

THE Catholic Spirit

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Lessons For Life

Catholic schools and parish religious education programs across the Diocese are forming children to love God's creation and respect the miracle of life. Kindergarten classes in St. Francis Cathedral School, Metuchen, were excited to see their chicks hatch in their Early Childhood Education Center, after keeping close eyes on the incubator and learning about their life cycle. See, also, our Respect Life poster contest winners on pgs. 24-25: The Beauty of Motherhood

—Stephanie Monteleones photo



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<i>Sixteen men were ordained to the diaconate, including one transitional deacon.</i>	



1. Bishop James F. Checchio lays hands on the head of Deacon Anthony Woods, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Whitehouse Station. The gesture, rooted in Scripture and Tradition of the Church, signifies the conferral of the Holy Spirit. **2.** The elect lay prostrate in an act of humble prayer and surrender to God, symbolic of dying to their old self and rising. **3.** Wives of the deacons carry the liturgical vestments of the

diaconate to their husbands, where the elect are vested in the stole and dalmatic by their vesting clergy. **4.** Msgr. Joseph Celano, pastor, Immaculate Conception Parish, Somerville, congratulates Deacon Tuan Bui from Immaculate Conception, after vesting him. **5.** Bishop Checchio places the Book of the Gospels in Deacon Ketan Christian's hands, as a sign of his duty to preach the faith of the Church in word and in deed.

— Photos and headshots by Mike Ehrmann

Bishop Checchio ordains 15 permanent deacons, one transitional deacon

By Deacon Patrick Cline
Correspondent

“What a wonderful day for an ordination,” said Bishop James F. Checchio as he began the Mass of Ordination for 16 men to the Diaconate on May 3, the Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles. He said these two saints will be “wonderful intercessors and inspiring examples for our brothers today.”

Reflecting on the lives of these two saints, Bishop Checchio told the men he was about to ordain that just as Jesus called down the Holy Spirit upon his Apostles, “the Church now calls down the Holy Spirit upon you. You are ordained today not to fulfill a role in the Church but rather to light a fire, to light a fire in our world, and in our Church.”

Bishop Checchio said St. James reminds us that faith must never be reduced to simply an abstract or verbal declaration but must always be expressed in acts. “So brothers, your ministry must be marked by good works, particularly loving the poor,” the Bishop instructed.

In the Gospel of St. John, St. Philip introduced the Apostle Nathaniel to Jesus

using the Lord’s own words, “Come and see.” Bishop Checchio said that St. Philip thus urges us to become closely acquainted with and fall in love with Jesus. He assured the candidates that “Jesus promises to be with you always, don’t forget that. May your road to sainthood always be guided by him and by his Blessed Mother.”

Then Bishop Checchio questioned the candidates regarding their willingness to undertake the tasks and obligations of the diaconate. In response, the men expressed their resolve to fulfill the office of deacon in accord with the mind of Christ and of his Church.

In one of the most moving moments common to all ordination rites, to the diaconate, presbyterate and episcopacy, the 16 men prostrated themselves in the biblical gesture of humility. As they did so, they and the congregation were invited to pray the Litany of Supplication invoking “All holy men and women, Saints of God,” many by name, to pray for those men.

Bishop Checchio prayed that God would mercifully hear our prayers for his aid in sanctifying and blessing these candidates the Church has deemed worthy to

be tasked with the Office of the Diaconate. Through the laying on of hands by the Bishop on each man, the gift of the Holy Spirit was conferred upon them.

After they were vested with the Stole and Dalmatic, the signs of their new office, the Book of the Gospels was presented to each Deacon by the Bishop with the admonition, “Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practice what you teach.”

A recurring comment from many of the people attending the Ordination Mass was how joyful and moving the Mass was, especially when all the other deacons present exchanged the Kiss of Peace with the newly ordained men. “You could truly see the look of joy on all their faces,” said Anna Bui, wife of Deacon Tuan Bui of Immaculate Conception Parish, Somerville.

In addition to the men ordained to the permanent diaconate, Rev. Mr. Jerome Roxas Ocampo was ordained a transitional deacon as he continues his journey towards priesthood. Deacon Ocampo said, “Although I knew two deacons from my hospital ministry at St. Peter, I was overwhelmed by the welcome

I received from all the deacons present.”

Peter Cain, the son of newly ordained Deacon Paul Cain, paid tribute to his father when he said, “Dad has been a blessing to our family all my life and now I know that he will be a blessing to all the people of our parish,” Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Bernardsville, where Deacon Cain will minister.

In his closing remarks as in his homily, the Bishop thanked everyone who had played a role in bringing the new deacons to that day, especially their wives and families. He also expressed his gratitude to all who contributed to making that Mass such a wonderful celebration.

May 3rd was also the eighth anniversary of Bishop Checchio’s episcopal ordination and installation as the Shepherd of the Diocese of Metuchen. In a message to the people of the Diocese earlier that day he thanked everyone for their love, prayers, and wonderful cooperation throughout those eight years, “And what a blessing it has been for me!”

Deacon Patrick Cline served as associate director of Formation for the Ordination Class of 2024 and serves in St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, Bridgewater.

DEACON ORDINATION

Deacon **ROBERT BARRY**

Deacon Robert A. Barry converted to Catholicism in 2016, and his experience with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults created a desire for a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith.

“My resulting conversion to Catholicism transformed my life,” he said. **“Finding God has fueled a passion within me to serve and to help others realize the amazing power of the faith.** The permanent diaconate program has allowed me to develop a richer understanding and greater appreciation of my Catholic faith while fueling my desire to serve.”

He was ordained by Bishop James F. Checchio in the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen, May 3.

The clergy and the people of St. James Parish, Basking Ridge, have been essential in his journey to Ordination: “Through my RCIA experience, I came to know so many very influential people who showed me by their example of how to live a life in Jesus Christ. This opened my heart and mind to be able to hear and respond to the call.”

His wife, Eileen, “has been truly instrumental in this calling, and I couldn’t have made it this far without her.”

At St. James Church he has served as altar server co-leader and an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. He is a member of the Men of St. James and volunteers in prison ministry.

“God has placed an intense passion in my heart to give back for what he has done for me so I look forward to engaging in my ministries and meeting people where they are on their faith journey so we can collectively help each other grow in faith and closeness to God,” Deacon Barry said.

Born in Hyde Park, New York, he is a graduate of the University of Vermont, Burlington, with a bachelor’s degree in biology and minor in chemistry. He is a 2024 graduate of Seton Hall University’s Immaculate Conception School of Theology with a master’s in theology.

His career in telecommunications includes work at AT&T, Lucent, Alcatel-Lucent and Nokia with roles spanning corporate strategy and development, product management, project management, operations, finance and supply chain.

The father of two enjoys biking, jogging, hiking, swimming, golfing, cooking and reading.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor

Deacon **TUAN BUI**

Deacon Tuan M. Bui is a fisherman, and he appreciates the silence when he is on the water, awaiting that catch his wife, Anna Thao Huynh, will transform into a delicious meal.

“In today’s society, people are scared of the silence, but for me, while I am fishing, the most productive and successful times are those quiet times;” said the deacon who was ordained at the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen, May 3, by Bishop James F. Checchio. “This carries over to my time when I write my reflections that soon will be my homilies. In the quiet and silence is when you can truly hear what’s in your heart ...”

As for the patience and tenacity that fishermen need, he prays he will have these traits as he begins to serve the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Somerville.

Born in Saigon (now known as Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam, the 48-year-old deacon attended Bloomfield University where he received a bachelor’s degree in chemistry in 2003 then attended Northeastern University, earning a master’s in Regulatory Affairs for Drugs, Biologics, and Medical Devices in 2010.

His training for the permanent diaconate was at Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology at Seton Hall University for a master’s in theology.

Deacon Bui had the calling to be a deacon since he went to college, “but life was louder than the Holy Spirit at that time,” he said. After he got married, he and Anna spoke about it, and he spoke to his pastor; he decided to answer that calling.

The father of two works at Sanofi in Bridgewater as a digital quality expert.

Deacon Bui hopes to use his interest in artificial intelligence to help his parish. “Everything is about AI now, so once I graduate from diaconate formation, I will focus my attention on learning and working with AI products ... which can quickly provide us with an analysis of what our parishioners need,” he said.

Deacon Bui serves as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and lector at Immaculate Conception Church, brings communion to the home bound, and volunteers in pastoral care at St. Peter’s Hospital, New Brunswick.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor

Deacon **PAUL CAIN**

Deacon Paul E. Cain was motivated to pursue the permanent diaconate by a desire to help the Church better serve its people.

Ordained May 3 in the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen, by Bishop James F. Checchio, Deacon Cain looks forward to celebrating the sacraments and to helping others find peace through Christ.

A member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Bernardsville, he is a lector, usher and parish finance committee member.

He brings Holy Communion to and is a lector at Morristown Medical Center and member of the school advisory committee for the School of St. Elizabeth/Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Bernardsville.

“It has been a privilege to serve on the finance council and to help the parish meet its current and future responsibilities, said Deacon Cain, acknowledging also, “I am especially grateful for the opportunity to serve at Mass as a Eucharistic Minister and as a Lector. Each time I serve in either capacity, my faith is renewed and strengthened.”

Deacon Cain began serving as an extraordinary minister of the Holy Communion with the spiritual care office at Morristown Medical Center during the third year of his diaconate formation at Immaculate Conception Seminary of Seton Hall University in the master of theology program.

“Bringing the comfort of Christ to patients who are feeling vulnerable and uncertain has been the highlight of my time in formation,” he said; he plans to continue that ministry.

A former product manager for AT&T, he resigned in 2002 to become a stay-at-home dad. He and his wife, Katy George, have one son.

Deacon Cain, 63, was born in Albany, New York, and graduated from the University of Rochester (New York) in 1983 with a bachelor’s degree in economics. He later earned a master’s in economics from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor

Deacon **KETAN CHRISTIAN**

With his May 3 ordination to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of Metuchen, Deacon Ketan J. Christian believes he is the first-ever Gujarati-speaking permanent deacon worldwide.

Raised Catholic in a small Catholic mission village called Mariampura in Gujarat, India, he came to the United States in 1985 at age 23 and is now a member of the Church of the Sacred Heart, South Plainfield.

He sees his fluency in Gujarati – an Indo-Aryan language native to the Indian state of Gujarat and spoken predominantly by the Gujarati people – as an important element in his ministry to those who speak that language.

“Active religious participation has been an essential way of life for a Catholic from Gujarat, where churches provide the social structure to support and sustain their faith in their language and culture after Vatican II,” he said.

“For immigrants to the United States, immigration is a disruptive event that alienates them from that religious practice. ... It is important for Catholics who speak Gujarati to have a clergy member to minister to them who speaks their native language, who can become a bridge to cross the immigration barriers and have a clear line of communication.”

Deacon Christian and his wife, Ila, have three children.

He was employed at Amspec as a laboratory manager, operations manager and client coordinator at locations in Linden and Avenel and as application support specialist in Cranbury.

He is completing his second unit of Clinical Pastoral Education and hopes to work in a hospital, nursing home or adult day care center.

He enjoys many activities including listening to music and singing, family and social gatherings, pilgrimages, nature and bird watching, sports (especially cricket), family vacations, photography and poetry in his native language.

Deacon Christian is a founding member and past executive member and current advisor of a Gujarati Catholic Samaj, an organization of Gujarati-speaking Catholics of India residing in North America.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor



Deacon **CHRISTOPHER CURRAN**

There are many aspects of being a deacon that appeal to Deacon Christopher G. Curran. “I am told the deacons like Baptisms. Why not? Babies and young children are fun to be with,” he said.

He is excited to have the opportunity to preach and serve at the altar during Mass. “Having a hand in bringing the Word and the Eucharist to people will be great,” said the member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Whitehouse Station. **“Being a servant of Christ will allow me to interact with people like I have never done before,”** he said. “There will be many opportunities to serve the Church and community.”

He was ordained at The Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi in Metuchen on May 3.

Deacon Curran had often thought about the permanent diaconate and had asked his wife, Barbara, her thoughts about it, and they decided he should look into it. “I have been part of many charitable projects at work and the church over the years. The calling to the diaconate is an extension of that charity,” he said.

He belongs to three prayer groups, and his prayer life brings him closer to God. “Praying as part of a community group elevates my prayers. Being part of the community helps me know Christ intellectually and spiritually,” he said. “Every time the groups meet, we learn something about ourselves and about God.”

Born in South Amboy, Deacon Curran, 59, credits his parents for instilling faith in God and the Church in their nine children: “Throughout our lives they kept the conversation of God alive. My father’s love for the Eucharist and my mother’s simple faith in Jesus were powerful influences.”

Deacon Curran received a bachelor’s degree in 1999 from the College of St. Elizabeth in computer programming and a master’s of theology from Seton Hall University in 2023.

A former UPS systems programmer, he currently is a middle and high school substitute teacher in the Readington School District.

A faith formation teacher, RCIA team member and Knight of Columbus, he enjoys running, bike riding, golf and reading historical fiction.

He and his wife have two children adopted from Kazakhstan.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor



Deacon **HARRY De FREITAS**

Known for his own sense of humor, newly ordained Deacon Harry De Freitas hopes to use humor in his ministry as a way to put people at ease. “Many people are very serious and need to have a little laughter to break up the tension,” he said.

But he turns serious when he contemplates his call to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese and identifies the Holy Spirit, his wife and the two deacons in his parish as most influential in his answer to the call to ordained ministry.

Born in New Hyde Park, New York, and now a parishioner of St. Augustine of Canterbury Parish, Kendall Park, Deacon De Freitas, 66, graduated from St. John’s University in Jamaica, New York, with a bachelor’s degree in government and politics with a minor in speech, communication and theater.

His recent master’s in theology degree is from Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University.

He and his wife, Janet, have three children.

Ordained in the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen, by Bishop James F. Checchio on May 3, Deacon De Freitas has always had a passion for loving and serving God.

“In kindergarten I was asked what I wanted to do when I grew up, and I said I wanted to be a priest. **I pretended to be a priest as a child and used to make hosts out of Wonder Bread and offer Mass for my family** in my living room,” he recalled.

A former project manager and senior trainer for MCII/Verizon Business, he now works as parish catechetical leader at St. Ambrose Church, Old Bridge.

He enjoys singing and writing and teaching songs to teach children about prayer or Scripture, as well as walking and praying the Rosary.

Asked what he is most looking forward to doing as a permanent deacon, he replied: “Helping the poor. Teaching the doubter, and just being a loving presence wherever and whenever I can.”

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor



Deacon **JACINTO FERNANDES**

Deacon Jacinto J. Fernandes has been involved in many activities at Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Piscataway, but as he spent time in Adoration at the chapel, he contemplated how he could spend more time with the Lord. That desire fueled his call to the permanent diaconate, and he was ordained at The Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi in Metuchen by Bishop James F. Checchio on May 3.

He said **“service to our loving and merciful Lord Jesus Christ and His Church”** led him to pursue that calling.

Deacons are ordained as a sacramental sign to the Church and to the world of Christ, who came “to serve and not to be served.”

Deacon Fernandes is involved in different ministries at Our Lady of Fatima Parish including serving as a guardian at the Adoration chapel that is open 24 hours a day seven days a week, as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, a Heritage Day participant, an annual picnic participant and a finance committee member. He is the coordinator of the Corpus Christi procession, sexton, daily Mass altar server and lector.

Born in Masura, Maharashtra, India, in 1972, Deacon Fernandes attended high school there and then attended St. Andrew’s College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai, India, earning a bachelor’s degree in commerce in 1993. He later attended Aspen University in Denver, Colorado, where he earned a master’s in information management in 2008.

He works for Bank of America as a technology service lead.

Asked how he lives his faith in the workplace, he replied, “Simply just by following Jesus’ teachings.”

The deacon prays and works to bring “fellow brothers and sisters back, who have been away from the Church, to build a faithful community.”

He and his wife, Monica L. Fernandes, have two teenage daughters.

Deacon Fernandes enjoys watching sports and movies, going on treks, traveling to visit new countries, taking cruises and spending time with friends. He likes to volunteer at the events hosted at work and to lead some of those events.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor



Deacon **ERIC KOPPI**

Deacon Eric J. Koppi was baptized Catholic in 2009. In 2024 he was ordained to the permanent diaconate.

“I had no religious affiliation whatsoever other than being taught the Lord’s Prayer when I was six years old by my paternal grandmother,” he said.

But a conversation stuck with him that he had had in mid-2019 with Monsignor Eugene Prus who baptized him. “During that conversation, **Msgr. Prus told me he thought I would make ‘great deacon material,’**” recalled Deacon Koppi. “The role of service has been part of my whole life. I thought this pursuit of the permanent diaconate was a continuation of the calling the Holy Spirit gave me in 2008.”

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word “diakonia,” which means “service.” The Order of Deacon has three essential functions: proclaiming the Gospel, serving at the liturgy and doing charitable works.

Born in Kankakee, Illinois, Deacon Koppi, 64, is a member of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Martinsville. He and his wife, Eileen, have two children. She supported him as he answered the call to the permanent diaconate by listening to him when he had doubts, by loving him when he felt alone. “Her wisdom and clarity of mind helped smooth my path,” he said, noting that he has looked to St. Joseph for guidance as he has pursued this calling.

He attended Illinois State University where he received a bachelor’s degree in computer science in 1982. He received a master’s in theology from Seton Hall University in 2023. He was ordained May 3 by Bishop James F. Checchio in the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen.

A retired medical coder from RWJ Barnabas Health (Somerville and Mountainside locations), Deacon Koppi is involved in religious education at his parish and volunteers at Jewish Family Services in Somerset County, assisting the homebound by shopping and delivering their groceries along with visits of companionship.

He enjoys helping his wife with gardening and landscape projects, reading and weightlifting.

—By Cori Urban, Contributing Editor

DEACON ORDINATION

Deacon **DAVID LANG**

"I served as an altar boy growing up through high school," said Deacon David Lang, a resident of Somerville and lifelong member of the town's Immaculate Conception Parish. "My greatest encounters with our Lord always have been while serving on the altar."

Born in 1965 as one of five children to the late Gilman and Marian Lang, the altar boy attended the parish's Immaculate Conception Elementary and Immaculata High Schools before earning a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from the University of Scranton.

He completed studies for the diaconate in Seton Hall University, South Orange, earning a master's degree in Systemic Theology. He has worked for nearly 40 years at the Laboratory Corporation of America Holdings, most recently as associate vice president and laboratory manager.

Newly ordained Deacon Lang has served the parish as lector, cantor, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, a member of the parish council and on parish fund raising committees. He and his wife, Heather, created the JPII Cultural Arts Ministry.

Deacon Lang brings his management experience to the Heritage Trail, where he is a former member of the board. He is also founder and artistic director of the Middlebrook Theatrical Society, a group dedicated to historic education through artistic engagement; presenter for the League of N.J. Historical Societies, and vocalist with the N.J. State Opera and the New York Grand Opera Company.

The deacon also fulfills the duties of Official Town Crier for the Borough of Somerville.

Deacon Lang is looking forward to a new role at the parish, near the very altar he served as acolyte so long ago. He stated, **"The opportunity to serve as an ordained deacon is an opportunity to encounter Christ in new and deeper ways."**

—By **Christina Leslie**, Contributing Editor

Deacon
MICHAEL MACCHIAROLA

The seeds of Deacon Michael Macchiarola's journey of the diaconate were planted two generations ago, he asserted.

"I come from a family with a working-class background that placed a high value on serving others," he said, naming his two grandfathers (both of whom served in the military, then went on to blue-collar careers.) Born in Staten Island in 1970 to Robert and Cecelia Macchiarola, the youngster spent many weekends with his grandparents tending to their garden and attending Mass where his grandfather served as lector.

Deacon Macchiarola graduated from St. Peter's College, Jersey City, where he earned a bachelor's degree in international business and trade and an associate's degree in business management, and later, a master of art's degree in systematic theology from Seton Hall. Deacon Macchiarola has a distinguished career as an equity professional for companies like Bloomberg LP, R.W. Baird, and Simplicity Holdings.

Among those who nurtured the seeds of faith, Deacon Macchiarola credits his grandfather, Michael; Father Edward Heavey, a Jesuit priest he met while at St. Peter's College, and Father Edmund Luciano, with whom he worked while discerning the diaconate. "Father Edmund was our parochial vicar at St. Bernard of Clairvaux [Parish, Bridgewater] and has been a great source of support and guidance," he said.

The new deacon also credits his wife of nearly 30 years, Christine, with whom he has three children, and his sister, Maria Carlucci, for their support. "Deacon Patrick Cline, Deacon Gerry Simms, Msgr. Joe Celano, and Msgr. Randy Vashon (his pastor and vesting priest) have been my cornerstone over the past five years. Their unwavering support has given me the strength, courage, and persistence to fully embrace God's graces, and I am forever grateful for their love and guidance," he said.

Deacon Macchiarola shared his plans about continuing the legacy of faith with a new generation of faithful. He said, **"I would like my ministry to focus on being present in all that I do and one that builds bridges between the clergy and laity."**

—By **Christina Leslie**, Contributing Editor

Deacon **JAMES OHE**

It took a brush with death to point the way to service for Deacon James Ohe.

"Fourteen years ago, I was in a car accident that almost took my life," recalled Deacon Ohe, a communicant of Our Lady of Mercy Parish, South Bound Brook. **"I thought about what I could do to make my life meaningful. I wanted to do something to make me and others happy."**

Born in 1960 in Seoul, Korea, Deacon Ohe attended elementary school there, then high school in Port Richmond, N.Y. He earned food handler certificates and spent the next four decades owning and/or managing delicatessen/grocery stores in Queens, N.Y., Tewksbury and New Brunswick. He and his wife, Teresa, have two children.

Post-surgery, fellow parishioner Deacon Ignatius Youn invited him to consider the diaconate, but the challenges of working in the deli full-time and rigorous diaconate studies tabled the choice. Deacon Ohe accelerated his retirement savings just in time to qualify to begin his studies before age 60, the program's cutoff age. "It was all in God's plan," he said with a smile. "I was right on time."

Deacon Ohe has served the Korean Catholic Community of the Diocese as director of vocations at Woodbridge's Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, and as director and coordinator of liturgy at Transfiguration Parish, Edison.

Additionally, he visits the sick of his parish and volunteers at the Unity Square food pantry, New Brunswick, under the aegis of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen. Deacon Ohe has chosen Father John Lee, Our Lady of Mercy parish administrator, as his vesting priest.

—By **Christina Leslie**, Contributing Editor

Deacon **JESUS REGO**

Deacon Jesús Rego has discovered that God's call to diaconal service may be postponed, but the creator's love cannot be denied.

The member of St. Ann Parish, Raritan, revealed, "I first felt a strong attraction to the diaconate some 23-24 years ago but, with two kids in diapers and a busy family life, I discerned it was not the time and did not pursue it. Mercifully, God kept calling and, happily, the Church discerned both the validity and the timing of the call and, by the mercy of God, here I am."

Rego was born in La Coruña, Spain, in 1958, one of three children of the late German and Carmen Rego. Upon completion of elementary and high schools in his native country, he continued his education in the United States, where he earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology, and a master's degree in computer science from Marist College. Over the course of his career, he has worked at a number of companies as an engineer and in system analysis and database management, most recently for UBS Investment Bank as director, service and product management IT security.

Deacon Rego chose his pastor, Father Thomas Odorizzi, as his vesting priest. His service to his Raritan parish includes work as lector and Eucharistic minister, as well as bringing the Eucharist to the homebound and sick; he also serves as a volunteer chaplain at St. Peter's University Hospital. He and his wife, Patricia, have four children.

The new deacon has a request for his fellow followers of Christ: prayer. He said, **"I would like to ask the prayers of the faithful – pray that I may love and serve the people of God with the heart of Jesus and persevere in that service."**

—By **Christina Leslie**, Contributing Editor

By the imposition of the bishop's hands and the specific prayer of consecration, the deacon receives a particular configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, who for love of the Father made himself the least and the servant of all"

POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II, 1995



Deacon RICARDO RIVERA

Ricardo Rivera, a member of Parish of the Visitation, New Brunswick, credits the Lord's patience and guidance for his decision to pursue the diaconate. "My journey of becoming a deacon has been all about opening my heart to the Lord, listening to Him and saying 'yes' without hesitation," he said.

The first life-changing 'yes' was uttered to his wife, Brenda, when she asked for his help with the parish's Christmas play. "Looking back, I would have never imagined that volunteering to help my wife ... would have resulted in me joining the Knights of Columbus," said Rivera. "[It] led me to establish a personal relationship with holy priests who demonstrated the beauty of falling in love with our Lord and serving His Church."

Deacon Rivera was born in Boston in 1971 to the late Ramon Rivera and Carmen Hernandez; the family moved to Puerto Rico when he was a toddler. He graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico. Relocating to New Jersey two decades ago, he has worked at major pharmaceutical companies, and currently serves as executive director of clinical supply operations at Bristol Myers Squibb.

Rivera earned a master's degree in theology from Seton Hall University's Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology; he selected Father Michael Fragoso, pastor of his parish, to vest him as a deacon. The deacon has ministered at his parish as an acolyte, lector and catechist to adults.

As for the future, Deacon Rivera admitted, "I don't have a specific plan about what I want to achieve... At this time, my goal as a deacon is 'not to be served but to serve,' and, as one of my favorite prayers says, '**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**'"

—By Christina Leslie, Contributing Editor



Deacon ANTHONY SCARPANTONIO

"I am looking forward to serving the Church and guiding all who wish to journey towards our Lord, whether they are already on their way, or have questions and wish to learn about our faith," said Deacon Anthony Scarpantonio when reflecting upon his new role in ministry. Sometimes, that service might not have to include any questions at all, he continued, adding, "I could just be their ear when they need someone to talk to."

Born in 1967 in Brooklyn, N.Y., as one of five children of the late John and Rachael Scarpantonio, Anthony attended elementary and middle schools in the borough of Queens, returning to Brooklyn to graduate from Brooklyn Tech High School. He earned his HVAC certification from Apex Technical School, and has worked at the National Grid (formerly Keyspan / Brooklyn Union Gas Company) since 1987, currently holding the position of lead tech, facilities management.

Deacon Scarpantonio is a member of Christ the Redeemer Parish, Manville; his pastor, Redemptorist Father Stanislaw Staby, was his vesting priest. His ministry at the parish has included leading Bible study, lectoring, serving as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and teaching religious education. He and his wife, Linda, have two children.

The new deacon spoke once again about how he might be a source of comfort to those seeking the truth. He observed, "I believe that there is a lot of loneliness and misunderstanding in the world today. Sometimes people just need someone to listen to them, and once that's done, then I could walk with them on their own journey."

—By Christina Leslie, Contributing Editor



Deacon ANTHONY WOODS

Asked to explain the reasons he pursued the diaconate, Deacon Anthony Woods of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Whitehouse Station, gave three. "I was asked by my pastor [Father Leonard Rusay,] and my wife, and I have always been a 'Bible nerd,'" he freely admitted. "I have always been involved in the community and with my kids, so this is a good next step."

Woods was born in Irvington in 1964 as one of two children of James and Mary Woods. He attended Christ the King elementary school, Hillside, then South Orange's Seton Hall Preparatory School. Woods earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Seton Hall University.

The deacon has spent his professional career at major firms in the roles of data analyst, engineer and architect, most recently as principal data architect at Pershing.

At Our Lady of Lourdes, Deacon Woods has served as lector and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion; contributions to the community include membership in the Knights of Columbus, scoutmaster, junior baseball youth coach and player/treasurer/vice president of the Celtic Theater Company. He and his wife, Elizabeth, whom he calls "my greatest ally" in pursuing the diaconate, have three children. His pastor, Father Rusay, served as his vesting priest at the ordination.

"I love being part of the liturgy," Deacon Woods said, and anticipates assisting the parish in myriad ways. He advises others contemplating the diaconate to "pray a lot," and shared advice from two friends.

"When I first heard the call, I went through all the emotions and wondered if I was worthy," he recalled. "Two of my friends told me, '**It is not your decision if you are worthy or not. If you believe the call is genuine, you are worthy.**'"

—By Christina Leslie, Contributing Editor



Deacon JEROME OCAMPO

Transitional Deacon Jerome Ocampo sees his ordination as a milestone allowing him to "increase my desire and knowledge on how to live my life as a priest," he said.

Deacon Ocampo was born in 1994 in Malolos Bulacan, Philippines to Maloures and the late Isagani Ocampo. He attended grammar and high school in the Philippines, then earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from that island nation's St. Camillus College Seminary. He also completed further studies in theology from Seton Hall University's Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange.

Deacon Ocampo was ordained May 3 by Bishop James F. Checchio in the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen.

His assignments include ministry in Immaculate Conception Parish, Spotswood; Our Lady of the Mount Parish, Warren; St. Joseph Parish, Carteret, and his current assignment in Parish of the Visitation, New Brunswick. He was vested as a deacon by Deacon Vincent Brigande of St. John Vianney Parish, Colonia.

"To be a deacon is inseparable in the life of the priest," he explained, "because the life of the deacon is the life of service. The word 'deacon' is from the Greek word diakonos meaning 'servant' or 'messenger.' **Being at the service of others and to be a messenger of God's love to people is the core mission of the priest.**"

—By Christina Leslie, Contributing Editor

This ministry] can equally be the link between the lay world, the professional world, and the world of the priestly ministry... In this way, you give witness in the world of today, as well as in the working world, of the presence of faith, of the sacramental ministry and the diaconal dimension of the sacrament of Orders. This seems very important to me: the visibility of the diaconal dimension."

POPE BENEDICT XVI, 2008

I like to meet you now, while you are deacons, because one does not become a pastor without first being a deacon. The diaconate does not disappear with priesthood: ... it is the foundation on which it is based."

POPE FRANCIS, 2024

Canonical retreat for deacons prepares class of 2024 for Ordination

By Deacon Patrick Cline, Correspondent

Fifteen men who initially met as strangers in August 2020 gathered together April 15, 2024, as brothers preparing to be ordained permanent deacons on May 3. They were beginning the five-day retreat required by Canon Law as a final step before Ordination.

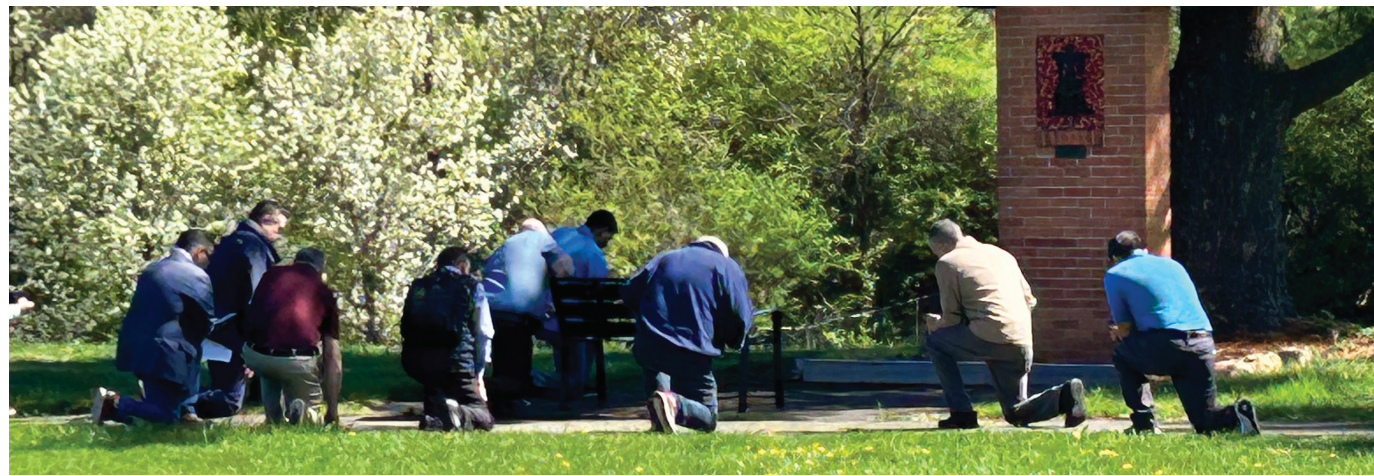
The retreat was held at the St. Francis Retreat House in Easton, Pa., and consisted of days filled with Mass, prayer, both personal and communal, along with a variety of liturgical celebrations each day. Also included were quiet times for reflection and social events.

Monday was a time for the men to move from their busy everyday activities of family, work and other outside activities and enter a time of quiet and calm. The grounds of St. Francis provided opportunities for the men to reflect on the upcoming week and the impact of the sacrament they were scheduled to receive after five years of preparation and studies.

To allow a deeper immersion in a very special week, Tuesday was a day of silence structured around the monastic practice of gathering together to sanctify the day by praying and reflecting. Pausing all other activities, seven times they celebrated the Liturgy of the Hours; upon awakening, mid-morning, midday, mid-afternoon, evening and nighttime. The day ended with the 15 men keeping vigil in turns throughout the night in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

Father Michael Fragoso, pastor of Visitation Parish, New Brunswick, was the speaker on Wednesday. Once ordained these men who are all married will have cares, concerns and demands on their time not shared by celibate priests. Father Fragoso is uniquely qualified to address these issues and challenges. Prior to being ordained he was a pediatrician and happily married for 32 years. After his wife, Carmen, died he discerned a call to the priesthood and in 2013 was ordained.

In his presentations, Father Fragoso quoted Pope John Paul II who, “Spoke of the vocation of the human person to love;



either in marriage or the celibate priesthood.” He reminded the men that while the Roman Catholic priesthood calls men to the celibate life, all Catholics are called to live the virtue of chastity.

These men will be required to pray Morning and Evening Prayers everyday after their Ordination. Father Fragoso celebrated Evening Prayer that afternoon within the context of the Mass. This combination of the two great prayers of the Church, the sacrifice of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, while not a common practice, provided a deeper insight into the prayer life of the Church.

As the men begin to exercise their new ministry they will be working very closely with their pastors and other priests in the parishes to which Bishop James F. Checchio will assign them. In addition they will have relationships with the parish staff, parishioners and others to whom they will minister. Although all the members of the group have been dealing with many of these same relationships for years, these can take on different aspects once ordained.

On Thursday Father Edmond Luciano, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, South Plainfield, spoke about various dimensions of these relationships, especially between priests and deacons, once ordained. Father Luciano also offered Mass for the men and was available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation that afternoon.



Over their years of formation the men had weekly opportunities to lead Evening Prayer and many were introduced to liturgical roles since becoming acolytes last September. The retreat provided other opportunities for the men to exercise some of the liturgical roles they will be fulfilling in the future.

Paul Cain, a candidate from Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Bernardsville, in a reflection at Morning Prayer said, “I am more convinced that this diaconal ministry is truly where the Lord wants me to be.”

On Friday morning the final presenter of the week was Rev. Mr. Steven Bolton of the Raritan Oratory. He gave his perspective of the diaconate based on his year as a transitional deacon in preparation for priesthood.

Deacon candidates spend time in prayer with the Stations of the Cross, top photo, and again during Nocturnal Adoration, bottom photo, while on a five-day retreat at St. Francis Retreat House, Easton, Pa., prior to their May 3 Ordination. —Patrick Cline photos

As the men returned to their homes and families they were asked to complete an evaluation for the retreat house. One of the comments summed up the week, “These five days allowed me time to focus on and prepare for the gift of Ordination.”

Deacon Patrick Cline served as associate director of Formation for the Ordination Class of 2024 and serves in St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, Bridgewater.

Bishop addresses guests at Hope Through Education luncheon



Bishop James F. Checchio, center, opened the 2024 Hope Through Education Spring Luncheon held April 25 at Hamilton Farm Golf Club, with inspirational words to some 120 guests.

The event included a reception, pop-up shop, and student and parent participation with Call to Heart, an auction during which donors received bouquets of tulips from students in attendance.

The event was emceed by Elizabeth Nader, C.O.O. of the Common

Sense Club, pictured right, and featured nationally recognized keynote speaker and best-selling author Dr. Carol M. Swain.

Hope Through Education is an independent 501(C)3 organization that provides disadvantaged children in Central New Jersey with scholarships to attend academically excellent, values-based schools. For more information visit www.hopethrougheducation.usa.org.

—Courtesy photo

The Gospel of John Club

Continued from page 3

Campus Chaplain Father Tom Lanza, a guiding figure within the club, notes the genuine desire for knowledge and growth among its members. But what struck him the most was how the club

was completely run by students.

“You have student leaders that have gotten other students to think about where true joy and happiness comes from,” Father Tom said.

Beyond knowledge and understanding, the Gospel of John Club also fosters the Saint Joe’s Brotherhood.

“It’s a judgment-free zone where

students are free to ask questions,” Father Tom said. Tracey Coudriet, director of campus ministry, notes the impact of the club on its members as they listen to the discussions and insights each week.

“You can see their openness to what they’re hearing,” she said.

As the Gospel of John Club continues to thrive, it welcomes any student

that would like to strengthen their faith or just see what it’s all about. Coudriet advises students to give the club a “shot.”

“Once a student makes that leap of faith, they might be surprised and realize it’s what they’ve been searching for all along,” Coudriet said.



**Congratulations
to
our newly ordained**

**DEACON
ANTHONY SCARPANTONIO**


May God Bless you in your new ministry.
May Our Lady of Perpetual Help guide you
and protect you as you serve the Church of God
for many years to come.


Fr. Stan - Fr. Piotr - Deacon Bill and Deacon Tom
Parish Staff and all Parishioners
of Christ the Redeemer Parish in Manville, NJ

**Church of the Sacred Heart
congratulates Ketan Christian
on your Ordination as Deacon**

*“They presented these men to the apostles
who prayed and laid hands on them.”*

ACTS 6:6



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