

*The Spiritual Journey of Robert L. Martin*  
*To be ordained a Permanent Deacon of the Archdiocese of Washington*  
*At the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*  
*By Archbishop Donald Wuerl on June 26, 2010*

I was born and raised on a farm in Charlotte Hall, Charles County, MD. I attended elementary, junior and high schools in Charles County, MD. After graduating from high school, I attended Morgan State (now) University and received a B.S. in chemistry. Later, I attended Georgetown University in Washington, DC and received a Ph.D. in chemistry.

Joan and I are high school sweet hearts. We attended the same high school and were married in college. This was a “mixed” marriage in that I was not a Catholic at the time, but we agreed that any children that we had would be raised in the Catholic faith. With God’s blessings, we will be married for 48 years on July 22. We have three children (2 sons, 1 daughter) and 4 grandchildren (3 boys, 1 girl).



After 3 1/2 years in New Jersey, we relocated to Washington, DC where Joan continued her employment with the Internal Revenue Service and I began graduate studies at Georgetown University, receiving the Ph.D. in 1972. Joan retired from IRS in 1997. I have been employed at the Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition since 1972 where I am currently the Deputy Director of the Division of Biotechnology and

GRAS Notice Review. I have also taught chemistry for some 25 years as an Adjunct Professor at the University of the District of Columbia.

We moved to Waldorf in 1975 and Joan and our children joined St. Peter’s Church at that time. Even though I was not Catholic, I attended Mass with my family. We became regular fixtures in the left hand second row pew facing the altar at the 8:00 a.m. Mass.

After attending St. Peter's for some 22 years, with Joan and our children, I converted to the Catholic faith at the Easter Vigil in 1997. Joan was my sponsor. I recall Deacon Wilson telling me during that time: "As a non-Catholic, you seem to be more Catholic than a lot of Catholics."

I am also a 2002 graduate of the Education + Parish + Service (EPS) program sponsored by Trinity University in Washington, DC. At St. Peter's, I have taught CCD and am a certified catechist. I have also served on the Parish Council, as a lector, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and as Sacristan. Additionally, Joan and I served as co-chairs of the Forward in Faith campaign for St. Peter's. I am a member of the Knights of Saint John International Sacred Heart Commandery No. 309 having joined this organization in 1997. I was a fortunate recipient of the Archdiocese of Washington Order of Merit medal from Cardinal McCarrick on December 12, 2004. Additionally, I have served as a volunteer since 2002 at the Body of Christ Farm in Malcolm, MD where I teach religion to many young children in the area.

I can't say that I had some lightening bolt experience that called me to the diaconate. It was more like many small incidents where I observed, or was involved, in the grace, mercy and love of God with other people and the satisfaction that I received from being involved in these activities. Things like visiting the sick, teaching CCD, evangelizing -- all of these activities served to continue to remind me of how blessed I am.

Throughout my life, I know that I have been blessed. I have a fine, understanding wife, fine children, grandchildren, relatives, in-laws, friends, good health and a good job. I thank God for all He has done in my life and I can't help but ask as the Psalmist in 116 asks: "What return can I make to the Lord for all He has done for me?" I came to realize that I could help in the Church by using the "talents" that God has given me. At the same time, there was the feeling that I could do more. I believe that becoming a deacon will help me do that. I am reminded of an African American hymn which says: "If I can help somebody as I pass along the way, then my living will not be in vain."

The diaconate program has been a humbling and revealing experience for me. It has been rewarding and challenging. It has resulted in many changes in my life, primarily realizing that God is in control.

When I had time, my "hobbies" were reading, gardening, golfing and building things. Hopefully, I will be able to do more of these things in the future.