

THE *Belleville Deacon*

OFFICE OF VOCATIONS | DIACONATE FORMATION | DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE



JUBILEE 2025 PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Diocese Administrator

Bishop Michael McGovern
618-277-8181
bmogovern@diobelle.org

Vicars General

Very Reverend Godfrey Mullen, OSB, V.G.
Vicar General/ Director of the Office of Worship
frgodfrey@cathedralbelle.org
(618) 234-1166
Very Reverend Paul R. Wienhoff, J.C.L., V.G.
paulwienhoff@sjandcc.org
(618) 632-7614

Director of Permanent Deacon Formation

Reverend Steven Pautler
Parish phone: 618-532-6291, Ext. 307
spautler@diobelle.org

Assistant Director of Permanent Deacon Formation

Reverend Michaelsami Arockiam
618-233-2391
misar5613@gmail.com

Coordinator of Deacons

Deacon Thomas J. Helfrich
618-722-5042
thelfrich@diobelle.org

Administrative Assistant, Office of Vocations & Deacon Formation

Martina Skorch
618-722-5043
mskorch@diobelle.org

Candidates please remember you can find course syllabus, agenda, required books, and other information at St. Meinrad's Student Portal... BLACKBAUD

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Archbishop-Designate Michael McGovern stands with the Class of 2028 following their Rite of Candidacy. His presence reflects his deep commitment to the formation and support of future deacons. A moment of joy and fraternity as the journey toward ordained service continues.

A Heartfelt Farewell and prayerful blessing for Archbishop-Designate Michael McGovern.

As Archbishop-Designate Michael McGovern departs our diocese to begin his new ministry as Archbishop of Omaha, the deacon community of the Diocese of Belleville—active and retired deacons, candidates, and their wives—joins together in profound gratitude and prayer.

From the very beginning of his time among us, Bishop McGovern has embraced the diaconate with heartfelt support and pastoral care. His genuine

interest in the well-being, formation, and growth of our deacons and their families has been a gift to us all. He has walked beside us not only as a shepherd, but as a brother in faith—encouraging, guiding, and lifting us in prayer.

One of his most visible and meaningful moments of connection came as he stood with the Class of 2028, pictured here at the moment they were received as candidates for the permanent diaconate. That image reflects so clearly what we have experienced throughout his time with us: a shepherd who is present, supportive, and invested in the mission of the diaconate in the life of the Church.

Bishop McGovern, please know that your care for our ministry has not gone unnoticed. Your words, your presence, and your pastoral heart have inspired us and deepened our resolve to serve with humility, joy, and love. As you begin this new chapter, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May He continue to guide your steps, sustain your spirit, and surround you with the same peace and strength you have so generously shared with us. Though your role is changing, your presence in our lives and our prayers will remain. May God go with you always.

*With heartfelt gratitude,
The Deacon Community
Diocese of Belleville*

*"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."
— Matthew 25:21*

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF DEACON FORMATION *He Is Risen: So Too Is Our Call to Serve* —Reverend Steven M. Pautler

Happy Easter! In this sacred season, we rejoice in the love of God made visible through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—we are called to lead the faithful through Lent's desert, the sorrow of Holy Week, and into the glory of Easter. Deacons, in particular, play a vital role during the Sacred Triduum, witnessing to the Gospel through word and service. Thank you for your generous ministry to God's people. As the 2024–2025 academic year nears its close, please keep our candidates in prayer as they continue discerning their call to serve Christ and His Church.





MESSAGE FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Rev. Michaelsami Arockiam

Deacon Candidates receive formation. What do we exactly mean by formation? What is being formed exactly? One goes through a long period of formation to be ordained deacon or priest. Though we talk about different kinds of formation (spiritual, intellectual, theological, pastoral, physical, psychological and sociological formation), at the end of the formation, a person is expected to have acquired sufficient knowledge, conviction, pastoral character and aptitude to deliver the ministries proper to the Ordained ministers. Ultimately what is acquired at the end of the formation is “a new conscience,” say “a priestly conscience,” which was not there before the start of the formation program. At the end of the formation program, i.e., after Ordination, “this new conscience” begins to readily guide him to do the pastoral ministries in his “thought world,” “in his words,” and “in what he does” to serve our High Priest, Christ Jesus at the right hand of the Father. The same new conscience guides the person to confess and receive forgiveness for “what he has failed to do” in his ministry. The Church speaks about the formation of conscience: conscience is being formed as we grow in a given context or culture or civilization. Therefore, the Deacon formation aims at giving or creating “this new conscience” in the candidates; the candidates must pay attention to this fact. As for the Ordained Deacons, the ministries strengthen their conscience and perfect it in and through their fruitfulness and failures. “This new conscience” is the purpose and aim of one’s formation; one must be consciously aware of this formation of conscience since he is the primary teacher of the formation of his own conscience. That is why it deserves and needs so long a period. God bless.

Save the Dates: Key Events for Deacons

Annual Retreat for Deacons and their Spouses

September 26–28, 2025

Location: St. Meinrad Archabbey



WHAT IS THE CLASS OF 2028 DOING?

Deacon Candidate Bill and Judy Rebolz

Greetings from the Class of 2028! Please know that we are deeply appreciative of the many prayers and broad support that help to move us along on our journey. May of 2025 finds us deep in our studies and formation, even as the Church begins the process of choosing a new Pope and, in our case, a new Bishop. While we mourn the passing of Pope Francis and are saddened by the departure of Bishop McGovern, we move forward confident in the Holy Spirit and joyful in the splendor of the Resurrection!

During April and May we are studying the Old Testament with Deacon Anthony Cassaneto, Ph.D., a member of Saint Meinrad’s faculty. Our faculty members have brought not only their subject matter expertise, but their lived experience and unique perspectives on the ministry of the Deacon. Deacon Anthony is no exception. His kindness and deep concern for God’s people is evident in all that he does. His lectures and helpful study guide build on the “Introduction to Scripture” course we had earlier in the year, developing in us a depth of understanding that allows us to more fully grasp the richness of Holy Scripture.

Our Saturday afternoons focus on a specific topic directly related to the ministry of the Deacon. In April, Father Godfrey Mullen, O.S.B., V.G., presented a seminar on “The Introduction to the Deacon at Mass”. Concise excerpts from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (G.I.R.M.) were greatly appreciated, as well as his personal observations and encouragements concerning Deacons serving and preaching at Mass. He recommended and referenced two publications (in addition to the G.I.R.M.!) for our read-

ing: Service Ministry of the Deacon, by Reverend Timothy J. Shugrue, available on the Diocese of Belleville website, and The Deacon at Mass: A Theological and Pastoral Guide by Deacon William T. Ditewig. With all that he had to do for his parish during Holy Week and in preparation for Easter, Father Godfrey’s time and effort are greatly appreciated.

We celebrated Palm Sunday at the Vigil Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter, which has become a very special place for each of us during this formation period. Bishop McGovern was the presider and, coupled with the thoughtful visit he made to our class earlier that afternoon, it made for a bittersweet weekend. He will be missed.

Finally, lest anyone conclude that our weekends are all work the fact is that we greatly enjoy our time together—Candidates, spouses and formation staff. We are always glad to see each other on Friday evenings, look forward to catching up with one another’s lives and families, and particularly appreciate our communal prayer. Time is going by quickly for us, but the fruits of our formation are manifold. We recognize that we are blessed and loved in so many ways!



Grow in Ministry: Opportunities for Ongoing Formation and New Skills.

Enrich your ministry. Deepen your call to serve.

Nolan Lecture on the Permanent Diaconate.

Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary invites you to *The Nolan Lecture: Theology of the Permanent Diaconate* on September 12–13, 2025, at Saint John’s University in Collegeville, MN. The keynote speaker will be The Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight, Bishop of Jefferson City, MO. Special sessions will include a talk by Deacon Frank Agnoli and a plenary panel featuring diaconal spouses. For more information and to register:

www.csbsju.edu/sot/sustained-encuentro

Bishop Barron on the Word on Fire Show.

Bishop Robert Barron recently joined Brenden Thompson of Catholic Voices UK to discuss preaching, public speaking, and more on the *Word on Fire Show*. Don’t miss this engaging conversation!

Watch now at: <https://video.wordonfire.org/wof-show-video>

A Legacy of Diakonia — A Reflection on Pope Francis.

Deacon Dominic Cerrato invites deacons and candidates to read “*A Legacy of Diakonia*”, a reflection on Pope Francis’ lasting impact on the Church’s understanding of diaconal ministry. It offers timely insight into servant leadership and the vocation of the deacon.

Read it here:

<https://www.the-deacon.com/2025/04/21/a-legacy-of-diakonia/>

Upcoming Webinar: Integrating the Diaconate into Marriage

Join Deacon James Keating for a free, live webinar on *Wednesday, May 7 at 7:00 PM CDT*, exploring how the diaconate integrates into married life. This important event addresses the balance, challenges, and grace of serving both the altar and the home.

Register here: <https://www.sanctifind.com/event/9LYx3j4gMw2/>

Marten Conference on Catholic Preaching

June 16–18, 2025 | University of Notre Dame

Join preachers, seminarians, homiletics teachers, and theologians at the University of Notre Dame for the 2025 Marten Conference on Catholic Preaching. This year’s theme, *Jesus, Dead and Risen, Jesus Living in the Church: Preaching the Paschal Mystery*, focuses on deepening our understanding of the heart of Christian preaching. Keynote speakers include Bishop Joseph Perry, Hans Boersma, and others.

Registration: <https://cvent.me/4lqbNw>

Details: [Department of Theology // University of Notre Dame](https://www.theology.nd.edu/)

Hispanic Diaconate Formation:

SEPI Conference for Formators in July 2025

The SEPI Conference “Diaconado Permanente: Formation for Formators” will take place July 14–17, 2025, in Miami, FL, focusing on bilingual and bicultural diaconate formation for Hispanics. It includes a spiritual retreat led by Bishop Pohlmeier and workshops on pastoral concerns, English proficiency, and multicultural ministry. The cost is \$450 (\$250 for Miami residents), and more information is available at www.sepi.us. Participants will explore tools from Spanish formation programs and engage in open forums and group discussions. This event supports collaboration among those guiding Hispanic permanent deacon candidates. Follow this link: <https://sepi.us/>



Who is a rock, but our God.

**Bishop Stanley Schlarman:
A Shepherd, Teacher, and Friend to Deacons.**

We mourn the death of Bishop Stanley G. Schlarman, who passed away on April 28, 2025, at the age of 91. A native son of Belleville, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1958 and faithfully served the Church for over four decades. He served the people of the Diocese of Belleville as a priest, educator, and in 1979 was appointed Auxiliary Bishop. In 1983, Pope John Paul II named him Bishop of Dodge City, Kansas, where he served until his retirement in 1998. His ministry was marked by a pastoral heart, a devotion to youth and education, and a joyful witness to the Gospel.

We remember Bishop Schlarman as a man who inspired vocations and nurtured lay leadership. In 1973, he introduced the Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) movement to the Diocese of Belleville—a ministry that continues to bear fruit in the lives of countless young people. As both auxiliary and diocesan bishop, he remained a faithful supporter of the permanent diaconate, encouraging candidates, deacons, and their families with genuine warmth and pastoral care. Many in formation recall his presence at retreats and diocesan liturgies, where he offered thoughtful encouragement and carried himself with humble joy.

We give thanks for Bishop Schlarman's enduring witness to the priesthood and the diaconate. Even in retirement, he continued to celebrate Mass and walk prayerfully among God's people, rosary in hand. His episcopal motto, "*Who is a rock but our God,*" reflected the quiet strength he carried throughout his life. As we commend him to the mercy of the Lord, we honor his legacy and pray that his example will continue to inspire those who serve the Church—as deacons, priests, and bishops—with fidelity, joy, and love.

**NO BELLEVILLE DEACON
NEWSLETTER**

The Belleville Deacon will take a summer sabbatical from publishing during June, July, and August. Thank you for your faithful support over the past four years. We look forward to returning in September, renewed and ready to continue sharing stories that inspire and uplift our diaconal family.

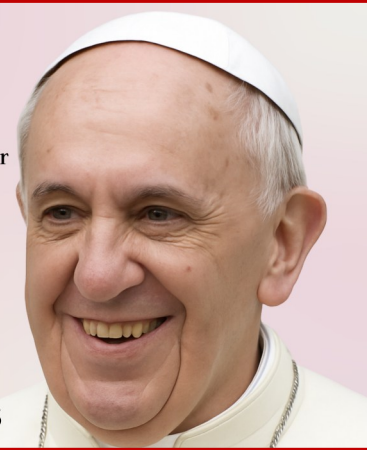
Jorge Mario Bergoglio

Pope Francis

The 266th Successor to the Apostle Peter
March 13, 2013 - April 21, 2025

Eternal God, in Your providence You called Jorge Mario Bergoglio to shepherd Your Church as Pope Francis, the 266th successor of St. Peter. We thank You for the gift of his humble heart and his unwavering call to mercy and compassion. As he now rests in Your eternal embrace, grant him the peace that surpasses all understanding. May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

December 17, 1936 - April 21, 2025



**Pope Francis:
Champion of Servant Leadership.**

Pope Francis consistently affirmed the vital role of permanent deacons, calling them “guardians of service” and living icons of Christ the Servant. He emphasized that permanent deacons have a distinct and essential vocation within the Church—not as future priests, but as ordained ministers called to serve the poor, proclaim the Gospel, and strengthen the community through humble and faithful witness. With heartfelt encouragement, he urged bishops to support their deacons and invited men to consider this vocation as a powerful expression of love in action—one that bridges the altar and the everyday world with compassion, mercy, and joy. As permanent deacons, we give thanks for Pope Francis’ unwavering support and continue to pray for our Holy Father, our shepherd and servant of servants.

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.” — John 12:26

**Call for Seminar Presenters:
2025–2026 Deacon Formation Year.**

We are inviting priests, deacons, and individuals with advanced degrees in theology or pastoral ministry to lead Second Year Formation Seminars for the Deacon Class of 2028. These 2-hour sessions take place on the second Saturday of monthly formation weekends (September–June) and cover topics such as preaching, sacraments, moral theology, crisis ministry, and Catholic social teaching. If you're interested in presenting—or continuing a topic from the 2024–2025 year as a Part 2 session—please email Martina at the Vocation Office: mskorch@diobelle.org.

Beginning Homiletics:

Foundations of preaching, structure, delivery tips, and practice exercises.

The Deacon and the Sacraments:

Liturgical roles in baptisms, weddings, funerals, and Benediction.

Spiritual Direction & Personal Prayer:

Deepening personal prayer life and fostering spiritual maturity.

Catholic Social Teaching in Action:

Applying CST in real-world ministry and parish engagement.

Moral Theology & the Deacon's Role:

Guiding others through complex moral and ethical issues.

Crisis Ministry & Pastoral Care:

Providing presence and support in grief, trauma, and addiction.

Marriage Preparation & Accompaniment:

Equipping deacons to support couples before and during marriage.

Preaching Practicum & Peer Feedback:

Practice preaching with live feedback and group reflection.

OCIA & Adult Faith Formation:

Teaching, mentoring, and catechizing adults entering the Church.

Deacon as a Bridge: Clergy, Laity & Leadership :

Building communication and collaboration in parish leadership.

Final Spring Seminars Announced: Deacons and Wives Invited to May & June Sessions.

The final two Deacon Formation Seminars for the 2024–2025 year will take place on **Saturday, May 10** and **Thursday, June 12**, from **1:00 to 3:00 p.m.**, and will be led by **Reverend Monsignor John T. Myler, S.T.D.** On May 10, “*Deacon & Proclamation of the Word*” will focus on the deacon’s role in preaching and proclaiming the Gospel with clarity and conviction. On June 14, “*Deacon & Leading Marian Devotion*” will explore ways deacons can encourage Marian spirituality within their parish communities.

Deacons and spouses are warmly invited to join the Class of 2028 for both the seminar and a shared meal. You are welcome to attend lunch at **12:00 p.m.** or dinner at **5:00 p.m.** on formation Saturdays—held the second full weekend of each month—to build relationships, share experiences, and foster spiritual growth. **Michelle Miskell** and her team will also be present to connect with spouses and offer sessions specifically geared toward their unique formation journey. If you would like to participate in May or June Formation, please contact Martina at **618-722-5043** or mksorch@diobelle.org. A **freewill offering** is appreciated but not required.


Father Tom Esselman, C.M., available for Spiritual Direction

Father Tom Esselman, C.M., will be assisting priests and deacons seeking spiritual direction at St. Mary Immaculate Conception Parish in Mount Vernon, located at 1550 Main Street, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the third Monday of each month. He is also able to meet in various locations throughout the Belleville area for those who cannot travel to St. Mary’s.

Ordained for 44 years, Father Tom considers spiritual direction a vital part of life and ministry—an opportunity to reflect on one’s relationship with God and how it shapes every aspect of life, including service in the Church. He is pleased to offer both spiritual direction and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Even if you already have a spiritual director, but need someone to listen or offer guidance on parish-related matters, Father Tom is honored to serve. Following Saint Vincent’s call to support diocesan priests, he considers it a privilege to accompany you in your ministry.

To schedule an appointment, please reach out to:

Rev. Thomas Esselman, C.M.
1408 S. 10th Street, St. Louis, MO 63104
Email: tesselman@vincentian.org
Phone: 314-956-0185



Seminarians

Deacon Levi James, Mr. Casimir Cozzi,
 Mr. Terry Marmion, Mr. Greg Kassen,
 Mr. Kyle Kellerman.

Deacon Candidates

Belleville/Springfield Cape
 Tom Braun & Betsy Amoroso, James &
 Chelsea Burris, Jeffrey & Jennifer Craig,
 Nathan & Carrie Higgerson, Douglas &
 Cynthia Kuhl, Matthew & Angela Lees, Andy
 & Cheryl Orlet, William & Judith Rebolz,
 Timothy & Joan Taylor, Gary & Dorothy
 Zwilling, Brian & Barbara Bauknecht, Bob &
 Lori Janota, Jim & Holly McCleary, Brad &
 Emily Stroder, Ron & Linda Yates.

Gracious God, You have called us through Baptism to discipleship, believing in your Son, Jesus Christ, who has sent us to bring the Good News of salvation to the world. We pray to you, asking that you grant us more priests and religious who will help us build up your Church in the Diocese of Belleville and the world. Stir up the grace of a religious vocation in the hearts of many of our youth. Grant to them the willingness and generosity to give of themselves in service to our Lord Jesus and His people. May a new generation of priests, deacons, sisters and brothers be a sign of your presence among us. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord Amen.



**Ordination of
 Deacon Levi James
 Saturday, June 7, 2025
 Cathedral of St. Peter
 10:00 a.m.**

Come, Holy Spirit! Celebrate the Ordination of Deacon Levi James on Pentecost Weekend.

As we continue the joyful season of Easter and look ahead to Pentecost, we are reminded of the many signs of new life in our Church—especially through the sacraments. This year, the Diocese of Belleville has one more reason to celebrate: the upcoming ordination of **Deacon Levi James** to the Sacred Priesthood.

The ordination will take place on **Saturday, June 7, at 10:00 a.m.** at the **Cathedral of St. Peter** in Belleville, during Pentecost weekend—a powerful time to invoke the Holy Spirit upon a new priest. All the faithful are invited to join Deacon Levi’s family and the diocesan community as we gather to witness this sacred and joyful moment in the life of our Church.

Priests, deacons, seminarians, and deacon candidates are especially encouraged to attend and show support through their presence and prayer. This is a time for the entire Church of southern Illinois to come together in thanksgiving for God’s call and Levi’s generous response.

While Bishop McGovern had originally hoped to preside at the ordination, he will be in Omaha that same day due to his new assignment to the Archdiocese. In his place, **Bishop Mark Rivituso**, Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis, will graciously serve as the ordaining prelate.

Information for **concelebrating priests and assisting deacons** will be provided soon by the Diocesan Administrator, so please watch your email for further instructions.

Let us continue to pray for Deacon Levi as he prepares to lay down his life in service to Christ and His Church—and may many more hear and respond to the call to priesthood and religious life in our diocese.



N.D.I.C.E.
 National Diaconate Institute
 for Continuing Education

2025 CONFERENCE
JULY 20-23, 2025

HOLY TRINITY PARISH
 FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

The 2025 NDICE Conference Comes to Fairview Heights — A Local Opportunity for Deacons to Grow in Faith and Fellowship.

Deacons and deacon candidates—now is the time to register for the 2025 NDICE Conference, taking place **July 20–23** in **Fairview Heights, IL!** This annual gathering offers a rich opportunity for fellowship, prayer, and **20 hours of accredited continuing education**, all while reflecting deeply on this year’s inspiring theme: **Vocations**. Join brother deacons and their wives from across the country for a conference filled with insight and renewal, featuring keynote speakers like **Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski, Dr. Ralph Martin, Deacon Greg Kandra**, and many more. Whether you are newly ordained, in formation, or years into ministry, NDICE is a chance to rekindle your spirit, connect with others, and grow in your sacred calling.

Register for the conference at:
<https://ndiceonline.regfox.com/2025-ndice-conference>
Book your hotel room at the Drury Inn:
<https://www.druryhotels.com/bookandstay/newreservation/?groupno=10139593> Visit www.ndiceonline.org for full conference