



# St. Mary Catholic Church

## Parish Deacons: 123 Combined Years of Ministry

Profiles of Faith

*Penny Haney*

### Deacon Jim Francois



Jim Francois' response to suggestions from Sister Carla Mae and Ron Lesjak to enter a new diaconate program in the 1970s, was "Oh, no. Not for me. I'm not that kind of guy."

What kind of guy?

"I thought I was going to be a holy, holy person, and I didn't consider myself a holy, holy person, but Sister Carla Mae kept encouraging it. Then one day, at Mass when the priest elevated the host, it was like the Holy Spirit whopped me on the head and said, '*This [diaconate] is what you have to do.*' It was amazing."

Deacon Jim discussed this calling with his wife, Judy. She said she and their family would back him all the way. He entered the program.

Deacon Jim talks about the difficulty of working full-time and raising a family of eleven children while in formation. He explains it was difficult for Judy, too. Eight sons were involved in sports and other activities.

"Judy was busy running the kids from one practice or game to another on Saturdays while I was at the program. It was a long haul."

One of the ministries Deacon Jim serves today is a truck stop ministry. He and Judy had become aware of the need for truck stop ministers at a deacon meeting.

"Because of the job I had at Birchwood Foods, I understood what truckers went through. I had to work with them as part of my job." So when the need for truck stop ministers was discussed, Deacon Jim recalls, "I looked at Judy and said, 'I can do that.' She said, 'I'll help you.' Just like that."

As far as the sacramental part of his ministry, Deacon Jim says, "I officiate at weddings, including several of my kids' weddings and a couple of my grandkids." He baptized all of his sixteen grandchildren and three of his great-grandchildren. "I enjoy Baptisms because I'm bringing these little babies on the first step of their faith."

### Deacon Ron Lesjak



Deacon Ron Lesjak's journey to the diaconate was not a straight line. During 8th grade, a nun had suggested the priesthood to him.

"I couldn't believe she'd think I could be a priest," he says with a chuckle.

Yet, the idea of entering the priesthood stayed with him. Deacon Ron was in seminary from 1956-1964. He served four years as a Salvatorian religious, but then left the Salvatorians in 1966 and married Gail.

The couple relocated to Kenosha from Milwaukee in 1971 and joined St. Mary's.

"The first thing I did was teach CCD and religious education. Then I became the groundworker, and I've been doing the groundwork for 45 years."

One morning in the 1970s, Father John Michael Murphy suggested to Deacon Ron that he attend an introductory presentation about a new diaconate program. Deacon Ron talked over the idea with Gail and ultimately decided to follow Father Murphy's suggestion. Deacon Ron was ordained to the diaconate in 1979.

Over the years, among many other services, he worked in the jail ministry, baptized over one thousand individuals, officiated at many weddings, organized the Share Food Program for 27 years, and he continues to preach and maintain the parish landscape.

## Deacon Ron Lesjak (continued)

"I love groundskeeping. I love gardening. I love to go out and make things look nice," but he admits he could use help with it.

In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, golf, and spending time with his family. He and Gail have three daughters and six grandchildren.

"I've become a crazy woodworker. There's a lot of things in church that I made," Deacon Ron says with pride. The collection boxes at the church entrances and the ambry (the recessed cabinet used to store oils used in sacraments), and many other pieces were hand-crafted by Deacon Ron.

"I love what I'm doing here at St. Mary's. I wouldn't change it."



## Deacon Wilson Shierk

As a young boy, Wilson Shierk arrived at school one morning and found a flyer on his desk titled, *So You Want to be a Priest*.

"I thought it was God calling me because I didn't know how it got there," he recalls. Deacon Wilson was impressed that his brother was a deacon, and he began his own diaconate formation in 1992.

Deacon Wilson and his wife, Sylvia, have been members of our parish since the 1970s. He has been a deacon at our parish since his 1996 ordination.

Deacon Wilson is immersed in three ministries - the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SDVP), missions, and the jail ministry. Passionate about social justice, he points out, "You can't evangelize folks who are hungry. Before you can even talk about God, you have to provide at least enough so they feel somewhat self-sustaining."

He mentions that SDVP's outreach program is generously funded by the SDVP store, individual St. Mary parishioner contributions, and the parish's second collection on fifth Sundays.

For years he has read *Maryknoll Magazine* and its stories of mission work all over the world. Deacon Wilson was intrigued.

"In 2006, I and a few others went to our first mission experience in the Dominican Republic. Next January is our fifteenth trip there. For the last ten or eleven of those years, we've also run an eye clinic with doctors who go with us."

As for his jail ministry, Deacon Wilson serves on Kenosha's Jail Chaplaincy Board. He serves the detention center (Highway H) and the Downtown Pre-Trial Facility. Once a month, he brings communion service and prayer service to inmates.

Deacon Wilson is proud of two, ongoing efforts between St. Mary's and other parishes. St. Elizabeth's Closet is a collaborative effort between our parish and St. Mark's. The Giving Circle is a collaborative effort between our parish and St. Elizabeth's and St. Mark's. The Giving Circle helped 235 families last year.

## St. Mary Parish Diaconate Candidates

---



### Brent Enwright

In Brent's words: "I was not considering the diaconate prior to being asked by the three deacons of St. Mary. I am deeply honored and humbled by their request for me to consider the diaconate formation program. With the support and prayers of our deacons and the Church, I will be able to know His will for me.

"The formation process is quite involved and requests a lot from not only me but my wife and family. It has been difficult in many different respects, but it truly is worth the effort. I appreciate the opportunity to be asked to be involved with the program. There are many people and situations that I have had the privilege to be connected with that have tremendously helped me through discernment. Thank you all for your love and support for me and my family as we continue."

**Jason Myres** of our parish is also in the diaconate formation program.