

GOD IS CALLING – ‘SPEAK LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING’

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Dcn. Steve Kramer

Dcn. Steve Kramer, director of homiletics and director of recruitment at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, had planned to host a “Come and See” information session on April 18. It was designed to be an informal meeting where anyone could come in and ask about anything related to feeling called. Since the pandemic cancelled gatherings, Sacred Heart Communications Director Monica Misey interviewed Dcn. Kramer, to bring the Come and See to you.

Misey: What was your Come and See going to be, what was its purpose, and who would have attended?

Dcn. Kramer: A Come and See allows people to come in and learn about what religious life or a vocation to lay ecclesial ministry might look like. Usually, the sessions are held by specific organizations. For example, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee holds open houses for young men to learn about what it might be like to become a priest in this diocese. Religious orders also hold Come and See days to allow people a glimpse into life in a religious community. Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology is an institution that educates a variety of people: seminarians studying to be priests for dioceses or religious orders, clergy from around the world studying language and theology, in addition to lay people (non-clergy) who want to further their theological education. Many lay ministers, catechetical directors, teachers, parish administrators and chaplains have studied at Sacred Heart. So, our Come and See is really for anyone who has questions about who to talk to in order to explore various callings. We wanted to be able to make the next step a little easier; to connect people with resources.

As for who would have attended? That's the fun part for me. God calls everyone in their own way. I field questions throughout the year from people in college to people who retired many years ago. People hear God calling and sometimes the voice is loud enough for each of us to inquire about where we need to go.

Misey: Vocation is a word heard often, but what does it really mean?

Dcn. Kramer: Vocation is about what God is calling you to; it comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means to call. Everyone has a call. If you look at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's Vocation page, they list multiple ways of life people might be called to: single life, consecrated virginity, marriage, religious life, permanent deacon, and priesthood. The ones that I answer the most questions about are religious life, permanent deacon and priesthood. Let's break those down.

Religious Life: Is when a person chooses to live in community within a religious order. For men, they may choose to live their lives as either priests or brothers in a particular community. For women, they might choose a religious community and live a life as a sister completely devoted to prayer or in a community where they live together as a religious congregation yet continue to do ministerial works out in the world such as nursing, teaching or parish work. Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology is an apostolate of a religious order: The Priests of the Sacred Heart, also known as "Dehonians" after their founder, Fr. Leo John Dehon.

Permanent Deacons: Deacons receive the sacrament of holy orders and are ordained to serve parishes, the diocese and other institutions. Every priest is ordained a deacon prior to their ordination to the priesthood. Typically, a transitional deacon (one who presumably will go on to the priesthood) spends about one year in that order. Permanent deacons are men who are ordained to serve the Church and typically will not move forward to the priesthood. I have been ordained 26 years and have been blessed to serve the people of God. Deacons are ordained for service – service at the Altar, the Word of God and of Charity. Liturgically, a deacon can preach the homily at Mass, he (and the priest) is the ordinary minister of baptism and Holy Communion, may witness marriages, conduct funeral and burial services, and bring viaticum to the dying. A deacon also leads prayer/communion services and celebrations of God's Word. Much of a deacon's ministry is found outside the walls of the church; ministering to those living on the outskirts of society, shelters, food distribution, counseling, and being a bridge from the street to the sanctuary. Many deacons are married. A deacon, his wife and children must be flexible because he works a full-time job outside of the church, is married, and fulfills many ministerial roles.

Priesthood: A priest gives his entire life to God. He is ordained to serve the people of God and, like the deacon, promises obedience to his bishop if he is a diocesan priest. Religious order priests are consecrated men who take the three vows: of poverty, chastity and obedience, and are bound to the other members of their community. Priests will preside at Mass, preach, baptize, witness marriages, hear people's confessions, anoint the sick and the dying, and counsel people. A priest's life is bound up in service to his people. Priests primarily serve in parishes; however, many serve as hospital and nursing home chaplains, some serve in the armed forces as military chaplains. Others work at colleges and universities in campus ministry and some are called to administrative posts with the diocese. No matter what, they are priests first. Their primary duty is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and administer the sacraments.

Misey: How would you describe a lay minister?

Dcn. Kramer: A lay minister refers to someone who is not ordained but works or volunteers for the Church. Think about the people who run Confirmation programs, catechists, pastoral associates, ushers, choir members, those who take communion to the home-bound, parish administrators, folks who run soup kitchens, meal programs and clothing ministries. The list is endless. Milwaukee has a very vibrant lay ministry. Many have come to Sacred Heart for further education, studying in our Cor Unum Master's program. Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI is very supportive of continuing formation for lay ministers. Susan McNeil, director of the Office for Lay Ministry, is a great resource.

Misey: So, what is the next step for someone interested in learning more?

Dcn. Kramer: Well, since most buildings are closed to the public, the best way to contact me is via email until our world returns to some normalcy. People are welcome to contact me, or you, and we can direct them to diocesan contacts, religious orders, etc.

Misey: Any last words of wisdom for someone who might feel like God is calling them to something more?

Dcn. Kramer: Yes. God calls everyone and everyone has a vocation. I'm happy to help you discern what that might be for you. You are not committing to anything, just an honest conversation. Five or ten minutes may make a tremendous difference in your life. No matter what your vocation is, remember that every vocation is a call to love.

Helpful Resources:

Contact Dcn. Steve Kramer at skramer@shsst.edu or Monica Misey at mmisey@shsst.edu

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology: <https://www.shsst.edu>

Priests of the Sacred Heart, "Dehonians," vocations: <http://dehoniansusa.org/vocations/>

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee vocations: <https://www.thinkpriest.org/Think-Priest.htm>, <https://www.archmil.org/Vocations.htm>

Office of Deacon Formation, Archdiocese of
Milwaukee: <https://www.archmil.org/offices/Diaconate.htm>

Religious discernment for women: <https://www.archmil.org/Vocations/Womens-Religious.htm>

Religious discernment for men: <https://www.archmil.org/Vocations/mens-religious.htm>

Lay ministry options: Contact Susan McNeil, Director, Office of Lay Ministry at the Archdiocese of
Milwaukee: <https://www.archmil.org/ArchContacts/Susan-McNeil.htm>