

YC Recognizes Alumni Serving as Deacons

Barbara (Ember) Full '78



Deacon Stephen Pichler '70



Deacon James Koch '79 (right) with his nephew, Rev. Stephen Logue (left)

The word Deacon arises from the Greek *Diakonos*, which means servant. The very first Seven Deacons were mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-7). There are two types of deacons: transitional deacons, men who are continuing on for priestly ordination and permanent deacons. In 1967, after the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI installed permanent deacons, those who chose not to continue on in formation to another ministry, but instead serve the Church in worship assistance, pastoral care and community service. York Catholic helped to “plant the seed” of service in this way with at least five alumni who selflessly went on to become deacons in their Churches. Mike Bahn '61, now a retired deacon, served at St. John the Baptist Church in New Freedom, PA, and currently resides at Country Meadows in West York. Christopher Spiese '00 is currently assigned to a parish in Columbus, OH. Stephen Pichler '70, Jeff Baylor '78, and James Koch '79 are all assigned to local parishes, St. Mary's York, St. Peter's Columbia, and St. Patrick's York, respectively.

Deacons Steve Pichler and Jim Koch were both accepted into Harrisburg's Deacon Formation Class of 2015 and ordained in 2020. Steve reflected, “I had been discerning a vocation to the priesthood, but after meeting my wife, Sharon, I put discerning a religious vocation on the ‘back burner.’ We were busy raising our three children; making the sacrifices to put them through Catholic schools, and becoming involved by helping in their various activities. Yet, I still felt that God was calling me. It was not until our youngest son Dan '11 was in college that after much discussion with Sharon about how the Diaconate would change our lives, and many hours of prayer with the Lord, that I applied to the program.” Jim was reading *The Catholic Witness* newspaper and saw where Bishop Gainer was calling for a class of permanent deacons and it resonated with him. He spoke with his wife and his pastor, and they encouraged him. Jim is grateful that he was running Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen at the time and was able to fit in the demanding course work and meetings with his work schedule. Diaconate formation requires five years of Graduate level studies in Philosophy, Theology, Biblical Studies, Liturgy, Sacraments and how to Administer them, Group Dynamics, Personal Interactions, and Counseling. It also requires five years of spiritual development for both the deacon and their spouse, as 90% of the deacons in the United States are married.

There are many rewards in this ministry: baptizing people, bringing them into the faith, administering the Sacrament of Marriage to couples, helping them to share their lives with Jesus Christ, preaching, and teaching various religious educational classes to help people improve and strengthen their relationship with God. Steve shared that

“the most rewarding ministry I do is to visit the sick people of the parish with Holy Communion, whether in nursing homes or the homebound. The love and joy they show to me at each visit, and the fervor of the belief for the Eucharistic Presence of our Lord is for me an experience in true humility. It makes the ups and downs of my daily ministry worthwhile.” Jim remembers performing a small graveside service for a niece who had just lost her aunt. The niece shared that she was not very strong in her faith, but was so appreciative of the meaningful service. He left the cemetery praying that his simple act would help her realize that living her faith, as she had done that day, was the most important thing in this life, to help her get to the next! Pray for your parish deacons, for they truly strive to serve the People of God.