

DIOCESAN NEWS

Ordination is June 22 for Deacon Fennessy

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Have you ever heard about the meteorologist who got a job at a lumber company after a tornado passed through town, and later on became a priest?

No, that's not the opening of a joke or riddle. It's the actual capsulized version of Deacon Jim Fennessy's career thus far, which may explain his frequent tendency to say "Well, there's a story behind that" while recalling his past.

And, in keeping with his life experience, Deacon Fennessy prefers not to chart a specific course for his priesthood.

"I really have no idea what's in store for me. Some people have an idea 10 years down the line, but God only knows what my ministry is going to be like," he said. "You kind of have to go with the flow, and evolve with change as the church does."

Deacon Fennessy, 44, will be the only man ordained to priesthood for the Diocese of Rochester this year. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will perform the ordination beginning at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, June 22, at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Deacon Fennessy, the son of Donald and Jean Fennessy, was born in Auburn and resided in Liverpool for most of his childhood, graduating from St. Joseph the Worker School and Liverpool High School. He moved back to Auburn, and in 1979 received an associate's degree in liberal arts from Cayuga Community College. That was followed in 1982 by a bachelor's degree in meteorology from the State University of New York at Oswego.

After going a year without finding work in his field, Deacon Fennessy one day traveled to Phoenix, N.Y., to see if he could assist after a rare tornado had struck the community. He volunteered to help with clean-up at a lumber plant that had been damaged — and ended up getting a job with the company. His career with Wickes Lumber would last more than 10 years and involve a transfer to Waterloo, where he became an assistant manager.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways," Deacon Fennessy remarked.

By the mid-1990s, Deacon Fennessy had decided to act on a call to priestly life that he first heard way back in grade school. "I'd ask the nuns, 'How do you know you should be a priest?' They said, 'Well, God will call you.' Being in fourth grade, I thought it would be a tap on the shoulder and a whisper in the ear, and of course that never happened," Deacon Fennessy said.

His thoughts about life in the church



Rev. Mr. Jim Fennessy

were rejuvenated after his grandmother, Clara Fennessy — whom Deacon Fennessy describes as "the greatest influence in my life" — died in 1990. "That made me sit down and think.

It was then I started to get involved," he recalled.

He became active at St. Mary's Parish in Waterloo, teaching religion and serving as a representative for the diocesan Synod in 1993. While attending a meeting at his home parish, St. Alphonsus in Auburn, he came across some literature about a discernment group for men ages 30 and older at Becket Hall, the diocesan pre-theology program. "A friend of mine said, 'Have you ever thought about being a priest?' I said I had, but thought I was too old," Deacon Fennessy said.

After discovering otherwise, Deacon Fennessy's discernment process intensified. In late 1995, he opted to formally enter Becket Hall and return to college for pre-theology. Coincidentally, just after he made that decision, the lumber company in Waterloo announced it was shutting its doors. "That kind of just blew my mind. I didn't have a clue," Deacon Fennessy said.

He moved to Rochester and resided at Becket Hall from 1996 to '97 while taking pre-theology courses at Nazareth and St. John Fisher colleges, as well as St. Bernard's Institute. In the fall of 1997 Deacon Fennessy began four years of study at Theological College, located at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He spent the summer of 1998 gaining pastoral experience at St. Andrew's Parish in Rochester; served his pastoral year of 1999-2000 at St. Ambrose Parish in Rochester; and served the summer of 2000 at Strong Memorial Hospital.

He was ordained a transitional deacon at Sacred Heart Cathedral last June, then returned to St. Ambrose for summer experience. He will conclude studies at Theological College this spring before returning to the Rochester Diocese for his ordination.

"It's been a long journey, but there's nothing of it I regret. There have certainly been some difficult areas, but the whole thing has been a learning process. Anybody who goes to the seminary does not lose out," Deacon Fennessy said. "You learn more about yourself; you get ... experiences too numerous to mention in an article."

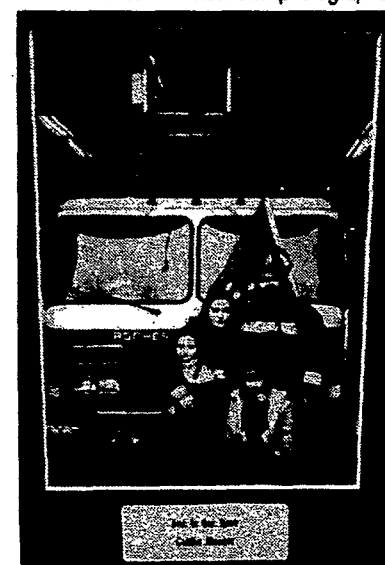
Deacon Fennessy said his first assign-



Andrea A. Dixon/Staff photographer

Patriotic project

Mary Kay Touris (left) studies a photo as her mother, Joan Baier, and son, Brian Page, embrace while viewing an exhibit created by sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders from St. Lawrence School in Greece. The exhibit opened April 6 at the Link Gallery in Rochester's City Hall and grew out of a social studies assignment to photographically document how people displayed the American flag after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Touris and her family visited the gallery to see photos by her other son, Scott Page. At right, the image "Dad is Our Hero" was submitted by Caitlin Maeder, who also appears in the picture. The exhibit runs through May 16.



ment following ordination has not yet been determined. Wherever he ends up, he will strive to "help the lay people become involved in ministry, so that I'm not actually doing all the ministry."

One way to reach this goal, he said, is to stay on an equal plane with the laity. "You can't assume you're more spiritual than the people you're ministering to. You don't have to have a degree in theology to be spiritual," he said.

As examples he mentioned young Catholics, to whom he especially enjoys ministering. "The spirituality of the youth, you can never underestimate that. I think sometimes people do."

Drawing upon his own life, Deacon Fennessy also stressed that one is never too old to deepen his or her spirituality.

"I've grown a great deal as a person. You would think that at 44, you're at where you're at," he remarked. "When you stretch yourself it's quite amazing, the work of the Holy Spirit. And that's one of the things about the priesthood, is that you bring that Holy Spirit and grace with in people into the forefront."



Seminarian advances

On Feb. 4, Rochester seminarian John Loncle was instituted in the ministry of acolyte at the Theological College in Washington, D.C.

Becoming an acolyte is the second formal step on the path to becoming a priest. The first step is to be instituted as a lector. Loncle's next step is ordination to the transitional diaconate, followed by priestly ordination.

Auxiliary Bishop Gordon D. Bennet of Baltimore presided at Loncle's institution. The following people from the Diocese of Rochester were also in attendance: Father Lee Chase, pastor of St. Thomas More Church in Brighton; Father John DeSocio, diocesan director of pre-theology and seminarians; seminarians Bill Coffas and Mark Brewer; and Bill Olsen, diocesan Director of Human Resources.

Vieira professes vows

Rochester native Julie Vieira professed her first vows Feb. 23 as the newest vowed member of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The ceremony, which took place during the Liturgy of Evening Prayer at the IHM St. Mary's Center in Monroe, Mich., focused on the theme of awakening.

Sister Vieira, 30, has a master's degree in theology from Regis College in Toronto, and a bachelor's degree in philosophy from St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto.

She is currently teaching religious studies at the University of Detroit Mercy, and writing and publishing for various Catholic periodicals.

Rochester diocese gives parishes \$75,000 in grants

The Diocese of Rochester has awarded \$75,000 in grants to seven groupings of parishes to support their efforts to respond to needs identified through the Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium process.

The awards and recipients are:

- \$18,000 for the first year of a three-year grant to the Irondequoit Planning Group (Christ the King, St. Cecilia, St. Margaret Mary, St. Salome and St. Thomas the Apostle parishes and St. Ann's Community) toward a senior ministries program, including a coordinator position.

- \$15,000 for the second year of a three-year grant to Good Shepherd Catholic Community in southern Cayuga County toward the position of religious education coordinator.

- \$13,745 for the first year of a three-year grant to five parishes in central Steuben County (St. Catherine, Addison; St. Mary, Bath; St. Stanislaus, Bradford; St. Joseph, Campbell; St. Gabriel, Hammondsport) toward a youth ministry coordinator position.

- \$10,000 for the third year of a three-

year grant to the parishes of the Holy Family planning group (Sacred Heart, Perkinsville; St. Pius V, Cohocton; St. Joseph, Wayland; St. Mary, Dansville) toward the position of residence director for Wayland's Vincent House, a comfort-care residence for the terminally ill.

- \$9,000 for the third year of a three-year grant to six parishes in the city of Rochester (Corpus Christi, Mt. Carmel, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Bridget, St. Francis/Holy Redeemer, St. Michael) for a part-time coordinator of youth ministry and youth outreach.

- \$6,255 for one year to three Winton-Culver area parishes (St. Ambrose, St. James, St. John the Evangelist) toward the development of coordinated social outreach to their area of Rochester.

- \$3,000 to the Geneva parishes of St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen for the third year of a three-year grant for a part-time social ministry coordinator.

Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium combines parishes and faith commu-

nities in the Diocese of Rochester into 35 planning groups. In support of some of their planning initiatives, the diocese provides "seed money," including money donated through the annual Thanks Giving Appeal.

"This program is now in its fourth year," said Casey Lopata, diocesan planning group liaison. "Projects previously supported by these grants are now meeting health care, youth and adult education, communications, bookkeeping and social outreach needs identified through planning. Though valuable in themselves, collaborative successes like these have enabled neighboring faith communities to come to know each other better, and they've generated ideas for additional collaborative projects. We're delighted to be able to support new youth, outreach and seniors ministry projects this year, as well as to support continuing multi-year projects supporting youth, religious education, social outreach and the terminally ill."

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