

# Wives of newly-ordained deacons played important roles in formation

By Cathy Stevens  
Correspondent

While 13 men were ordained as permanent deacons at the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, 11 wives watched with pride and joy from the pews. The day marked the culmination of the five-year journey they shared, one that brought challenges, but also rewards, beyond what they could have expected.

The wives of members of the Class of 2017 learned that the demands of the diaconate program were intensive. The men attended bi-weekly classes in a rigorous four-year graduate level academic program as well as frequent formation activities, workshops and service projects. Significant sacrifices to family life were necessary. As such, one prerequisite for the men to enter the program and again, prior to ordination, involves written consent from their wives.

While their husbands pursued their calling to be deacons, year after year the wives supported them, managing the home front while juggling their own busy lives as mothers, workers, volunteers and active parishioners.

"The past five years have involved a lot of study, hard work, and countless hours away from home for my husband Mark," said Michele van Duynhoven of Immaculate Conception Parish, Anandale. "At the beginning of formation, our younger daughter was still in high school, and balancing life with her needs and activities was especially challenging."

Julie Robitaille, a member of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Dunellen, agreed. "When Glenn started classes, much of his time was spent studying. Our three sons were in 12th, seventh and first grades. Balancing work, family and school was a challenge and taught me to prioritize. I learned that at times, I had to say no to requests of my time."

Laughing, she added, "Sometimes we only saw each other when we woke up and went to sleep! We made a point of going on date nights to reconnect."



Newly ordained Deacon Rick Stevens poses with his wife, Cathy, at the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Metuchen, May 20. Deacon Stevens was one of 13 men who were ordained to the permanent diaconate for the diocese and Cathy is one of 11 wives who shared the five-year formation process with their spouses.

While the men are instructed to put their families first, at times the message seemed to conflict with all that they were asked to do. Renee Ciszewski, of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Pittstown, whose husband Ed, was ordained, said, "These candidates are active participants in their families, careers and church communities. Their wives and children are also involved in service and volunteerism within their parishes and schools. Acknowledging and valuing these activities as supporting the diaconate candidate's formation would truly honor the statement, 'family first,'"

Nevertheless, the women also found that the journey enriched their faith profoundly. Rosa Lopez of St. Luke Parish, North Plainfield, whose husband, Reynaldo, was ordained, remarked, "One of the most beautiful things that I have learned is that God should always be the first priority and everything comes after. Putting this into practice has not only strengthened my faith in God but it has also reinforced my love for my husband

and for our three children."

For Robitaille, "My conversations with God have become more intimate," and she said she was pleasantly surprised at "how close the deacons and their wives have become. A new family has been formed, one that I love very much."

"I have grown not only in my own faith, but met wonderful women of faith on the journey," noted Ciszewski. "I'm grateful and humbled by this wonderful experience and the people I was blessed to encounter."

The women also received inspiration and support from the Center of Diaconal Formation, Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology at Seton Hall University, South Orange. Kimberly Mailley, assistant director, and Diane Traflet, associate dean and assistant professor, launched a new program in 2014 designed to provide spiritual

nourishment and accompaniment to the wives of deacons and candidates.

"We began by offering 'Mornings of Reflection' where we reflected on women in scripture and facilitated discussions and bonding among the community of wives," Mailley said. "The response has been overwhelming. We have had over 100 women join our programs so far."

The Center has since enriched its program by adding events for diaconate couples to attend together, and will offer a graduate Certificate in Christian Spirituality to interested wives. "Our goal is to build a community of women who share their faith and support each other on their journeys," Mailley said.

With their husbands' ordinations now behind them, the wives of the Diaconate Class of 2017 have words of encouragement for other wives who are earlier in the program or who may be discerning whether to begin the journey with their husbands.

"Learn to ask for help," Robitaille said. "Know who your support system is and lean on them when you need to."

"Give your husbands all of your support," Lopez said, "because it is what will help them maintain focus and accomplish their goal."

"When selecting workshops to attend," van Duynhoven noted, "wives should focus on their own personal faith formation and not just attend random sessions with their husbands."

Now, as the wife of a new deacon, she adds, "My continuing role is to help ensure that a proper balance is maintained between family, career, and church obligations."

To these faithful women, the real journey of deeper service to the Church alongside their husbands has just begun.

For further information on the Center of Diaconal Formation and programs, go to [www.shu.edu/go/diaconate](http://www.shu.edu/go/diaconate) or [Kimberly.Mailley@shu.edu](mailto:Kimberly.Mailley@shu.edu)



Among the 11 wives who attended the ordination of their husbands to the permanent diaconate were, from left: Julie Robitaille (Glenn), Barb Urcinas, (David L.), Rosa Lopez (Reynaldo), Diana Boccellari (Thomas) and Stevens.

— photos courtesy of Cathy Stevens



**MORRIS HALL**  
ST. MARY'S ASSISTED LIVING  
ST. JOSEPH'S SKILLED NURSING CENTER





*Our Continuum of Care Community Welcomes...*

**THE GREEN HOUSE® APPROACH TO NURSING HOME LIVING.**  
Our goal for each Morris Hall Meadows Elder is to have a meaningful life with as much autonomy over his or her activities as they choose. Elders live in actual homes offering more privacy and comfort than traditional nursing home settings. 24 hour support from our multi-disciplinary staff of professionals, security and a stimulating array of daily activities make life at Morris Hall Meadows enjoyable and fulfilling.



**MORRIS HALL MEADOWS**  
AT LAWRENCEVILLE



PRIVATE BED & BATH



SCHEDULE YOUR TOUR TODAY

For more information please visit us at [www.morrishall.org](http://www.morrishall.org) or contact us at [mhadmissions@morrishall.org](mailto:mhadmissions@morrishall.org) or (609) 712-1016