

Friday, 22 July, 2011

The Catholic Times, 3710 East Avenue South, P.O. Box 4004, La Crosse WI 54602, 608-788-1524

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Two diocesan seminarians ordained transitional deacons

By Stan Gould, Editor



CT/Stan Gould
Bishop William Callahan smiles as he congratulates Deacon David Bruener (left) and Deacon Daniel Oudenhoven following their ordination as transitional deacons.

Two Diocese of La Crosse seminarians were ordained as transitional deacons in their home parishes on back-to-back days last weekend.

Daniel Oudenhoven was ordained on June 11 at St. Bronislava Parish, Plover and David Bruener was ordained at St. Alexander Parish, Port Edwards. Both are seminarians at Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Ill.

Ordination as a transitional deacon is the final major step prior to being ordained as a priest. Deacons Oudenhoven's and Bruener's ordination to the priesthood is tentatively scheduled to take occur next summer.

Both Deacon Oudenhoven and Deacon Bruener, who have chosen to answer the call to the priesthood, are from Wisconsin, were ordained as deacons on the same weekend and attend the same seminary; but the circumstances that brought them to this point are very different.

Deacon Oudenhoven was born in La Crosse to Gary and Amy Oudenhoven. The family moved around a bit, moving to Green Bay before his first birthday, and later to Peshtigo, Wis where he attended Catholic elementary schools until the seventh grade. Moving to Stevens Point he attended junior high and high school in the public school system. After high school, he attended the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point before transferring to the University of Wisconsin Madison where he graduated in 2007 with a degree in philosophy.

Deacon Oudenhoven began to consider the priesthood during the spring semester of his junior year in college, the result of having difficulties discovering what he wanted to major in. He said that he was "never at peace with anything I tried."

The experience of consolation at Mass caused him to ask, "What does God want me to do with my life, rather than what do I want to do with my life." During an internship at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish, Wisconsin Rapids, in a bulletin item he wrote, "The experience of Christ's love caused me to become interested again in prayer and growing in relationship with Christ. ... I now want to be a priest because I feel that God is calling me to this vocation."

Deacon Bruener, the son of Dorothy and Bill Bruener of Port Edwards answered the call later in life. Taking over a family business, he ran the James Bruener Timber Products Company, a lumber yard and pallet factory in Port Edwards, for 20 years before he sold it to enter the seminary.

He was a success in business. "I was getting the American dream," he said in an interview with The Catholic Times. "I had a nice house and cars and I could take vacations and things like that, but I still had a hunger in my heart that I knew more things were not going to satisfy."

To help his discernment, he stopped doing his extracurricular activities, to free up some time, and prayed "Ok God, my evenings are going to be a lot more free. I don't know what you want me to

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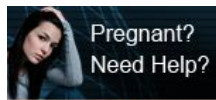
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do, but whatever comes into my life You can lead me there.”

He felt that the prayer would lead to becoming a lector or serving on a parish finance council, or something similar. During a vacation in Florida, in a parish outside of Fort Meyers, he saw a pastoral associate preparing for Mass and leading the Rosary; and he thought that would be good thing to do with his time, or maybe when he retires.



He then heard a very different question, “What if you had one year to live, what would you do with your life?” He recognized that he would not be doing what he was doing. This led to a period of discernment, that with the help of Father John Swing, his pastor at St. Alexander Parish, Port Edwards and others, he was led to the seminary.

Diocesan vocation directors stress that vocations start with the family. Deacon Bruener’s call is no exception. “I’m from a pretty prayerful family ... Mass was always very important,” he said in an interview with The Catholic Times. When his family went on vacation, after arriving at the hotel, the first thing his father would do is locate the nearest Catholic church and find out the Mass times – then the vacation could start.



The seed that planted Deacon Oudenhoven’s vocation also started in the family. Prior to the ordination, Amy Oudenhoven said of her sons’ vocation, “We are just overwhelmed that God has put his hand on our two sons. It is really overwhelming to watch this all unfold. We wish all parents could go through this because it is so beautiful, so wonderful.” Gary Oudenhoven commented on how preparation for the priesthood has changed his [two] sons, “it was phenomenal.”

Deacon Daniel Oudenhoven is the brother of Father Tim Oudenhoven, who was ordained a priest of the Diocese of La Crosse on May 29, 2010.

Tracey Oudenhoven, Father Tim Oudenhoven’s and Deacon Dan Oudenhoven’s “little sister” was very supportive of her older brothers, “They are just the greatest blessing a family could have. It was really beautiful to see God working in their life ... and how they followed His call to be priests. Tracey will be attending graduate school in Madison, majoring in Chemistry next fall.

During his homilies, Bishop Callahan stressed the life changing aspects of the ordination of Dan Oudenhoven and David Bruener. They will make a promise of obedience “to me, to my successors, but to the Church – the Church through me, and all of the various ways that you will be called to serve.” Deacons Oudenhoven and Bruener also made a promise to faithful and lifelong chaste celibacy; and a promise of prayer.

“The third is a promise of prayer for you and for me, for all of the Church and for all of the world.” Bishop Callahan stressed the importance of prayer. “It is good for you to know that we not only have an obligation to pray for you, but it is quite likewise very important for us to remember the beauty of what prayer is. Prayer is our intimate relation with Jesus Christ.”

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