

CLERGY APPRECIATION MONTH

Did You Know?

Deacon Tom Carone

Every morning both before school and during the summer months from fifth to eighth grade, young Tom Carone made his way to Notre Dame Academy to serve Mass for the Notre Dame sisters at 6:15 a.m. "We lived about a mile from Notre Dame Academy," says Deacon Tom. "I served that Mass every day, Saturday and Sunday included."

He remembers the reward was having breakfast with the sisters before heading to school. "I think that's where I discovered I wanted to have some connection with ministry," Deacon Tom says.

Once he started high school at Central Catholic High School, Deacon Tom had to let go of his altar server duties. Still, he was feeling called by God.

"I had the inclination to be a priest," says Deacon Tom.

In the 1950s to enter seminary, young men were required to have taken Latin in high school. Deacon Tom took Latin at Central Catholic but struggled with the class.

After high school graduation he went to seminary in Kentucky for four years. He was able to master Latin, but thought theology was more than he could handle so he came back to Toledo and did what good Catholic young man did in 1964 – got married and started working. His two daughters were born shortly after, and his career in education was a good fit.

About a decade later one of the sisters at his school told Deacon Tom he should enter the diaconate program in the diocese. "In 1975 I started thinking about the diaconate," Deacon Tom says. "Sister Marciana went after me until 1981."

After five years Deacon Tom completed the program and was ordained to the permanent diaconate. His plan was to continue teaching and just help out in a parish, but to avoid adult education and formation as much as possible – speaking in front of adults made Deacon Tom nervous.

Working in ministry in five different parishes in the Diocese of Toledo, Deacon Tom wasn't actually able to completely avoid adults in the parishes. He taught adult CCD for eight years.

Then in 1995 he retired from his full-time job in education. Msgr. Michael Billian, his nephew, immediately came to him with a proposal. "I need you to come to St. Patrick's with me," Msgr. Billian told Deacon Tom.

He had just been assigned to Historic Church of Saint Patrick and Central Catholic High School, and Msgr. Billian wanted it to be a family affair. He gave his uncle the weekend to pray about the request.

The answer was yes, and Deacon Tom came to the parish on June 1, 1995. "I've been here ever since," he says. "I've loved every minute of my time here. It's never been a job."

Avoiding work with adults wasn't possible at HSP, and Deacon Tom got over his shyness with adults pretty quickly. "I am doing more forms of ministry than I ever thought I would," he says.

Baptisms, weddings and funerals mix with leading the RCIA program and managing the outreach program. Deacon Tom's Food Pantry has been a huge help to the neighboring community as it serves the poor in the 43604 and 43609 zip codes.

"I always had an affinity for the poor. The drive I have to do that has always been there," says Deacon Tom. "I set up food pantries in every parish where I have been assigned. When I got here at HSP the door was opened even more to help the poor."

His love of serving those in need has inspired the parishioners of HSP, from those who bring food donations the first Sunday of every month to those who volunteer to work on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays every week, as well as the people who make the holiday basket assembly line run smoothly every Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Deacon Tom gave parishioners a scare earlier this fall when illness took him away from the parish. During his time in the hospital and in rehab, he felt the prayers said for him and enjoyed the cards and visits from his HSP family.

"My heartfelt thanks to my brothers and sisters at Historic Church of Saint Patrick for all the prayers, cards and well wishes," Deacon Tom says. "That's what brought me back."

His return on Sunday, October 7, to bless the pets of the parish in honor of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Padre Pio was a perfect way to get back to his parish routine. Although he has not returned to the office full-time, Deacon Tom is slowly making his way back to his old schedule. He is also hoping to counsel patients in the rehab facility where he continues his physical therapy.

The joy of being part of this parish gives him strength to keep going. "I see God in everything I do. We are all so blessed with this pastor, staff and parishioners," Deacon Tom says, echoing the feeling of all those who have found a home at HSP.

For those men who are called to ministry, Deacon Tom recommends prayer and asking God for guidance. "If you feel in your heart that God may be calling you to something, but it's not the priesthood, consider becoming a deacon," says Deacon Tom. "There are so many rewards."