*Diocese of Portland Maine*

*Deacon News*



*Winter 2021*

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***Directors Message***

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus and may His peace reign in your hearts!

Indeed, 2020 will go down in history as a year of great uncertainty and hardships, marked with global shutdowns that have crippled economies, of disruptions and division, of unemployment and hunger, of sickness, tragedy, and loss, of isolation and crippling stress, causing widespread fear and anxiety throughout the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And we still find ourselves forced to embrace a new normal. This is still being defined!

Amidst all these challenges, the Christmas message of love and hope reminds us that God is with us through the gift of His son Jesus, and he will sustain us through this extremely difficult time.

As we enter the season of Lent, let us pause in a spirit of gratitude, to recall the countless acts of service and sacrifices championed by many to keep us all safe and healthy: For the tireless efforts our priests, parish staffs, and volunteers make daily to ensure ministries carry on keeping us connected with our faith, for those who serve in soup kitchens and food pantries to feed the hungry, for first responders and medical workers whose daily sacrifices and heroic efforts save lives, for those who serve

the poor, the marginalized, the immigrant, and the most vulnerable in our society, for the frontline workers who place themselves at risk for the benefit of others, for law enforcement and military personnel who put their lives at risk daily to keep us safe, and for the scientific discovery of COVID-19 vaccines in record time to save tens of thousands of lives, to name a few. Indeed, the good works displayed by so many have been a blessing to all for the common good and bear witness of God’s love and mercy.

As ministers of the Gospel, St. Paul says, “we are ambassadors for Christ as if God were appealing through us” (2 Cor 5:20). As such, through the ***Diakonia*** we live and share, we must conform our lives to the image of “Christ the Servant” embodying His immense love in the various ways we serve others, particularly among the poor and the most vulnerable. Perhaps we can strive this year in our ministry endeavors to become more compassionate, patient, understanding, generous, forgiving, helpful, kind, and loving towards all. And Lent, a time of intense spiritual renewal, can serve as a catalyst for growth in these areas; through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, may we experience a deeper conversion of heart in love of Jesus and our neighbor!

As ambassadors for Christ, let us proclaim the Christmas message as beacons of love and hope to a world in need of His saving power!

***News Update***

**Formation of a New Cohort:** I am excited to report that we are making headway in forming a new cohort for initial diaconate formation. On January 9th, I hosted an orientation session for 17

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nominees and their wives designed to introduce the diaconate within

the context of Holy Orders, Canon Law, Formation, and a witness talk to help them discern the next step in the process which is to apply for Aspirancy. To this end, the following presentations were given:

**“Diaconate as part of the Sacrament of Holy Orders**”

Msgr. Marc Caron

“**Canonical Requirements, Rights and Obligations**”

Fr. Jack Dickinson

“**The Diaconal Couple, Collaborators in Ministry**”

Deacon Tim & Lisa Dougherty

“**The Diaconate Path of Initial and Ongoing Formation**”

Deacon Peter J. Bernier, OFS

I am extremely grateful to our keynoters for talks well done evidenced by the positive feedback I received from the nominees of which all 17 have applied for Aspirancy! The Admissions Board conducted virtual interviews with each of the couples on February 13th, so please keep them in your prayers. The goal is to begin formation on March 1st!

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Bishop Deeley recently appointed Fr. Michael Sevigny as the new Director of Hispanic Ministry now that Sr. Pat Pora has officially retired. Sr. Pat who has played an incredible role over the years as one of the founding leaders and catalyst of Hispanic Ministry, will continue to serve the Latino Community as a volunteer.

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***Formation Events 2021***

Please mark your calendars with the following dates:

* ***Clergy Institute***: May 17-20th Atlantic Oceanside, Bar Harbor.
* ***Deacon Assembly***: September 25th St. Joseph’s Church, Brewer.
* ***Deacon & Wives Retreat***:

October 16-18th

Marie Joseph Spiritual Center

* ***Harvest Ball:*** TBD
* ***NADD1 Regional Conference***:

November 5 – 6th

Southbridge Hotel & Conference

Center; Southbridge, MA

***Formation Events 2020***

I am pleased with the level of participation this past year despite the negative impact COVID-19 had on our ability to gather as a Diaconal Community. Like many organizations today, I took advantage of virtual technology to host our annual Deacon Assembly which had about 45 in attendance.

I am grateful to Fr. Frank Morin, Fr. Michael Sevigny, OFM Cap and Jose Perez for their wonderful presentations on the workings of Hispanic Ministry in the Diocese. Indeed, much ministry is ongoing to meet the spiritual and material needs of our Latino sisters and brothers through evangelization, catechesis, sacramental ministry, and works of charity, especially during COVID-19. The pictures Jose shared created a beautiful tapestry of Latino spirituality which is centered on devotionals and rich prayer experiences in family life. As you may already know,

Fr. Jack Fagan

Jose Perez

Fr. Michael Sevigny

Sr. Pat Pora

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![A group of people in a room

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The Canonical Retreat was a great success with fourteen in attendance which worked out perfect with social distancing practices in place. I want to commend the staff at Marie Josephs Spiritual Center for doing an outstanding job in keeping everyone safe by strictly following all the COVID-19 protocols which included the modification of the kitchen area to accommodate traffic flow.

The theme of the retreat, “Deacon as the Bridge” was presented by Deacon Francis Burke, the Director of Marie Joseph’s who served as our retreat leader. The ice breaker activity consisted of having each couple design and build a bridge out of construction materials such as popsicle sticks, clay, ties, and other such items. The object was to build a bridge that was both functional and sturdy. And it was fun to see everyone’s creativity…each bridge had its own little story to tell as each couple described their approach to completing this task.

Using virtual aids, storytelling, music, metaphor, and dialog, Deacon Fran painted a portrait of the diaconate as a bridge ministry that is firmly anchored in Christ, nourished by the Sacred Scriptures, and strengthened by the gift of the Spirit, creating a solid foundation to weather storms and provide safe passage! Emphasis was placed on the need to embrace others where they are in their life’s journey.

**Deacon & Wives Retreat 2021**

I am pleased to announce that Deacon Dominic Cerrato, Ph.D. will serve as our retreat leader this coming October. He is the editor of *Our Sundays Visitor’s, Deacon Magazine*, and he is a nationally known speaker and author. His latest book entitled, “Encountering Christ the Servant: A Spirituality of the Diaconate” is now available for purchase. I hope to see you there!

***ON-Going Formation***

In an effort to keep everyone informed of the Deacon Advisory Board initiatives, I have enclosed the minutes from the September and November meetings for your review.

***Protecting God’s Children***

Keeping our children safe from sexual predators on all fronts is of the upmost priority for all of us. To do so, we must be vigilant in being aware of safe practices and of behavioral signs that could be of concern. To help keep us aware of the latter, the Diocese has made good use of the VIRTUS program as source of education and on-going awareness. This practice is compulsory to keep compliant with diocesan Safe Environment practices that are audited yearly. That said, as of late there are **15 deacons** that have not reviewed **3** or more bulletins which is not acceptable. As I mentioned in the past, faculties may be suspended with non-compliance, and **I am getting weary of policing this matter**, so please get caught up! I thank you in advance for your cooperation and diligence in keeping our children safe!

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I also want to express my deepest gratitude to the members of our **Deacon Advisory Board** for their dedicated service, wisdom, and generosity as they continue to be an invaluable source of support and inspiration to me as your Director. In a spirit of collaboration and unity, we continue to build upon the various diaconal initiatives that are underway as we continue the work of strengthening the ***Mission and Ministry*** of *diakonia* here in the Diocese of Portland. The hope is that we will realize the vision of becoming more deeply integrated into parish life and diocesan institutions that we are called to serve in perfect charity!

The members are as follows: Deacons Denis Mailhot, Frank Daggett, and John Murphy. I will be working with the Advisory Board to discern new members.

***Recognition Corner***

Please join me in thanking Deacon Dennis Popadak for his generous service to the Diaconate Community as a member of the Deacon Advisory Board. On November 19, 2020, Deacon Dennis completed his last term having served more than 12 years! He provided valuable insights to me and ultimately to Bishop Deeley regarding norms, policies, and practices that impact the life and ministry of deacons in the Diocese. I am also grateful for his part in helping me present the survey results and the new Deacon Policy Manual to the Presbyteral Council to gain their support and final approval for publication…this was an historic moment in the life of our Diaconal Community.

Well done, thank you Deacon Dennis!!!

**Admissions Board**

I would like to recognize the members of the Admissions Board for their generous service to the Diaconal Community in helping us form a new cohort for Aspirancy.

**Members are as follows:**

Deacon Peter Bernier: Chair

Msgr. Marc Caron, VG & Moderator of the Curia

Deacon Tim and Lisa Dougherty

Deacon Dennis and Bev Popadak

Barbara Smith

Debra Bernier

Steve Letourneau, CEO of Catholic Charities.

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My dear friends in Christ,

I am most grateful for your generous support and your perseverance in this difficult time of uncertainty. It appears we will be forced to embrace this “new normal” for some time to come but we will weather this storm together united in Christ’s love!

Please keep me in your prayers as I put my trust in the gift of the Spirit to continue the collaborative work of implementing goals and objectives which help integrate our diaconal ministries more fully into the local parish and the mission of the Diocese!

Lastly, let us be grateful for the gift of our diaconal ministries. For it is through God’s grace we are called to serve as a ***bridge*** between the Church and the World, between the hierarchy and the laity, and between the liturgy and life!

As always, I am deeply honored to serve you!

Your servant in Christ,

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Deacon Peter J. Bernier, O.F.S, M.P.S.

Director of the Diaconate