

Give Us Shepherds: Dcn. Jim Matthias

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CALLIE GAY

SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC HERALD

Did your faith play a major role in your childhood?

My grandmother was very devout – my earliest memories were of her praying the rosary in French. My mother made sure my brother and sisters said our prayers at night. Not sure what impact it had on me, but I had a crush on Sr. Sheila in second grade.



- **Dcn. Matthias attended St Pius X grade school in Wauwatosa.**
- **He was in printing for more than 30 years and**

worked as a sales director at a web-printing plant in Brookfield.

- He will celebrate his 40th anniversary with his high school sweetheart Rhonda this year.
- Matthias and his wife have three sons, two daughter-in-laws and four grandchildren.



▲ *Dcn. Jim Matthias is the operations manager for Pro-Life WI. (Submitted photo)*

Did you ever discern the priesthood?

I'm not sure, but I had my own altar in my room.

What made you decide to leave the printing business?

I found myself yearning for something greater. My best customer was a deacon in Minneapolis, and we started having long conversations about faith. I found myself wanting a change. And God didn't make it easy. At just about the same time, I had two opportunities. One was my dream job in printing and the other was a complete restart working for a non-

profit. The two choices were very different, including a downgrade in our living conditions and lifestyle. My wife and I chose the non-profit. And that non-profit helped prepare me for my job as operations manager for Pro-Life WI.

What is your main focus as operations manager for Pro-Life WI?

I've been there for over three years. I oversee everything and help meet the needs of the state director and other managers. I keep them within the budget and I deal with the people who call in. I was responsible for helping bring "Unplanned" to almost 100 parishes throughout the state.

As a deacon and a member of Pro-Life WI, you've been heavily involved in the 40 Days for Life. What has been your role in that ministry?

For the past few years, we ran a program called the "40 Clergy for 40 Days." We contact the priests and deacons, and ask them to come pray for an hour. We pray for the women and their babies, but we also pray that the workers and abortionists receive a change of heart and employment. The archbishop has been there, the auxiliary bishops, and many priests and deacons, but what's amazing is it seems that every time a collar is present, we almost always hear that a woman has changed her mind and a baby has been saved. I don't know if it's divine intervention or what it is, but it sure seems a collar makes a difference. So many more go across the street to the Women's Care Center. Anytime we can get someone to go there it's going to be a win; they offer everything the abortion mill has except for abortion.

When did you feel the call to the diaconate?

Jesus is a great salesman. If you open the door just to talk, he's going to lead you to places you didn't even know you wanted to go. While I was discerning the diaconate, I started doing more service work – hospice final hours, jail ministry, standing in front of an abortion clinic, working in truck stop ministry, and talking with survivors of suicide. The more I did things where I was serving the most vulnerable and those in need, the more I felt called to be a deacon.

What has changed most about your ministry during the COVID-19 crisis?

I can't get into the jail, and I can't go visit people in nursing homes. I was able to bring viaticum to a woman who passed around Easter. It was very sad but sacred. Most of the other groups have moved online and I can still be part of that with them. Our church has been very active televising Masses and Stations and an Adoration worship service plus we have adoration every weeknight. I've actually been very busy.

How has this time impacted your faith?

One of the groups I have been working with are big followers in Schoenstatt and we had been talking about making home shrines. As this hit, I took some things I already owned and created my own "home shrine." I call my shrine The Heart of Tranquility, and I have moved my morning and evening prayer in front of it. It's been a tremendous help to me and brings me peace.

What specific gifts do you see that God gave you to serve his people?

God emboldened me – gave me the courage to do things I didn't think I could. I think I tend to find areas where people are hurting or lonely or just need an ear. I love being present for his people.

What do you love most about being a deacon?

I love seeing the joy of God in others. Nobody has all the answers, but I love being around seekers of God.