

## Reflecting on the diaconate's impact on immediate and extended families

By Deacon Tom and Karen Sink  
Special to The Witness

I (Deacon Tom) grew up on the east side of Waterloo just four blocks south of St. Mary Church and School. St. Mary's church and school were both in the same building; we didn't have to go outside to go to Mass, practice singing for Mass, go to reconciliation, change classrooms or to use the gym — or get called to the principal's office!

I was the oldest of 11 — six sisters and four brothers. Most of us eventually had the same teachers through the years, and they got to know us pretty well.

One of the young Franciscan associates dubbed us the "Litany of the Sinks." I prayed that the church would forgive the use of the pun on the Litany of the Saints.

In a big family you learn to help each other. That attitude had taken hold in our family as we grew up and spread wider than just our family.

Over the years the 11 (10 since Jim died two years ago) of us became very close and remain so today. Each of us has taken a path that calls us to reach out to those around us through our families, friends and careers.

I believe the years at St. Mary, as well as a Catholic education and the dedication



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of families willing to provide sound adult faith growth, have had an impact on our Catholic training through the years.

Following a stint in the U.S. Army that ended in 1969, my wife, Karen, and I moved back to Waterloo and then Cedar Falls. We registered at St. Patrick Church and enrolled our son at the parish school.

It didn't take us long to get involved, and we became active in our parish and school. While we had our oldest two children in the parish school, we volunteered

in the high school religious education program for children registered in the public school system.

Karen became a member of the parish council, and Tom became a member of the parish school board. We authored a faith building experience to help families see how faith formation can be a family experience.

We volunteered to lector at Mass and distribute the Eucharist as well as take Communion to parishioners at various nursing homes. We helped organize a weekly hot meal program (Community Meals) and took our children with us so they would begin to understand that volunteering is an appropriate thing to do.

In 1974, we heard a talk by a visiting archdiocesan priest about how the Archdiocese of Dubuque was planning to begin a formation program with the understanding these men could be ordained as permanent deacons.

After the first group of men started in the formation program we prayed about also entering the diaconate formation program. One cold, snowy January day, we interviewed with a team of people, and eventually we were accepted in the readiness preparation program.

We explained to our parents what we were doing, and Tom explained it to his supervisor at the company where he worked.

We talked with our family, our children and our friends. Once we passed a series of interviews, we were invited to the four-year diaconal formation program and became part of Formation Class II.

We attended diaconal formation classes together and quickly got comfortable. We began looking forward to the Saturday classes. We couples talked to each other and eventually we shared our stories. We

had more in common than we realized and were amazed at how much we were learning. We formed lifelong friendships that have lasted long after ordination.

In 1979, Tom was one of the two candidates in this class of eight named to assist Archbishop Byrne at the ordination Mass. Both sets of parents, siblings, close friends and parishioners attended the ordination. A small group of these gathered afterward to celebrate.

After 15 busy and enjoyable years in our parish, Tom was transferred by his employer to Davenport, Iowa. We became members of a parish in Bettendorf. As a deacon, Tom was granted diaconal faculties in the Diocese of Davenport and became part of the parish staff while Karen did volunteer work in the parish. Later, Tom and Karen did some consulting work in nearby parishes, and eventually Tom took early retirement from his employer. In 2000, we moved back to Cedar Falls and registered once again at St. Patrick Church.

We learned so much during those 15 years away; yet we thoroughly enjoy being "back home." Tom was offered a position on the parish staff in Cedar Falls to replace someone who had returned to her old job in another city, and Karen replaced a parish secretary who had retired.

Today, we are retired, but we cherish the more than 35 years we spent in service in the diaconate. We continue sharing some ministries we shared together over the years.

*This article is part of a series in The Witness marking the 40th anniversary of the diaconate in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.*

## FFA members serve breakfast at Beckman



Students at Beckman Catholic High School in Dyersville who are members of the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization served breakfast to faculty and staff Feb. 22 during FFA Week. Members of FFA who are seniors at the school are pictured above on the day of the breakfast. (Contributed photo)



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**Every Friday Feb. 16 - Mar. 30, 5-7:30 p.m.:** Mt. Vernon Rd. SE & Hwy. 13 (behind Casey's). All you can eat baked and hand battered fish, catfish nuggets, baked and french fried potatoes, coleslaw, corn bread, fresh baked desserts, fountain pop and coffee, Children's menu: Mac & Cheese and grilled cheese sandwiches. Adults: \$12; children 5-12: \$5; 4 & Under: Free. 50/50 drawing each Friday at 7:30 p.m. Call 319-247-2000.

## Spotlight on a deacon: celebrating 40 years

### How do you balance family, job and ordained ministry?



**A deacon's immediate and extended family:** Many believe that a deacon's priorities are to his relationship with God, to his wife and family, to his employer and then to the diaconate. While this makes sense in a carefully qualified way, it runs the risk of reducing the diaconate to a set of functions that a deacon may or may not do. The reality is much more complex. This kind of balance can only be achieved by constant prayer and by exceptional communications between all the individuals involved. The key word here is: balance!

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**St. Bernard, Alta Vista**

**Mar. 18:** St. Patrick's Supper, Alta Vista Municipal Hall, 3-6 p.m. (Snow date Mar. 25.) Serving grilled pork chop, dressing, green beans, potatoes & gravy, coleslaw, roll, pie. Adults and children, \$10 in advance; \$11 at the door. Carryouts available in VFW. Tickets available from parishioners or in New Hampton, Alta Vista or Elma. Raffle tickets are also available, sponsored by Catholic Order of Foresters.