD

The Deacon Personnel Board met on January 26, 2019, at the Mary Mother of the Church Pastoral Center. Deacons Gulig, Schneider, Stanula, Nosacek, Campbell, Chmielewski, and Fr. Herda were in attendance.

The meeting opened with prayer and reflection led by Deacon Nosacek. The minutes of the October 6, 2018 meeting were reviewed and approved. Deacon-specific issues were then discussed including ten covenant renewals, two new assignments, one status change, and 17 late, pending or in progress covenants. There were no significant concerns noted.

Post-ordination plans for the two most recent classes were discussed. The third and final required session for the class of 2016 will take place on June 1, 2019

from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at MMCP. Three deacons from the class of 1978 will lead the morning discussions and two deacons from the class of 2009 will lead the afternoon sessions. The first required session for the class of 2018 will happen on June 15, 2019, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., also at MMCP. Deacon Dan Kehrer will lead the morning discussion, and Deacon John Mezydlo and his wife Rita will lead the afternoon session. Any deacon is invited to attend all or part of these sessions.

We then continued our discussion about the future of diaconal assignments. There seems to be value to assigning deacons to multiple parishes in a cluster. The future will also likely include deacons being assigned to parishes with no deacons, especially if there are multiple deacons

in a neighboring parish. There was also discussion about the continuing need to strengthen priest/pastor awareness and understanding of diaconal presence and ministry.

There was a general “word on the street” discussion of multiple topics, including: the 50th Anniversary Celebration, district happenings, adjustment of the 2018 guys, the new Director of Formation, and the possibility of assigned mentors for aspirants and candidates.

The meeting concluded with words of wisdom from Deacon Gulig (Chair) and a closing prayer. The next Personnel Board meeting is set for May 11, 2019 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at MMCP.

— Deacon Mike Chmielewski

► PEACE

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May he Rest in Peace!

† **Deacon Jay W. Wittak** died on April 14, 2019. He was born in Milwaukee on May 22, 1950. He graduated from Milwaukee Hamilton High School in 1968 and earned a B.S. from UW Stevens Point in 1972. He served his country in the US Army (active duty, 1972-75; National Guard, 1978-79, and Army Reserves, 1984-87), and was honorably discharged in 1987 with the rank of Major. He was employed the majority of his professional life by the US Forest Service. He spent most of his career stationed in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He retired after 30 years from forestry work in 2005, partially due to health problems.

Jay married the love of his life, Susan, on June 22, 1974, in New Richmond, WI. They have three children: Jennifer (Andy) Stilling, Jon, and Jason (Amy). He

is also survived by three grandchildren, Matthew, Katie, and Ben Stilling, his mother Betty, as well as siblings and other extended family.

While living in Michigan, Jay heard the call to the Permanent Diaconate. He was formed in the Diocese of Superior, WI and was ordained for the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan on June 3, 2005, by Bishop James H. Garland at St. Peter Cathedral in Marquette. He served as a deacon at Our Lady of Peace Parish, Ironwood, MI. In 2007, Jay and Susan moved to Union Grove, WI where he eventually entered into a Diaconal Covenant with St. Robert Bellarmine Parish. He served there until 2014 and then entered into his final covenant with St. John the Baptist, Paris, and St. Francis Xavier, Brighton serving until taking sick leave in 2016. In addition to service at the altar and other parish ministries, Jay's true passion was ministering to the veterans at the Union Grove Veterans Center.

Funeral services for Dcn. Jay began with a visitation on Tuesday, April 23, at the Heritage Funeral Home in Greenfield, where Archbishop Listecky offered condolences and prayed with the family. Additional visitation took place on Wednesday, April 24, at St. Mary Parish, Hales Corners. The Mass of Christian Burial was presided by the Most Reverend John Doerfler, Bishop of the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan. He was assisted at the altar by Dcn. Larry Normann and Dcn. Michael LeBeau (Marquette). The Gospel proclamation was the Cantic of Zechariah (Lk 1:68-79), the foundation of the deacon's morning prayer. Dcn. Normann's homily offered a beautiful image of Dcn. Jay's commitment to service in all he did. Twenty-five deacons and wives prayed with the family. Burial took place at the Union Grove Veteran's Cemetery with full military honors. Please keep Dcn. Jay, wife Susan, and his family in your prayer. *May He Rest in Peace!*

Prayer Requests

Dcn. Roberto Fuentes ('02) and wife Lorenz

Dcn. Dick Govek ('92) and wife Dorothy

Dcn. Baleriano Gonzalez ('84)

Dcn. Jim Chrisien ('98)

Donna Hying, widow of Dcn. Joseph ('84)

Ginny Schimmels, widow of Dcn. Tom ('84)

Judy Francois, wife of Dcn. Jim ('83)

Dcn. Leon Zalewski ('83) and wife Joan

Phyllis Heideman, wife of Dcn. Willis ('02)

Dcn. Richard Hiller ('75)

Dcn. John D'Alessio ('98)

Jeri Petro, wife of Dcn. Greg ('12)

Family of Dcn. Claude Kennedy ('79)

Dcn. Dave Pollak ('96)

Martha Kustner, wife of the late Dcn. Chuck ('75)

Susan Wittak, wife of the late Dcn. Jay ('05)

Dcn. Mike Rooney ('92)

Dcn. Dan Zozakiewicz ('94)

Dcn. Dick Govek ('92) and wife Dorothy

RECENTLY DECEASED AND THEIR FAMILIES

Janet Schopper, wife of Dcn. Gene ('83), February 15, 2019

Dcn. Claude V. Kennedy '79, March 7, 2019

Dcn. Chuck J. Kustner '75, March 11, 2019

Rubin Lezama, father-in-law of Dcn. Zuniga '07, week of March 11, 2019

Fr. Roger Veik, OFM Cap, brother-in-law of Dcn. Chmielewski '09, March 22, 2019

Eileen Bartz, mother-in-law of Dcn. Copson '09, March 23, 2019

Susan Marx, sister-in-law of Dcn. Marx '07, April 10, 2019

Dcn. Jay W. Wittak '05, April 14, 2019

INDIGENT BURIALS

James Mclemore, March 8, 2019

Robert Gillespie, March 8, 2019

David Allen Gravelle, March 8, 2019

Thomas Yela, April 16, 2019

Carolyn Willis Gray, April 16, 2019

Martin Herro, April 18, 2019



DATES TO REMEMBER

June 1, 2019: Post-Ordination Formation, Session 3, Class of 2016, MMCPC

June 15, 2019: Post-Ordination Formation, Session 1, Class of 2018, MMCPC

September 14, 2019: Roman / Episcopal Gathering, 8:30 a.m. – Noon, Good Shepherd, Menomonee Falls

September 22-29, 2019: Seven Days of Service, sponsored by the archdiocese

September 21, 2019: Deacon / Wives Listening Session / Morning / Site TBD

October 2019: Holy Hour for Life Prayer

October 27, 2019: Memorial Mass, planning by Districts 1/2/3; Fr. Jerry Herda presiding

November 1-3, 2019: Deacon Retreat, Redemptorist Retreat Center, Dcn. Dominic Cerrato directing

April 2-4, 2020: Women of the Diaconate Retreat, Siena Center, Racine (Note this is a Thursday – Saturday, Palm Sunday weekend)

Deacon Day 2020: Planning by Districts 6/10/13...details pending



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