



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Rick Roy, Daniel J. Pavlina, James B. Nail, William C. Lenhart and John A. Brasley prostrate themselves before Bishop Matthew H. Clark during their diaconal ordination May 31 at Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral.



Malia Johnson of St. Mary's of the Lake in Watkins Glen receives the Eucharist from Deacon Roy following his ordination.



Bishop Clark congratulates Deacon Brasley following his ordination.

Deacons ordained

Ministers team up to strengthen marriages

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Church ministers in Canandaigua are joining forces in an effort to support marriage unions in that community.

In March, more than a dozen members of the Ontario County community's clergy association met at St. Mary's Catholic Church and pledged to support a "Canandaigua Community Marriage Policy," according to Deacon Claude Lester of St. Mary's.

Then, during the weekend of May 30-31, one of the groups supporting the policy, Flint Creek Family Ministries in Stanley, hosted a training session for eight couples of various denominations. The couples will become "marriage mentors" who will minister to other couples seeking to improve their marriages. Another training session may take place this fall with the participation of St. Mary's staff and married couples, according to Flint Creek's Gerry Fish, a Southern Baptist who will be

ordained a minister June 22.

Catholic and Protestant ministers alike are alarmed by the nation's high divorce rate — some estimate as many as one of two marriages end in divorce — and they want to do something about it, Deacon Lester said.

"Everyone acknowledges that the real accomplishment over the next few years will be to reduce the divorce rate," the deacon said.

To that end, the marriage policy calls for Catholic and Protestant ministers to collaborate on programs that train marriage-preparation and marriage-ministry volunteers, Deacon Lester said, and to follow basic guidelines when ministering to the engaged and married. The Canandaigua clergy pledged to take the following actions in their respective churches when ministering to couples:

- **Encourage courtship of at least one year.** Deacon Lester noted that while some mature couples are ready to marry before one year is

out, too many couples are harmed by not really knowing each other before they take their marriage vows.

- **Promote chastity** outside of marriage and faithful marital relationships.

- **Provide four to six months of marriage preparation**, utilizing both Scripture and a premarital inventory, or list of questions, for those wishing to be married. For example, Deacon Lester said, St. Mary's uses a list of almost 200 questions covering such topics as money, careers and other issues for engaged couples to answer as part of its marriage-preparation program.

- **Encourage newlyweds** to attend seminars, retreats, classes and other activities designed to enrich their marriage.

- **Create a support system** consisting of couples whose marriages have successfully weathered life's challenges with honesty, forgiveness and caring to serve as mentors to work with engaged couples, newlyweds or those experiencing marital difficul-

ties. On this note, Deacon Lester said his parish will be recruiting married couples over the next few months to work with other couples.

- **Seek to establish support systems** for blended families, in which one or both spouses had children from a previous relationship. This may involve creating support groups for such families, Deacon Lester said.

- **Encourage clergy to be supportive** in terms of this policy.

- **Cooperate with other congregations** and organizations to share resources in order to create a positive climate, that will promote successful and fulfilling marriages. For example, Deacon Lester said the Canandaigua churches will likely work together to bring in speakers who can educate marriage-ministry volunteers from all the involved churches.

Deacon Lester said the policy "is very countercultural. But the church is by its very nature countercultural."

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