

DIOCESAN NEWS

Deacon looks to 'family of Christ'

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The movie, "Moonstruck," the expression, "clotheshorse" and the poem, "The Hound of Heaven," can, on reflection, provide some insights into the life of Deacon Peter M. DeBellis, who on May 31 will be ordained a priest of the Diocese of Rochester.

The transitional deacon, who will turn 39 on June 6, was raised in a largely Italian parish (St. Francis of Assisi, Auburn) and home. He said his home life was remarkably similar at times to that portrayed in "Moonstruck," particularly in the warm but colorful, extended family scenes. He's had the kind of Italian upbringing where, as he put it, "you love to hate it but you still love it."

Though he is anxious to wear his priestly clerics, "the symbol of Christ's love in the world," he owned closetsful of Armani suits and expensive ties — which he's been giving away — from the days when he earned \$50,000 a year as an investment counselor.

And for many years, he acknowledged, the church was definitely on the back burner. He likens his life then to that described in Francis Thompson's classic poem, "The Hound of Heaven": "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days / I fled Him down the arches of the years / I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways / Of my own mind"

Deacon DeBellis said he likewise fled God's call.

"Basically I was running from the Lord and filling my life with material things to make me happy," he said. At various times, the Auburn native studied to become a missionary, and also worked in groundskeeping, hotel management, restaurant work and modeling.

He acknowledged that his father, Peter K., a barber "with homespun knowledge," had encouraged him during those years to get on with his life. The elder DeBellis and his wife Florence, a hospital switchboard operator who worked third shifts to help provide for their four children, continued to offer Peter shelter and support between his wide-ranging ventures.

"My father would be the first to tell you I'm not as good as people think I am," Deacon DeBellis laughed.

At his ordination at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Deacon DeBellis will include a special family element into the rite of ordination — his parents will present his new vestments to the vesting priest, Father Dennis Bonsignore. The ceremony also will include an older element, the maniturgium, from the former ordination rite.

A newly ordained priest traditionally used this embroidered linen cloth to dry his hands after they were anointed with holy oils. It later would be buried with his mother, who symbolically took it to heaven as a sign she'd given God a son, he said.

"In my interpretation (of the tradition) I also gave everybody in my class a maniturgium, like an ordination gift," Deacon DeBellis said, adding that each of those graduates from St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto has incorporated it into their ordinations so far. "It's one of the small things you do that means a lot."

Deacon DeBellis has control over his own ordination plans because he is the lone diocesan priest to be ordained in

Judge delays priest's case

The case against Father William D. Lum, who is accused of four counts of third-degree sodomy, was adjourned to May 28. The priest appeared in Greece Town Court May 22, at which time Justice Vincent B. Campbell agreed to delay the case.

Father Lum is accused of sodomizing a teenage boy in 1992 when Father Lum was pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Greece. The priest has pleaded not guilty to the charges.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Deacon Peter DeBellis (center) talks with his parents, Peter and Florence, about the guest list for his ordination May 31.

Rochester this year. He has mixed feelings about this situation.

"I always tell people the beauty of my ordination is I am the only one being ordained," he said. "It also is the sad part."

But, he added, "In one sense the vocations crisis is a good sign because it will call the laity forth to respond to their baptismal call. And two, when the church suffers, she grows more and there is an increase in vocations."

Deacon DeBellis has also written his siblings into the ceremony. His brother William will do a reading, and his two sisters, Mary Ann and Patricia Marie, and sister-in-law Beth will present the gifts.

Deacon DeBellis said he doesn't come from an "overzealous" family. As Catholics they occasionally said the rosary together and regularly attended church.

"But we did a lot of family retreats," he said. "Family retreats were very important to us."

The family also had priest friends over often for dinner, he said, and their home has always been open. Friends his father "kind of adopted" ended up watching television with the older DeBellis while Peter went out for the night.

Deacon DeBellis graduated in 1976 from Auburn High School, with football scholarship offers and a recommendation to West Point. Instead, his first stop was Wadhams Hall seminary college in Ogdensburg for three years. He had his eye on becoming a missionary, but later spent a year with the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Rome.

Last year at his 20th high school reunion, he was unexpectedly presented the "most unlikely profession" award.

But it must be "the Lord's will," he said, that he took a few side roads, perhaps to mature, and spent time since in jobs with

the Boy Scouts of America, Dining Associates in Skaneateles, an investment corporation and a communications company back in the Midwest.

"I had everything I wanted but nothing I needed," he finally realized. Even his fiancée — yes, he was engaged — realized he wasn't happy, he said. He eventually recognized he was "called to love everyone."

Deacon DeBellis recalled a meeting not long ago with Bishop Matthew H. Clark. "The bishop said, 'Part of the grace in your orders is the relationship with people you touch,'" he said.

"He's right. You touch so many lives, so many relationships," he said. "The priesthood is the greatest life someone could choose if you have a vocation for it. It also is the most difficult, in some ways. You have to relinquish your family in one sense."

"But you gain the family of Christ, in another."

EDITORS' NOTE: Deacon DeBellis will celebrate his first Mass of thanksgiving at St. Francis of Assisi Church, Auburn, at 10:30 a.m. June 1, and his second, at St. Louis Church, Pittsford, where he was an intern, at 12:15 p.m. June 8. His first assignment will be as parochial vicar at St. Michael's Church, Newark.

Priest raises Auburn total

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The fact that three priests — one celebrating his 50th jubilee, another his 25th and another his ordination — have emerged from one church, St. Francis of Assisi Church in Auburn, "is probably out of the ordinary," noted one of the priests, Father Louis A. Vasile.

He upgraded that moments later. That three priests have come from one parish in 50 years is "a miracle," said the pastor of Fairport's Church of the Resurrection, celebrating his 25th year in the priesthood.

"It's an extremely encouraging sign," he said. "The community isn't even 100 years old."

His fellow St. Francis priests are Deacon Peter DeBellis, to be ordained May 31, and Father Anthony F. Calimeri, retired in Phelps and celebrating his 50th year as a priest.

They're known as "Auburn boys," Deacon DeBellis said. In fact there are jokes, he said, that "You've got to watch out, there's something in the water there."

At one time, Father Vasile recalled, "There were close to 30 to 40 (diocesan) priests from Auburn." There are still at least 20, he estimated.

All of this, he said, "indicates how supportive families have been for vocations in Auburn over the years."

Deacon DeBellis' father, Peter K., has shown such support, he said. The elder DeBellis, in "his attitude about life, about church, about family, about youth," was an inspiration to him early on, as scoutmaster for Father Vasile's troop.

It all ties in with his advice for the future Father DeBellis: "I would say no matter how we're trained, we're never adequately prepared for what's ahead of us. The one thing that will be constant in his life is people will be very loving."

"We get more from the people than we give."

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

Will you pray for a priest each day?

Jesus' Prayer for His Priests

O Jesus, by Thy most loving Heart, I implore Thee to inflame with zeal for Thy love and glory all the priests of the world, all missionaries and those whose office it is to preach Thy word, that on fire with holy zeal, they may snatch souls from the devil and lead them into the shelter of Thy Heart, where for ever they may glorify Thee.

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Prayer Suggestions: Mass, Rosary, Fasting, Day Offering, Eucharistic Adoration, Offering, Sufferings, Divine Mercy Chaplet

June, 1997

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Pope John Paul II | 2 Inactive Priests | 3 Joseph P. Brennan | 4 Jose Pepe Quintero | 5 Robert A. Meng | 6 Brian E. Jeffers | 7 Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark, DD |
| 8 Winfried M. Kellner | 9 Msgr. J. Emmett Murphy | 10 Richard C. O'Connell | 11 Francis Marino, SM | 12 Robert S. Bourcy | 13 Peter C. Clifford | 14 Jerome Machar, OCSO |
| 15 Charles Adams, OFM | 16 Louis Vu Minh Nhien | 17 Joseph M. Sasso | 18 Joseph F. D'Aurizio | 19 Msgr. Leslie G. Whalen | 20 Lawrence C. Tracy | 21 Dominic F. Mockevicius |
| 22 William J. Gaynor | 23 Patrick L. Connor | 24 Lawrence W. Sansom | 25 Thomas F. Corbett | 26 William G. Darling | 27 Michael C. Hogan | 28 Charles E. Curran |
| 29 Edward Golden | 30 Julian Phelan, OFM Cap | We rely on your financial help to publish this calendar each month. Please send donations to: MPRP, 70-A Green Knolls Dr., Rochester, NY 14620 | | | | |

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