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Bishop calls for new deacon class, focuses on service

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<https://youtube.com/watch?v=kxKLYzZrr3Y>



Deacons are engaged in many forms of service. Kicking off a new video series showing part of their ministry through the Works of Mercy, Deacon Tom Berna helps to feed the hungry.

Bishop David Zubik is calling for a new class of applicants to the Deacon Formation Program in the diocese and said he intends to resume doing so every other year.

Classes were called in alternating years before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Recognizing the vital role of our deacons—along with our bishops, priests, religious and laity—in making the Church of Pittsburgh a vibrant manifestation of *The Church Alive!*, I am pleased to call for another class of men to enter the Deacon Formation Program,” Bishop Zubik said.

“In doing so, I highlight the fact that service, which is the defining characteristic of the diaconate, has always been at the heart of the Church’s ministry,” he added.

Eight permanent deacons were ordained last year, and one will be ordained Saturday, June 19.

Three information sessions for prospective applicants are planned in upcoming weeks at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, 2900 Noblestown Road, Pittsburgh 15205:

- Sat. July 24, from 9 – 11:30 a.m.
- Thurs. July 29, from 6:30 – 9 p.m.
- Tues. Aug. 3, from 6:30 – 9 p.m.

“For anyone who would like to learn more about the formation experience and diaconal ministry, I’d suggest attending one of these sessions,” said Deacon Stephen Byers, director of the Deacon Formation Program.

Married men may become permanent deacons, and spouses are encouraged to attend the sessions.

Like bishops and priests, deacons are ordained ministers of the Catholic Church, with a special calling to perform works of charity and service and assist in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

Deacons help priests at Mass, preach on occasion, and preside as needed at baptisms, weddings, funeral services and other liturgical functions. They also provide pastoral care to people in hospitals and nursing homes, jails and prisons, and in various other settings, sharing the faith by word and example.

The diocese currently has 96 deacons in active ministry and 37 men in the formation program.

"Since 1974, when the first diaconate class was ordained for our diocese, deacons have faithfully served the Church in the liturgy and by their countless works of charity, especially to the sick, elderly, imprisoned, hungry, lonely, and forgotten," Bishop Zubik said. "We have been richly blessed by their ministry."

The ministry of deacons goes back to the time of the apostles. When faced with the need for help in distributing food for a growing number of the faithful, the apostles prayed and designated certain men to serve the community, according to the New Testament. "Deacon" derives from a Greek word meaning "servant" or "minister."

An applicant for the formation program may be a married or single Catholic man between the ages of 30 and 59, a college graduate with a secure job or source of income, and in full communion with the Catholic Church. Additional criteria for application will be discussed at the information sessions.

To begin the process, a nomination by an applicant's pastor or by another priest or deacon of the diocese is required by September 1. More information is available at www.diopitt.org/permanent-diaconate.



Bishop Zubik with the Permanent Deacon Class of 2011

Fifty years of faith & music

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Photo by Jim Judkis

When Tom Snow was 12 years old, he began playing the organ for Masses at his church, Saint Paul in Butler. This month, he celebrates 50 years of using worship music to create a sacred space where people can encounter God.

Under the instruction of his older brother, Snow began playing piano at age five. By 10, he had decided that the piano was not for him and switched to the organ. Two years later, word spread at Saint Paul that he had a gift for the pipes. The church organist asked him to play at Monday night novena services, baptisms and Masses.

When school let out that June, the choir director asked the boy if he could cover all the Masses that summer. Snow was soon playing 26 services per week, earning \$5 for each one.

Though he took on a busy workload, Snow felt a responsibility to use his talent for the service of the church from that young age.

"I just knew I had to do it, and I did it," he recalls.

When Snow returned to school that fall, then-pastor Monsignor Francis Glenn asked him to keep filling in on evenings and weekends, a practice Snow has continued for a half century. The money he earned playing the organ paid his way through nursing school. Snow worked as an R.N. for 42 years, retiring in April. He currently volunteers with the Jean B. Purvis Community Health Center.

"I look back and I see God's hand," Snow says. "He enabled me to play so that I could go to school. It's been a great journey."

Snow does not consider himself an educated musician; he says he learned his skills on the job. He currently plays about 20 Masses per month. His wife Debbe often lectures and serves as a Eucharistic minister when he is at the organ.

In playing beautiful and familiar hymns, Snow tries to create a spiritual, emotional experience that allows people to encounter God. At the recommendation of his mother, he learned to play the hymn "Mother at Thy Feet is Kneeling" at a young age. It has since become a favorite of the faithful.

“Tom Snow is one of the finest, kindest and most dedicated people that I know,” said Father Kevin Fazio, administrator of the Butler Area Catholic Churches, which includes St. Paul Church and will become All Saints Parish on July 1.

Snow has been instrumental in helping the parish moves towards the merger, said music director Catie Brown. She said he is always ready to provide history of St. Paul Church and to play at different churches in the grouping.

“Tom is an integral part of our church community,” Brown said. “I would not be able to do what I do without him.”

Beverley Nikonow, who has been a cantor since the since the 1990s, says she is never nervous singing when Snow is at the organ.

“He has a knack for music,” she said. “He feels the music and follows whoever he’s accompanying.”

For Snow, music is a way to help people deepen their relationship with Jesus.

“I’m very devoted to my Catholic faith and want to do anything I can do through music to help people grow in their own faith,” he said.



<https://youtube.com/watch?v=zUv2172KMvw>



Tom Snow plays his signature song, "Mother at thy feet is kneeling"

New home for hope

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Fr. Decewicz celebrates Mass at the St. Juan Diego parish picnic in 2018.

Father Michael Decewicz may be retiring as a parish priest, but the ministry he founded will continue saving lives and souls.

The former pastor of Saint Juan Diego Parish in Sharpsburg who most recently served as senior parochial vicar in the Lower Allegheny Valley parish grouping will take up residence next month at the Saint Francis of Assisi Church property in Harmar.

There he will continue his assignment as director of the Addiction Recovery Ministry, or ARM, as it's known, which was established three years ago.

The move comes as government leaders said overdose deaths in Allegheny County jumped 22 percent in 2020, likely a result of the stress and seclusion caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Countywide, 689 people died of overdoses, most of whom had some amount of fentanyl in their system. Father Decewicz was sympathetic, but not surprised by the statistics.

"Isolation is tough," he said. "That's why support meetings are so important. There's too much temptation."

In 2017, Allegheny County marked a record 737 fatalities from accidental overdoses.

The Addiction Recovery Ministry's mission is "to provide support, encouragement, education, and to bring the love of God to all those struggling with addiction and recovery, and to all those loved ones who have been affected in any way by this disease."

ARM offers weekly meetings, spiritual enrichment and special events. When he moves to Saint Francis, Father Decewicz plans to celebrate Mass at least three days a week, offer a Holy Hour, a weekly reflection on the 12-step recovery process, start a grief support group for people who have lost loved ones, and plant a memory garden.

"There's a sense of shame for many people," he said. "Family members blame themselves. 'What didn't I see? Did I not do enough? Was I too harsh? Why did my son or daughter do this?' And that can lead to isolation for family members."

The ministry has started a partnership with Gateway Rehab for recovering addicts leaving treatment, providing cash for a first month's rent, a bus pass, or to turn a phone back on.

To learn more, visit <https://www.addictionrecoveryministrypittsburgh.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/Addiction-Recovery-Ministry-Pittsburgh-272173470125033>.

Adventure camp looking for teen leaders

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Lunchtime at Camp Lajas, 2019 (file photo)

Young people looking to get out of the house this summer, make new friends and grow in their faith have an exciting new opportunity—a week away at a Catholic adventure camp.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Adventure Camp & Retreat Center in Volant, Lawrence County is still accepting applications in their teen leadership program in July, and for Camp Lajas, a wilderness adventure program based at the site.

A group of Pittsburgh priests bought the 101-acre camp along Neshannock Creek to help youth seek Jesus in nature, the sacraments, and in one another.

A day camp program for children entering first through seventh grades is filled for next month, according to Erin Stuvek, executive director of Dry Bones Ministries, the nonprofit that runs the camp. But there are openings for the teen programs, with boys in particular encouraged to sign up.

Camp staff will be following updated COVID-19 health guidelines.

“Our three goals are for youth to understand the depth of God’s love for them, instill practical tools for daily prayer, and spark a desire to do His will—in the Church, and in the world around them,” she said.

Stuvek made the comments on Catholic Education Plus, airing Sunday, June 20 at 6:30 a.m. on KDKA Radio and available later online: <https://www.audacy.com/kdkaradio/podcasts/catholic-education-plus-20662>.

Creative director Julie Amatangelo, a former youth minister, helped develop the Frassati Leadership program for teens. It was named after Blessed Pier Frassati, a young Italian mountaineer who served the poor in the early 20th century.

“We want young people to be confident in their identity as sons and daughters of God, and win others for Christ,” she said. “Sometimes that means standing up for their faith, just being a friend, or inviting them to their youth group.”

Amatangelo said many parish youth groups were deeply impacted by the pandemic, unable to meet in person for fellowship, prayer or service projects. She hopes camp participants will return home ready to help revitalize

youth ministry.

Camp Lajas will offer day trips for whitewater rafting, rock climbing, rappelling and hiking, and campers will return to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Camp at night for teepee camping along the creek. There are two weeks scheduled for young women, and two weeks for young men.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Camp & Retreat Center has three lodges, 14 tent platforms, two pavilions, hiking trails and a basketball court. A master site plan is being developed to add lodging and adventure features, and volunteers experienced in landscaping, trail maintenance and construction are needed.

The camp will be open year-round, hosting confirmation retreats and outside groups.

For more information, visit www.drybonespgh.org/olmc.



Connecting with Christ and one another at Camp Lajas in 2019.

Bridging the Gap: Don't let it go to your head

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Bridging the Gap

Bishop David A. Zubik

It was a beautiful, sun-drenched day: June 21, 1963. What made that bright summer Friday even brighter was something that happened “across the pond.” That day, the Cardinals of the Church, gathered together in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, elected Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini as the new Pope. Not only did they elect a new Pope, they elected a future saint. He took the name of Paul VI.

Earlier that month, the much loved Pope John XXIII passed after a relatively short but very productive reign as our Holy Father.

During the course of his fifteen years as Pope, Paul VI not only reconvened the Second Vatican Council, but more importantly put into action its mandates.

He guided the Church through a time of great unrest, paralleling a similar spirit in the secular world. Paul VI described himself as “a humble servant” of a suffering humanity and challenged the richer nations of the world to reach out to the poor in the Third World.

Following his death in 1978, on the road to sainthood, Pope Benedict XVI called Paul VI a leader who lived a life of “heroic virtue.” He truly lived the Gospel not simply from his head but clearly from his heart. He put into action both his love for God and God’s love for the world.

June 21, 1963 is a day I also remember for another reason. That day, in my hometown of Ambridge, this writer graduated from the eighth grade. A milestone in my life. The beginning of many more chapters of life.

One of the surprises of graduation day was the announcement that I was receiving the American Legion Award. The presentation of that award, one each to a young woman and to a young man, was viewed as the high point of the graduation exercises year after year. I didn’t see it coming. I was “blown away” by this unexpected honor.

Following the ceremonies, we graduates were reunited with our families, I can vividly remember the words of my mom and dad. They congratulated me. They shared how proud they were of me for receiving the American

Legion Award. What followed next was a profound admonition: "Don't let it go to your head."

As a matter of fact, every time I reached a new milestone, a new threshold in my life, my parents relayed the same piece of wise advice: "Don't let it go to your head."

What my mom and dad ultimately wanted me to learn was this lesson: "Don't let it go to your head. Let it go to your heart."

And wasn't that the lesson that Jesus sought to teach his disciples "back then" and us now? HE wants to get into our hearts.

Isn't that ultimately what was recognized in the life of Paul VI? He was a man of "heroic virtue" who sought to follow Jesus from the heart.

Every time I have recalled my parents' advice on June 21, 1963, I have heard in their words the deep desire and dream of Jesus Himself: "Love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul and heart." And while you're at it, love your neighbor as yourself.

As we come through a most difficult year and begin to resume a more normal life in what we hope is a post-pandemic society, it is so important to remember the hopes and dreams that Jesus has for us. While we need to "know" in our minds the "stuff" about Jesus and His Church, it is even more important to let Him into our hearts.

When we do so, we become like Jesus:

- we feed those who hunger for respect by treating them as they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us;
- we give a drink to those thirsting not to be treated with prejudice but to be treated as they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us;
- we welcome those who feel themselves at the fringe of society by treating them as they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us;
- we clothe those who feel naked because of their need for forgiveness by treating them as they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us;
- we visit those who feel alone by giving them our listening ears because they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us;
- we free those who are imprisoned by their lack of self-worth with an affirmation of who they are—a daughter or son of God, a brother or sister to us

These are the ways we can become like Jesus.

These are the ways we help the world, our country and our Church become what God wants each to be.

And these are the actions, the avenues, the GPS guidance, that will get us to heaven.

And so—let me paraphrase my parents' wise advice of June 21, 1963.

"Don't let Him *only* go to your head." Let Him *especially* be in your heart.

Photo by Justin Merriman

Catholic at Home

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Catholic at Home

Jennifer Antkowiak

As we sat in church waiting for the Baccalaureate Mass to begin, I reflected on so many other times we had been there.

Sunday Masses, yes, and also baptisms, reconciliations, first Communions, confirmations, weddings, funerals. So many family milestones, in His house; given such depth and meaning through the sacraments.

On this day, members of the grade school class who graduated from high school in 2021 came back home to the church where they had gone to weekly Masses and had made their first Communions.

After the homily, these young adults—many now taller than their parents— were congratulated and blessed. They were also given a beautiful gift and card that encouraged them to stay connected to the Church and to share the love of Jesus as they find their way in our world.

My family is celebrating two graduations this year—our son from college, and our daughter from high school. This Mass was held in the church attached to the grade school that all the kids attended. The name of the school has changed through a merger as part of the diocesan schools regionalization plan. And, our church building is one of eight that make up a new parish with a new name—part of the diocesan *On Mission for The Church Alive!* initiative.

At first, those changes were not easy for me to accept. I had great love for those names and what they represented. Those parish and school communities have been my points of reference, my spiritual home.

Yet, as I sat and reflected, I realized that the name or location of the place truly didn't matter. What mattered was the fact that we were there, wrapped in the sights, sounds, and scents of His home, as part of a Church family.

As a mom, inviting Jesus to be part of the journey has given me such comfort as the kids grew and moved on, as we experienced these bittersweet moments of pride and recognition. God's messages to us through the sacraments help us to transition through these rites of passage.

Whether for sad or happy reasons, transition is change, and most of us need support as we move into new territory. I've found constant support through my relationship with Jesus.

One message He brings as we mark milestones is simply to have faith. *Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of time* (Matthew 28:20). Jesus said that as he ascended to His Father. To truly know that we will never have to go through anything alone is life changing.

Jesus gives us hope, and I sensed it deeply in that church. We can have courage through transitions, knowing that He has plans for each of us, and that He has our back.

An ongoing message from Jesus which resonates as we mark milestones, is that of love. He has unconditional love for us, and we are called to love one another as He loves us.

No matter where our lives have been, or where they lead, having Jesus with us amplifies the happy times, and brings great comfort in the difficult times.

As you watch your families grow, I pray that you may feel Jesus' support. Throughout all the changes, He is with you, offering His messages and His gifts of faith, hope, and love.