

Christmas

December 2023



for the parishes of Ogdensburg, Heuvelton & Lisbon

Vocations Newsletter

Deacon Douglas Schirmer, Ogdensburg

Perhaps the most beautiful part of being a deacon, for me, is the knowledge that I'm committed to something. A huge part of discernment, from way before I was a seminarian (or even Catholic) was struggling to find something to commit my life to. Now I don't need to worry about that anymore: my path is laid, and my life is given to the service of the Church. The act of committing to a vocation is incredibly freeing, even though society wants us to think that limitless options is the preferable way of living. But the embracing of a vocation, of any vocation, allows you to say, 'this is who I am, and this is what I do: that is what I cannot do.' It's a wonderful thing!

Being able to preach and teach and offer benediction and prayers for the people, has been incredibly life-giving over the past six months. I had the great privilege of working for Fr. Mickey Demo and Fr. Matt Conger in Watertown over the summer. What a beautiful community! Now, at the end of fall semester (my last year of seminary), I've been able to work weekends at St. Bartholomew's church in Manchester, MD. Fr. Collin Poston



is a wonderful pastor, and has been able to challenge me with prayer and healing ministry, preaching, and getting involved in the events of the parish.

It's been a very busy year, and there is a lot more to come! As I traveled further into this process, I realize that we are all asked to find a way to spend ourselves in the service of Jesus. At the end of the day, if we aren't doing that, we're probably serving our own desires and opinions. Finding a vocation is about prayer, discernment, counsel and advice. It takes time and should lead us into an increasingly deeper relationship with God. Now that I've finally been able to start working, there is so much peace- and, at the same time, an urgent realization that there is a lot of work to be done in the Lord's vineyard! We are all called to be disciples: those of us called to ministry as a priest or deacon have a particular way of helping others on that road, but we're all in this boat together.

I pray God blesses you! Merry Christmas!

Our hometown seminarians, Carter Pierce and Douglas Schirmer reflect on their journey since their ordinations to deacon in May 2023 and their last seminary semester,

Deacon Carter Pierce, Heuvelton

Merry Christmas to you all! It is now almost seven months since I was ordained a deacon. I would like to share some of the blessings I have experienced in that time. But first, I would like to thank you all for your many prayers and sacrifices on my behalf. Please continue to pray for me, for all our seminarians, and for an increase in vocations in our diocese. I know that I could never have made it to this place on my own. Your intercession undoubtedly aided me in first hearing God's invitation and has buoyed me up across the last decade of discernment. For that I am very grateful. I have found deep joy and fulfillment in my life as a deacon.

Let me first speak about the day of ordination itself. It was the culmination of God's work in my heart, showing me the gift and beauty of such a life and freeing me to embrace it wholeheartedly. It is an incredibly unique and surreal moment when you commit the rest of your days to a particular way of life. It is also a time of overwhelming joy. Afterwards, many people asked me if I felt different. More than anything, I felt more myself than ever before. Having given away my life, I received a new sense of freedom and life.

I chose as a particular patron St. John the Baptist, because in some way I see a similarity between my ministry and his work: baptizing, preaching, and always pointing to Christ. So far, I have been privileged to baptize twelve babies. It is a simple ritual, but an awe-inspiring realization that through me God has embraced them, entered into their hearts, and given them the promise of Heaven. I have found preaching to be a challenging but satisfying experience. In my preparations, God has fed my soul in new ways. I am then able to nourish His people with that same Word. Lastly, I have been amazed at how wearing a collar has been a conduit to God for those I encounter everywhere I go.

At this point, I have barely begun adjusting to life as a deacon and it is already time to look towards priesthood. A parishioner recently asked me why I am most excited. After a moment's thought, it dawned on me that I am looking forward to every aspect of priestly ministry that I have already received some experience of teaching, evangelizing, making home visits, and the list goes on. It gives me great hope that life as a priest, in all its challenges, will be a gift to me as much as it will be an offering to God and others.

May you be filled with the joy of the Spirit and every blessing this Christmas season.



After the Christmas break, Doug and Carter will return to Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland for their canonical retreat and final semester. God willing, they will be ordained priests of the Diocese of Ogdensburg in the spring of 2024.

Please keep Deacon Carter, Deacon Doug, our other five seminarians (Tyler Fitzgerald, Dennis Ombongi, Kevin McCullough, Venes Laine and Michael Lennox) and other men considering the seminary in your prayers. And pray for the vocations of all young men and women, that they may lead lives which follow the call of our Lord.