



THREE *of a kind*

NEWLY-ORDAINED DEACONS & THEIR WIVES

Dominic and Frances Kerr

Dominic is Deacon at St Catherine of Siena in Birmingham

What led you to become a Deacon?

Well, I'm hoping the answer to this is that it's God's doing! For most of my adult life I believe I have felt a calling, something tugging away at me, gently and persistently pulling me forward. I haven't been able to explain this and am still unable to, only to say that in the responding, I have found myself to be increasingly more at peace. Over time, I have come to see the deacon as someone who, in the name of the Gospel, witnesses to the Father's love for all, particularly in those places where people are in greater need and for those who are struggling to believe they are worthwhile or good. Perhaps this is what we are all called to do and to be in the world for in any case? Nonetheless, preparing to become a deacon now seems like something I have always needed!

What will your new role encompass?

As a fledgling, I have imposed myself already on the good will of two parishes near Birmingham city centre and practise on them most weeks! Here, I have opportunity to learn, at least a little, how to serve as a deacon in a parish and am very grateful and happy to be doing so. I am drawn still to pastoral work in the prison and am waiting for a time when I may begin to revisit this. All the while, I continue in my various roles at school and hope to discover what it means to be a deacon here also, with the many young people I encounter from day-to-day. In prayer too, I hope that the diaconate will be a blessing on all whom I know and have known, and on my family and our lives together.

Frances, when your husband said he wanted to become a Deacon how did you feel?

Bewildered, supportive, pleased, angry, appalled, indignant, frustrated... and now... peaceful and happy! Dominic brings such good humour, gentleness, shrewdness and wisdom when being with people and I knew he was embarking on training that would enable him to be available to more people in order to help and serve them. I also trusted Dom's sense of being called. I had to be reassured many times that our daughters' needs and my needs would come first.

All my frustrations with clericalism surged forward, and indignation that only men were being allowed to follow their calling. But I know Dom felt the same and that God



was calling him knowing our concerns and frustrations. So we embarked together and I know Dom will stay grounded.

How do you nurture your faith as a couple?

Dominic: We pray together sometimes and have done many times over the years, though this is not something we've done, or perhaps felt the need to do, routinely or every day. We frequently talk about the many things of faith that matter to us: questions of belief, the Church, the things happening in the world, prayer for those in need and our hope in Pope Francis. I think that each day we try to be deeply kind to each other in all the great or small things we share and perhaps it is in this most of all that we find together our living faith in action.

Frances: Not having Dom beside me at Mass has been one of the hardest things about his training. I did try joining in the Daily Office for a bit so we would be together but it is not for me. I prefer meditation and more informal praying and our lives are so full-on that to do both is too much if the house is to stay standing and the cats fed.

What do you do to relax?

Dominic: In the good weather, I love sitting in our garden, which Frances constantly maintains and makes beautiful without my interference. Together, we love walking out in the hills when we get a chance, sharing lovely food, meeting up after work on Fridays to enjoy the pub and a nice meal, watching films and series of anything truly funny or gripping

on TV or at the cinema and, of course, supporting the mighty West Ham.

Frances: West Ham. Hmmm. Not interfering in the garden. Humph! Aside from the above I love meeting up with friends, reading, oil painting, serving on the till in Harborne Oxfam and gazing lovingly at the architecture in Birmingham!



Dirk and Marleen Hermans

Dirk is Deacon at St Edward's Parish in Selly Park, Birmingham.

What led you to become a Deacon?

Simply put: I was led. Over the years, I was strangely drawn to articles on the diaconate, or diaconate workshops at conferences that I attended. But the notion of being a deacon was always promptly rejected by myself.

But there is no escaping from God's plan, and just when he bathed me in His Grace, at a key moment in my life, He made sure the question was put to me.

How could I say no? At first unsure how I could be His servant, the Formation Programme has helped to give confidence that the Lord will always provide what I need to do His work.

What will your new role encompass?

As long as I'm in full-time work, not much can be added to my current commitments, but it is clear my contribution to the liturgy will change and I hope to be able, after the Covid-19 pandemic, to re-engage with some pastoral works, e.g. bringing Christ to those in nursing homes.

I will need to be conscious that, even more than at present, I will be looked upon (and judged) as a Christian in my secular workplace.



I'm also planning to help the local hospital chaplain and the university chaplaincy team when I can. I stand ready for whatever else His Grace the Archbishop may want me to consider doing.

Marleen, when your husband said he wanted to become a Deacon how did you feel?

Excited but also confused. This was not part of our plan. Why did God call him on this new path? I have now come to understand that our Lord is a Lord of surprises and that we are safe in His hands. We are ready for this next step in our lives. We are on this journey together.

How do you nurture your faith as a couple?

We now have a well-established prayer routine, with Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and a Rosary said daily as a couple. Regular Mass attendance is a given.

Pre-pandemic, we used to attend a few

Catholic Charismatic Renewal events each year, to refresh our spiritual batteries, and have discovered virtual retreats during this pandemic.

We have a growing library of religious books that we are slowly working our way through and share what we've discerned with each other. We both hope to continue to find inspiration and comfort in reading the Word of God.

What do you do to relax?

Spending time with our four children and their families, including playing about with the five grandchildren and doing some DIY around the house, plenty of projects there until well after retirement!

We like a good read, particularly anything historical, a bit of television and a Sudoku puzzle a day to keep the mind sharp.

John and Joanna Garvey

John is serving as Deacon at St Nicholas, Boldmere in Sutton Coldfield

What led you to become a Deacon?

I would like to say that this was a slow burn over a long period but this was something that was suggested to me by my Parish Priest, Father Van. It was a complete shock but once I had got over the 'I am not worthy' excuse (which one of us is, after all?) I felt that perhaps this was something I may be able to do. I do feel that at times, I am being dragged, kicking and screaming through formation but in doing so, I am becoming more attentive to His calling and more faithful in trusting to his designs.

What will your new role encompass?

I am currently teaching in a secular school but have contacts with the Diocesan Prison Chaplaincy team which may be an option in the future. That being said, working with vulnerable students at this time of uncertainty is certainly God's work. I hope to be involved in parish life and my experience with young people will, I am sure, be utilised.

Joanna, when your husband said he wanted to become a Deacon how did you feel?

At first I was a bit taken aback but after our Parish Priest had mooted it we went home and discussed it at length. We have been married 30 years, together

for 33. We have both had challenging jobs, me originally as a Paediatric Oncology Nurse, John as a police officer, now both teachers, and we have both seen the stark reality of life for some people and having four children, a long marriage with ups and downs, means John has a realistic view of what life can hold for some people and offer his support. He is a wonderful father, son and husband and I know that he will give his time willingly to support those around him.

How do you nurture your faith as a couple?

We have always had a strong faith but with a young family it was perhaps a little less structured than it is now. It is easy to lose a little focus when life is full of the beautiful chaos that parenthood brings but we have been blessed with the four year formation process which has positively impacted the whole family. Religion is a regular subject for discussion (and debate) in our house. We both passionately believe in faith in action and that does at times, result in some frustration in how our society conducts itself.

What do you do to relax?

We run a large youth group (over 200 children) together with some close friends. Contrary to how it sounds, this is a great source of relaxation. We love spending time with our four children and also, with our four dogs and two cats. Beautiful chaos is never far away.