

Diaconate admission

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |



On Sept. 14, 53 future deacons gathered for a bilingual Mass in the Morris Hall Chapel at the St. John Center in **Little Rock** for the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for Holy Orders. This Mass served as an opportunity for the candidates to publicly express their intention to be ordained permanent deacons.

Candidates responded in English and Spanish that they were resolved to becoming a deacon and, in due time, working to help the Church and faith communities.

Father Rubén Quinteros, director of the Diaconate Formation Office, said the Diocese of Little Rock is blessed to have so many men willing to join the diaconate.

“Candidacy Mass is the ceremony where candidates state their intention to follow the path or process of formation towards the diaconate,” Father Quinteros said. “... We are extremely blessed in our diocese to have the number of candidates we have. It is not only the men involved in the formation process, but the unconditional support of their wives and the entire family.

“Candidacy is the first official step of preparation for the liturgical role in the future but also the willingness to learn and teach what the Holy Church teaches and preparing a discerning heart to be attentive to the needs of the people for works of charity. The number of candidates very well reflects the diversity and needs of our Diocese of Little Rock.”

Neal Reeves, one of the diaconate candidates and a parishioner of Christ the King in Little

Rock, said the Mass made him feel emotional.

“I felt very humbled, honored and emotional ... that God has placed this call in mine and Robyn’s (Reeves’ wife) life,” Reeves said. “I felt like God was asking me to be open to the calling and to take the journey day by day. I believe I have something to offer the Church and God is working that out through the diaconate program.”

Sixty-three men began their formation in 2023. The diaconate ordination is set for June 2028.

CORRECTION: The original publication of this brief stated that candidates would be ordained as transitional deacons. They are being ordained as permanent deacons. Transitional deacons are ordained with the intention of becoming priests.

Sixty men seeking to be deacons begin their formation

written by Malea Hargett |



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE:

- Preparatory year added to diocesan seminary formation
- 63 men chosen for next diaconate formation class
- Fifth graders to be introduced to religious vocations
- Eveld: 'Knowing the Lord called me is an awesome thing'

Sixty men began a five-year journey in August toward becoming ordained deacons for the Diocese of Little Rock.

The men and their wives meet monthly at St. John Center in Little Rock for weekend classes led by local priests, deacons and laypeople. They are scheduled to be ordained in June 2028.

Like previous classes, the men come from a variety of backgrounds.

The English-speaking class includes 37 aspirants from 24 parishes. Four of them work in education, five in healthcare and one works full-time for his parish. Only four of them are retired.

Charles Dwyer, a member of Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine in Winslow, said, "I would like to become a deacon because I feel I have a lot to offer the Church and the parish. I have the heart of a volunteer and am the president for a local nonprofit in my small town. I believe I have good leadership skills and am a former mayor of my town as well. I will bring my leadership skills, organizing and fairness to serve the Church."

William Campbell of St. Bernard Church in Bella Vista said he was inspired to apply for the diaconate formation because of other deacons he knows.

"Deacons have been lights in my life leading me to Christ, and I would be honored to serve his people as a deacon," he said.

The Spanish-speaking class has 23 aspirants from 14 parishes. They work in a variety of professions, including construction, welding, auto repair and truck driving.

Jose Guzman of St. Theresa Church in Little Rock said service to the Church is his main reason for entering formation.

"Firstly, because the service of the diaconate comes from my heart, and secondly, I want to serve the Church and the community in the areas of evangelization and in all the needs of the Church."

Formation director Deacon Mark Verkamp said classes for the first year focus on spirituality.

"The next four years the study requirements are intense so we have to have the spirituality for the base," he said.

Since 1981, when the Diocese of Little Rock's first diaconate formation class was ordained, more than 150 men have served the state.

63 men chosen for next diaconate

formation class

written by Malea Hargett |



Sixty-three men have been chosen for the next diaconate formation class, which will begin its five-year program in August.

Deacon Mark Verkamp, diaconate formation director, said about 120 men expressed interest in becoming deacons, with about 90 submitting applications. The selection was made after psychological evaluations, recommendations from their pastor, parishioners and coworkers, background checks and interviews with the diaconate formation team. Bishop Anthony B. Taylor approved the aspirants who were chosen.

Beginning Aug. 4-6, the men and their wives will meet monthly at St. John Center in Little Rock for weekend classes. The classes will be held 11 times a year through May 2028. Their ordination will be held in June 2028.

The English-language program will be led by instructors from St. Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, while the Spanish-language program will be taught by Arkansas priests.

Verkamp said he is already impressed with the eagerness of the aspirants.

“The sense of commitment from everyone is excellent,” Verkamp said. “We have a wide range of people, different professions from ranchers to doctors, lawyers, construction workers, all walks of life. Some are retired, and some still work their day job. It is a great sense of initial excitement. Everybody comes across with a servant’s heart.”

Twenty-five Hispanic aspirants were chosen. They are:

- **Our Lady of Fatima, Benton:** Francisco Antonio Lemus Sagastume, wife Mirza
- **Our Lady of Good Counsel, Little Rock:** Juan Miguel Moreno Compean, wife Anabel
- **St. Edward, Little Rock:** Ernesto Garay Badillo, wife Lili
- **St. Edward, Texarkana:** Leovardo Parra Vargas, wife Remedios; C. Rolando Olmos Zepeda, wife Ana
- **St. John, Hot Springs:** Armando Cadena Morales, wife Carmenn
- **St. John, Russellville:** Salvador Gonzalez, wife Tere
- **St. Joseph, Fayetteville:** Gonzalo Leon Perez; wife Maria
- **St. Jude, Waldron:** Martin Baza Millan, wife Leda
- **St. Luke, Warren:** Jorge Acuchi Diego, wife Maria
- **St. Mary, Arkadelphia:** Melesio Vazquez Torres, wife Silvia
- **St. Mary, Batesville:** Cesar Rendon Rodriguez, wife Yamel
- **St. Michael, Van Buren:** J. Cruz Hernandez Solis; wife Mari; J. Lucas Hernandez Gutierrez, wife Marina
- **St. Raphael, Springdale:** Cruz Carlos Ortiz Benavidez, wife Lorena; Jose Dalio Ceciliano, wife Guadalupe; Mario Escobar Serrano, wife Esperanza; Roman Villagran Mondragon, wife Maria
- **St. Theresa, Little Rock:** Jose Guadalupe Guzman Pineda, wife Ena; Oscar Mendez Leon, wife Mariana; Raul de Jesus Beza Beltran, wife Rosario
- **St. Vincent de Paul, Rogers:** Jesus Martinez Reyes, wife Herminia; Jose Luis Balderas Medrano, wife Jacky; Jose Aquiles Morales Galvez, wife Claudia; Paul Ibanez Becerra, wife Ana Liz

Thirty-eight aspirants will be in the English-language program.

- **Christ the King, Little Rock:** Doug "Neal" Reeves, wife Robyn
- **Holy Redeemer, El Dorado:** John Eckart, wife Laurie
- **Immaculate Conception, Fort Smith:** David Young, wife Rosalie; Robert "Rob" Maestri; William "Bill" Thomas, wife Peggy
- **Immaculate Heart of Mary, North Little Rock (Marche):** Daniel "Danny" Bercher, wife Anita
- **Our Lady of Fatima, Benton:** James "Rick" Lee, wife Kathy; Thomas "Tom" Avery Jr., wife Michelle
- **Our Lady of Good Counsel, Little Rock:** John Ekeanyanwu, wife Jennifer; Michael Smith, wife Cindy
- **Our Lady of the Holy Souls, Little Rock:** Jeffrey "Jeff" Hathaway, wife Laura
- **Our Lady of the Lake, Lake Village:** Ross Sims, wife Dallas
- **Our Lady of the Ozarks, Winslow:** Charles "Chuck" Dwyer, wife Emily
- **Sacred Heart of Mary, Barling:** Anthony "Tony" Schneider, wife Darla; Joseph "Joe" Schneider, wife Alina
- **Sacred Heart, Charleston:** Philip Savage, wife Cindy
- **Sacred Heart, Morrilton:** Mark Hoelzeman, wife Annie
- **St. Augustine, Dardanelle:** David "Dave" Thompson, wife Elena
- **St. Bernard, Bella Vista:** William "Bill" Campbell, wife Lucia
- **St. Edward, Little Rock:** Mark Wankum, wife Sarah
- **St. Joseph, Fayetteville:** David McCall, wife Meagan; Mark Rehtin, wife Tammy; Rodrigo Montemayor, wife Carrie; Ronald "Ron" Novak II, wife Abby
- **St. Joseph, Paris:** Raymond "Ray" Kiefer, wife Angela
- **St. Joseph, Tontitown:** Mark Casey, wife Catherine

- **St. Jude, Jacksonville:** Thomas "Tom" Smith, wife Gretel
- **St. Mary, Altus:** Andrew Post; GregoryKap LianNgaihte, wife Annunciata; Noel Sagullo, wife Laurie; Paul LeBlanc, wife Lisa
- **St. Mary, Hot Springs:** Lawrence "Buck" Womack, wife Kara
- **St. Raphael, Springdale:** Bradford "Brad" Keeling, wife Annette
- **St. Stephen, Bentonville:** Gregory "Greg" Brandenburg, wife Mandy
- **St. Vincent de Paul, Rogers:** George Schaefer, wife Alesia; Juan "Fernando" Serrano, wife Vanessa; Stephen "Steve" Perry, wife Suzie; Timothy "Tim" Spellman, wife Darcy

The English-language formation team includes Debbie King of North Little Rock; Deacon David and Karen French of Conway; Deacon Calvin and Margaret Percy of Conway; Deacon Randy and Kim Spellins of Little Rock; and Deacon Ronnie and Sharon Hoyt of Rogers.

The Spanish-language formation team includes Deacon Marcelino and Maria Vazquez of Fayetteville; Deacon Ricardo and Rosario Puello of Paragould; Deacon Oscar and Alejandra Lopez of Springdale; Deacon Jose and Candy Luebano of, El Dorado; and Deacon Elias and Maria Rangel of Berryville.

Bishop Taylor ordains largest class of deacons ever for state

written by Alesia Schaefer |



The diocese's second diaconate ordination of the year was held June 25 in Rogers

Pandemic didn't stop diaconate preparations for 46 men

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



After six years of preparation, two diaconate ordination Masses will be held in June

Fort Smith parishes finding more hungry people to feed

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



Fort Smith diaconate candidates serve meals to locals in need

Ministry of priests, deacons is a life lived for others

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

Perhaps you remember the beautiful preface we pray at the ordination Mass for priests and deacons. This preface is very rich theologically, but the last sentence always speaks to me with special power because it makes very concrete what faithfulness to our vocation requires.

It goes like this, referring to the newly ordained; “As they give up their lives for you and for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, they strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer you a constant witness of faith and love. ”

And what is the Greek word for witness — “constant witness of faith and love”? Martyr! And how do they give that witness? By laying down their lives, striving “to be conformed to the image of Christ himself!” In other words, ordained ministry is a life lived for others.

Do you know what was on Father Rother’s ordination card? It read: “For my own sake I am a Christian; for the sake of others I am a priest. ” Ordained ministry is a life lived for others, and that’s not easy. That is why the Church holds up for us so many examples of courage, faithfulness and love.

In today's Gospel we have the story of the martyrdom of John the Baptist, a saint who was called from his mother's womb to give witness to Christ, and he did so a) first with his words — "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" ... "he must increase and I must decrease" and b) by his example of a life completely committed to doing God's will, calling people to repentance and denouncing the evils of his day — in particular the corrupt rulers, which is what led to his imprisonment, and c) finally by the shedding of his blood.

The biblical account of his death is lurid and it is possible that he didn't know anything about the dance of Herodias and Herod's oath that was the cause of his beheading. But he had long known that speaking the truth was what faithfulness required and that the forces of evil can inflict a great deal of suffering, even if in faith we know that evil will not prevail in the end.

The same was true in the life and death of Father Rother, whose ordination card I just quoted. He strived "to be conformed to the image of Christ and offer a constant witness of faith and love" and it cost him his life as well. Like John the Baptist, he too gave witness to Christ by his words and deeds long before he gave witness to him by the shedding of his blood. But unlike John the Baptist, he had a congregation of thousands of souls to take care of, so he had to be very careful about what he said in public so as not to put their lives in danger, but his deeds spoke volumes.

He accompanied his people — Pope Francis speaks a great deal about this type of witness. He stayed with his flock. He searched for the missing, buried the dead, helped widows and orphans, all the while knowing that in the twisted logic of the army, that was a form of helping the enemy. But this was necessary if he was going to be "conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer a constant witness of faith and love. "

My brothers, who are being installed as lectors in this Mass, if you want to be a faithful deacon, you will have to find in yourself the generosity to "give up your life" for the Lord and "for the salvation of your brothers and sisters. " Certainly, in your words and deeds, and maybe even with your blood.

After all, isn't that how it was with 10 of Jesus' 12 apostles and St. Paul and many others? John was the only one to die of old age, and even he died in exile, which was another kind of martyrdom.

Ordained ministry is a great adventure. Like with Jesus' original followers, you have no idea where it's going to take you. But one thing is for sure, if you conform your life to the image of Christ himself, there will be no lack of opportunities for you to "offer a constant witness of faith and love. "

As we saw on Father Rother's ordination card, we can say regarding you who will be installed as lectors today, "For your own sake you are a Christian; for the sake of others you will be ordained a deacon. "

.

Jesus' roots like ours: some boring, some bizarre

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

John Center in Little Rock for permanent diaconate class.

One of the most eye-opening and humanizing things I ever did was develop an interest in family history and genealogy. There hidden in our family tree are the people who formed the people who formed us — including the full range of the human condition: the good, the bad, the boring and the bizarre, which goes a long way to explaining the quirks of relatives who are living today. Roots can really make you human, in the best sense of the term.

Today as we celebrate your candidacy for the permanent diaconate on the feast of the birth of Mary, our Gospel reading contains Matthew's version of Jesus' genealogy. His message is that when God became man in Jesus born of Mary, it was not merely a matter of taking on flesh and bones. Jesus took on the human condition in the full sense of the term — and his family tree included the good, the bad, the boring and the bizarre. There was Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Rachel to whom he could point with pride — persons of faith who took real risks to do what God wanted. But there were also some unsavory characters. You want dysfunction and incest? Read in Genesis 38 the bizarre story of how Tamar came to conceive Perez by her father-in-law Judah. You want sin, adultery and murder? Read how Solomon was sired by David, who earlier had committed adultery with Bathsheba, whose husband he then killed to cover up his sin. You want misogyny? The only women mentioned by name are those who were foreigners like Ruth and Rahab, or were guilty of serious sin like Tamar and the wife of Uriah. You want stupidity? Read about Jesus' ancestor King Rehoboam whose poor leadership caused the kingdom to be split in two. And then there all those people who we don't know anything about; the other kings of Judah who were ineffective and unfaithful to God; and Josiah and Hezekiah, reformers who came too late; Zadok, who restored the priesthood after the return from Babylon. Something for everybody!

When we read this genealogy at Christmas, we typically think of baby Jesus, innocent and undefiled, lying sweetly in the manger. But Matthew gives us the rest of the story: that even though Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, his roots were very human — and thus he proclaims to us a Jesus who took on the weight of the human condition in all its ambiguity and complexity. Jesus has great relatives in his immediate family — Mary whose birth we celebrate today and Joseph, what could be better?

But like all of us, his family roots were a whole 'nother story. And it is here that Jesus undertook his great work of redemption. He was like us in everything but sin, and that "everything" included even a complicated family heritage.

In defending the truth of Jesus' full humanity (without denying in any way his divinity), the early Fathers of the Church continually proclaimed that "what was not assumed was not redeemed." So if we have been redeemed by Jesus, part of the reason is that he took on the human condition in the fullest sense of the term.

You candidates for the permanent diaconate are on a path to becoming ordained ministers of

the Church. As such, you will encounter human brokenness in many ways and will need to deal compassionately with everyone you meet, including those people who are hard to love. People like some in Jesus' genealogy — people with some of the same brokenness that you find in your own ancestors or in your own self and your own family. And other people who are just as inspiring as some of the inspiring people in Jesus' lineage. If you study the history of our diocese, you will find many people who lived their Catholic faith courageously at a time when it wasn't easy to be a Catholic in Arkansas. But then also there were those who abused children and adolescents.

The good, the bad, the boring and the bizarre — all of us are gathered here today as members of a single human family writ large, all of us brothers and sisters of each other.

Jesus is the head of our family and Mary is our mother . . . and what a joy it is to celebrate her birth today. And to celebrate your admission to candidacy for the diaconate.

Men move forward toward their diaconate ordination

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



62 men take step toward their ordination to the diaconate

In 50 years, permanent diaconate a 'raging success' in U.S.

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Appreciating deacons since diaconate re-established in U.S. 50 years ago