

# Bells of St. Mary

## Calling all to Community



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### Stier Calls His Job Challenging But Easy *By Dan Darragh*

So how does a guy whose education and work backgrounds in computer science end up as Coordinator of Religious Education at St. Mary of the Assumption?

Chris Stier will be the first to admit he doesn't have a "church or teaching pedigree" in the sense of a holding a degree in either theology or education, and until last August never held a paid position in the church.

"I know I can't walk in and say to Father Jim, 'Well, this is how we did sacramental preparation at this parish or that parish over the years, so I think this is how we should do it at St. Mary,'" says Stier.

"However," he's quick to add, "I'll honestly say it's the most challenging yet the easiest thing for me because, not having that 'pedigree,' I rely completely on the Holy Spirit. I spend a lot of time in prayer and wait patiently for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It comes through sometimes in the middle of the night, and I'll wake up and scribble down some thought I have. Other times it comes in the form of ideas from others on the catechetical team. Someone will suggest an idea and I answer, 'Wow, I was just praying about this.'"

Not having to depend on himself and depending instead on guidance of the Holy Spirit for everything he is doing in his job at St. Mary of the Assumption "is actually quite a relief ... assuming I'm patient enough to wait on the guidance and not try do something on my own."

As Coordinator of Religious Education, Stier is responsible for the direction of catechesis in the parish – the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), the Parish School of Religion (PSR) for children in kindergarten through sixth grade, Adult Faith Formation, and Liturgy of the Word with Children during weekend Mass for ages 3 through third grade. He also supports Mike Hoendorf with the junior high, high school and young adult groups. A native of Fort Wayne, IN, he and his high school sweetheart, Pam, married after finishing college. He went to Purdue University and earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and then to Baltimore to work in computer engineering with a division of Johns Hopkins University's, the Applied Physics Laboratory. While there he earned a master's degree from Johns Hopkins. He worked for 35 years in the computer technology field --- most recently seven years with Google. Stier came to Ohio in 1990 to work at what is now LexisNexis and then another company, Science Applications International Corporation in Dayton, before moving on to Google. He had been able to work out of his home as a "remote employee" but Google reorganized and the company wanted him to move to California.

"I was Midwest born and raised and have aging parents in Indiana that I want to spend time with," says Stier. So, he left Google, with the anticipation of finding a position with another tech company. But some friends in Michigan who knew he was very active as a lay person in several ministries in this area urged him to apply for positions with the church up there. "I just prayed to God to put me where he wants me," he says.

During that interviewing process, Stier said, "Father Manning reached out to me when Sean Kelly left as Coordinator of Religion, because I was involved in some of the adult formation and Bible studies at St. Mary and coordinated through him. Father knew me from seeing me at daily Mass and started talking to me and asked if I would consider interviewing for the position. One thing led to another and I was hired."

The Stier family joined St. Mary of the Assumption soon after the new church was built. "We enjoyed Father Manning and periodically came to St. Mary in Franklin, and I ended up leading one of the Scripture studies for Lent at that time. We had talked about making a switch due to the regionalization of Our Lady of Good Hope and St. Henry's and decided now was the time," he said.

The Stiers have three daughters – one a junior at Alter High School, one who graduated last year from Ohio University and one who is married and is a physical therapist in Shreveport, La. Their son is completing medical school at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee.

When they were living in Maryland, Pam was working for one the largest savings and loan associations in Baltimore, but after their first child was born decided she wanted to stay home and raise the children. "I was totally for that," says Chris. "I call her the CFO – chief of family operations." After taking over the religious education position in August, Stier said his immediate attention was on PSR program. He spent several weeks working with the team of catechists to understand what had been done in the past in the classroom, particularly with sacramental preparation and together they came up with a plan which was approved by Father Manning.



Stier, far left, with RCIA candidates Jennifer Pelgen, Jeff Pelgen, Kate Berry, Sierra Fox, Russ Urzi, Michael Gallagher, Geoff Lewis and Father Jim Manning

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# What's a deacon? What does he do? By Dan Darragh

Ask just about any adult Catholic what Vatican II was all about and you are likely to hear about how it brought about major changes in church doctrine -- allowing Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraging friendship with other non-Christian faiths and allowing other languages besides Latin to be used during the Mass and having priests facing the congregation while conducting Mass.

One thing you don't hear much about is that it led Pope Paul VI in 1967 to restore the ancient practice of ordaining men, who were not going to become priests, as permanent deacons.

Deacon Steve Bermick at St. Mary of the Assumption admits that he didn't even know what a deacon was back in the late 1970s when his parish priest in Cambridge, Ohio, suggested he might want to look into. It's not that Bermick wasn't a good Catholic, but until about 15 years ago it was unusual to see a deacon taking an active part in the Mass. Now there are three at St. Mary of the Assumption and a fourth studying for ordination.

Note that Pope Paul "restored" the ordination of permanent deacons. He did not create it.

According to Wikipedia, the word *deacon* is derived from the Greek word *diákonos*, meaning "servant", "waiting-man," "minister", or "messenger." One commonly promulgated speculation as to its etymology is that it literally means "through the dust," referring to the dust raised by the busy servant or messenger.

The diaconate as an order is mentioned in the sixth chapter of Acts of the Apostles when they appointed seven men, including Stephen, the first martyr, to serve the poor widows. However, over time the deacons primarily served the bishops, writing letters, assisting in proclaiming the Gospel and representing the bishop and serving the needy on the bishop's behalf. However, over time the Order of Deacon evolved from a permanent state into a transitional period prior to ordination to the priesthood. Young men preparing to become priests are ordained as temporary deacons the year before their final year in the seminary and make their vow of celibacy, and they serve in a parish as an intern until their final ordination.

The Second Vatican Council proposed that the permanent diaconate be restored to the Latin Rite (it was never done away with in the Eastern Rite churches) so deacons could assist bishops, especially in missionary areas where a shortage of clergy existed, according to Deacon Steve. In those missionary and remote areas, or where a shortage of priests exist, permanent deacons can preside at worship services where a priest is not present or administer a parish without a resident pastor. In recent years, with the shortage of priests, permanent deacons also assist parish priests in many roles that over the years they had done themselves, especially visiting the sick, aged and prisoners, giving voice to the poor, as well as assisting in the Mass and administering certain sacraments.

A man who is ordained as a deacon receives the sacrament of Holy Orders, however, deacons are not priests. So, what can deacons do and what can they not do?

According to St. Mary Seminary at the Athenaeum of Ohio, which has had the responsibility for the permanent diaconate formation program of the Archdiocese in Cincinnati since 1998, "permanent deacons promise service to God and the people of God, characterized by service to the word of God, the sacraments of the church and a life of heroic chastity."

Their service of the word includes reading the Gospel, leading the prayer of intercession and giving the Benediction during Mass, as well as preaching and teaching. In fact, a priest, bishop or even the pope should not proclaim the Gospel if a deacon is present. Their liturgical ministry includes various parts of the Mass proper to the deacons, including being an ordinary minister of Holy Communion and the proper minister of the chalice during Mass.

The ministry of charity involves service to the poor, the marginalized and the ill. Deacons, like priests and bishops are ordinary ministers of the sacrament of baptism and can serve as the church's witnesses at weddings, which the bride and groom administer the vows. However, if the vows take place in a wedding Mass the Mass is celebrated by the priest and the deacon acts as another witness. Deacons can preside at funerals not involving a Mass, such as the final commendation at the gravesite or the reception of the body at a service in a funeral home. They may give certain blessings but they cannot hear confessions and give absolution, administer confirmation, anoint the sick, or celebrate Mass.



**Deacons Steve Bermick, left, and Tom Platfoot entered the diaconate together in 1991 and now serve together here at St. Mary of the Assumption.**

# Deacon Steve Retired But Still Busy *By Dan Darragh*

When Steve Bermick was working as a computer programmer for NCR at Cambridge, Ohio, in the late 1970s, becoming a permanent deacon was “something that just wasn’t on my radar.”

But then he got to know the local priest in the little country parish where he and his wife attended church and about a year later he told Bermick, “You know, you ought to think about becoming a deacon.”

I said, ‘Well, OK, what’s that, because I knew nothing about it.’”

The priest explained the process to him and Bermick says he thought about it for awhile but then moved on to another job with NCR in Dayton. “We went to St. Albert the Great in Kettering, and I attended a Christ Renews His Parish retreat there and I started thinking about it again.”

Then, in 1985, he became convinced it was something he would like to pursue and with the support of his pastor and the Parish Council at St. Albert’s along with his wife Linda he applied at the archdiocese in Cincinnati and was accepted.

He was ordained in 1991 at age 40. Also in his class and ordained the same year was Tom Platfoot. That was also the same time when Father Jim Manning came to St. Albert the Great.

Bermick began doing his diaconal ministry as a volunteer in his parish while continuing his full-time job as a programmer. But after ordination he was still discerning and decided he wanted to work within the church full-time in addition to being a deacon. So, in 1998 he was hired into a full-time staff position at St. Christopher’s in Vandalia and worked there until 2006 when he left for a job in Michigan.

He returned to Ohio a year later when Father Jim came to St. Mary and hired him as Director of Religious Education. A year later, Anne Langsdale retired as pastoral associate and he went to Father Jim and told him he might better serve the parish as a pastoral associate than as DRE. “He told me what he really needed was a parish administrator because as parish priest and as president of Alter High School he had in essence two full-time jobs.” Deacon Steve moved into that new position at St. Mary in Franklin and helped make the move to the new church in Springboro. He retired as parish administrator in 2016 but remains an active deacon.

Permanent deacons have three ministries – Ministry of the Word, Ministry of the Liturgy and Ministry of Charity. Deacon Steve fulfills his Ministry of the Word by teaching in the RCIA, training new lectors, conducting adult religious education, preparing parents to have their children baptized, and conducting marriage preparation for engaged couples. He has also helped mentor men who want to become deacons and assists parishioners who are petitioning the church to have their marriages annulled.

As do the other two parish deacons, his Ministry of the Liturgy involves assisting at Mass in roles proper to the deacon, being an ordinary minister of Communion, and preaching. His charitable work includes visits to parishioners in hospitals and in their homes, bringing communion to Catholic residents at three area assisted living facilities, and presenting musical programs at two care facilities where he and parishioner Nick Lagana perform.

The Bermicks live in Washington Township in Montgomery County and have two sons who live in Kettering along with their six grandchildren.



**Deacon Steve baptizes Cayden Frantz on April 14 after Mass at St. Mary of the Assumption. Shown with Cayden are his parents, Andrew and Caitlyn Frantz.**

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## **Stier from Page 1**

This year the focus is on second grade students and their first reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. For next year, he is looking at how to extend PSR to pre-K children. “Beginning decades ago, education pioneers like Sofia Cavalletti, Gianna Gobbi and Tina Lillig demonstrated the catechetical potential for children as young as three, and how the younger child is especially responsive to God’s overture of love,” says Stier.

With his responsibility for the catechetical direction of the parish, Stier is discerning what he calls a relationship-based plan. “The essence of it is that all formation is about bringing people into closer relationship with Jesus Christ *through* the faith community. We don’t typically have a spiritual transformation by reading a book -- although reading spiritual books is always good – or even going to a Bible study, which is also good. Most of the time we grow in stages and it is through our relationship with others. It’s the model the early Christians used in the first century because back then confessing your love of Jesus could get you killed, and Christians who were shepherding new people in the faith walked beside them. We call it the catechumenate model in RCIA, it’s walking together and growing together.”

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## Meet Deacon Rich *by Jay Lees*

Deacon Rich Hobbs and his wife Julie have been married for 21 years. Their family includes two boys, Robert, and Nicholas and a daughter, Elizabeth. They reside in Franklin and have been members of the church for 20 years. Currently, he makes a living as the legal editor for LexisNexis.

Rich grew up in Fancy Farm, KY. He graduated from Thomas More College (now university) and Chase College of Law at northern Kentucky. He studied at Anthenaeum in Cincinnati for two years to obtain a certificate in Lay Pastoral Ministry and three years to complete formation. He has been a deacon for nine years.

Rich had many reasons to become a deacon which include his love of Christ, the church, call to serve, his wife, and conversations with the late Father Chuck Mentrup, when he was pastor at St Mary. He and Julie prayed about making that major commitment and after a period of time realized it was the right thing to do.

His duties as deacon have changed over the years as the parish and his life have changed. He has been involved in baptism, marriage preparation, and training servers. Currently, his devotion to the study of canon law has reduced his time spent in parish ministries. However, Sundays find him taking Communion to Otterbein residents in Springboro and volunteering at Hospice of Butler Warren near the Atrium Hospital.

The best part of becoming a deacon, according to Rich is, "Growing in the journey and the journey continues to evolve and grow as I grow. My love for Christ, church, Julie, and family grows more each day."



Deacon Rich Hobbs

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## April showers bring... *by Dan Darragh*

The month of April not only brought showers of the wet variety, but hundreds of dollars worth of baby shower gifts for the Community Pregnancy Center in Middletown. Shown below are members of St. Mary of the Assumption Ladies Society standing behind four tables full of baby gifts that they donated to the center. In addition, the Ladies Society purchased 10 Pack 'n Plays that were delivered directly to the center. This was the second annual baby shower, and members played several typical baby showers games before making their donation to a representative of the center. Lynn Darragh and Sue Moizuk were co-hostesses for the shower.



# Deacon Tom cut out for more than barbering

By Kathleen Garnica

Can a barber be a deacon? Absolutely, and Deacon Tom Platfoot is proof of it. As one of the three deacons serving our church, Deacon Tom is nearing senior status, the time a deacon can retire, but his goal is to continue to serve as long as he is capable.

A permanent deacon since 1991, Tom has served three different parishes, moving to Springboro last July. Married to Diane for 51 years, they have known one another since first grade. “I am a year older than Diane. We went to the same elementary and high school. We lived near each other, both of us raised on family farms outside Anna, Ohio,” he shares. The couple has three daughters, all married, one living in Philadelphia, one in Phoenix and the youngest daughter here in the area with two sets of twins.

After high school, Tom worked briefly in construction, a factory then attended the Dayton Barber College. For 25 years he worked as a barber, owning and operating his own shop at the Salem Mall for 15 years. Needing a change, he took a job selling heating-ventilation and air-conditioning systems for Allied Services in Clayton.

It was during those years that he was able to enroll in the diaconate formation program, a four-year process back then. “The seed planted in my heart grew as I opened myself to the Lord’s call. I talked with a friend who was a deacon about who and what a deacon is and does, prayed for clarity and with my wife’s support, I started my class work. I lived just five minutes from our church, Our Lady of Mercy where all the classes were held!. There were classmates traveling up to two hours to get there each Saturday. God made that part easy for me” he says.

After his ordination in 1991 with 10 other men, one being Deacon Steve Bermick, Deacon Tom became a church business manager, working at St. Rita’s in northwest Dayton for 7 ½ years and then Ascension Church in Kettering for 10 years. In 2011, he retired from full-time employment which allowed him more time to serve the church and spend time with his family and five grandchildren. Now settled in Springboro, Deacon Tom once again lives just five minutes from church and says he is happy to serve such a vibrant parish and community.

When asked what advice he would give to men discerning a call to the diaconate, Deacon Tom says, “Be open to the possibilities, consider what is required, talk to someone about the diaconate, look for encouragement from your wife and family, and pray, pray, pray, then go from there.”



Deacon Tom Platfoot



Deacon Rich & Fr. Manning



Deacons Steve and Tom

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## Knights Dedicate All Wars Memorial *By Jay Lees*

On April 6, 2019, the Knights of Columbus, 4th Degree Assembly, dedicated an All Wars memorial to all veterans who belong to St. Mary of the Assumption.



**L-R: Pat Monnin, Mark Cable, Mark Givins, Fr. Manning**



**Dick Tracy (seated), who served in WWII, and Dave Potts standing**