

# Our Vocation Journey Stories

Father Don DeSalvo, Father Dan Peters, Deacon Mike Lane and Deacon in formation Mike Winger were asked to share stories about their vocation journey. Two questions were used to prompt their responses.

**Did anyone inspire you to become a deacon?**

**What has been your greatest joy in living out your vocation?**

## Father Don DeSalvo

I had a cousin that was much older and we all called him Uncle. After graduating high school and on one of his visits asked me if I wanted to be a priest. That was easy; no, not me. There is no way I was going to give up all my girlfriends. And from that day never gave it a thought. After college and special schooling my career started as a medical laboratory technician. It was not long after graduation and taking my state boards that Uncle Sam sent me a greeting to join the Army. Things moved fast from then on.

The first thing that got my attention was assisting at autopsy on men younger than myself. How frail life was and how one accident can change everything.. With this boiling in my soul other things were changing for me. Being a party animal and liked going out with my friends was always paramount in my life. Slowly this changed and I began to see how unimportant these night-out's did not have the same meaning for me. My fellow tech's. had noticed a change in me. They were all reading Merton's book: THE SEVEN STORY MOUNTAIN. I was the only one that didn't show that great of interest. They questioned me one day and all gave the answer; reading his book and his struggle to find God and a meaningful life in which to live that live only spoke more of my own struggle.

Some of my friends talked about priests that inspired them to become a priest. With my Uncle and his friends my brother-in-law and I would tend bar at their functions. After the celebrations was over and all the lay people left was there time to really hit the drinks. Smoking cigars and drinking booze was not my idea of fun. Add to that our pastor in Oak Lawn for too many years was not a good example either. He always looked as if he needed a good night's sleep and his Sunday homily was always on the football score of Notre Dame's Saturday game. When looking at those examples i thought I could do that

and maybe better. By this age at 28 was going to be my biggest challenge as it was not the way it's done. This happens at a much younger age. Had the choice been to study for Chicago that would have been an open invitation. However, being locked into a brick and mortar parish was off my radar.

The hunt started as this was all new territory for me. The chaplain at the West Side VA where I worked help me as to what had to be done. The first stop was Joliet and that was a complete turn off. The next was Rockford and they sent me a huge package with all the forms to fill out the physical and X-rays. While going through all this there was an article in the Columbian magazine the Knights of Columbus puts on in regard a new kind of Army. At first being turned off by this new kind of army while still in the active reserves was a turn off. Drawn to it I did read the article and pow!!! all these lights went on. It talked of a new seminary called by Pope John XXIII to have a facility for older men seeking second careers and geared to a slower pace. I did apply and was turned down because of age again. This time though the problem was under 30 years of age the only restriction. However, at the end of the letter turning me down was a hint of perhaps this was not over yet. After talking to the rector of the seminary he said if I came to Boston and met with the board of directors and they gave me a pass there would be that opening. It worked. Rockford gave me a Saturday appointment to meet with the vocational director.. This was strange as the first thing out of the Vocational Directors mouth was: "I didn't have a chance to read your application and go through your file, sell yourself to me." Looking him square in the eye my reply was, I don't sell myself to anyone. Then told him of how important Saturday work was as only two people were working and one had to be a board certified technician. We left with his statement that the seminary would take you without a bishop so do that and if you do okay we will accept you. Of course not that I am my response was; well don't take any chances on me put them on a 13 year old.

When you are in the seminary without a bishop you need to pay your own way. Selling my car gave me enough money for tuition and transportation to and from the seminary. The seminary opened in 1964 while Vatican Council was still in session. It was a very exciting time with all the changes and the Church more open to laity with all the giftedness the Holy Spirit filled them with. After completing the first year it was another trip to Rockford. This time it was not with the Vocation Director but with Bishop Lane and the Chancellor of the diocese. I was incarnated then sent forth with the promise of the Bishop's prayers. I asked about financial aid and was told you are doing fine. Fine was the G.I. Bill that paid for college. I asked for help with my book bill and was given the same remark. I then went to our Knights of Columbus council and as a fourth

degree they would surely help. No! Same pat answer. Somehow this all came to an end with ordination the 10th of May, 1969.

While looking back at the assignments perhaps the one that fit the best was hospital ministry. It was a familiar venue and along with training in Clinical Pastoral Education was 15 years of pure ministry. There was no worry of roofs leaking or assessments to Rockford just this service to the sick/dying and recovery to health for others.

## Deacon Mike Lane

**Did anyone inspire you to become a deacon?** Looking back on my life I cannot say that there was any one person who inspired me to become a deacon. My call to this vocation came from many people and experiences. The seeds of my vocation were planted when Barb and I made a Marriage Encounter weekend in 1978. That weekend was an “awakening” for me. To realize that God is love and that He does not make junk was liberating. From that point on, my journey in faith continued to grow. Part of the faith journey was more and more involvement in the Church where I met and continue to meet many wonderful people.

The diaconate first came my way in the early 90’s with an invite from a deacon friend. At that time we had young children at home and the idea of becoming a deacon didn’t seem like a good fit. As time went on there was a continued gentle nudging that seemed to come from nowhere. In 2004, while we were living in Grand Rapids, the nudging became stronger and I made contact with the diocese about the diaconate. The diocese was in transition with a new yet to be announced bishop and they really weren’t sure what they wanted to do with their diaconate program.

In 2006, when we moved to the Sugar Grove area and began attending St Gall Church, Barb and I met with Fr. Karl to see how we could serve in the parish. During that meeting, Fr. Karl asked me if I had ever thought about becoming a deacon. I took that as an affirmation and moved forward to begin the process. Simultaneously, Ministry Formation and the Diaconate Program followed. In November of 2008, we became members of the new parish of SKD. I was ordained to the diaconate in 2012 and assigned as a deacon of our parish.

One of the “epiphany” moments was just prior to ordination when I went to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I confessed a tremendous sense of unworthiness about becoming ordained. What the priest told me was healing and impactful.

He said, **“You need to realize that God does not call the qualified, but rather He qualifies the call.”**

### **What has been your greatest joy in living out your vocation?**

My greatest joy is sharing with others, getting to know them and the sharing of our stories. Being made in His image, we all have been stamped with God’s DNA. We are all on a journey. A journey that may have some different paths and happenings from one another, but the desired end result is the same.

It is in the sharing of our stories that others are blessed and we are blessed as well. It’s like a math equation: I give something from myself to another and another gives something of him or herself in return and the net result is something that is greater in value than when the two first began. That is why I enjoy small faith groups and retreats so much because we can get to know one another at a deeper level.

I have found that this sharing of our story is powerful in all areas of my life; marriage, family, friends, church, business and community.

### Father Dan Peters

I worked 2 years in PADS at St Nicholas Parish before Hesed House existed. The pastor simply asked me “Dan you should consider the priesthood!”. It was an invitation. Once I began my journey I was encouraged by meeting and getting to know other priests, especially Fr. Bob Hoffman. He was a key factor in my deciding the priesthood. I was also inspired by my parish in San Antonio where I studied with the Oblates. There, vocation grew out of a community that celebrates together through shared prayer. The big factor was that my vocation came out of my volunteering to help the homeless in Aurora.....Matthew 25.....these two years were a time of learning and discovery!! I learned so much from the homeless.

### Deacon in Formation Mike Winger

My inspiration to become a deacon has come from my wife and her constant devotion to serve others and by her love of her faith which overflows onto me. Of course, Father Bob with his big heart and gentle nature and Father Dan with his joyful spirit have been inspirational too. Plus, I have the Holy Spirit which I found through adoration. Quiet time with our Lord is very inspirational and rejuvenating.

My greatest Joy right now is learning more about my faith and sharing a comradery with other faithful men of our Diocese.