

## SECOND CAREERS

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unteers — minus the commitment that paid positions might entail — Pedeville fields numerous applications from retirees seeking full- and part-time positions. She said many such applicants have backgrounds in education and health care, while others with business-related experience have gone on to become parish business managers.

In addition, the diocesan Catholic Schools Office, faced with a shortage of personnel, has sought in recent years to plug the gaps by recruiting retired public-school teachers and administrators.

Based on age, retirees' potential length of service is obviously shorter than that of younger applicants. But Pedeville said this factor alone is insufficient for ruling retirees out as candidates.

"On the contrary. What they bring to the parish is maturity, experience and commitment," Pedeville said, adding that she'd be happy if a retiree put in five to 10 years at a parish. "Most young people don't stay that long in positions anyway," she pointed out.

Pedeville emphasized that the diocese requires certification — usually in advance — for virtually all parish ministerial positions.

In the Diocese of Rochester, this requirement is most often met through St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, either through certification or master's degree programs. Thomas McDade Clay, St. Bernard's admissions director, said although most of the adult students are of pre-retirement age, some have retired or are nearing retirement.

Lippert and Deacon Welch are taking classes through St. Bernard's even though they've already begun their ministerial positions. Although he performs many duties of a pastoral associate at All Saints, Lippert explained that he is not yet certified



Deacon George Welch speaks with Dolores LeMark and Josephine Devitt, residents of the skilled nursing facility of Elmira's St. Joseph's Hospital.

to carry that title. Meanwhile, Deacon Welch said his diaconal experience in hospital ministry combined with his master's degree in education were deemed sufficient to qualify him for the chaplaincy at St. Joseph's Hospital — but even so, he has opted to pursue a master's degree in divinity.

Deacon Welch was ordained in the Diocese of Rochester's first class of deacons in 1982. Whereas he has taken advantage of retirement to pursue a paid position, Deacon David Palma, director of the diocesan Office of Deacon Personnel, emphasized that paid ministry is not, and should not be, the primary reason for pursuing the diaconate. Rather, diaconal candidates should be responding to God's call.

"It's a vocation with a very specific theology," Deacon Palma said. "It's a way of life, of living in the world."

To this end, Deacon Welch said he has not curtailed his parish responsibilities because of his St. Joseph's chaplaincy. He still puts in eight to 10 hours a week at Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Elmira, where he has served the past six years.

"I have a commitment to the diocese, because of my ordination, to do volunteer ministry," Deacon Welch said.

Although Deacon Welch has been ordained for more than two decades, some men don't begin pursuing the diaconate until retirement when they foresee having more time to serve the church. Yet Deacon Palma said this only occurs in isolated situations. The diocese's general limit for deacon ordination is age 62 — meaning that diaconal candidates would have to begin studies by age 58 in order to get the required master's degree in time, he said.

### 'A REAL BLESSING'

Much in the same way that a deacon's ministry is rooted in a call to serve, Lippert said that pay is not his chief motivation for ministering at All Saints in Lansing. Though he has part-time duties, Lippert said he regularly exceeds his scheduled hours in order to coordinate Masses and other parish events, lead Communion services, make Communion calls, and attend meetings. He said his ability to do so takes the load off the parish's first-year priest admin-

istrator, Father Scott Kubinski, who also has duties with Ithaca College's campus ministry.

"I was always a salaried employee, so you worked until the job was done. My career was in service, and part of service is you respond where there's a call or need. It just comes from my background," Lippert said.

Service is also what drives Deacon Welch as he performs funerals, leads Communion services, and ministers to the suffering and dying as well as their families at St. Joseph's Hospital.

"It's a real blessing. I love being with people; I love having the time to listen and to be able to be in a compassionate ministry. It was what I had always wanted," Deacon Welch said.

Lippert, on the other hand, said he's still kind of surprised at the way he has fallen into ministry. "Did I envision this? No," he remarked. "Maybe this was what God had in mind for me. My three children have all finished their undergraduate work, and I had a job with a very good pension that enabled me to do something I was called to do."

Whereas Lippert had not planned to jump into ministry, Deacon Welch said his co-chaplaincy at St. Joseph's Hospital is exactly the kind of work he had hoped to do. Having once studied for the priesthood, he said his desire to engage in full-time ministry goes back some 40 years. "The unfinished journey ... I wanted to travel that path again," he said.

Indeed, Deacon Welch said he would much rather be involved in a full-time chaplaincy than taking it easy in retirement. "That's not me. Never was, never will be," he said.

Lippert said he will remain committed to his position in Lansing for at least another year and hopefully longer.

"For me, it's a good fit. I just hope and pray it's a good fit for the parish," he said. "My view on it is that if the call is to go on longer, then that's God's will. And if it's not, that's God's will too."

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