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The Diocese of Ogdensburg Volume 75, Number 15

NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

AUG. 12, 2020

TWO NEW PRIESTS, THREE NEW DEACONS



JESSE SOVIE/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

On Aug. 1, Bishop Terry R. LaValley ordained two men to the priesthood and three to the diaconate at St. Mary's Cathedral in Ogdensburg. Pictured are, from left, Deacon Donald Wilder, Father Jude Nnadibuagha, Bishop LaValley, Father Severinus Torwoe, Deacon Matthew Conger and Deacon John Ojuok. For the complete story, as well as profiles of the newly ordained men, see Pages 3 through 6 and 10 through 12.

SUMMER SCHEDULE

The *North Country Catholic* is now on summer schedule and will print every other week throughout the summer. The next edition will be Aug. 26.

SHARING OUR STORIES

After Rick LaDuke helped his wife, Susan, complete the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and enter the Catholic Church, the South Plattsburgh couple took on the task of helping others make that journey. Learn more about the couple in this week's installment of *Sharing Our Faith*; *Sharing Our Stories*, an ongoing series featuring how Catholics of the Diocese of Ogdensburg are living out their faith. To suggest an individual to be featured in this series, please call the North Country Catholic at 315-393-2920 or email dfargo@rcdony.org.

FULL STORY, PAGE 16

Pope: Weapons must be set aside for peace

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—For peace to flourish, weapons of war must be set aside, especially nuclear weapons that can obliterate entire cities and countries, Pope Francis said on the 75th anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima.

"May the prophetic voices" of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "continue to serve as a warning to us and for com-

ing generations," he said in a written message sent Aug. 6 to Hidehiko Yuzaki, governor of the Hiroshima prefecture, who led a peace memorial ceremony.

The pope's message and others were published on the Hiroshima For Global Peace website: hiroshimaforpeace.com.

In 1945, during World War II, the United States dropped atomic bombs on

Hiroshima Aug. 6 and on Nagasaki Aug. 9 in an effort to get Japan to surrender. The cities were decimated and, by year's end, at least 200,000 people had died from the blasts or the aftereffects.

Those who survived, called hibakusha, were honored at the Aug. 6 ceremony, and the pope greeted them as well as the organizers and others tak-

ing part in the ceremony.

"I was privileged to be able to come in person to the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during my apostolic visit in November last year, which allowed me to reflect at the peace memorial in Hiroshima and at Hypocenter Park in Nagasaki on the destruction of human life and property wrought in these two cities during those terrible days

of war three-quarters of a century ago," the pope wrote.

"I continue to hold in my heart the longing of the peoples of our time, especially of young people, who thirst for peace and make sacrifices for peace. I carry, too, the cry of the poor, who are always among the first victims of violence and conflict," he said.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Working through our unworthiness

While I smiled behind my mask and responded, "no problem" to the request, my heart sank when my pastor, Father Raymond J. Moreau, asked me to serve as the lector 15 minutes prior to the start of Mass.

I don't mind speaking in public, and I enjoy serving my parish, but I usually obsessively prepare for the Sundays when it's my turn to lector. I go over the weekend readings at least seven to 10 times between Saturday night and Sunday morning. My goal is

always to deliver the readings as close to perfectly as humanly possible. I absolutely hate when I stumble over a word or when a sentence I deliver doesn't flow properly.

I hold myself to a surreal standard, a standard I would never dream of imposing on others. It's a standard I'm also sure God doesn't impose on me.

I'm confident God isn't watching me lector, hearing me stumble over a word, and proclaiming me unworthy to serve Him. I'm pretty sure

God knows I'm approaching the lectern with the goal of serving Him and proclaiming His word, however it comes out.

As I was thinking about that fact after Mass this Sunday, I couldn't help but think of the interviews and discussions I had over the last two weeks with the men who were ordained by Bishop Terry R. LaValley on Aug. 1.

Several of those men noted how humbled they are by the fact that God is calling them to serve Him despite their weaknesses, sinfulness and unworthiness. They know they're not perfect, yet they still feel called to serve our

perfect God. They continue to put their trust in God to work through them and use them, use even their weaknesses, in His service.

Like it would've been easy for me to decline Father Ray's request, it's easy for all of us to say, "not me, Lord. I'm not capable. I'm not worthy," when we feel called by the Lord. Yet when we surrender our ineptitude, unworthiness and sinfulness to God and His will, and we try to go where He calls us, beautiful things seem to happen, even if it's something as simple as being reminded that God isn't as tough on us as we are on ourselves.

Darcy L.
Fargo

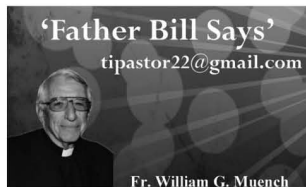
The Gratitude Journal

This week, I received a mailing from my insurance company. No, it was not a bill. It was a booklet in which there are several suggestions – ideas and games – to help a person deal with the time and trials of this pandemic.

I loved it! The various ideas were sensational! The booklet included several pages of pictures to color. You see, I love coloring. I have several adult coloring books. In addition, the booklet has games and exercises, and all sorts of other stuff.

I want to share with you one particular exercise in this booklet. In fact, I have talked about this several times with the people of our congregation in homilies. This page encourages us to develop a Gratitude Journal. This page encourages us to remember and offer gratitude to the individuals who have been or done something special for us this week.

As you know, I am rather hung up with gratitude and the importance of living a



grateful life. I know that Jesus was often concerned about the importance of gratitude. Do you remember the story of how disappointed Jesus was when he healed the ten lepers, but only one returned to offer his gratitude to Jesus?

I know that you are aware that each time we gather for Mass, it is a Eucharist. It is all about gratitude. The word Eucharist means thank you – you know that. In Mass, we praise God in gratitude for all that Jesus did for us through his life, crucifixion and resurrection. We thank God for all that the Lord constantly does for us. We are called to be a people of gratitude. This gratitude transforms our lives with love, peace and happiness.

So, I want to suggest to you that we develop an

everyday Gratitude Journal. Each day, let us take a moment to look back on our day to consider and recognize in our Gratitude Journal that person, that experience that deserves our gratitude. I am thinking that we will discover all sorts of surprises and the many individuals that brightened our days by their generosity and care. Those people did something special that deserve our gratitude and recognition. They become witnesses for us of doing the right thing. They actually brought a smile to our day.

I am not talking here about a simple thank you. We are invited to remember a powerful moment of gratitude. Now, I know we always thank God for the good that happens to us, but it is good to recognize the special people who deserve our gratitude. They may be family or friends, but I suspect that it will often be a complete stranger, like the lady who helped me out recently.

I was asked by my doctor to stop in the lab and to give

a blood sample. I was rather busy and in a hurry. I suspect I sounded anxious to the receptionist. I guess it was rather obvious that I was in a hurry, and this lady spoke up offering to have me take her place. Yes, I did feel rather uncomfortable, but I do send her my gratitude. She is on the top of the list in my Gratitude Journal.

There have been many strangers in my Gratitude Journal. They deserve to be contacted personally, but they remained strangers. I know you will agree with me that there are many wonderful times when, all of a sudden, a complete stranger comes along to win our gratitude.

So, as I write this column each week, I want to tell you that I put you all, my readers, in my Gratitude Journal. You are in my thoughts and my prayers each time I write.

One other prayer today: I pray that God guides me to be the kind of person who is mentioned in someone's Gratitude Journal.



DARCY FARGO & JESSE SOVIE/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

(Above) Five men, now Father Jude Nnadibuagha, Father Severinus Torwoe, Deacon Matthew Conger, Deacon John Ojuok and Deacon Donald Wilder, lay prostrate at St. Mary's Cathedral during the Aug. 1 ordination Mass. (Right) Bishop Terry R. LaValley lays hands on now Father Jude Nnadibuagha conferring on him the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the office of priest.



Two priests, three deacons ordained

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

OGDENSBURG—“Go out to all the world and tell the good news: Jesus Christ is risen, and he lives among us. Brothers, your task, the mission with which you are charged this day, is to win people for Christ with apostolic zeal, and to teach, govern and sanctify them in the name of Jesus.”

Those were the words of Bishop Terry R. LaValley as he prepared to ordain Jude Nnadibuagha and Severinus Torwoe to the priesthood, and Matthew Conger, John Kennedy Ojuok and Donald Wilder to the diaconate on Aug. 1 in St. Mary's Cathedral.

The cathedral, with two of every three pews blocked off to comply with social distancing requirements, was sparsely filled with mask-wearing priests, deacons and the family and friends of the men who would be or-

daind.

The First Reading was read by Catherine Russell, diocesan vocation coordinator, and the Second Reading was read by Joyce Wilder. The Gospel was proclaimed by Deacon Kevin Mastellon, director of diocesan permanent deacons.

After the Gospel, Deacon Fernando Solomon presented the candidates for the diaconate, and Father Christopher C. Carrara, director of seminarians, requested that the men be ordained.

“Most Reverend Father, Holy Mother Church asks you to ordain these men, our brothers, to the responsibility of the diaconate,” Father Carrara said, addressing Bishop LaValley.

“Do you know them to be worthy?” Bishop LaValley asked.

“After inquiry among the Christian people and upon the recommendation of those responsible, I testify

that they have been found worthy,” Father Carrara answered.

“Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose these, our brothers, for the Order of the Diaconate,” Bishop LaValley responded.

Deacon Solomon then presented the candidates for priesthood, and Father Carrara used similar language in requesting that they be ordained.

“Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose these, our brothers, for the Order of the Priesthood,” Bishop LaValley responded.

In his homily, Bishop LaValley thanked the five men for their willingness to serve God and the Church and thanked their families for supporting their vocations.

“Brothers, let me begin by expressing my gratitude to each of you for offering your lives to Jesus

Christ in ordained ministry,” he said. “I am particularly grateful to your parents and your wife and your families for their faith witness and support of your vocational discernment. Unfortunately, some of your loved ones can't be here due to the pandemic. I do hope your family, whether in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya or stateside are able to participate via livestreaming.”

Bishop LaValley also welcomed Bishop Douglas J. Lucia, bishop of Syracuse, to the ordination. Bishop Lucia previously served as director of vocations for the Diocese of Ogdensburg and worked with the men being ordained during their discernment and formation.

Bishop LaValley then reminded the assembly about the role of the ordained clergy.

“My friends, these men before us now are to be advanced to the Order of Deacons and Order of

Priests,” he said. “They are to serve Christ, the teacher, the priest and shepherd, by whose ministry his body, the Church, is continually being built up here on earth into the people of God. These our brothers will be consecrated for the preaching of the Gospel for the sanctification of God's people and for divine worship. With the help of God, and our prayers and our support, they shall go about all these duties in such a way, in such a way that we will recognize them as true disciples of him who came not to be served, but to serve.”

Bishop LaValley reminded the men to be ordained that they are called to use their unique gifts in the service of the Lord.

“Jesus chooses his disciples by name,” he said. “And how different we are by temperament and personality. There is no perfect human model. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Two priests, three deacons

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

hearts of each of you here to be ordained beat with the same passionate love for Jesus. Still, you're very different. Your gifts, your personalities will touch different people in different ways, and it seems that's the richness, that's a gift. That's the attractiveness of ordained ministry. As Paul wrote to the Romans, we all have different gifts. Use them to build up the one Body of Christ."

Bishop LaValley also reminded the men that "fraternal support is crucial."

"You've heard me mention it often: Ours is not a Lone Ranger ministry," Bishop LaValley said. "When one is ordained, he does not obtain a permit to set up private practice. The priests and deacons of this local church are second to none – Sorry, Bishop (Lucia) – of which I am so very proud. We call each other up. We talk about our struggles. We check on one another. We care. That's so important. We should never become strangers to each other."

Bishop LaValley also cautioned the men to "be aware of the routine of prayer, of Mass, of coworkers."

"You know close associations with people or things can lead to a loss of respect for them," he said. "Knowing someone or something very well, we can easily become bored with them and stop treating them with respect or stop paying attention to them. We can take them for granted. When we continually encounter the sacred, be it the Mass or any of the sacraments, they risk becoming routine for us, and reverential fear can be extinguished. Conditioned by all our habits, we no longer perceive the great, ever-new and surprising fact that God himself is present, speaks to us, gives himself to us. So, my brothers, celebrate every sacrament as if it were for the first time, the last time, the only time."

Following the homily, the elect for the diaconate and then the priesthood stood before Bishop LaValley and expressed their resolve to carry out their office in accord with the mind of Christ and the Church. The five men then prostrated themselves as a sign of humility for the Litany of Supplication.

After the Litany, Bishop LaValley laid hands on Conger, Ojuok and Wilder,

and prayed the Prayer of Ordination, conferring the gifts of the Holy Spirit and ordaining the men as deacons. The three men were then vested in stoles and dalmatics and were handed the Book of the Gospels.

Deacon Donald Wilder is a permanent deacon, serving as chaplain at the Watertown Correctional Facility and the Cape Vincent Correctional Facility. He also serves St. Patrick's, St. Anthony's and Holy Family parishes in Watertown. Deacon Conger and Deacon Ojuok, transitional deacons, will return to Christ the King Seminary to complete their studies toward priesthood later this summer.

After ordaining the three deacons, Bishop LaValley laid hands on (then) Deacons Nnadibuagha and Torwoe, conferring on them the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the office of priest.

"Grant, we pray, Almighty Father, to these your servants the dignity of the Priesthood," the write states.

Father Nnadibuagha and Father Torwoe were then vested in the stole and chasuble, their hands were anointed, and they were handed the bread and wine for the celebration of the Mass. A limited number of priests and deacons of the diocese also laid hands on the new priests, praying for them and welcoming them.

The new priests and deacons joined Bishop LaValley, Bishop Lucia and other priests and deacons of the diocese in celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

At the conclusion of the Ordination Mass, Father Nnadibuagha and Father Torwoe gave Bishop LaValley their first blessings.



JESSE SOVIE/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Father Severinus Torwoe receives the bread and wine for consecration from Bishop Terry R. LaValley as part of the Aug. 1 ordination.



DARCY FARGO/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Bishop Terry R. LaValley lays hands on Donald Wilder, conferring the gifts of the Holy Spirit on him and ordaining him a deacon.

JOB OPENING

Clerical Assistant for the Development Office & Assistant Diocesan Receptionist

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Ogdensburg is seeking a **Clerical Assistant for the Development Office & Assistant Diocesan Receptionist**. The full-time position provides administrative support to the Development Office and assists the Diocesan Receptionist. Applicants must possess strong secretarial and computer skills. Must be proficient in Microsoft Word and Excel and have the ability to learn new software including Raiser's Edge. Strong interpersonal skills and good oral and written communication skills are also required. High level of discretion and confidentiality is required.

Submit letter of interest, resume and three professional references to: Human Resources Office, Diocese of Ogdensburg, P.O. Box 369, Ogdensburg, NY 13669 or e-mail to: ksnover@rcdony.org.
Deadline for application is August 24, 2020.

Priesthood is new start for Father Nnadibuagha

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

LOWVILLE – For Father Jude Nnadibuagha, a long journey ended with his ordination on Aug. 1 and a new journey began.

“I had been waiting for this a long time,” Father Nnadibuagha said several days after his ordination. “I started this 14 years ago. I knew within myself that God was calling me to serve him. I can’t serve him in any way more than as a priest. I had to be patient, I had to wait, and I had to call on God. Everything came to light and came to pass as God willed it. I’m very happy to finally have gotten to priesthood. Priesthood is a new time in my life; a new beginning to serve the people of God and bring lost sheep back to the fold. It’s also a way to get to heaven for both me and people of God.”

Father Nnadibuagha is now serving as parochial vicar at the Catholic Community of St. Peter, St. Hedwig and St. Mary in Lowville. He has served as a deacon in that community since he was ordained to that role in October 2019.

“I believe that time was a wonderful, crucial time in my preparation for being a priest,” Father Nnadibuagha said. “It helped me to kind of learn the requirements of my vocation. Within that short period of diaconate, I immersed myself in assisting my priest and assisting the bishop. I tried to learn what it is to be a priest.”

Serving as a deacon gave Father Nnadibuagha experience celebrating funerals. Now, as a priest, he recently celebrated his first baptism, and he plans to preside over his first wedding later this month.

Father Nnadibuagha said another first, his first cele-



JESSE SOVIE/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Father Jude Nnadibuagha gives his first blessing to Bishop Terry R. LaValley after being ordained Aug. 1.

bration of Mass, was “very exciting.”

“It was a very holy moment, a very important moment in my life,” he said. “I never imagined I could do that. I thought that in the beginning, I was going to be afraid. But I had a lot of courage. That is a gift of the Holy Spirit. God was there with me and assisted me. I just did it the best way I could do it.”

Father Nnadibuagha said his ordination was a humbling experience and he’s “very happy to act in the person of Christ and bring Christ to humanity.”

“The center of priesthood is to serve God and the people of God,” he said. “I must be vigilant always to look to God and serve him. As a result, the Eucharist becomes the center of my priestly life, and celebration of the word and sacraments. It’s the celebration of truth manifested in Christ himself.”

Father Nnadibuagha said he’s also excited to con-

tinue learning how to be a priest while working with Father James W. “Jay” Seymour.

“I have not learned it all,” Father Nnadibuagha said. “As a deacon, I tried to learn. Now, I’m learning through practical experience, and I learn from my pastor. Being ordained a priest doesn’t mean I have all the knowledge I need. If I have confusion, I can ask my pastor. That’s the joy of being a parochial vicar. I have people to assist me.”

Father Nnadibuagha was raised Catholic in Nigeria and baptized a few months after he was born. He grew up going to Mass with his parents. He made Holy Communion at age 8 and was involved in several church activities, such as the Society of St. Jude’s, the rosary association and the parish council.

“I had a good Catholic upbringing,” Nnadibuagha said in a previous interview. “Initially, I never thought I would be a

priest.”

Despite the suggestions of some of his family members, Father Nnadibuagha said he wanted to become a lawyer when he was young and was on the verge of going to university to study law when he attended the first Mass of a newly ordained priest.

That first Mass in 2005 “really changed my worldview,” Father Nnadibuagha said, and he started thinking, “Is it not good to give this a try?”

So, he began applying to congregations to see if he could join them.

From 2006 to 2007, Father Nnadibuagha joined the Discalced Carmelites. In 2013, he finished studying philosophy, and then in 2017 he completed the theology studies in Rome. At the end of his studies, he felt called to the priesthood, wanting something more active than the contemplative life of the Carmelites.

He applied to a few dioceses, including the Diocese of Ogdensburg, and he came to America for the first time in 2018 to interview with the diocese. He decided to come to America in the first place, he said, after hearing from a priest in Nigeria about priests who conduct Masses at multiple churches because of a shortage of priests. In Nigeria, one church may have two or three priests.

As he prayed over his applications, Nnadibuagha said he quickly decided the Diocese of Ogdensburg would be the only diocese with which he would interview. His confidence stemmed from the quick replies he received from the vocation coordinator to his letters.

“I really said, ‘This could be a sign that I am called to be here,’” Nnadibuagha

said, adding that he completed his studies in Rome, returned to Nigeria, and waited patiently until everything was settled and the diocese asked him to come back.

Father Nnadibuagha said he’s now blessed to have the support and prayers of the people of the Catholic Community of St. Peter, St. Hedwig and St. Mary, as well as others he’s met in the United States, especially during the ongoing pandemic, which made it so his family could not attend his ordination.

“Friends from Boston came via car,” he said. “They drove seven hours and came. That made my day. I saw my father in them. I saw my mother in them. I saw my brothers and sisters in them. And the people of Lowville – God called me to their midst, and they were there. They identify themselves as my family. It was hard when I found out my family couldn’t attend, but I always try to have the disposition if something happens, I have inspiration to let it go. I didn’t really engage my mind thinking about my father or brother or sister when I saw all these good people around me.”

As he moves into this new part of his life and ministry with joy, Father Nnadibuagha said he’d encourage other young men to consider the priesthood.

“I’d like to tell people, young people especially, to always consider and ask God and pray for their vocation and ask God what he has destined for them in their lives. Read the vocations stories of people and see if there’s a relationship between what they go through and their lives. We need young people with good hearts to serve the people of the diocese as priests.”

Father Torwoe: Spirit 'continues to move me'

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

MASSENA—While he was a bit apprehensive before celebrating his first Mass as a priest, Father Severinus Torwoe said God helped him through the experience.

"The First Mass was wonderful," said Father Torwoe, who was ordained Aug. 1 and is now serving as a parochial vicar at St. Peter's Parish in Massena. "There was a kind of anxiety in me, and I was a bit afraid that I would make a mistake... A lot of people were there to join me. Meanwhile, I was praying that the Holy spirit should help me, and really the spirit of the Lord came and supported me. The only consolation I had was that it is not me who is celebrating, rather Jesus the High Priest, who is celebrating. I am just an instrument he is using. With these consoling words, I was able to celebrate my first Eucharistic Mass with great joy."

Father Torwoe said his time serving as a deacon helped prepare him for his priestly ministry.

"I learned a lot," he said. "I baptized three children. I made a confession practicum and a Mass practicum. I prepared myself a lot by reading Scripture to be familiar with the word of God. As a priest, there is a lot of preaching and teaching people. If I don't know the Scriptures, I cannot give that to others."

Father Torwoe said his time as a deacon also gave him opportunities to learn how to record baptisms and gave him experience visiting individuals in their homes and in hospitals.

"I was very excited to baptize three people," he said, noting he celebrated the sacrament while serving in Ticonderoga. "They



JESSE SOVIE/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Father Severinus Torwoe and Father Jude Nnadibuagha prostrate themselves during the Litany of Supplication, part of the Aug. 1 Ordination Mass.

were all from the same family and were baptized at the same time. I thought, 'these are the first fruits.'"

Father Torwoe said he is now excited to begin this new chapter of ministry.

"I have waited so many years to get to this day," he said. "God has been so good to me. It's a big responsibility. I'm not worthy, but I'm configured into the priesthood of Christ. God is calling me. He calls people who are not worthy. He calls sinners and people who are weak. It's humbling that I'm weak, yet God is so interested in me and calling me."

Father Torwoe said he hopes to devote his ministry to serving the people of God, especially those who have fallen away from the Church.

"My whole intention is to pray to the Lord to give me the grace to be an effective instrument," he said. "I want to reach out to people who left the Church. I want to go for the lost sheep and bring them back. I want to help people see the importance of Church."

Father Torwoe, a native of Ghana, said he was "disappointed" his family could not attend his ordination due to the pandemic, but he said he could see God working through the situation.

"It's divine providence," he said. "God knows why.

Being missionaries, wherever you go, you're part of that family. My family could not be here, but, in a way, the church in Ticonderoga and Massena has accepted me. When I'm with them, I feel like I'm with my family. The generosity of the people here has given me great comfort. I feel that I am home."

In a previous interview, Father Torwoe noted that he felt called to serve God as a priest from a young age.

"At the age of 8, I got my call," he said. "As the priest was celebrating Mass, I just felt like I was the one celebrating."

The youngest in a family of 10, Father Torwoe said he grew up as part of a devout Catholic family.

"We were all brought up as Catholic children," he said. "I have a brother who is a religious brother, a nephew who is a Redemptorist priest and another nephew in seminary."

Father Torwoe said his family was not "financially sound," and he couldn't attend secondary school.

"I went to vocational school," he said. "When I become a priest, I thought it would be good to be able to sew and make vestments, so I studied that for three years."

After completing his vocational program, Father Torwoe re-focused on pur-

suing his vocation to the priesthood.

"I joined the Franciscan Friars of Africa in Ghana," he said. "I took first vows in 1995. They sent me to high school. I also studied dress making, since they wanted me to continue with what I had already been studying. I was the only male with 35 girls, since I studied home economics."

His bishop would later send him for more advanced studies in sewing and fashion design.

Serving communities in Ghana, he organized neighborhoods into parish communities, where churches were later established.

Later, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal arrived in Ghana. While there was initially discussion of merging that group with the Franciscan Friars of Africa, the merger was never realized.

"I discussed with one of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal) that I wanted to be a priest," Father Torwoe said. "He talked to director Holy Apostle seminary (in Connecticut). I came here as a brother among the brothers to be trained as a priest."

After completing his studies, he returned to Ghana. There, no further steps were taken toward his ordination.

Then, when a new bishop arrived in his diocese, he severed ties with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

"Since I had done my seminary formation here in the states, I applied to the director, asking him if I could come back to Holy Angels Seminary to continue my studies and discernment and look for a diocese. I came back in 2018 to do a post-master's in theology and look for a diocese."

It was through another priest he met that Father

Torwoe became aware of the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

"I met a priest from Haiti, and he introduced me to this diocese," he said. "I met Bishop Lucia, and he connected me with Bishop LaValley, who interviewed me."

He said he saw unique challenges in the diocese that made him want to serve here.

"One thing interested me most: I went to the diocesan website, and I could see you have so many churches – 120 churches – but only 50 to 60 priests," he said. "Out of the priests, most are senior citizens and taking care of three, four or five churches. It moved me so much. I told myself, 'if these priests are getting to retirement age and still taking care of three to five churches, my services are needed here more.' Bishop LaValley also asked me, 'why Ogdensburg? Why not other big diocese in cities?' I told him this is what motivated me – not enough priests, and the priests are aging."

He completed a pastoral assignment in Ticonderoga, which gave him an opportunity to become familiar with the North Country.

"It's very beautiful here," he said. "People are loving and nice to me. I like the fraternity of priests. I like that the lay faithful want to associate with you and know you more."

Father Torwoe said he continues to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit as he moves into his priesthood.

"When people say to me, 'how did you come to Ogdensburg,' I tell people, 'you have to lift yourself like a piece of paper. The air blows you where it wills,'" he said. "The Holy Spirit blew me here. It's that Spirit that continues to move me."

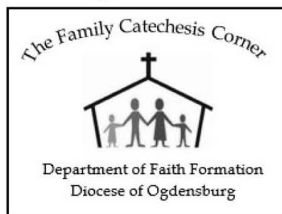
Using digital, social media for family catechesis

By Jessica Hargrave
Contributing Writer

Parents and teachers are starting to get a glimpse of what learning will look when the new school year begins. Schools are making difficult decisions and putting together complex plans surrounding face-to-face learning, online learning and/or combinations of both.

The Diocese of Ogdensburg and its parishes are also looking at options to get religious education programs on track. Parents choosing to be the primary catechists are concerned about digitally overloading their children if school districts go with online learning. Publisher Sadlier Region hosted a webinar called "Screen Time: The Good, the Bad, and the opportunity," which recognized the digital age we live in and how COVID-19 has made the use of technology more prominent during these difficult times.

During her presentation, Andrea Chavez-Kopp, director of advancement and business development for the National Catholic Educational Association, acknowledged too much screen time being a concern for parents, but finding a good balance and incorporating religious education into the mix, can be beneficial.



For parents embracing digital tech for catechesis, Chavez-Kopp suggests this conversation starter: search and bring up a religious image on the screen and have the kids describe the image in three words. Talk about why they chose those words. This can spark a whole conversation and could help reflect on scripture.

On social media, we see the use of "memes," which are captioned photos, usually meant to be humorous. As a homework assignment, parents or catechist could have a "meme-off." Kids can find a religious image online, create a caption for that image and send it to the parent or catechist on social media. The memes can then be shared and discussed with the group the following Sunday.

Whichever format parents choose to continue their children's religious education, keeping the faith alive in the home is crucial.

"Whether we gather in person or online, teaching our children about the Love of God and the

amazing story of our Faith can be a challenge," said Tom Semeraro, Kee-seville catechist and director of the Youth Ministry Office for the Diocese of Ogdensburg. "As a Catechist, I have always found that when I prepare a fun program that keeps kids engaged, moving and actively participating, the lessons 'stick' in their hearts and minds. 'Sticky Faith.'"

Bishop's Public Schedule

Aug. 12 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral
Aug. 15 – 4 p.m. – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral
Aug. 16 – 8 a.m. – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral
Aug. 23 – 8 a.m. – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral
Aug. 24 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Protecting God's Children

The Diocese of Ogdensburg uses the training, Protecting God's Children for Adults. Due to CoVid-19, there are no live trainings scheduled. If you need to complete VIR-TUS training, contact Jean Grizzuto, jgrizzuto@rcdony.org or 315-393-2920 x 1413, who will coordinate assigning the training to be completed online.

Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters from readers of the North Country Catholic.

- Due to space limitations, we ask that letters be limited to 500 words.

- We cannot accept letters which support ideas which are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

- Send letters to North Country Catholic, PO Box 326, Ogdensburg, NY, 13669 or e-mail to news@northcountrycatholic.org
- Join the conversation!

Rest in Peace

This week marks the anniversary of the deaths of the following clergymen who have served in the Diocese of Ogdensburg

Aug. 12 – Rev. Pierre Gagnon, O.M.I., 1901; Rev. John M. Varrilly, 1913

Aug. 13 – Msgr. Bernard F. Kellogg, 1993

Aug. 14 – Rev. Patrick Foley, 1839; Rev. George Dermody, O.S.A., 1956

Aug. 15 – Rev. Alfred Onesime Boyer, 1959; Msgr. Cornelius A. Collins, 1967

Aug. 16 – Rev. Peter Paladini, S.A.C., 1990 (Per his folder in our office)

Aug. 17 – Rev. Joseph Winfrid Vinet, 1907

Aug. 18 – Rev. Leoneo Proulx, O.M.I., 1979

Aug. 19 – Rev. J. N. Emery, O.M.I., 1933; Rev. Richard A. Maher, O.S.A., 1959

Aug. 20 – Rev. J. McCarthy, O.S.A., 1931; Msgr. Griffith J. Billmeyer, 1988

Aug. 21 – Rev. Albert G. Salmon, 1997

Aug. 22 – Rev. James W. M. Rensing, 1936

Aug. 24 – Rev. Louis Lewis, O.M.I., 1938; Msgr. Paul George Brunet, 1991

Aug. 25 – Rev. Damas Guilbault, 1919; Msgr. Hugh P.R. O'Reilly, 1948; Rev. George W. Tobin, 2010

To Report Abuse

If you have a complaint of suspected misconduct involving diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, contact **Victims Assistance Coordinator**, Terri-
anne Yanulavich, Ph.D., LMHC, 5050 Route 374, Merrill, NY 12955; [terri-
annyanulavich@yahoo.com](mailto:terri-
annyanulavich@yahoo.com)
Phone: 518-651-2267 days; 518-
569-0612 evenings; or Father
Christopher Carrara, the Episcopal
Vicar for Clergy;
ccarrara@rcdony.org Phone: 315-
393-2920 ext. 1340. If you have a
complaint of suspected sexual
abuse or related misconduct by the
bishops, contact the **Catholic
Bishop Abuse Reporting Serv-
ice** at 800-276-1562 or
www.ReportBishopAbuse.org.

Environmental Stewardship

I wonder...

As we pray over Scriptures, we find many with people filled with awe at the wonders of God's magnificent creative handiwork. This sense of wonder evokes in them a sense of deep gratitude for all life. The Psalms, often referred to as "God's Prayer Book," offer us an abundance of examples, including Psalms 8, 104, 148.

Not only scientists appreciate the beauty and importance of nature, but artists and writers appreciate it as well, as illustrated in the reflection below.

"When we choose to experience the natural world by being part of it, we can truly share in its wonder. As we become more knowledgeable about it, we may want to accept some level of personal responsibility in the caring of our common home.

From even the tiniest creatures, we can learn much about positive change and care for future generations. One such creature is the Monarch butterfly. While the Monarch's entire life is a wonder, its migration is especially fascinating. The relay migration of the Monarch is a study in sacrifice and interdependence to ensure there will be future generations. It is a journey fraught with declining food sources, temperature changes and predators. No single Monarch makes the round-trip journey of 2,000-3,000 miles. Only the last generation, the Methuselah generation, lives longer than the other generations, which allows it to complete the southward migration. Arriving in the mountain forest of Central Mexico, it will rest at last in land of its ancestors before beginning the cyclic journey northward.


Reflection: Words and images can open our hearts and help bring about change through awareness. How can I bring greater awe and wonder into my life to better appreciate creatures such as the Monarch? What miracles did I see in my life today? What actions can I take to protect these wondrous creatures for future generations?*

*Reprinted with permission from Suzanne Langelier-Lebeda's art exhibit, "Vanishing Point," at Adiron-dack Artists Guild Gallery in Saranac Lake, November 2017

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At the ordination

Photos by Jesse Sovie & Darcy Fargo



At the ordination

Photos by Jesse Sovie & Darcy Fargo



'I always wanted to serve,' Deacon Conger said

By Jonathan Monfiletto
Contributing Writer

OGDENSBURG – Like many college students, Ogdensburg's Deacon Matthew Conger found himself having to complete his spring semester online when the coronavirus pandemic forced colleges to close their campuses for in-person learning.

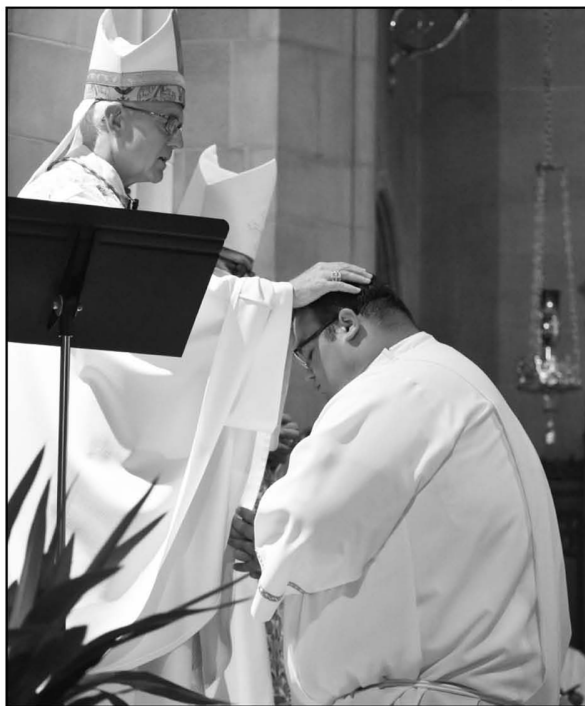
But unlike most college students, Deacon Conger is a seminarian at Christ the King Seminary in Buffalo and spent his spring semester preparing for his summer assignment as well as for his ordination as a transitional deacon.

"It's been different, that's for sure. I'm doing good," Deacon Conger said. "It was really different being in school during a pandemic. Doing it from online, you lose that structure of seminary, you lose the fraternity with the guys. So, that was a big change for me. Hopefully, everything starts to get better."

After completing his third year of seminary in a much different way than he expected, Deacon Conger also began his summer assignment in a much different way than he anticipated just a few months ago.

"It was a lot different," he said, noting he ended his assignment a few days before he would be ordained a deacon in order to have time to prepare for the ceremony. "Normally, you would be able to go out and do hospital visits and you'd be able to go to visit the homebound, and you really couldn't do that this time around, because they're elderly and you didn't want to bring anything in to them or expose them."

After his summer assignment, Deacon Conger began preparing for his ordination, which took



DARCY FARGO/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Bishop Terry R. LaValley lays hands on Deacon Matthew Conger during the Aug. 1 ordination at St. Mary's Cathedral.

place on Saturday, August 1.

"For me, right now any way, it's kind of surreal, I suppose you could say," Deacon Conger said two days before his ordination. "You spend all this time in seminary, and you go to different ordinations. In the back of your mind, you know yours is going to come up one day, but then you kind of think, 'Oh well, you know, that's another year away, that's a year away.' Then all of a sudden, before you know it, it's right here, and it's your turn to be ordained."

Now that Deacon Conger has been ordained as a transitional deacon, his next steps include finishing his seminary studies – he will enter his fourth and final year at Christ the King in the fall – and then, God willing, being ordained as a priest next May.

For Deacon Conger, that

process will also look differently than he might have expected. Christ the King recently closed permanently, but it will host a special program to allow Deacon Conger and the six other deacons to return to campus and finish their degrees.

With only seven seminarians on campus, Deacon Conger said they will be able to maintain social distance as they complete their coursework, which for him includes finishing up courses, writing a major paper, and taking a practicum to learn how to say Mass.

In Buffalo, Deacon Conger will be assigned to Our Lady of Victory Basilica. Following his priesthood ordination, he said, "it's all in the Bishop's hands" as far as his next assignment.

"Wherever he thinks there's a need or wherever he wants to put us," Deacon Conger said. "There's a

whole board actually that meets, the Priest Personnel Board, and they assign where the guys will be."

At 28 years old, Deacon Conger said becoming a priest has been a dream in the making for the last dozen years or so after growing up in a faithful family that includes an older brother and an older sister.

"Faith has always been very important to us in our family," he said. "My parents brought us up in the faith. They made sure that we were in church every Sunday. They made sure we went to church school and everything."

After he and his siblings received their confirmations, Deacon Conger said his parents considered them adults in the church and allowed it to be their decision whether to continue attending church. Deacon Conger continued in his faith, but more than that, he knew by 10th grade he wanted to become a priest.

He said the decision came at a time when young people are considering what college to attend and what career path to take.

"For me, it was the aspect of service. I always wanted to serve the people of the North Country in one way or another," Deacon Conger said. "I had a great example. My former pastor, Father Jim Shurtleff, he really exemplified that for me. Willing to do anything for anybody, didn't matter the time of day. He would be there for them. I thought, 'There's got to be something really special about the priesthood.' So, I began to think about it. I entered the seminary right after high school, and I've been going every since."

As a transitional deacon now and eventually as a priest, Deacon Conger is

charged with helping his parishioners maintain their strong faith. That is why, he noted, it is also important for him to keep his faith strong.

"For me, my faith is important to me because I think it's a great foundation on which everything else in life can be built upon and where your morals and all of that can come from, what you believe in and how you live your life," he said. "I believe the faith is the foundation for all of that."

For Deacon Conger, staying rooted to that foundation involves a strong prayer life. That includes a holy hour every day, the liturgy of the hours, and the rosary as his devotional prayer.

"I believe that we have to be rooted in our prayer in order for our faith to come fully alive," he said. "In those times, you can take whatever's burdening you or on your mind and you can just give it over to the Lord through that prayer. It helps lighten the load, it really does."

As well as his own prayers, Deacon Conger said it is the prayers of others on his behalf and on behalf of all of those entering the priesthood that strengthen him.

"I would like to say thank you to all the people of the diocese who have supported me throughout all these years of seminary, who have prayed for me and prayed for all of us," he said. "I'd really just like to say thank you to all of them because without their prayers, who knows where I could be? It's really the faithful who through their prayers get us to where we are. ... Keep praying. Keep praying for more vocations to the priesthood so that way the laborers aren't few but we have a lot of laborers for the harvest."

Deacon Ojuok found home in the North Country

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

OGDENSBURG— While he's had some detours on the journey, Deacon John Ojuok says he's felt called to be a priest since he was 8 years old.

"I was baptized in grade four," he said, noting that his parish priest insisted that both parents be present for baptisms, and his father was frequently away from his family's home in Kenya for work. "When I got through catechesis and was baptized, I started serving during the Mass as a altar boy. I had a wonderful, wonderful pastor, what we called a 'parish priest.' He was really friendly. One day, I went to him and said, 'I want to be a priest.' I was 8. He was so, so happy! He told me, 'that's very nice, but it takes a long way. What you should do now is be good, love your studies, be prayerful, be truthful, obey your parents and study hard. Finally, love our lady.'"

Deacon Ojuok, age 37, said that advice sticks in his mind even now as he continues his seminary studies at Christ the King in East Aurora, New York. He was ordained a deacon Aug. 1 by Bishop Terry R. LaValley.

"I've always followed those words," he said. "My mom was very devoted to Our Lady. Every evening, we prayed the rosary. Every kid had a day to lead. And before we'd go to bed, we'd get a blessing from mom."

While his father attended Mass less frequently, Deacon Ojuok said his mother required him and his siblings to attend Mass every Sunday, despite the hardships involved in doing so.

"The rule was 'no Mass, no food,'" he said. "And we had to walk one hour to get to Mass. We'd leave home so we could reach church before Mass starts. We'd



DARCY FARGO/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Deacon John Kennedy Ojuok was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Terry R. LaValley on Aug. 1. He will return to Christ the King Seminary later this month to continue his studies for the priesthood.

wake up at 6 for Mass at 9."

Deacon Ojuok said he attended Catholic grade school before seeking admission to minor seminary for his high school education.

"For minor seminary, you get in only by recommendation of your parish priest," he explained. "From each parish, three or four people are chosen to interview, and they only take one or two. I was so eager to interview, so prayerful. I stayed for three days for the interview. It also included algebra, English, Christian religious education and sciences. Then you wait for the results. When somebody is selected, they tell the parish priest, and the parish priest calls you. After three weeks, I was called. Out of four that I interviewed, I was told I would be alone. I was so happy! I started singing and sang from my parish to home. When I shared with my mom, she was so happy. She said, 'it's good you're happy, but let's pray first.' We prayed, we sang, and we had a nice meal."

During a pastoral assignment after minor seminary, Deacon Ojuok found himself working in a parish subcenter – a small church that was part of a larger parish. There, he worked in the homes of parish

members, praying with each household and teaching the Gospels. He also met a religious sister who introduced him to the Order of St. Augustine. He joined that religious community and received his bachelor's degree in philosophy in Rome.

Discerning the religious order wasn't right for him at that time, Deacon Ojuok "requested a break" and began working with Salesians of Don Bosco in their ministry with street children. He also started teaching philosophy at a local college, working at a psychiatric hospital and working with individuals with disabilities.

"I woke up each morning at 4 and went to bed at 12 (midnight)," he said. "It was really, really hard."

During that period of time, he had two separate experiences that reminded him of his vocation. In one incident, Deacon Ojuok was awaiting service of "a cold drink at a bar," when the server approached him and asked, "are you a pastor?"

"I had waited for service for almost two hours, and the first thing she asked me was if I was a pastor," he said, laughing. "After two months, I went somewhere else, and a guy came up to me and said, 'you should not be here. You

look like a priest.' I had been thinking I could serve God in other ways. I had all these areas of work, and I was falling from my call to be a priest. These two scenarios made me think otherwise."

A short time later, Deacon Ojuok was set to receive an award for his work with individuals with disabilities. At the award presentation, he was approached by a Dominican brother, who asked him if he had ever considered becoming a brother.

"He gave me his card," Deacon Ojuok said. "I started communicating with the Dominican brothers."

It was then Deacon Ojuok learned the religious community was based in the United States. While he wasn't sure he wanted to leave his family, Deacon Ojuok said the process moved very quickly, and he found himself heading for Illinois with the Dominicans. Early in his time with the order, he was assigned to a camp in Old Forge.

"During that time, we toured the Diocese of Ogdensburg," he said. "With the cows and corn fields, it reminded me of where I grew up. It felt like home. When we visited Alexandria Bay, I met Father (Douglas G.) Comstock. We exchanged information, and started communicating. I told him how I felt here. He asked me if it was possible that I'd want to join this diocese."

After a few snags in the process, Deacon Ojuok was accepted into this diocese. He traveled to Canton, mostly by bus, where he met Father Douglas Lucia, now Bishop Lucia, the bishop of Syracuse, then vocation director for this diocese.

"I arrived in the morning and freshened up in Canton," he said. "Then Father Doug told me we were

going to have lunch with the bishop. That was the first time I had eaten with a bishop since I was born. I found him so, so loving, so down to earth, so friendly. I was so happy. God was showing me I was home."

Deacon Ojuok learned he would be returning to Old Forge to stay with Father Howard J. Vnette, who was pastor there at the time.

"That night, I went back to Canton, and I had never before realized the joy I felt that night," he said. "I felt God had called me and been with me all these years to bring me to this point. I was so grateful."

After continuing his education at Christ the King, studies he's slated to complete this coming school year, Deacon Ojuok said he was profoundly moved by being ordained a deacon.

"I'm still taking it all in," he said. "The Ordination Mass was very, very powerful to me – the most powerful Mass I've had. I was so emotional when lying down there. I prayed, and I became emotional. I was so, so happy. God started this with me, and everything is becoming fulfilled."

Deacon Ojuok said he looks forward to continuing to serve the Diocese of Ogdensburg and its people.

"I'm looking forward to being a humble deacon and meeting the needs of those who need me," he said. "I'm praying to God – 'just let me be a humble servant.'"

He said he hopes to continue serving humbly as a priest, God willing.

"God gave me a heart for relations," he said. "I know how to relate to people well and give respect. I see the priesthood as not a job, something you do for money. It's a ministry. It's a call God gives you. I'm not working, I'm doing my ministry."

Deacon Wilder: 'Service is the big thing'

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

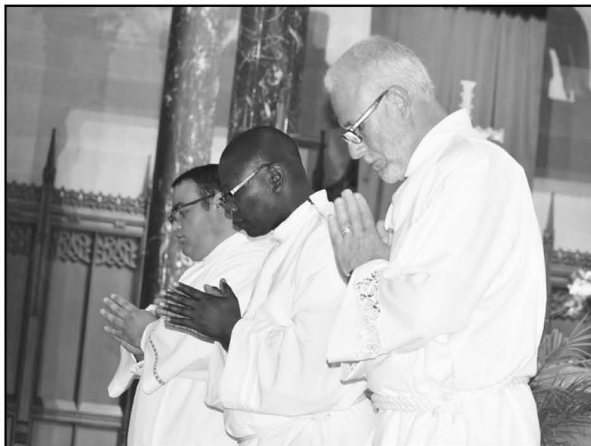
WATERTOWN – Though he started the deacon formation program 12 years ago, when (now) Deacon Donald Wilder completed the program, he discerned that the time wasn't right for his ordination.

"Just before I was supposed to be ordained, I decided to pull the plug," he said. "This January, I determined it was time."

Deacon Wilder was ordained by Bishop Terry R. LaValley to the permanent diaconate on Aug. 1. He is now serving as chaplain at the Watertown Correctional Facility and the Cape Vincent Correctional Facility. He also serves St. Patrick's, St. Anthony's and Holy Family parishes in Watertown.

Deacon Wilder said part of his inspiration to seek ordination came when a member of the current deacon formation class from his parish community, Patrick Jank, became ill and passed away.

"I wanted to step up to the plate," Deacon Wilder said. "I thought, if (Deacon



DARCY FARGO/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

Deacon Donald Wilder, right, was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Terry R. LaValley on Aug. 1, 12 years after starting the formation program.

Kevin Mastellon) could no longer serve our church or decided to retire, I wanted there to be a deacon at St. Patrick's."

Deacon Wilder said he first entered the formation program after guidance from three sources: God, Father Arthur J. LaBaff and Deacon Mastellon. He said the latter two approached him about considering the vocation.

"Father LaBaff and (Deacon) Kevin Mastellon kind of pointed me in that direction," Deacon Wilder

said. "I'm retired military. We became parishioners at St. Patrick's in 2001. We had lived in Copenhagen for four years and then moved to Watertown. We fell in love with St. Patrick's. When my wife and I became members of the parish, we became very active. We participated in the Lay Ministry program. We became lecturers. I went into ministry with the (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), and my wife went into the confirmation classes. We

both became (Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist). We got involved and really enjoyed helping in any way we could. The diaconate was kind of a natural evolution."

Though he opted not to be ordained at the conclusion of his formation program, Deacon Wilder continued to serve his parish community, and he also served in his role as prison chaplain. He said he hopes his new ministry will augment what he can do to serve both his parish and those he interacts with in his prison ministry.

"I want to help my community and be of service," he said. "I just want to serve in whatever capacity I can and whatever capacity is needed. I'm looking forward to serving on the altar during Mass. I also feel this feeds into my work as a prison chaplain, as well. I'll be able to do a few more things for the inmates. I'm looking forward to serving the bishop, serving our church and serving the community. Service is the big thing. It's how I envision my ministry."

Deacon Wilder said his wife, Joyce, has been very supportive of his pursuit of his vocation. He also noted that Deacon Mastellon was critical in getting him to ordination.

"In January, when I decided it was time to pursue this, I talked to (Deacon) Kevin (Mastellon)," he said. I think he was carrying the letter I needed to write in his back pocket. He advised me on exactly how to move forward. I went and had an interview with the bishop. He prayed on it and agreed to ordain me. Without the help of (Deacon) Kevin and Kathy Mastellon, I don't think this would've happened. He's like a brother. He's helped me over these last few months to prepare for ordination."

While he plans to pursue preaching faculties in the future to serve his parish in an additional capacity, Deacon Wilder said he's hoping to spend the immediate future adjusting to his new role.

"I ask people to keep me in their prayers and keep me in their patience," he said.

Meet the new seminarian: Venes Laine

By Catherine Russell
Vocations Coordinator

Venes Laine is one of four new seminarians this year studying for the diocese. He is a native of Haiti.

Before discerning a call to priesthood, Laine spent 14 years in a religious community as a religious brother. For the last two years, he has studied philosophy and sharpened his English at Holy Apostles Seminary in Connecticut.

In the fall, Venes will attend the Pontifical College Josephinum in Ohio to finish his bachelor's degree in philosophy.

Laine gives his mother credit for his desire to be a priest. As a child, a twin and one of 10 siblings, Venes' mother would drag him to daily mass and force him to stay awake. It wasn't easy but his mother never gave up.

"God kept knocking at my door," he said. "Four years ago, I called mom and told her I was going



Venes Laine

to become a priest. She was so happy. She said, 'Thanks be to god!'

Three weeks later, Laine's mother died.

Besides his devout mother, Venes' father was the church sacristan. Venes' twin brother has just professed vows as a religious brother in Haiti. "I was so fortunate to grow up in my family," he said. "We didn't have a lot but we were happy, and my parents shared their strong faith with us."

Laine's journey toward priesthood has been long and with many turns. His advice to someone think-

ing about priesthood is simple. Trust the call, give it a try. Expect challenges but never doubt God is in control.

Laine has a home base here in the diocese. He lives at St. Alexander's Rectory in Morrisonville when he is home from seminary. When he is not studying, Laine loves to read and play sports. So far, he loves the people and the priests he has met here in the north country. This is now home.

CATHOLIC WORLD AT A GLANCE

Church leaders seek aid for Catholic students in relief bill

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Some of the country's most prominent church leaders appealed to Congressional negotiators to include financial support for families to continue to send their children to Catholic and non-public schools in a coronavirus relief bill currently being negotiated. Explaining how the deep economic recession caused by the pandemic since March has "made it impossible for many struggling families to continue paying tuition," five cardinals, an archbishop and a bishop called for the aid in an Aug. 5 letter to Republican and Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives and Senate. The letter, released Aug. 6, implored for "robust" assistance "to ensure that the education needs of all children are met, including children in Catholic and other non-public schools." Among those signing the letter were Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York; Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago; and Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, California, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Catholic Education. The correspondence was the third plea for support in recent weeks by church leaders as Republican and Democratic congressional leadership and the administration were locked in days of negotiations over specific measures in the relief bill.

Vatican: Baptisms that used a modified formula are not valid

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Changing the words of the formula for baptism render the sacrament invalid, said the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Specifically, a baptism administered with the formula "We baptize you ..." instead of "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is not valid because it is the person of Christ through the minister who is acting, not the assembly, the congregation said. The doctrinal congregation's ruling was published Aug. 6 as a brief response to questions regarding the validity of baptisms using that modified formula. A baptism administered with this kind of modified formula is not valid, the congregation said, and the baptisms would have to be redone for those individuals who had been baptized with the improvised wording.

Bishops express solidarity with Lebanon, join pope in prayers

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the chairman of its Committee on International Justice and Peace expressed solidarity with Lebanon and joined Pope Francis in his call for prayers for the nation following the deadly Aug. 4 explosion in Beirut. In an Aug. 6 statement, Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, USCCB president, and committee chair Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, added their prayers to the pope's that Lebanon may "overcome the grave crisis they are experiencing," and beseeching the intercession of Our Lady of Lebanon, we place our sure hope in Him who reconciles all things unto himself." After a massive fire triggered the explosion that rocked Beirut's port area, Pope Francis Aug. 5 urged prayers and a united effort to help Lebanon overcome "this serious crisis." At least 100 people were reported dead, more than 4,000 others were injured, and more than 100 people were missing. Rescue workers continued to search for survivors under the rubble. Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the blast was caused by thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse that had caught fire.

Survey: Americans support COVID worship restrictions

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Americans overwhelmingly back pandemic-related restrictions on worship services, saying houses of worship should not be exempt.

Americans, by a 4-to-1 margin, said houses of worship should be subject to the same social-distancing rules as other organizations. The ratio backing this view was 3-to-1 for Christians, 4-to-1 for Jews, and 9-to-1 for those who are religiously unaffiliated.

Among Republicans and those who lean Republican, the margin was 2-to-1, and among Democrats and those who lean Democratic, the margin was 13-to-1.

The results were issued Aug. 7 by the Pew Research Center in a new report, "Americans Oppose Religious Exemptions From Coronavirus-Related Restrictions."

"On this question, Americans seem to align with two recent Supreme Court orders, which rejected lawsuits claiming that state restrictions on worship violated the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom," the Pew report said.

Among adults who go to church regularly, 55% said their congregation's place of worship is open with modifications, 31% said it is closed, and 6% said it is open as normal prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Asked what restrictions are in place, 45% said their house of worship required social distancing, 36% restricted attendance, 35% required masks and 20% limited communal singing.

Eight percent of Catholics told Pew their

church was open just as it had been before the pandemic, but 27% said theirs was still closed, while 62% said theirs was open but with restrictions. By comparison, 40% of mainline Protestant, and 41% of Black Protestant churches remained closed, but just 18% of evangelical Protestant churches remained closed.

By a 3-to-2 margin, Catholics felt at least somewhat confident they would not catch or spread COVID-19 by going to Mass, but there is a difference between white and Hispanic Catholics. Among whites, 71% said they felt at least somewhat confident about not being infected. But among Hispanics, only 47% said they felt confident about not catching or spreading the coronavirus, while 51% said they were either "not too" or "not at all" confident about keeping the virus at bay if they went to church.

Clear majorities of Christians of all stripes said they had watched religious services online or on television, according to Pew. Catholics brought up the rear at 63% in this category; 32% said they had gone to church in the past month. Twenty-one percent said they had done both, but 26% said they had done neither.

Ten percent of Americans, according to Pew, said they'll go to church more often after the pandemic has abated, while 5% said they will go less often. Of Americans who go to church at least monthly, 16% said they will go more often, and 7% said they will go less often.

Of those who have been watching religious services online, 19% said they will

continue to watch online after the pandemic, while 28% said they'll watch less often after the outbreak subsides, while 53% said their viewing habits will stay the same.

The Pew report said online watchers report great levels of satisfaction, with 91% saying they are at least somewhat satisfied by what they've seen. Forty percent reported they watch services from their own house of worship, while 29% said they've watched some other congregation's worship services, with the rest saying they've watched both.

Among those watching or attending services, 76% said they've heard from the pulpit about the importance of taking steps to limit COVID-19's spread — far outstripping other subjects such as support for Black Lives Matter protests (41%); the importance of voting, protesting or being politically engaged (40%); and opposition to abortion (35%). Opposition to government orders that stopped churches from holding in-person religious services was a topic heard by 31% of survey respondents, while 25% said they'd heard opposition to Black Lives Matter protests in a sermon, and 11% said they'd heard support for legal abortion.

Since the pandemic, 42% of Catholics said they've given "about the same amount" of money to their home parish — split 53% for white Catholics and 30% for Hispanic Catholics. Five percent of Catholics have given more, and 28% have given less, while 22% said they have not donated at all — 12% were white Catholics and 37% Hispanic Catholics.

CALLED TO SERVE

Adrift on the water without a guide

Early in the morning of Aug. 3, *The William Darrell* broke free from the ropes that kept it tethered to the dock on Wolf Island and went adrift. The boat is a ferry that transports people and vehicles between the Island and Cape Vincent on the St. Lawrence River. The ferry is operated by Horne's Ferry from April to October each year.

Press reports suggest *The William Darrell* was pushed by wind and currents several miles downriver before finally meeting a dock on Carleton Island. There was little damage, and no one was hurt. The ferry was freed and towed safely

EDITOR'S NOTE

Due to circumstances beyond our control, Msgr. Paul E. Whitmore's Scripture Reflections column was not available for publication this week. We hope to return the column in future editions.

back to its mooring.

Imagine with me what the ferry was thinking as it rode, unattended in the choppy St. Lawrence water. "I am free" is the first emotion I imagine. Then the exhilaration of this newly found freedom was dampened by the realization the journey is haphazard, uncontrolled. "I don't know where I am going, and no one is guiding me!"

The images of the ferry adrift made me think about the folks who have abandoned their religion during the pandemic. We have indeed paused many things in our lives since last March. Among them, many have stopped going to church, lack parish activities to keep



Deacon
Kevin Mastellon

them involved, ignored the opportunity to pray as a family or even alone. At first, we felt free from the responsibility we share as baptized Catholics to attend Mass. We did not "have to go to church."

The Apostles probably thought nothing of piling into a boat on the Sea of Galilee to travel with Jesus to the other side. They were visiting, relaxing, maybe even joking around a bit while Jesus napped. Everything seemed fine until "a violent storm came up on the sea." Matthew re-

ports in the Gospel that they turned to Jesus for help and he calmed the water, but not before he reminded them of their belief in God and their dependence on Him. "Why are you terrified, O you of

little faith."

They reached the other side with little or no damage to the boat, and no one was hurt. Many of us have been adrift since March and weathered the occasional violent storm in our lives. Perhaps we have pushed our luck to the edge, and it is time to renew our relationship with Jesus. It is time to return to prayer, return to Mass, return to the Lord who will find us stuck at a dock and pull us back to safety, undamaged and unhurt.

Deacon Kevin Mastellon ministers in Watertown.

He is the Director of Permanent Deacons for the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

UPCOMING EVENTS

BLESSING OF THE FLOWERS, HERBS & GRAINS IN LOWVILLE

On Sunday, August 16, at the 11 a.m. Mass at St. Peter's in Lowville, located at 5457 Shady Ave, the parish will observe the Polish custom of blessing flowers, herbs and grains to honor our Blessed Mother (Matka Boska Zelna.). Our Lady of the Greens. There are over 2,000 plants named after our Blessed Mother. We are called to imitate the qualities of the Blessed mother that these plants represent. All are welcome to bring bouquets, pots, vases and stalks of flowers, herbs and grains and place them in front of the altar. These blessed plants can then be taken to the home or cemetery or be given as gifts. Contact 315-348-6260 for more information.

'PUTTING FORGIVENESS AND LOVE INTO PRACTICE' VIRTUAL RETREAT

Retreat time will explore Scriptures on forgiveness and consider some of the barriers and aids to making these teachings a reality in our daily lives. The retreat will be virtual using Zoom on the computer. It includes presentations, time for personal prayer and reflection with optional times for sharing. Facilitators will be Sister Bethany Fitzgerald, SSJ, Molly Amoriell, and Jane Wells. Date: September 19-20. For more info., contact srbethssj@gmail.com (315-212-6592) Free willing offering is acceptable.

Bishop of Latakia, native of Lebanon, discusses blast

Editor's note: Bishop Terry R. LaValley received the following correspondence from Bishop Antoine Chbeir, bishop of the Diocese of Latakia in Syria. The Diocese of Ogdensburg has a "twinning relationship" with that diocese, which consists of 30 parishes, 27 priests and 27 consecrated religious. Bishop Chbeir is a native of Lebanon, which was rocked by an explosion at its major port last week.

Dear Bishop Terry,

Thank you for your prayers and your kind attention toward me and my people. Unfortunately, the black sequence for Lebanon is still going on. As if is not enough economic crisis, devaluation of domestic currency which is literally divided by five, Coronavirus lock down, high unemployment, this blast has been a



Bishop Antoine Chbeir

knock down for hundreds of Lebanese households, injured, dead, losing their homes, their cars and their belongings. May the Lord help them to overcome this ordeal, and to take away evil.

I was pleased for your diocese having new seminarians' graduation paving

the way for new ordinations, Christine Ward (editorial assistant for the *North Country Catholic*, who distributes the paper's electronic edition via email) is always updating me about new events in your diocese.

Know dear Bishop Terry, you are a blessing for me and for my diocese, you and your people are always in my thoughts and prayers.

+ (Bishop) Antoine (Chbeir)

Residents of the Diocese of Ogdensburg are urged to pray for the Diocese of Latakia, Bishop Chbeir and the people of Lebanon. To make a donation to the Diocese of Latakia, checks should be made out to the Diocese of Ogdensburg with "Solidarity in Faith" written in the memo section and can be placed in parish collections.



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MPDO: Please consider a donation

Missionary Projects of the Diocese of Ogdensburg – MPDO – still needs your help, please. Two weeks ago, a diocesan-wide collection was done to benefit the Missionary Projects of the Diocese of Ogdensburg. This a collection normally reserved for only half of the deaneries within our diocese every other year. This year due to the pandemic, the Mission Cooperation Plan (COOP) was not permitted to take place. Therefore, the MPDO collection is going to attempt to make up some of the shortcomings that COOP normally funds.

Missionary Projects of the Diocese of Ogdensburg annual collection took place on the weekend of July 25-26. The 2020 MPDO collection will be used to help with many causes this year. It will support missionary priests and religious who work here in our diocese: Sisters of Chavanod, Archdiocese of Caceras, Philipppines, The Herald of Good News; it will continue to support the Church in Latin America; it will further our solidarity efforts in the Diocese of Latakia; provide continued support for our former mission parish in Mollendo, Peru; and will help any other mission project throughout the world that Bishop Terry R. LaValley deems appropriate as part of our evangelization efforts. The MPDO collection provides hope and new life for so many in desperate and imminent need, such as those impacted by flood, famine, earthquakes and war around our world. It can serve as a source of funding in a crisis or emergency conditions.

Our diocese offers prayers as our churches fund missionary activities. Thank you for sharing in our missionary zeal that brings Christ's love to those living in developing countries. Thank you, from the grateful people in need whose names you do not know but who are praying for you. Your gift will make a difference in the life of the poor, oppressed, voiceless and hopeless worldwide. If you can consider a donation, please mail to the Mission Office, MPDO, PO Box 369, Ogdensburg, NY 13669.

Thank you for all you do. Especially now, in all this uncertainty.

Please remember "The Society for the Propagation of the Faith" when writing or changing your will.
www.rcdony.org/mission

OBITUARIES

Adams – Richard W. "Flipper" Axenfeld, 58; Private Mass of Christian Burial to be held at St. Cecilia's Church.

Black River – Carmaline (Dilello) Arquiott, 84; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 1, 2020 at St. Paul's Church; burial in Felts Mills Cemetery.

Bombay – Richard Henault; Graveside Services Aug. 13, 2020 at St. Joseph's Cemetery.

Brasher Falls – John Alton Ward, Jr., 80; Private Mass of Christian Burial to be held St. Patrick's Church.

Brushton – Janet M. (Drumm) Stevens, 79; Graveside Services Aug. 7, 2020 at St. Mary's Cemetery.

Carthage – Richard Clement, 89; Graveside Services Aug. 7, 2020 at St. James Church.

Champlain – William Dubois, 94; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 5, 2020 at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Clayton – Anthony M. Paris, 63; Private Mass of Christian burial to be held at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Coopersville – Elizabeth Laurin, 83; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 8, 2020 at Joseph's Church.

Croghan – Edward R. Nortz, 92; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 4, 2020 at St. Stephen's Church; burial in St. Vincent DePaul Cemetery, Belfort.

Madrid – Michael R. Pontillo, 65; Graveside Services Aug. 5, 2020 at St. John the Baptist Cemetery.

Malone – Ronald A. Demers, 81; Funeral Services Aug. 6, 2020 at the Bruso-Desnoyers Funeral Home; burial in Constable Cemetery.

Malone – Garth Gagnier, 85; Mass of Christian Burial July 28, 2020 at Notre Dame Church; burial in Brainardville

Cemetery.

Malone – Paula A. Poupore, 61; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 7, 2020 at Notre Dame Church; burial in Notre Dame Cemetery.

Massena – Ralph Edward Douglas, 79; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 4, 2020 at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery, Brasher Falls.

Massena – Phyllis A. (Prashaw) Smith, 78; Graveside Services to be held at a later date at Calvary Cemetery.

Morrisonville – Daniel Nicolas Brew, 41; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 5, 2020 at St. Alexander's Church; burial in parish cemetery.

North Bangor – Gloria M. Gonia, 70; Graveside Services Aug. 5, 2020 at St. Augustine's Cemetery.

North Lawrence – James H. McCuin, 70; Private Mass of Christian Burial July 30, 2020; burial in Hillcrest Cemetery.

Ogdensburg – Richard Franklin Gibson, 66; Funeral Services Aug. 6, 2020 at Frary Funeral Home; burial in Ogdensburg Cemetery.

Peru – John Henry Lawliss, 86; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 8, 2020 at St. Augustine's Church.

Plattsburgh – Sue Ann (Ashline) Ducatte, 59; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 1, 2020 at St. Peter's Church.

Plattsburgh – James J. Edwards, Jr., 89; Memorial Mass to be held at Our Lady of Victory Church; burial in Plattsburgh Community Mausoleum.

Plattsburgh – Sharon A. (Luck) St. Germain, 81; Mass of Christian Burial July 30, 2020 at St. Peter's Church; burial in St. Joseph's Cemetery, West Chazy.

Port Henry – Jennifer Ann (Trybendis) Carson, 47; Mass of Christian Burial July 31, 2020 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in CC of Moriah Cemetery.

Potsdam – Esther M. Charlebois; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 8, 2020 at St. Mary's Church.

Potsdam – Janet Roberta Nicolson, 67; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 7, 2020 at St. Mary's Church.

Redford – Irvin M. Rascoe, 82; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 4, 2020 at Church of the Assumption; burial in parish cemetery.

Saranac Lake – Emma (Law) Berghorn, 89; Mass of Christian Burial July 27, 2020 at St. Bernard's Church; burial in St. Bernard's Cemetery.

Saranac Lake – William "Bill" McGovern, 82; Graveside Services to be held at St. Bernard's Cemetery.

Watertown – Jane Pauline (Wszalek) Furgal, 96; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 7, 2020 at Holy Family Church; burial in St. Stanislaus Cemetery, Whitesboro.

Watertown – Deborah A. Marshall, 70; Memorial Mass Aug. 5, 2020 at Holy Family Church; burial Glenwood Cemetery.

Watertown – Matilda "Tillie" Helen (Schwarzkopf) Smith, 96; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 6, 2020 at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church; burial in Glenwood Cemetery.

West Chazy – Ricky S. Lashway, 66; Mass of Christian Burial July 27, 2020 at St. Joseph's Church; burial in St. Joseph's Cemetery.



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'Jesus Christ is my brother and my friend'

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

PLATTSBURGH - Since Rick LaDuke helped his wife, Susan, find the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church, the South Plattsburgh couple have been following God's call to help others find that truth.

"Rick is a cradle Catholic," said Susan. "I converted 10 years ago."

Rick said his grandfather first helped him become firmly grounded in the faith.

"My grandfather was my Godparent at baptism and my confirmation sponsor," Rick noted. "He helped me learn my faith, and I found it very fulfilling."

When Susan expressed interest in going through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) to join the Church ten years ago, circumstances played out in such a way that Rick became her primary teacher.

"It all started when my daughter got engaged to a Catholic and had converted to the faith," Susan explained. "We had been going to St. Peter's (in Plattsburgh) off and on - more on than off. I just loved the parish, the environment, the homilies - everything about it. I had been to Catholic churches before, but this was something different. I wanted to know more and get more involved. I talked at great lengths with Rick. He didn't force the issue. He wanted me to do what I felt was right."



The couple spoke to Father John R. Yonkovig, then pastor at St. Peter's, and Susan began RCIA with Rick attending alongside. Not long after she began the program, Susan's mother became ill, requiring Susan to provide care for her and preventing her from attending the RCIA classes.

"Rick took the classes, and he came home and taught me," Susan recounted. "I learned at the hands of the (Director of Religious Education) and my husband. He came home every night and sat with me for an hour or two hours talking to me about the discussion at the class. If not for him, I wouldn't have - I couldn't have - finished the class."

Now members of St. Alexander's Parish in Morristown, both Rick and Susan teach in the program that helped Susan become

a member of the Church.

"I have sponsored two other people to join the Catholic Church, and I work for the RCIA program," Rick said.

"We both do," Susan added. "Since I became Catholic, we felt this was something we needed to do."

This year, the pair worked with two teenage girls to help them prepare to enter the Church.

"That was an amazing year for us," Susan said. "With the pandemic, the ending was difficult, though. They didn't get to be received into the Church at the Easter Vigil."

"They received their Sacraments of Initiation a few weeks ago," Rick noted.

Both Rick and Susan also work to share their faith with their family, especially their grandchildren.

"We have eight grandchildren," Susan said. "Seven of

the eight are baptized Catholics. That's a big part of our lives - keeping our family as part of the faith. Their parents don't go to church as much as we'd like, but we bring our grandchildren when we can. It's a joy for us, watching them on their journeys and making their sacraments."

Susan said worshipping and growing together in their faith has helped make the couple's marriage stronger.

"Our marriage wasn't bad before, but we've been married 38 years, and the last 10 since I've become Catholic have been a 100 percent improvement," she said. "Having God in our lives and knowing what God wants from us has made our marriage better. And we're part of a community, a faith community. We keep trying to encourage (their children) to practice their faith. We hope that living our lives of faith and showing them what God wants, maybe they'll come back."

As part of their efforts to live their faith, the LaDukes say grace together at every meal, attend Mass together each Sunday and usually try to say morning prayer and evening prayer, parts of the Liturgy of the Hours, together.

"We haven't been able to do that as much through the pandemic," Susan noted, explaining that she spent a significant amount of time helping her daughter, who was working a significant number of hours in the medical field. "I spent a lot of time helping my grandchildren, especially my 11-year-old grandson, with their schoolwork. There were times my grandson would turn to me and say, 'I couldn't have done this without you.' It made my day. A lot of times, he was teaching me as much as I was teaching him. It was a

fun time and a hard time, but it was family bonding time."

The LaDukes also bolster their faith by participating in communities of faith. Rick is a member of the Knights of Columbus, and Susan is a member of the Catholic Daughters.

"That means a lot to me," Rick said of his participation in the Knights. "It's a group of men who put everyone else above themselves. You see how much money you can earn and raise so you can give it away where it's needed."

"It's being part of a community, part of the Church and getting to know people on a different level," Susan added.

The couple has also found community in their parish home.

"Our community has grown," Susan said. "Father Scott (R. Seymour) has four churches. We seem to do ok when other parishes are brought in. There's no pushing and shoving, and it seems like it all works out. Our communities have become a very large family, a very large community of faith."

The LaDukes serve their community as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist and by teaching religious education and RCIA. Susan also teaches Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC). She also volunteers for the parish's annual harvest dinner.

Both say their faith is critically important to their lives.

"Jesus Christ is my brother and my friend," said Rick, who also works at Seton Catholic School. "He died on the cross to save my soul."

"With faith, anything is possible," added Susan. "We have to have that belief. We have to have it in our hearts. With Christ, all things are possible. I believe that."