

Dear Parishioners of Blessed Kateri,

Today is an historic day for our parish, as we thank God for, and celebrate the ordination of, our parishioner and our first permanent deacon, Rev. Mr. John Barone.

At St. Patrick's Cathedral yesterday, at a 9am Mass, His Eminence Edward Cardinal Egan gave John the Sacrament of Holy Orders for service as a Deacon of the Catholic Church. We will pray for him and his family at all our Masses today, and the 12:15 Mass will be a special Mass of Thanksgiving with his family and friends joining our parishioners for prayer and celebration.

Many of you know John as a devout man, a sincere friend, and a compassionate person who loves Jesus and strives to serve God and people. John was a fireman in Yonkers for twenty years before retiring and moving south. Happily for us, he and his wife Angela came back to New York about six years ago.

I met John after that, when he was beginning his studies for the permanent diaconate for the parish in Beacon. He needed a spiritual director, and so we started to meet monthly. In an unusual set of circumstances, he and Angela moved closer to us, and then the pastor who was sponsoring him was transferred. That opened the way for our joint request that John continue his studies with me as his sponsor and Blessed Kateri as his new parish.

I want to say a special word of appreciation to John's wife Angela for the support and encouragement that she gave him in his quest to serve the Lord as a permanent deacon. The four years of classes and tests and retreats and the hours of time spent at hospitals and in religious education programs and at food kitchens and other service sites often involved her too, and required sacrifice and understanding. John and Angela have two married sons and three grandchildren. Last year they successfully negotiated all the steps of adoption and went to China to bring home their youngest child, three year old Lia Rose.

People often want to know how to address someone who has been their neighbor and friend, and has now been ordained. "John" is still fine for most situations, but "Deacon" is appropriate when he is involved in church ministry. Among the liturgical things that a permanent deacon can do are: baptize babies (which he will do in turn with us priests), witness weddings, lead prayers at wakes and cemeteries, prepare people for sacraments, visit the sick, and in general assist the priests and represent the Church. It will be up to our new pastor, Msgr. Desmond O'Connor, to plan with Deacon Barone and develop his specific duties for Blessed Kateri parish.

I am very happy that next year at this time we can expect to be welcoming a second deacon for ministry at Blessed Kateri. Our parishioner Bob Horton, with the help and encouragement of his wife Judy, has completed his third year in the diaconate program, and God willing, should be called to Holy Orders in June of 2008.

I am confident that these two deacons, working well with the priests of the parish, with Mary Biasotti and other parish leaders, will be a tremendous asset for the continuing growth of our parish and for giving Christ-like service to all our parishioners.

One of the lessons that new deacons and priests – like newlyweds and new parents – quickly learn is that with the applause comes the responsibility. I remember 32 years ago, as I moved my books into a new parish, how the pastor welcomed me warmly, then said, "Meet me at 6:30 tomorrow morning in the basement and I'll show you how to put water in the boiler."

So let me inform Deacon Barone and all of you about some of the **nitty-gritty issues that after July 1** will become the responsibility of my friend Msgr. O'Connor.

Starting with water, I told you that we had to install a \$35,000 water purification system because tests showed that our well had some impurities and bacteria that you should not drink. That process has taken 9 months, during which we have placed barriers over the drinking fountains and provided bottled water for our 750 students.

The problem now is that the students aren't coming every week, and the requisite break-in and chemical testing can't be done without wasting money and a huge amount of water. (Imagine lots and lots of unnecessary flushing.) So we are going to keep the status quo until the start of school; then drinking water will flow freely again.

You can see that there is construction happening or about to start on both sides of the church. (I suspect that all the dump trucks moving and beeping during weekday Masses were sent to prepare me for Masses in the city.)

On the street side, we are getting a whole new septic system to accommodate the larger number of weekday users that will be coming to this renovated space for religious education classes in September 2008. And on the other side, a huge machine will soon chew up the parking lot to enable expansion and realignment.

Our architect, Don Swartz, came on Monday to show Mary Biasotti, Diane McCoach and me his most recent plans for the reconfiguration of our existing church. Where we worship now will be changed during the summer next year. We will gain 5 classrooms, a seminar room, and a larger office (above ground, with windows!) for the religious education program and its teachers.

As I said in my recent letter to all donors to the Building Campaign, thanking the 500+ members who are making this possible, *"Our new church and new classrooms are being built only because you stepped up and contributed. Many parishes have needs, but only the best communities get to address their needs so fast."*

Let me again encourage newer families in the parish to step up and join those whose names will be memorialized when the church is finished. Generous pledges over three years are in fact easy enough to fulfill. Having pride of ownership and teaching one another to share for the common good are important lessons to pass on, and pledging to build a church is a fine way to show our trust in Providence.

Finally, whether it be Providence or blind luck, some of you will be winners on June 24, when we have our drawing for the Captains Club. \$10,000 will be distributed among 200 persons or families who took a \$100 ticket, and our parish will be a \$10,000 winner too.

In many ways, you have to be involved in life to win it.

Yours in Christ,
Msgr. William Belford