



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

A series of historical highlights from the first 200 years of St. Peter – Libertytown.

Deacons John Martin, Jerry Jennings and Michael Dvorak

“I’ve come to serve.” That was the response called out by John Martin in May 2009 and by Jerry Jennings and Michael Dvorak in May 2011 as each was called forward from the pews of Baltimore’s Cathedral of Mary Our Queen to be ordained as deacons by then-Archbishop (now Cardinal) O’Brien. When asked today to talk about their roles as deacons assigned to St. Peter’s, they each summarize by saying “I’m here to serve.”



Figure 1 Permanent Deacon Mike Dvorak (l) joined Deacons John Martin (c) and Jerry Jennings (r) at St. Peter's in July 2023

Both Deacon John and Deacon Jerry have served in our military, and Deacon Mike works for the Employee Assistance Program for the Department of Defense. Deacon John was in the U.S. Air Force and Air Force Reserves, while Deacon Jerry is a retired U.S. Army Colonel. All are husbands and fathers, and Deacons John and Jerry are grandfathers. They each talk about how blessed they are to serve in our parish which values its deacons and allows them to exercise their full diaconal ministry through the liturgy, sacraments, preaching and outreach ministries. Over the years, our deacons have carved out their niches within our parish. Despite all that they do for us, they feel that they get more out of their ministries than they give.

John Martin was born in Washington, DC in August 1953, the fourth of seven children. His parents John P. and Nellie Elizabeth Martin both died within four months of each other in 1965. Robert and Margaret Marquette, another couple in their parish of St. Theresa in Anacostia, adopted John and one of his brothers. Deacon John says one of the constants throughout his life’s experiences was that the Catholic Church was there to support him, noting “when my parents died, it was my parish church who brought food baskets to the house. It was our parish priest who took me and my siblings to buy us clothes and shoes. It seemed that during the times of my life when I needed support, my Catholic parish family was there for us.”

After discharge from active duty and earning an engineering degree and later an MBA, Deacon John worked for several defense contractors in engineering and management roles. He and Angela were married in May 1975. As they raised their six children, and wanting his children to view the Church as a place where they could feel safe, secure, and have fun, John became a Youth Minister. He served as a Youth Minister for 21 years before stepping back when his brother was dying of cancer. Finally, in 2004 he says “I decided, with some encouragement from my wife, to attend an information meeting regarding the Permanent Diaconate. I applied and was accepted in 2005.” He entered the Aspirancy and Formation program in 2005 and was ordained to the Diaconate May 23, 2009. Assigned to St. Peter’s, Deacon John

does a lot of pastoral care visits to homebound parishioners, visiting and bringing them the Holy Eucharist. He also teaches a couple of RCIA classes, speaks to our youth group, and helps with Vacation Bible School among his various other contributions to our parish life. While in Deacon formation he would make pastoral care visits to nursing home patients and developed a deep respect for the elderly. Deacon John and Angela opened Shepherd's Staff In-home Care in 2011. Today Deacon John feels it is an honor to be able to spend quality time visiting those who are not able to get out. He notes "they are part of our faith family and need to know they are not forgotten."

Deacon Jerry was born to GB and Muriel Jennings in Kansas City, MO in January 1954, with two brothers and a sister. With a doctorate in microbiology and another in veterinary medicine, Deacon Jerry served in a variety of senior leadership positions both here and abroad during his career in and after the Army, largely in medical research and development areas. He and his wife Jeannine were married in September 1978 and have two children.

In reflecting on his call to the diaconate, Deacon Jerry notes how we each have our own salvation history. There are many people who make us the Catholics that we are. He notes the influential roles that his parents played as did his different pastors over the years. Specifically, though, he notes his time as a parishioner at St. Ignatius Church in Ijamsville when the bulletin had an announcement about the need for a fifth grade CCD (religious education) teacher. That announcement ran a second week, and then a third. He told himself that if it appeared the following week that "maybe that's what God wants me to do." He had never taught before, but when the announcement showed up again, he applied and became a teacher. The fifth graders were a wonderful class, fully participating and asking great questions. The questions led him to think more about his lifelong faith and his role in it, and that is when he felt himself called to become a deacon. Years later, Deacon Jerry tracked down and invited those fifth graders, by then in college, to his ordination, since he says "they were the reason I became a deacon."

Deacon Jerry chairs our parish's Social Concerns Committee and does a lot of the related outreach. He does spiritual mentoring for individuals, works with people seeking annulments, and is also in charge of altar servers. He admires how our older altar servers work with the younger altar servers, and tells new servers "don't worry, you'll always be with someone that's been around, done it more times than you, and they will help you through it." With a smile, he also tells our new altar servers something he picked up from Fr. Jason Worley, "don't worry...if you make any mistakes, Father always blames the deacon."

Our deacons appreciate that our parish and our pastors have always allowed our deacons to maintain the trifold of family, job, and diaconate. It is stressed in formation that they need to maintain that balance. Both deacons also appreciate the support they receive from their wives, and specifically note how helpful it is to have a spouse that can provide advance feedback on a homily they have prepared.

Our deacons also appreciate St. Peter's rich history, noting that it is a privilege to serve on the same grounds where area Catholics have worshipped for two centuries, and to be part of a chain of salvation history that stretches back that far. They express gratitude to our pastors with whom they've served, to the late Deacon Mike Misulia ("a humble, holy man"), and most of all, to the Holy Spirit for guidance they receive. We, in turn, express our thanks to our deacons for all that they do.

In July 2023 we welcomed a new Permanent Deacon, Michael Dvorak, who was ordained in 2011 with Deacon Jerry. Deacon Mike was born to Frederick and Lynne Dvorak in Baltimore, MD in May 1967. He is the middle of three brothers. He and his wife Kim, who he met through music ministry at Immaculate Heart of Mary, live in Westminster and have two children. Deacon Mike would attend elementary school at St. Thomas More Parish in Baltimore then Archbishop Curley High School. This was where his first call to a vocation was fostered as, after graduation he would join the Order of Friars Minor, Conventual,

and become a Franciscan, following a passion he has for the lives of St. Francis and St. Clair. He would go into the novitiate at what is now the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City and then to St. Hyacinth College and Seminary in Granby Massachusetts before his discernment would have him leave the order and return him home to finish college at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work with a minor in psychology and history from UMBC and a Master's degree in social work from the University of Maryland School of Social Work in Baltimore. He has worked with many populations including those with traumatic brain injuries at Sinai Hospital, with children who suffered abuse at the St. Vincent's Center in Timonium and clients who suffered from post-traumatic stress, various addictions, schizophrenia, sexual abuse and domestic violence while interning at the Baltimore VA Medical Centers outpatient program. Early in his career, he worked part time as a counselor in the Prince Georges County DWI Education Program as well as would do on-call emergency assessments at Church Home, Good Samaritan and Franklin Square Hospitals when needed. He was in private practice with the Counseling Centers of Maryland from 1994-2008. In 2000 he would return to UMBC as an adjunct faculty member in the social work baccalaureate program teaching a class on addictive personalities which he continues today and in 2007 was asked to join the staff at McDaniel College teaching the same course. He has also been a member of the Carroll County Critical Incident Team for police, fire and EMT, as a mental health provider since 2004. He worked at the Baltimore VA Medical Center in the Hospital Based Home Care program for a couple years after graduating but then in 1993 was given the job as the first social worker for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program where he would work for 11 years with chronically mentally and medically ill, homeless and addicted veterans. As of 2003 he has been working in an internal Employee Assistance Program for the Department of Defense in Anne Arundel County and heads up the agency's Addiction Support Program working with civilian and military employees and spouses. Deacon Mike states that he has specialized in working with two populations over his 32 years of counseling, couples and those who suffer from a wide variety of addictions. He actually has a specialization in addictions counseling through the National Board of Forensic Counseling.

In reflecting on his vocational journey Deacon Mike has concluded that it is better not to ask and just listen. "If you would have told me in 1988 when it seemed my vocational journey ended that I would be a deacon in 2011, I would have told you that you were crazy." He served in music ministry at various parishes in the Archdioceses and he and his wife Kim would lead the music ministry at the Shrine of St. Anthony for almost 10 years. He feels that God has not yet fully revealed what he wants him to do but has accepted that God has always put him where he needs to be. Since ordination he has been asked to teach a class on Pastoral Theology/Pastoral Counseling at St. Mary's College Seminary in Roland Park which he did from 2011-2018. Deacon Mike also worked with dozens of couples as he ran the pre-Cana programs at Sacred Heart in Glyndon and for the Catholic Community or South Baltimore for a number of years. He was also asked by the Archdiocese Marital Tribunal Office to help with psychological reviews of annulment cases as well as act as an advocate and advisor for those who may be entering the process of annulment. He loves teaching and has found, through his vocation as a deacon, that he has been able to help people with their spirituality and faith journey as they struggle through all kinds of mental health, addictions, marriage, trauma, grief and other issues and hopes to always be available to those in need.

He is grateful to God's will to have him serve now at St. Peter's after spending his first almost 13 years of ordination at St. Joseph's Catholic Community in Eldersburg where he learned so much. "I love sharing and experiencing the sacrifice of the mass and the sacraments with people whether, baptisms, weddings or funerals. I also believe in strong preparation, especially for the sacrament of marriage and hope to work with couples on their journey into the sacrament." He looks forward to serving the people of St. Peter's and offers his service. "I have come to serve and will wherever and whenever I can by the grace of God."