



Profile

Four men prepare for the priesthood

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Meet this year's Priestly Ordination Class of 2009. One priest is a veterinarian; another has a masters in classical languages. One priest used to design high-end department stores and another has served Mass for the Holy Father in Rome. All four of these men, Christopher Ankley, Harold Potter, Joseph Gray and James Adams, are preparing for their Ordination Mass on August 8th. Read on to learn a little bit more about our new diocesan priests.

Deacon James Adams

It took only a summer internship at an engineering firm to convince James Adams that an office-type job wasn't for him. After a year studying physics and playing hockey at Bethel College in Minnesota, Deacon Adams transferred to Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. It was there during his second year there that he received a very precise call to the priesthood, he says.

Yet still Deacon Adams notes that his journey is somewhat atypical. For the better part of his childhood he attended a non-denominational church and graduated from the now-defunct First Assembly Christian high school in Kalamazoo. It wasn't until his father began re-examining his own faith and bringing Deacon Adams along on that journey that he was reacquainted with Catholicism.

Deacon Adams attended the North American Pontifical College in Rome. In addition to playing on the seminarian soccer team and having the honor to serve Mass for the Holy Father, Adams is especially grateful for other advantages of being in Rome.

"Being in Rome allowed me to see in a very different way the tangible nature of the lives of the saints," he says.

His own journey to the priesthood was void of any angst. "I had a deal [with the Lord]. I asked him to let me know what His will was for me and I was fortunate that He did so in a very precise way."

Deacon Adams, who recently baptized his own infant nephew, also is looking forward to administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"It's not easy for me to go to confession," says Deacon Adams recognizing the fear some people have. "But good things don't come without a struggle and I look forward to the hard work in the confession and really helping each person with a gentleness and kindness."

Christopher Ankley

Some pet owners do a double-take when they first see Deacon Ankley in his collar. "Hey, wait, didn't you used to be my vet?" The answer would be, "yes."

Deacon Ankley was a practicing veterinarian in the Kalamazoo area for more than eight years before entering the seminary. He grew up on a farm in Imlay City and was always around animals. His busy childhood included participating in 4H and Future Farmers of America. At the same time he was very active in his home parish Sacred Heart as an altar server and working summers helping his pastor Fr. Dunn.

He credits Fr. Dunn with planting the seed for his vocation.

“I remember right after college and I was actually trying to figure out whether to study teaching or veterinary science and Fr. Dunn said, ‘you should be a priest Chris.’ It was always somewhere in my mind.”

Deacon Ankley remembers eventually getting up the courage to contact the diocesan vocations office and leaving a message with then-director Fr. Creagan.

“He called back but it took me a year to return his phone call,” he laughs.

His first few months in the seminary proved challenging and Deacon Ankley decided after two years to take a break. Looking back he can see God’s hand in this plan as it was during this time that his father became ill and he was able to help his mother care for him during his final days.

Deacon Ankley then entered Blessed John XXXIII seminary. He graduated this past May and says with a smile that he is “very relieved.”

On the day of the interview Deacon Ankley, who spent his summer assisting at St. Joseph Parish in St. Joseph, was visiting a lake-side nursing home whose residents share their home with two cats and a few dogs. Fr. Ankley especially enjoys this aspect of pastoral life—visiting the elderly.

“They’re a hoot,” he says of the senior citizens he visits. “They don’t keep anything back; there’s no pretense and that’s just great.”

Ankley’s advice to those discerning a vocation: “Stay close to the Eucharist and receive it as often as you can. And pray. Just asking people to pray for you and remember prayer is very powerful.”

Joseph Gray

As Deacon Gray gives a tour of St. Joseph, Watervliet, where he worked this summer, he points out ornate candelabra he rescued and helped restore — clear evidence of his former career as an architectural and engineering designer. Before his call to the priesthood, Deacon Gray worked in architectural and engineering firms helping to design high-end department stores, food processing facilities and coal-fired power plants. He’s done some informal consulting on the redesign of St. Joseph’s rectory and on a new chapel at Holy Apostles seminary — work he truly enjoyed.

“Church architectural should allow your soul to soar,” he notes.

His own call to the priesthood came later in his life. He also has the unique distinction of being both a father and a grandfather and believes this perspective will help him in his own ministry.

“I do believe that I will bring a different understanding and be able to relate to parishioners with empathy as someone who has faced many of the same issues they are dealing with,” he notes.

In addition to assisting at St. Joseph Elementary School, Deacon Gray also enjoyed working with the parish’s food pantry and helping those in need.

“We’re easily four times as busy as we were before,” he notes as he helps stock shelves. Like Deacon Adams, Deacon Gray is also looking forward to helping the faithful with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

“I wish more people would take advantage of this wonderful sacrament,” he says. “The Lord is truly so compassionate and present in our lives.”

Harold Potter

While many may assume he's fresh from Hogwarts, Deacon Harry Potter actually grew up in Grosse Pointe, Mich. He says he doesn't mind the jokes associated with sharing a name with one of the most popular fiction characters in the world.

"[my name] actually gives people an opportunity to start a conversation with me," he says. A sure icebreaker. "I get to tell them that the real magic—in the sense of wonders and miracles—is in the Church."

Deacon Potter, a graduate of Hope College, also has a Masters in classical languages. He taught Latin and Social Studies at various high schools and colleges in Michigan. During his time as a teacher he first really started contemplating the priesthood. A trip to Turkey and Spain, tracing the steps of St. Paul in 1998, further affirmed his call.

"At one point I was struggling with my vocation so I decided to do what the monks in the Middle Ages did to divine what God's will was. I opened up a Bible and just randomly picked out a verse."

God's message came through loud and clear to Deacon Potter as the verse was from Psalm 110, Verse 4: "The Lord has sworn, and he will not repent: You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

The first seminary Deacon Potter attended was in Nebraska but it wasn't quite the right fit. He left there after two years and moved back home to discern the next chapter of his life. It was during this time that he met a seminarian from the diocese and made the decision to apply.

When asked what he's most looking forward to as a priest, Deacon Potter says administering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

"I wanted to lay hands upon so many who are suffering from illness."