

Gracias a Dios: the journey of a Hispanic deacon

By Deacon Rigoberto Real
Special to The Witness

Often Martha and I are asked, "Why is it that you devote so much time to the church?" As Martha and I reflect on this question, we come to the conclusion that serving God through his people and his church is our vocation and passion. We do not know why God chose us, but we certainly have experienced his great love and mercy. The only way we can express our love to him is by serving our church.

We have devoted many years of service ever since we were dating together, so this has become who we are. In fact, we met and fell in love when we were members of the youth group of our parish in California. After we married, often times our pastor and other deacons of the parish



Deacon Rigoberto Real

would, out of the blue, say to me, "Rigo have you considered being a deacon? You would make a great deacon."

This happened many times over a period of several years. I started to pray and reflect on the possibility of God calling me to this vocation. So, I prayed and asked God to guide me and to open the doors to the possibility of becoming a deacon.

It was not until we moved to Iowa that God, in his perfect plan, opened the doors for me to enter diaconal formation. I became a member of the first bilingual deacon program of the archdiocese, Class XIII.

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The deacon and his role in the archdiocese: Priests collaborate with the diocesan bishop in planning for the inclusion of deacons into the life and ministry of the diocesan church. Pastors especially are involved in the presentation, selection and assessment processes of aspirants and candidates. They are expected to catechize the people on the ordained vocation of the deacon and seek out competent nominees for this ministry.

The years we spent in formation were so enriching. We learned so much about our faith and our church. But most of all, we met so many wonderful people who we now consider friends and family.

Formation was not easy, giving up two weekends a month, having lots of reading to do and homework to complete, besides our fulltime jobs and family obligations. All of this posed many challenges, but God led the way and provided for us. In fact, God, in his great love, provided for us so well, that he also provided a new member to our family. Our youngest daughter, Paloma, was born four months before my ordination.

Shortly after my ordination, I was asked to work as director of Hispanic ministry at Queen of Peace Parish, Waterloo. At that time, our pastor thought that since I was already involved in my community, and with my duties as a deacon, I was a perfect fit for the job.

I am grateful for this opportunity because working and ministering has helped me grow enormously. Martha and I work hand-in-hand in all areas of ministry. We complement each other in the different areas of ministry.

Working together has helped us keep our marriage strong. It has not been easy, balancing family, work and ministry, but we continue to serve.

As the years go by, our community's needs also grow. Our Hispanic community has many needs, both spiritual and mate-

rial, that are not always easily met, such as financial help, counseling, housing and legal assistance. For the most part, the resources in the community come with certain restrictions that our members, depending on their legal status, may not qualify for.

Evangelization is another area of need. Martha and I work alongside Sister Rita Menart and the directors of Hispanic ministry from the archdiocese to provide retreats and speakers in our native language. We also initiated a pilot program for lay formation called "Semillas" (Seeds) in which about 70 people are enrolled.

As I look back, it has been five years of formation and nine years of being ordained for which I give God thanks for the many blessings my family and I have received. The respect and the love that my family and I receive from many people in our community, and the many wonderful people I have the pleasure of meeting and working with, is more than I could have imagined.

God is merciful in calling me to his service. The only way for me to express my gratitude is to serve my church and community with joy, humility and love.

Deacon Real and his wife Martha are members of Queen of Peace Parish in Waterloo. This article is part of a series that marks the 40th anniversary of the permanent diaconate in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

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St. John's, Mt. Vernon

Oct. 6: 4th Annual 5k Run for the Least (or walk) starts at 9 a.m. in Lisbon (one mile from Mt. Vernon) for impoverished children of Haiti to help support over 4,500 students of the Belle Fontaine area with schools supplies, books, teacher salaries and continued education for their teachers. Cost is \$25 until Oct. 1 then it's \$35. One mile Fun Run for children 10 and younger: \$10. Winners of each age division are awarded a homemade apple pie. Sign up at runfortheleast.com.

St. Patrick, Cedar Falls

Oct. 7: Parish fall festival. Turkey dinner with all the trimmings and homemade pies served 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Two service lines, including an Express Line for handicapped and those who purchase tickets online at www.saintpatrickcf.org. Adults, \$9; seniors, \$7; youth 4-12, \$4; 3 and under, free. Raffle, silent auction, bake sale, book sale, children's activities, pumpkin patch/sale.

St. Joseph the Worker, Dubuque

Oct. 7: Oktoberfest. Chicken and ham dinner served 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Craft corner, silent auction, games and more.

St. Francis (Barclay), Dunkerton

Oct. 7: Annual Fall dinner with serving from 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Menu includes roast beef and ham, scalloped potatoes, green beans, salad and dessert bar. Prices: Adults, \$9; children 5 to 10, \$6; preschoolers, free. Raffles, country store with arts and crafts, baked goods and garden produce.

St. Patrick, Anamosa

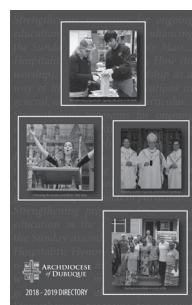
Oct. 14: Annual fall festival at the Lawrence Community Center, 600 Main St., Anamosa. Roast beef & ham dinner with sides, salads and dessert will be served from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Adults: \$11; children 5-10: \$6; children 4 and under: free. Advance tickets can be purchased at the parish office.

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