

(Vermont Catholic/Cori Fugere Urban) The candidates lay prostrate in the sanctuary of The Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel during their ordination to the diaconate.

Written by Cori Fugere Urban
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Photo by Cori Fugere Urban/Vermont Catholic

Two men were ordained to the diaconate Feb. 11 at the Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel on the campus of St. Michael's College in Colchester: one to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of Burlington and one to the transitional diaconate as he prepares for priestly ordination as a member of the Society of St. Edmund, the order that founded the college.

Burlington Bishop Christopher J. Coyne ordained Philip J. Lawson to the permanent diaconate and Edmundite Brother Michael R. Carter to the transitional diaconate.

"Today, in this church, two roads are about to diverge: one road moving forward into the transitional diaconate, the witness of celibacy, and -- all things being equal -– ordination to the

priesthood as a member of the Edmundite religious order, and the other road leading into the permanent diaconate, a continuing witness to the sacrament of marriage and the gift of family," Bishop Coyne said in his homily after reading from "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

"With their ordination to the diaconate, they will move now on different but parallel roads in service to the Church," he said. "It is important to note that their ministry of service is not separate from the road of our common baptism in Christ but is a continuation."

The bishop said the two men -- one married and a father, one a celibate religious – are "walking two glorious but divergent parallel paths in service to God's Church."

Thirty permanent deacons currently serve in Vermont.

According to Deacon Peter Gummere of Corpus Christi Parish in St. Johnsbury, Lyndonville and Danville, director of the Permanent Diaconate Program for the Diocese of Burlington, deacons provide the diocese with about 20,000 hours per year of actual ministry.

The deacon is called to minister in three specific areas: Ministry of the Word includes proclamation of the Gospel at Mass and preaching; ministry of sacrament includes assisting at the altar, distribution of the Eucharist, baptism and witnessing the sacrament of matrimony and presiding at funerals and graveside committal services; ministry of charity varies but may include serving at prisons, nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, soup kitchens, food shelves, homeless shelters and crisis pregnancy support centers.

During the special 11 a.m. Mass attended by numerous priests and deacons as well as a congregation full of religious and laity, the candidates for the diaconate lay prostrate in the sanctuary during the Litany of Supplication to the saints and martyrs in heaven to intercede for them and the pilgrim Church on Earth, asking God to pour forth His grace and mercy.

Then, through the laying on of hands by the bishop and the Prayer of Ordination, the gift of the Holy Spirit for the diaconal office was conferred on the candidates.

They were then vested in a stole and dalmatic, signs of the office of deacon.

The newly ordained knelt before the bishop who handed on to them the Book of the Gospels and then welcomed them by the Sign of Peace.

"This ordination is an exciting one," Deacon Gummere said before the celebration. "Phil Lawson is exceptionally well qualified to serve as a deacon; he has already had a significant favorable impact on the diocese. Although I have not met Brother Michael Carter, I have heard some very positive reports about him. And I am happy to see the Edmundite community growing. I have a deep appreciation for them as a St. Mike's alumnus."

Deacon Lawson, director of evangelization and catechesis for the Diocese of Burlington, studied

for the diaconate in the Diocese of LaCrosse, Wis., and the Diocese of Green Bay, Wis., and was in formation -- both formal and informal -- for about six years.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Wis., he earned a bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and a master of theological studies degree from Ave Maria University.

He has worked as a religious education director and youth minister, pastoral associate and coordinator of Young Adult Ministry, Discipleship and RCIA Formation.

Six years ago he met with his spiritual director to ask about deepening his prayer life. "Unexpectedly, he asked me if I had ever considered the diaconate. I hadn't," said Deacon Lawson, who is married to Patty Lawson and the father of five children ages one to 10. "That conversation opened a door that, in spite of my own hesitation, was reinforced many times over. And in spite of my fears, this call and journey has been an incredible blessing for both me and my family."

He said he approached his ordination to the permanent diaconate with "a mixture of trepidation, wonder, excitement, amazement and peace."

As a deacon he will assist at the parish to which he belongs, St. Luke Parish in Fairfax. He will continue to help at Joseph's House in Burlington and assist at diocesan events. "Ultimately, I'll go wherever Bishop Coyne asks me to be of service," he said.

"Ordination in the Diocese of Burlington means that I now belong to the diocese and I am grateful for that! I am grateful for all the many wonderful people I have been blessed to meet here," he said, adding his particular thanks for the kind reception and counsel he has received from priests and deacons.

The last ordination to the permanent diaconate in Vermont was in 2012.

"These are exciting times for the diaconate community in Vermont and for the Church in Vermont," Deacon Gummere said. "The people of Vermont have a desperate need for Jesus Christ."

The beginning of classes for the next permanent diaconate program is planned for September.

Deacon Carter has been working at St. Michael's College as an Edmundite Campus Minister and as a lecturer in the Religious Studies Department.

Born in Burlington, the son of Richard M. Carter and Kathleen M. Carter of Burlington attended Christ the King School there through eighth grade then Burlington High School. A member of the St. Michael's College Class of 2012, he earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies with a minor in political science. He received a Master of Divinity degree from Boston College in 2016 and worked in the clinical pastoral education program at the University of Vermont Medical Center in Burlington.

“I feel incredibly humbled and emotional,” he said about his ordination to the transitional diaconate. “This has been my desire since I was very young. … I look forward with excited anticipation (and a little nervousness and fear) toward my future.”

When he encountered the Society of St. Edmund during his undergraduate studies at St. Michael's College, the notion of community life was instantly attractive to him, and the sense of camaraderie and humor that the Edmundites shared with one another “was infectious,” he said. “This sensibility, balanced with their commitment to education and working with marginalized people was a model of priesthood that I felt an instinctive attachment to.”

He mentioned specifically the late Edmundite Father Michael Cronogue who was a mentor and guide.

Deacon Carter will continue to serve as a campus minister and teacher at St. Michael's College, at least until the end of this semester. His future assignments “will be according to the will of the Edmundite community,” he said.

He is scheduled to be ordained a priest on Sept. 16 at St. Michael's College.

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