

Called to Serve



Diocese of Portland Maine

Deacon News

December 2018

Directors Message

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray that you are experiencing a peace-filled Advent!

As you can see, I have made an attempt to spruce up the format of our quarterly Newsletter to make it more enjoyable to read and organized. In addition to segments concerning news updates, on-going formation activities and highlighting diaconal events, I have added a "Recognition Corner" to showcase some of the important diaconal work that we are undertaking throughout the diocese in bearing witness to the Gospel. That said, please feel free to submit short articles that highlight some of your own ministerial endeavors so that I can share them with the rest of the diaconal community. I have also incorporated a segment entitled "Just for Fun" to bring a little humor into our conversation.

Advent is a special time for reflection and heightened prayer when we pause to prepare our hearts to joyfully celebrate the First Coming of Christ the King into the world! The season is short this year, only 23 days in length, and it comes at a time when daylight is at its minimum leaving us



"The time of Advent...returns us to the horizon of hope, a hope that does not disappoint because it is founded on the Word of God." - Pope Francis

in the darkness of nightfall much of the time—many of us experience this reality when traveling home from work. However, Advent serves as a reminder that in the midst of the darkness, Jesus lights our way as a beacon of hope for a brighter future! Human beings cannot live without hope, without something to look forward to, or without something to live for otherwise, we can fall prey to despair. Naturally there are many things that we can find hope in to give us reasons to live such as a loving family, a prosperous career, good health, medical advancements, financial security and the like. But most importantly, we are to put our hope and faith in Christ! And as Jesus' disciples, we are to become beacons of light and hope for others to see so that they may come to know His saving power. In our call to embrace the **diakonia of charity**, we are given the privilege to serve as the bridge between the Church and the people in meeting their needs as instruments of God's love and mercy. Our ministry extends far beyond the walls of the Church as we become a visible presence in the midst of the larger community in serving the poor, the marginalized and the neglected, through selfless acts of generosity. The Gospel of Mathew reminds us (Mat 25:40) that Jesus said "...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me". Therefore, let us remain steadfast in striving to mirror **Christ the Servant** as beacons of hope!

Formation Events 2019

Please mark your calendars with the following dates:

- ❖ **Clergy Institute:** May 20 -23rd
Atlantic Oceanside, Bar Harbor.
- ❖ **Deacon Assembly:** September 28th
St. Joseph's Church, Brewer.
- ❖ **Deacon & Wives Retreat:**
October 18 – 20th
Marie Joseph Spiritual Center
- ❖ **Harvest Ball:** October 25th
- ❖ **NADD1 Regional Conference:**
November 1 – 3rd
Marriot in Windsor, Connecticut.

Formation Events 2018

I was very pleased with the level of participation this past year. There were 53 in attendance at our **Deacon Assembly** and I think most would agree that the presentations given on **"Domestic Violence"** and **"Immigration, the Church and You"** were timely and very well done. We gained a great deal of knowledge and awareness of how these relevant topics are impacting our Church, the larger community, and our diaconal call to serve those who are both victimized and marginalized, as agents of Christ' love and mercy. The presentation on **"The Diaconate & Issues of Sacramental Character"** was certainly thought provoking and well done, leaving us with a more informed understanding of the theological dialogue that is taking place to help clarify its meaning, along with the implications surrounding the question of the ordination of women. Most importantly, we were blessed

by the presence of Bishop Deeley who celebrated Mass and spoke openly about his reactions to the recent allegations concerning the clergy sex abuse scandal. He placed emphasis on the need to eradicate this intrinsic evil from the Church and commented on how well the diocese is doing in following through on our policies and practices to keep children safe—we passed our annual **Safe Environment Audit** with no findings. We have not had a new credible allegation of sexual abuse by the clergy in over twenty years.



There were 39 in attendance at our **Deacon & Wives Retreat** and many expressed how much they were deeply moved with Deacon Art Miller's presentations on evangelization. Having a background as an activist and in theater, through role playing, he brought the scriptures to life with the different skits that he had us orchestrate. Here Deacon Art placed emphasis on the notion that we all have "Stuff" to deal with and we can use these experiences to help others discover a deeper relationship with Jesus!



Lastly, I am pleased to note there were 8 in attendance at the NADD Region 1 Conference from the Diocese of Portland. The conference theme "***Deacons-bridge builders in a time of change and chaos***" focused efforts on helping deacons and wives work as collaborators with their local bishop, clergy, and lay leadership to identify ways they can assist to move forward with the sex abuse scandal. Dr. Melissa Martinez, a clinical psychologist, unpacked the profile of abusers and looked at ways of building trust in helping those who have been abused. The conference also explored the demographic and cultural realities that are transforming American Catholicism when Dr. Hoffsman Ospino, Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College, spoke about the shift from an American/European to an Hispanic/African milieu where there are unique opportunities for deacons to engage in ministry. ***The Diocese of Portland, Maine, will be hosting the 2019 conference at the Marriot in Windsor, CT, so please keep me in your prayers as I develop the theme and put the agenda together, thanks!***

On-Going Formation

In an effort to keep everyone informed of the Deacon Advisory Board initiatives, I have enclosed the minutes from the June and September meetings for your review. Several questions were addressed regarding the presentation of the Precious Blood to priests during Mass, the vesting of deacons for Mass, and a brief guide for wearing clerics---a comprehensive guide will be incorporated into the Deacon Policy Manual. Concerning the latter, the manual is nearly completed; we are hoping to get it in front of the Presbyterial Council for approval in the spring, which includes vetting with the six Vicariates throughout the diocese.

I have also enclosed a Q/A entitled: "Deacons Praying with Extended Hands" to help clarify standard practices. When it comes to the Mass, the deacon's hands should be joined during prayer (Collect, the Our Father, and the Dismissal, etc.). In the U.S., it has been a common practice for the congregation to join hands during the ***Lord's Prayer***, so deacons often follow suit; however, the preference is for deacons who are serving in the sanctuary to keep their hands joined. When proclaiming the Gospel, the GIRM (175) calls for the following: "At the ambo the Deacon greets the people, with hands joined, saying, ***The Lord be with you***". There have been inconsistencies with this rubric so please try to make this a standard practice. Likewise, during the invitation to the Sign of Peace, the GIRM states (181); "With hands joined, he faces the people and says, *Let us offer each the sign of peace*".

I have also enclosed the Diocesan norms that were promulgated on June 3, 2018, governing the practice of SCAPs for your review. Incidentally, these norms were sent to your pastors several months ago, and I thought it would be of great benefit to know what the expectations are so that we are all the same page! With the projected shortage of vocations to the priesthood, SCAPs could happen more frequently in the future. Bearing this in mind, I am part of a committee formed by Msgr. Andrew that is focused on putting a SCAP training package together for prospective deacon and lay presiders.

Protecting God's Children

Keeping our children safe from sexual predators on all fronts is of the utmost 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. As you may recall, I sent out a notice in early October reminding everyone of the need to follow through on reviewing their VIRTUS monthly bulletins. This practice is compulsory to keep compliant with diocesan Safe Environment practices that are audited yearly. That said, your initial response to my notice has been very favorable but there is still some work to be done. For example, of late there are 16 deacons that have not reviewed 2 or more bulletins, so I would ask that you please get caught up. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and diligence in keeping our children safe!

Recognition Corner



Once again, I would like to congratulate Deacon Darrell Blackwell who is our 2018 recipient of the **Msgr. Charles Murphy Deacon of the Year** award. I have come to know Deacon Darrell as a person of deep faith who bears an authentic witness to the Gospel through his words and ministry. Likewise, he is a person of integrity who cares deeply about others, and a person who exercises his diaconal ministry with passion, in a spirit of humility and simplicity, all anchored through the underpinnings of a rich prayer life that is centered on Christ. I also want to congratulate his wife, Marla, for her wonderful support and for the many sacrifices she continues to make in service to others. As a diaconal couple, they bear a powerful witness of the *domestic church* in making Christ present through their married life, while bringing hope to many through selfless acts of kindness and generosity!

For more of their inspiring story, go to this link: <https://portlanddiocese.org/vocations-office/diaconate>.

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 the work of strengthening the **Mission and Ministry** of *diakonia* here in the Diocese of Portland, with the hope that we will realize the vision of becoming more deeply integrated into parish life and the diocesan institutions that we are called to serve in perfect charity!

The members are as follows: Deacons Dennis Popadak, Denis Mailhot, Paul Lissandrello, Dan Sheridan, and John Murphy.

Lastly, I would like to recognize the leadership of Deacon Denis Mailhot, who as the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish Outreach Coordinator in Auburn, has led parishioners in donating a large amount of food to the St. Mary's Food Pantry that provides emergency food assistance to residents in the Lewiston-Auburn area. In a letter to me from St. Mary's Health Systems' Executive Director of Philanthropy, she reported that between 2015 and early 2018, parishioners have donated over 5,100 pounds of food! What a wonderful expression of generosity and *diakonia* among the faithful who are making a difference in the lives of many who are in need of God's mercy and love! Congratulations!

Just for Fun

A friend was coming out of church one day, and the preacher was standing at the door to shake hands. He grabbed my friend by the hand and pulled him aside. The pastor said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord"! My friend replied, "I'm already in the Army of the Lord". Pastor questioned, "How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter"? He whispered back. "I'm in the secret service".

As always, I am very grateful for your wonderful support and I am deeply honored to serve you! Please keep me in your prayers that I may continue to rely on the gift of God's gracious Spirit in helping our diaconal community realize our full evangelizing potential as the **Bridge** between the Church and the people in making Christ present, thus truly being beacons of light and hope!

May you and your families have a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!!!

Your servant in Christ,

Deacon Peter J. Bernier, O.F.S, M.P.S.
Director of the Diaconate