

Easter
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Vocations Newsletter
for the parishes of Ogdensburg, Heuvelton and Lisbon

My Vocation Journey: Embracing the Divine Call

Deacon Dennis Mamwacha Ombongi

I hail from Kenya, East Africa, born into a deeply faithful family with six brothers and one sister. My family is steeped in a rich religious tradition, with three of my uncles serving as priests and four cousins as religious sisters. My personal journey began at the tender age of seven when I first felt the divine spark of God's call in my heart. It started as a gentle whisper realization that life holds a purpose far beyond my individual existence.

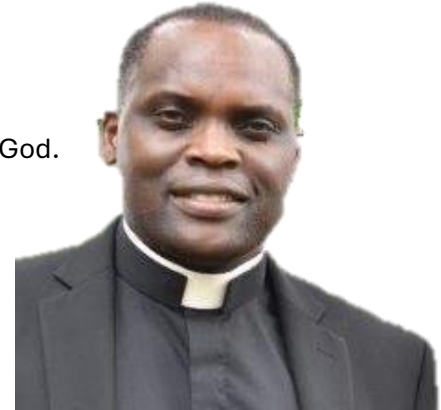
My family's steadfast support nurtured this calling. Their prayers, exemplary lives, and encouragement instilled in me the belief that vocation is not merely a personal choice but a divine mandate from God. After completing high school, I embraced religious life as a brother, serving in Kenya, Uganda, Jamaica, and Haiti. In each culture and community, I found Christ—in the joyful laughter of children, in the struggles of the impoverished, and among the faithful.

Years later, I felt a renewed call—not to return to where I had been, but to delve deeper. This time, the call was to the priesthood. I journeyed to the United States to begin seminary formation, a path now approaching its eighth year and nearing fulfillment. Through study, prayer and ministry, I've learned that a vocation is never silent. It evolves, deepens and brings unexpected surprises.

I have learned in life that the vocation is accessible to everyone whether your calling is to the priesthood, sisterhood, married life, or single life. The Lord consistently asks, "Will you let me in?" Each calling is unique and far from dull; it is a thrilling journey. My family's faith was my bedrock. They never pushed me, but they prayed for me and lived their beliefs. I see myself called to support, encourage, inspire, and uplift others. Any calling is a beacon that encourages someone to say "yes."

In my vocation or in any of our diverse vocations, be it married, religious, priestly or single life, we serve God faithfully in our simple, unique daily activities to fulfill our calling and contribute to

Christ's ministry on Earth. Being human, I may not fully accomplish all this, but I trust that my daily service to God's people is part of Jesus' ministry. Likewise, service is a collaborative effort to bring God's kingdom in our lives. My dear people of God, I pray for you, and I ask for your prayers as well. God bless you all!



Three men have been called to Orders, called to be ordained priests of the Diocese of Ogdensburg on May 30. They share their thoughts on this monumental step of their faith journey!

Twenty-First Century Man

Deacon Tyler Fitzgerald

I will be ordained to the priesthood this spring for the Diocese of Ogdensburg (soon to be Fr. Fitz!). Although I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the North Country, Madrid, has been home since I was three years old. My mother and her family have been born and raised on the family homestead in Norfolk for nearly two hundred years. My father is from Binghamton and a strong line of Irish Catholics, including three nuns and a Jesuit priest. I love all things historical: genealogy, local and Church history, photographs, and letters. In fact, I am the genealogist and inheritor of heirlooms for both my mother and father's side of the family.

I love history not because it is an escape to an era when things were "simpler," but it helps me understand where I, we, come from. For example, our diocese started as mission territory with a small presbyterate. We grew, enjoyed some "glory days," but now we are faced with a different, changing reality. I believe we can gain so much wisdom and be inspired by the thousands of souls who helped shape Catholicism in the North Country. Not to mimic the way things used to be, but to be inspired and





Bishop Douglas Lucia, Deacon Michelet Boncoeur, Bishop Terry LaValley, Deacon Dennis Ombongi and Deacon Tyler Fitzgerald after their ordination as transitional deacons on May 24, 2025. Ordination photos Darcy Fargo / North Country

encouraged by our missionary roots! Aren't the nature and purpose of the Church to be missionary? To be sent out and bring the Good News of Christ's Resurrection? Didn't the Church start with only Twelve Apostles?

As I approach ordination to the priesthood, everything feels natural. Sure, I am nervous and anxious, but through all of it, everything just feels natural. I know I was created for this. After spending four years at a seminary run by Benedictine monks, certain monastic hallmarks have rubbed off on me. I have a sense of peace knowing God is using this to lead others to Himself as my own unique salvation story unfolds. The gift of the priesthood is, of course, for others but is also a beautiful gift for the priest himself. A gift we certainly don't deserve, but God never calls the perfect, He perfects the ones

He calls.

I love baking, cooking, traveling, and exploring. The neatest fun fact about me is that I will soon be the first priest of the Diocese of Ogdensburg born in the twenty-first century! Pray that I, and every priest of Ogdensburg, may live our lives with the words of our first bishop, Edgar Wadhams, on our hearts: "The priest is for the people, not the people for the priest."

Twelve Years of Formation and Experience

Deacon Michelet Boncoeur

Over the spring break, I was talking to some seminarians here at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary. I told them that I am happy to finish my twelfth and final year in seminary formation. Twelve years, are you a Salesian or a Jesuit? It is hard to believe, but I have solid formation and experience which will empower me to better serve the people of God in the Diocese of Ogdensburg. I studied philosophy for three years with the Salesians of Don Bosco in Haiti, while with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

I left to teach Introduction to Philosophy and Haitian Literature. There Helen Ryder, an Irish Religious Missionary Sister, introduced me to the Society of the Divine Word. I was accepted to come to the USA and arrived at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa in 2017. I learned English for a year, then earned an associate degree in Intercultural Studies. I did a Novitiate year in Techny, Chicago and then began my theological studies at Catholic Theological Union where I earned a master's degree in Liturgy. In 2022, after six years of religious experience, I left to have a diocesan experience. Father Medenel Angrand introduced me to the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

On November 13, 2023, I began a pastoral year at the Catholic Community of Moriah in Crown Point and Port Henry and then went to Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland for theological studies. Bishop Terry LaValley ordained me to the diaconate last May 24 at Sacred Heart Church in Massena. My ordination to the priesthood is scheduled for May 30, 2026.

So: 3 years with the MSC, followed by 6 years with the SVD, then 1 pastoral year and finally 2 years at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary. I relate my 12 years of training to the twelve Apostles, who Jesus formed and educated before sending them to evangelize others. Formation and education are crucial before being sent for ministry. Like the twelve Apostles, patience, perseverance, prayer and faith in the Lord are the primary virtues that have strengthened me to follow Jesus and listen to Him. I am now ready to say goodbye to the seminary and serve the people of God using all my formation.

I am grateful to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Society of the Divine Word and the Diocese of Ogdensburg for their roles in my formation. I carry with me the knowledge, faith and resilience gained over these twelve years. I look forward to serving the people of God with dedication, gratitude and hope.

