

# THE Deacon Servant

OFFICES OF DEACON SERVICES | DIACONATE FORMATION | ARCHDIOCESE of MILWAUKEE



ARCHDIOCESE of MILWAUKEE  
**DIACONATE**  
*Where love becomes service.*

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## DIRECTOR'S REPORT



*Dcn. Mike Chmielewski*

A few weeks ago, Archbishop ListECKI called Deacon Dale Nees, Fr. Jerry Herda, and myself to begin a discussion on diaconal service and covenants. The main point of emphasis for the archbishop was to see if

we could better utilize the gifts and passions of our deacons in service beyond the walls of the parish.

We all know that the foundation of our diaconal service comes in our ministry and participation within the parish, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments.

However, we also know that as deacons, we are called to extend our ministry beyond the walls of the parish. We are to go out to those in need as "Christ Servant." The diaconal covenant invites and commits the deacon to "Service of Justice and Charity." Nearly every deacon ministers and serves the needy outside the parish walls. We serve the sick, homebound, hospitalized. We reach out to the imprisoned, hungry, homeless, and unemployed. We are present as chaplains for first responders, those in hospice care, truckers, refugees, and the outcast. We guide SVDP Conferences and we work for the dignity of all life. We are called to be "Christ Present" in places that

the formal Church cannot enter.

Archbishop ListECKI is asking us to ponder more ways to connect our deacons in ministry and service to those in need. He is asking us to look closely at the gifts, talents, and passions of individual men as they journey through formation. Then after ordination, he hopes deacons will expand their ministries by using these gifts and passions.

We have deacons who are formally covenanted to social ministries rather



than specific parishes: Dcn. Przedpelski '94 to Franciscan Peacemakers, Dcn. Niggemann '00 to prison ministry, and Dcn. Sommers '00 to the deaf community. However, all three

are also connected to parish ministry. We have multiple deacons whose ministries outside the parish are significant commitments including chaplain service to hospitals, hospices, and first responders, ministry to traveling shows, and extended service to the homeless, hungry, and neglected.

There is also a vision of deacons using their gifts to serve the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and parishes in very specific areas. Many of us have significant educational and life experiences that could serve the greater community. We have a number

► See **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**  
*(continued on page 2)*

## COMING FULL CIRCLE



*Deacon Dale Nees*

This September, it will be four years since I began in the role of Director of Diaconate Formation. At that time, the Ordination Class of 2022 were just starting their Aspirant Path. They are the first class I have had the pleasure of personally accompanying, along with their wives, throughout their entire four-year initial formation. But proper accompaniment requires a whole team of people, including the formation staff, pastors/parish directors, spiritual directors, faculty, tutors, committee members, mentors, deacons, deacon wives, bishops, and archbishop. Thanks to everyone's efforts and God willing, there will soon be 16 more deacons serving the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

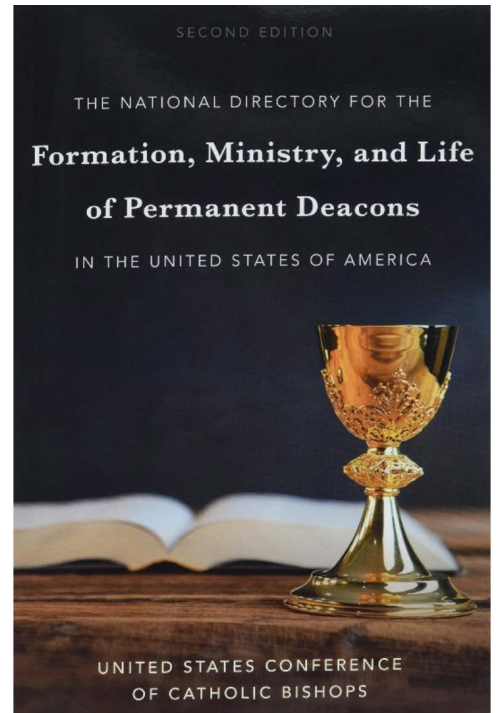
But that very same week, the Diaconate Formation Program, as it does every two years, will again come full circle with a new group of men selected to begin as the Aspirant Class of 2022. This group having been selected prior to *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States of America – Second Edition's* effective date of June 9, 2022, will continue to follow a four-year footprint. I greatly appreciate the level



of collaboration that was necessary to complete the application process almost three months earlier than usual; it is a testament to what can be achieved with teamwork. This was especially true as we continue to support the 12 men who are advancing to their second year of candidacy.

The plan is that later this year, we will have a much clearer picture of what adjustments to our curriculum will be necessary in meeting the needs of those we serve, along with the spirit of the revised National Directory. As is always the case, we rely heavily on your prayerful support, especially as we prepare to come full circle with the Aspirant Class of 2024.

*Deacon Dale Nees*



### ► DIRECTOR'S REPORT *(continued from page 1)*

of deacons serving as Parish Directors, much appreciated by the archbishop. The Church does have needs in places like finance, human resources, management, education, leadership, and mental health. These are places that the gifts and passions of a deacon could serve our pastors, new priests, parishes, or the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. There is also always a need to serve the diaconal community in

formation, governance, guidance, and care of those in need.

The invitation here is to broaden our vision of diaconal service. What are your gifts and your passions? Where is God calling you to serve? How and where can we best be "Christ Servant" to His people, His Church, and the Diaconate?

*Easter Blessings to all!*  
*Deacon Michael Chmielewski*

## “OUR MINISTRY IS NOT OURS”: ENCOUNTER DURING MISSION TRIP 2022



**Dcn. Manuel Maldonado-Villalobos**

Our ministry is not ours; it is the ministry of the Church; it is Christ's ministry." With these words, Fr. Sandro, Director of Diaconate Formation for the Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, encouraged our Candidates 2024 to live a ministry of service and reminded us that as deacons, we represent the Church.

In this encounter with Fr. Sandro Jimenez and our brother Deacon Domingo, our candidates had the opportunity to learn about the diaconate in the Dominican Republic. They had the opportunity to share some experiences with Dcn. Domingo and learn from him about his ministries as a deacon for our sister parish of La Sagrada Familia. Here is a little bit of this encounter.

Fr. Sandro explained that he is new in this position as Director of Diaconate Formation and he is very happy for the opportunity to work and form deacons for the clergy and the Church ministry. There are 32 ordained deacons in the diocese and 22 in the formation program. Their program is different from ours in some processes and similar in others. Age, canonical impediments, married or single are similar criteria as we have in the United States. To become a deacon, the formation process and experiences are a little different. The man needs to be a "Presidente de Asamblea" (president of the assembly) for one to two years. Presidente de Asamblea is in charge of the faith community or communities. He organizes catechesis, baptism prep, evangelization and the Liturgy of the Word with Communion in the communities when the priest is not available. Then, after the man gets endorsed by his pastor, he goes into the diaconate formation program for three years. Also, in order to become Presidente de Asamblea, the man goes to a three-year formation program. It takes approximately 8 years to become a deacon.

Dcn. Domingo shared his discernment/formation process. After the three years preparation as Presidente de Asamblea, he ministered in that role for 19 years. He tried to become a deacon a couple of times but did not find the support needed back then. Later with the encouragement of Fr. Juan Manuel and his support/endorsement, Dcn. Domingo started his formation to the diaconate and was ordained in 2018. Dcn. Domingo continues to express his love for the Church and the ministry of service to the people in need. His ministries as a deacon include catechesis, jail ministry, visiting the communities and "reaching out." He loves the opportunities to do Liturgy of the Word with Communion, preach as a way of catechesis and evangelization, and the sacraments of Baptism and Marriage.



For Dcn. Domingo, fidelity to the Church and faithfulness to the ministry are very important in his life and as a deacon. You cannot be a deacon without strong faith and a strong Bible foundation. He continues to say that our mission is also for the people outside the Church, attending to their needs as much as we can. Fr. Sandro continued the conversation, stating that "ustedes son hombres de Dios" (you are men of God). Pope Francis, Fr. Sandro mentioned, reminded us that we have to be men of God and Pope Francis is an example to follow. A true servant for all people, he goes to the people of God and serves them, "Church or no Church."

Fr. Sandro emphasized the importance of ministerial presence in the parish and in the community. He mentioned that part of the process of formation is doing ministry, being involved in ministry before diaconate formation, during formation, and after. This also includes the wives of the deacons. The wives are "required" to be in ministry with their husband, as part of the support and ministry of them as deacons. One of our candidates mentioned that in our program, we ask them to step out of ministries and parish commitments and Fr. Sandro said that is not what they do in the Dominican Republic. The best way to promote and learn about the diaconate is by doing ministry. The presence of a deacon candidate is the best catechesis and promotion to the ministry of a deacon. I needed to step in and explain why we ask to "step back" from some responsibilities; we talk about the ministerial experiences and placements that happened during formation and they understood that it is the same process with different approaches to be fulfilled.

There is more from this encounter with our brother Dcn. Domingo and Fr. Sandro and the Candidates 2024 that they will reflect on and remember for future ministries. At the end of this encounter, both Fr. Sandro and Dcn. Domingo reminded us that we represent the Church; that our ministry is not ours, it is Christ serving others and attending their needs. We received a "double blessing" as Fr. Sandro and Dcn. Domingo gave us their blessing at the same time. Truly, this encounter was inspirational and motivational. Let us pray for our brother deacons in the Dominican Republic and for an increase of vocations to the permanent diaconate.

**Dcn. Manuel Maldonado-Villalobos**

## LOVE & MARRIAGE



**Maritza Espino**

*“Love is patient,  
Love is kind;  
Love is not jealous or boastful;  
It is not arrogant or rude.  
Love does not insist on its own way,  
It is not irritable or resentful;  
It does not rejoice at wrong,  
But rejoices in the right.  
Love bears all things,  
Believes all things,  
Hopes all things,  
Endures all things”.*

*~1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

This Bible verse comes alive as I interview the wives of the men entering Diaconate Formation in Fall 2022. As you already know, the Discernment Process for the Diaconate Formation Program is quite intense — couples interested in learning more need to attend four discernment sessions with an already ordained deacon couple offered throughout the different parishes of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. As part of this discernment process, Dcn. Dale Nees, Director, follows up with them with a Deacon Perceiver Interview — he meets with future aspirant, and I meet with the wife. This is my first year doing wives’ interviews and I was delighted by this experience. It gave me an opportunity to connect with them one-on-one and learn a little bit about them, their families, children, hobbies, what they do for a living, their future plans, etc. One of the questions I ask as I interview them is if they are in support of their husband’s vocation to the diaconate and why.

Based on my conversation with them, I want to say that most of the ladies’ answer is “because they love him” even though they don’t necessarily use these words. I am confident they are willing to sacrifice and support their husband out of their love for them. Pope Francis affirms that “Love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples, and their children.”

(Amoris Laetitia, Apostolic Exhortation, Ch. 4, #90) The wives are willing not only to sacrifice but accompany their husbands throughout their four-year formation — they too are answering their call to their husband’s vocation as well as the rest of the family.

This year, we have younger couples who amazed me by the fact that they already have a plan set in terms of their family support when they will be at an “All Day Wives’ Day” with their husbands. They’re being proactive and committed — ready to welcome and endure whatever the future brings in terms of their future formation. These ladies are courageous, confident, loyal, hard-working mothers, resilient, and self-giving, motivated merely out of LOVE.

I am so looking forward to getting to know them, and their children, teenagers, and/or young adults. It’s exciting and motivating to see gentlemen and their families answering a vocation at a younger age and willing to make the necessary sacrifices to support their loved one.

Yet, the admission process is not done. They still need to complete the necessary requirements, and a C.O.A.S. interview, before they are presented and accepted by Archbishop Jerome Listecky to move forward as Aspirants in our Diaconate Formation Program of 2022.

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

*~1 Corinthians 13:2-3*

**Maritza Espino**

## DEACON SENATE

The Deacon Senate met on January 19 and March 16 via Zoom. While there was an across-the-board desire to meet in person, Covid-19 has taught us all the value of technology. For the time being, the meetings will continue to be via Zoom. However, there is strong consideration of going back to in-person in the fall. If anything, we learned over the last couple of years that predicting what the world will be next month is difficult, much less predicting 6 months from now. We have all begun to master the art of “Pivot.”

From a finance standpoint, the Senate account is in good shape as we come to the end of the fiscal year. The current balance is slightly over \$7,500 with only a couple smaller financial obligations anticipated. A \$100 memorial in the name of Fr. Tom Thibodeau, who died unexpectedly of Covid-19, was sent to the Redemptorist Retreat Center. Thank you Dcn. Scott Campbell for your efforts in tracking the Senate expenses.

► See **DEACON SENATE** (continued on page 5)

## WOMEN'S DAY OF REFLECTION

On Saturday, March 26th, 25 women of the diaconate gathered for a Women's Morning of Reflection at the Mary Mother of the Church Pastoral Center. It was the first planned formal gathering for the women of the diaconate since the April 2019 retreat – another casualty of the COVID pandemic.

In planning the event, I invited Maritza Espino of the Diaconate Formation Team to join me on a joint presentation. Maritza is very involved in formation programming with the wives of the Aspirants and Candidates. Her participation in this event just seemed very logical. As we reflected on a possible topic, we realized that March 26 was the day after the Church celebrated the Solemnity of the Annunciation which we decided would be the foundation of our spiritual reflection. Unfortunately, Maritza tested positive for COVID the week before the gathering and thus was not able to attend.

As we gathered, one of the women said it best: "It feels like we are coming out of hibernation!" The day was a marvelous opportunity for the women to renew and reconnect. We had a very diverse and beautiful group that included: 2 women whose husbands were ordained in the 70's, 2 in the 80's, and 7 in the 90's; 5 widows (including one widowed less than a year and one over 40 years ago); 4 ordained outside Milwaukee; 2 women who, with their husbands, moved to Milwaukee in the last 6 months; and for the class attendance award, 6 of 7 from the class of 2018.

We opened with Tai Chi morning prayer and then after introductions, the large group spent some time reflecting and praying with the Annunciation Gospel. The discussion was then narrowed to small groups at tables of 6 to ponder and reflect on snippets from the Gospel. Discussion topics were focused on: "The Lord is with you," "Do not be afraid...you have found favor with God," "Nothing is impossible with God," and "I am the handmaid of the Lord."

After some large group sharing of the table reflections, we



gathered for a box lunch or salad from Skyline Catering and more catching up. The women left written comments and suggestions for future gatherings. There was a very warm, joyful feeling in the air as the women departed. All seemed eager to resume a common spiritual journey with their spiritual sisters.

*Dcn. Mike Chmielewski*

### ► DEACON SENATE *(continued from page 4)*

It was encouraging to see the increased participation in the district meetings. More districts are beginning to meet in person or by using a hybrid of in-person and Zoom. The districts also welcomed the 3rd year candidates to their soon-to-be assigned districts. It was great having the opportunity to meet them, offer a sincere welcome, and let them hear about some of the day-to-day struggles and joys other deacons are experiencing. Districts 1, 2 and 3 are working on the final details of Deacon Day 2022. Districts 14, 15, and 16 are

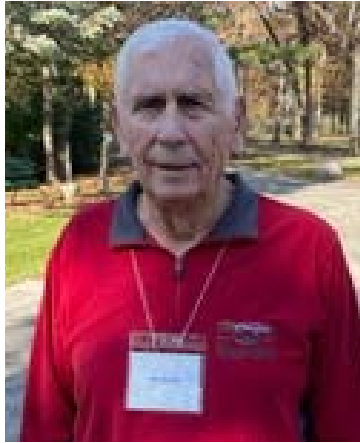
planning this year's Memorial Mass. Districts 7, 8, and 9 are already planning 2023 Memorial Mass (classic overachievers). There are a number of opportunities to offer time and talents. Dcn. Mike Chmielewski is looking for participants to assist with the Post Ordination Sessions May 14. Dcn. Dale Nees is looking for participants to help out with the ordination retreat in August. Dcn. Jim Matthias is looking for those interested in prison ministry.

*Dcn. Jim Starke*

## KNOW OUR DEACON

Deacon Ron Lesjak was born and raised in Milwaukee. He graduated from the Salvatorian Seminary High School and eventually earned a Master of Science Degree in Exceptional Education from University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. His professional career was as an exceptional education teacher and coordinator in the Kenosha Unified Schools. He married Gail in 1966 and together they have 3 daughters.

Ron was ordained a Deacon in 1979 and assigned to serve at his home parish, St. Mary, Kenosha, where he continues to be covenanted



*Dcn. Ron Lesjak*

as a Senior Deacon. In addition to the usual parish liturgical ministries, Ron was the long time coordinator of the Kenosha SHARE food program. Ron has also ministered in the Kenosha County Jail for over 20 years, and was instrumental in creating the Deacon Personnel Board in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 1986. Ron was also very active in the National Association of Deacon Organizations, serving as president in the early 1990s.

Thank you, Ron, for all your service to God's people!

*Dcn. Mike Chmielewski*

## NEW DEACON COUPLE

Deacon Robert Larkin and wife Jana moved into the Archdiocese of Milwaukee late this past summer. Bob and Jana moved here from Naperville, Illinois (Diocese of Joliet) in order



*Deacon Robert Larkin and wife Jana*

to live closer to two of their adult children (and spouses) as well as two young grandchildren.

Bob is familiar with the Milwaukee area as he is a 1982 graduate of the Business School of Marquette University. He has been employed in the finance industry for nearly 40 years and currently is a Sr. Financial Advisor for Merrill Lynch with his new office in downtown Milwaukee.

Bob was ordained a deacon for the Diocese of Joliet on August 27, 2016. He served at St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Naperville. Outside of the usual liturgical service, Bob was active in Prison/Jail ministry as well as Mission Ministry in Haiti.

Bob and Jana have settled in Glendale and have connected with St. Eugene Parish in Fox Point. Bob began formal ministry at St. Eugene's this fall and is currently finalizing his first Milwaukee Diaconal Covenant.

BIG Welcome to Bob and Jana Larkin!

## MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. About half of Americans will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition sometime in their life with symptoms starting by age 24 for the majority of people. The average delay between symptom onset and treatment is 11 years, meaning a lot of people spend months or years facing mental health challenges before getting a diagnosis. It is never too early to seek treatment for your mental health. Intervening effectively during early stages can save lives and is critically important for people living with mental health conditions.

There's often no one single cause for a mental health condition. Instead, there are many possible risk factors that can influence how likely a person is to experience a mental health condition or how serious the symptoms may be. Some risk factors for mental health conditions include trauma, which can be a one-time event or ongoing; the environment and how it impacts one's health and quality of life (also known as social determinants of health like financial stability and health care access); genetics; brain chemistry; and habits and lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, sleep and stress management.

Faith communities are often the first place people turn to when they are hurting and in need. Do you feel prepared with how to respond and minister to those in your parishes who may be living with mental illness themselves or are supporting loved ones with mental illness? Are you concerned with how to respond to someone who is contemplating suicide? Is your parish community interested in forming a mental health ministry to provide education, support and outreach? I am happy to help with any and all of the above! Some resources to get started may

▶ See **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH** (continued on page 7)

## KNOW OUR DEACON

Deacon Jim Francois was born and raised in Racine and is a graduate of St. Catherine High School and Lakeland College (Ashland, Wis.). He married Judy in 1957 and together they have 11 children. Jim spent 19 years as a high school math teacher and a coach of football, baseball, and wrestling. He taught and coached at St. Joseph, Kenosha; Pio Nono, Milwaukee; and in the Kenosha Unified Schools. After 19 years of teaching youth, he took a job as a quality assurance manager at Birchwood Meats in Sommers, Wis.

Jim was ordained a deacon in 1983 and assigned to his home parish of St. Mary, Kenosha where he continues to serve as



*Dcn. Jim Francois*

a Senior Deacon. In addition to the usual parish liturgical ministries, Dcn. Jim and wife Judy had a passion for truck stop ministry. Following a model from the Chicago area, Dcn. Jim and Judy became a fixture in the truck stop ministry at the Iron Skillet Truck Stop on I-94 and Hwy. 20 in Racine County. For more than 20 years, they served and recruited others to serve the long-haul truckers until the pandemic brought this ministry to – hopefully – a temporary halt in 2020.

Thank you, Dcn. Jim, for your care of God's people!

*Dcn. Mike Chmielewski*

## DEACON PERSONNEL BOARD

The Deacon Personnel Board met on 2/1/2022 via Zoom. Present: Dcns. Gulig, Campbell, Stanula, Schneider, and Chmielewski / Fr. Herda. Excused: Dcn. Nosacek (in Africa).

Dcn. Gulig opened the meeting with prayer followed by approval of the October 5, 2021 Meeting Minutes as submitted. Our usual formation discussion was set aside as we await the full Board's access to the Second Edition of the National Directory. The new books will be mailed out in the next week.

Deacon specific issues were then discussed including: 19 covenant renewals, 2 deacons moving into the Arch, 1 deacon moving out, and 4 deacons retiring. There are 16 deacons with overdue covenants but no major concerns beyond the need for the deacons to be more timely in the renewal process. There was one deacon of special concern. This deacon has historically been non-compliant with diaconal expectations. The Board has asked Dcn. Chmielewski to bring the deacon in for a face-to-face meeting

about these serious issues. At least one Board member will be invited to attend that meeting.

We are anticipating 16 men to be ordained in September and Board members should anticipate attending the signing of initial covenants beginning in mid-July and extending to early September.

Fr. Herda told the Board there will be up to 20 priest assignment changes this Spring. He also spoke of a meeting with the archbishop at which the archbishop talked about assigning deacons to specialized ministries in place of or in addition to the usual parish assignment. Fr. Herda will follow up with Dcns. Nees and Chmielewski on this issue.

Dcn. Gulig closed the meeting with a reminder of confidentiality and the continuing need to support our parishes and brother deacons as the current pandemic seems to be moving to more of an endemic. The meeting closed with prayer and a plan to meet again in May of 2022.

*Dcn. Mike Chmielewski*

### ► MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH *(continued from page 6)*

be found on the Continuing Formation of Clergy webpage under [Mental Health Awareness Month Resources](#) or by contacting me at [delmores@archmil.org](mailto:delmores@archmil.org).

What about taking the opportunity during the month of May to preach about mental health? Your message from the pulpit can be powerful. Some great resources on this topic are available through The Archdiocese of Chicago <http://www.mimistry.org/support.htm> and the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers <https://catholicmhm.org/>. In addition, you can incorporate prayer intentions for those living with mental illness in the Prayer of the Faithful. Parish bulletins can highlight local mental health resources such as Catholic Charities, NAMI of Southeast WI or Mental Health America Wisconsin.

I encourage all of us to take time during the month of May to pray for the healing of those among us who are struggling with mental health. Let God help us to be messengers of hope and healing in Jesus Christ.

*Stephanie Delmore, Victim Assistance  
Coordinator & Employee Support  
Coordinator for Parishes & Schools*

## Prayer Requests

Kathy Marx, wife of Dcn. Keith `07	Dcn. Gerry Ponec `81
Deacon Troy Major `02	Dcn. Stan Lowe `98
Antoinette D'Alessio, wife of Dcn. John `98	Dcn. Bill Banach `83
Dcn. Don Borkowski `81	Dcn. Larry Normann `84
Dcn. Tom Filipiak `94	<b>RECENTLY DECEASED AND THEIR FAMILIES</b>
Dcn. Al Foeckler `07	Barbara Rose Koebel (mother of Dcn. Mike `90), 4/5/22
Dcn. Roberto Fuentes `02 and wife Lorenza	



## DATES TO REMEMBER

### May 7, 2022

Deacon Day 2022, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.  
St. Thomas Aquinas, Waterford  
Stephanie Delmore presenting /  
Fr. Herda (& successor) presiding

### May 14, 2022

Post Ordination Formation, Session 2,  
Class 2020, 8 a.m.-2 p.m, MMCP

### September 10, 2022

Diaconate Ordination, 10 a.m.  
Cathedral St. John the Evangelist,  
Milwaukee

### October 23, 2022

Memorial Mass 2022, 2 p.m., Archbishop  
Listecki, St. Roman Parish, Milwaukee

### November 3-6, 2022

Deacon Retreat / Redemptorist, Fr. Rob  
Kroll, S.J.



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P.O. Box 070912 | 3501 South Lake Drive Milwaukee, WI 53207-0912

**Deacon Michael J. Chmielewski, Director Deacon Services, 414-769-3409**  
**Deacon Dale Nees, Director Diaconate Formation, 414-758-2212**  
**Manuel Maldonado-Villalobos, Associate Director, 414-758-2207**  
**Maritza Espino, Associate Director of Pastoral Formation, 414-758-2205**

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**Catholic Stewardship Appeal**

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

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