

CONTINUED...

Deacon

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car once a month to spend a weekend in Rochester attending classes.

"St. Bernard's Seminary was not equipped for an influx of young families sharing facilities with its seminarians," said the deacon, currently pastoral administrator of the parishes of St. James, Waverly, and St. Pius X, Van Etten. "My children were 8 and 10 years of age at the time. Our youngest child was born during our second weekend at the seminary. As one might imagine, rambunctious kids and crying babies were not all that welcome in those stately halls of sacred education."

Speaking of education, many of the deacon candidates had not been in a classroom in years. Among them was Deacon Stanley J. Douglas of St. Rita's Parish, Webster. Also a member of the class of 1982, Deacon Douglas recalled that the first night he and his wife, Joanne, attended a "heavy theology" class, they had second thoughts about their decision to join the program.

"The professors would sort of work with me, and I came through it without any problem," he said.

Father Sebastian Falcone, president emeritus of St. Bernard's Institute, now known as St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, headed the commission that established the permanent diaconate in the diocese. The diocese thought it was important that its deacons be academically solid, he said.

"They had to work on par with the priests," he said. "There are 30 different colleges within the Diocese of Rochester. You can't have people who do not have (academic backgrounds). It would cripple their ability to communicate."

Deacon David Palma, director of the diocese's Office of Deacon Personnel, said candidates for diaconal ordination undergo four years of training. Deacon Palma said the training consists of theological preparation, spiritual work, ministerial-skills development, field work and formation into the community of deacons. Many deacons complete master's degrees in theology, he added, and the deacons' wives are encouraged to attend classes with their husbands and work with them in ministry.

With their wives

Msgr. George A. Cocuzzi, priest-in-residence at Church of the Assumption in Fairport, was the permanent diaconate's first director. The priest wrote an article on the first years of the diaconate for the March edition of *Deacon News*, a monthly newsletter put out by the deacon personnel office.

"Those early years made for a great sense of adventure for us all," he wrote. "We were really going into unexplored territory, at least as far as the concept of a married clergy in the Catholic Church was concerned... We believed that the wives of the candidates should be fully engaged in the formation process, and we offered them the opportunity of taking part in all or some



Deacon Nemesio Martinez and his wife, Bruni, participate in a small-group discussion during the convocation.

aspects of the program, according to each one's circumstances."

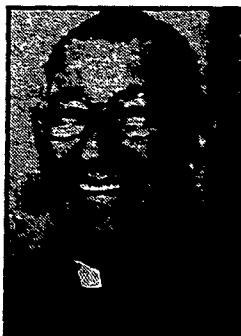
On that note, virtually every deacon will tell you just how crucial his wife is to the success of his ministry. For example, '82 graduate Deacon Anthony Mercadel, one of the first African-American deacons to be ordained in the diocese, has worked in Catholic ministry with his wife, Jean, since before he was ordained. The couple have run many social ministry efforts out of their home parish, Guardian Angels in Henrietta, and have ministered to married couples and people with developmental disabilities, among others.

"It's just been very inspiring for us to work together because we can share what it means," Jean said. "I think the parish sort of expects us to work together rather than separately."

The diaconal community recently established a Wives Committee, according to Beverly Clark, whose husband, Deacon Gary Clark, died in 1995. Beverly was left to raise children who were still at home, she said, and the committee was established, in part, to see how the diaconal community can extend various kinds of support, including financial and emotional, to widows.

Losing a husband who was a deacon can be a tremendous blow to a family, she said. "Our whole lives revolved around Gary's vocation, this thing we were all geared for, and then, we were no longer a part of."

She said she has helped fill the void left by her husband's death by serving as director of Benincasa, a home for the dying established by the Clarks' home parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Mendon. Her children assist her both by volunteering at the home and serving as fundraisers, she said.



Msgr. George Cocuzzi



Deacon David Palma (left) hugs Father Sebastian Falcone during Mass.

Day with the bishop

More than 200 people attended the Permanent Diaconate Community's "Day With The Bishop" at Monroe Community Hospital on April 27. An annual event for the permanent deacons, this year's program highlighted the first class' ordination on April 17, 1982, by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. In addition to the class of 1982, the event also specifically honored the classes of 1987 and 1992, celebrating their 15th and 10th anniversaries, respectively.

The event featured talks, discussions and a Mass, as well as a memorable dinnertime performance by Deacon Patrick Graybill of Emmanuel Church of the Deaf in Rochester. The deacon, who is a deaf, nationally known theatrical performer, belongs to the class of 1982, and told several humorous stories of growing up Catholic.

As he signed, a sign-language interpreter spoke to the audience, telling members about Deacon Graybill's first confession. Since he was unable to talk to the priest in

the confessional, the deacon recalled that he had to write down his sins on a checklist for the priest to read. One question asked "How many times did you lie?" Not quite sure of the number of sins in this category, he turned to a friend in line who said, "Make something up!" so Deacon Graybill wrote down the number "10."

Another dinner highlight was when Deacon William F. Schmitz of Mother of Sorrows Parish, Greece, won the Deacon Stan Zawacki Award for exemplary service. Deacon Schmitz had a hand in establishing the award, which was first given in 1996 in honor of his late friend, a member of the '82 class who was particularly well-known statewide for his work in prison ministry.

Deacon Zawacki, who died in 1994, also established the St. Stephen's Association, a fraternal association of deacons, and Deacon Schmitz received the award, in part, for his work in re-establishing the group in recent years. The group is now known as the St. Stephen's Diaconal Community Association, and works to foster community among deacons and their families, he said.

Sitting at the table with Deacon Schmitz was Deacon Greg Kiley of St. John's Parish in Clyde, and its mission parish, St. Patrick's in Savannah. Like the other deacons present that day, he said deacons are meant to serve people who fall through the cracks of society. He knows such people firsthand because he's employed as a chaplain at Five Points, a state maximum security facility in Romulus. Prisoners know they are sinners, he said, and long for someone to bring them the message of God's forgiveness.

"They understand the Gospel because they understand they need Christ," Deacon Kiley said. In a sense, he added, prisoners today are like the neglected widows mentioned in Acts whom the church's first deacons were called to serve.

"There are different people in every era," he said.

That spirit of service also moves in the heart of Deacon Salvador Otero of Holy Apostles Church in Rochester. The Puerto Rican deacon, 39, is the youngest deacon in the diocese. Like Deacon Kiley, Deacon Otero works in prison ministry. He does so, in part, because he was somewhat wild as a young man and said he could have wound up an inmate himself if he had not chosen to follow his calling to the diaconate.

A city employee who plows snow-covered streets in the wintertime, Deacon Otero said he hasn't touched a drink or had a smoke in well over a decade, and credits his dedication to others and God for keeping him on a path of service. His wife, Maria, likes the fact that her husband concentrates on his family, his ministry and his work. "I think he is a good example for our kids," she said.

And that commitment to family and others is what constitutes the call of permanent deacons, according to Deacon Douglas. Deacons are meant to bridge church, family and the wider community, he noted.

"We come from the pew to the pulpit and from the pulpit to the pew," he said.

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