

Deacon serves church and family

By GEORGE B. CLAY SR.

Journal Staff

UNION SPRINGS — When John Prave goes to Mass at St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, he looks like any other parishioner coming to worship.

But there is a significant difference.

After kissing his wife goodbye, he goes to a side door to don the robes of the Catholic priesthood and his family goes into the chapel to await the service. Prave, who lives at Springport Cove with his wife and three children, is one of 54 lay deacons in the Rochester Diocese; he regularly assists the Rev. William V. Spilly in services at four Catholic churches along Route 90, and occasionally assists the Rev. Paul I. Cloonan in two more churches near Route 34.

Becoming a deacon is a necessary step before a man can become a Catholic priest. Prave said he may never take that next step. But, as a deacon he wears the same alb and stole the priest wears, except a deacon drapes his stole across his left shoulder instead of wearing it around his neck. When he was ordained on April 17, 1982, he took obligations similar to those of a priest, except he will continue with his marriage.

Prave, Spilly, Cloonan and Sister Brigid Quinn form a team that ministers to six parishes. Besides St. Michael's, they are St. Patrick's in Aurora, St. Joseph's in Cayuga, Our Lady of the Lake in King Ferry, St. Bernard's in Scipio Center and St. Isaac Jogues' in Fleming.

One weekend a month Prave gives six homilies. A homily is a talk related to the scriptural passage of the day. A sermon is a spiritual talk that isn't necessarily based on the day's scripture, Prave said.

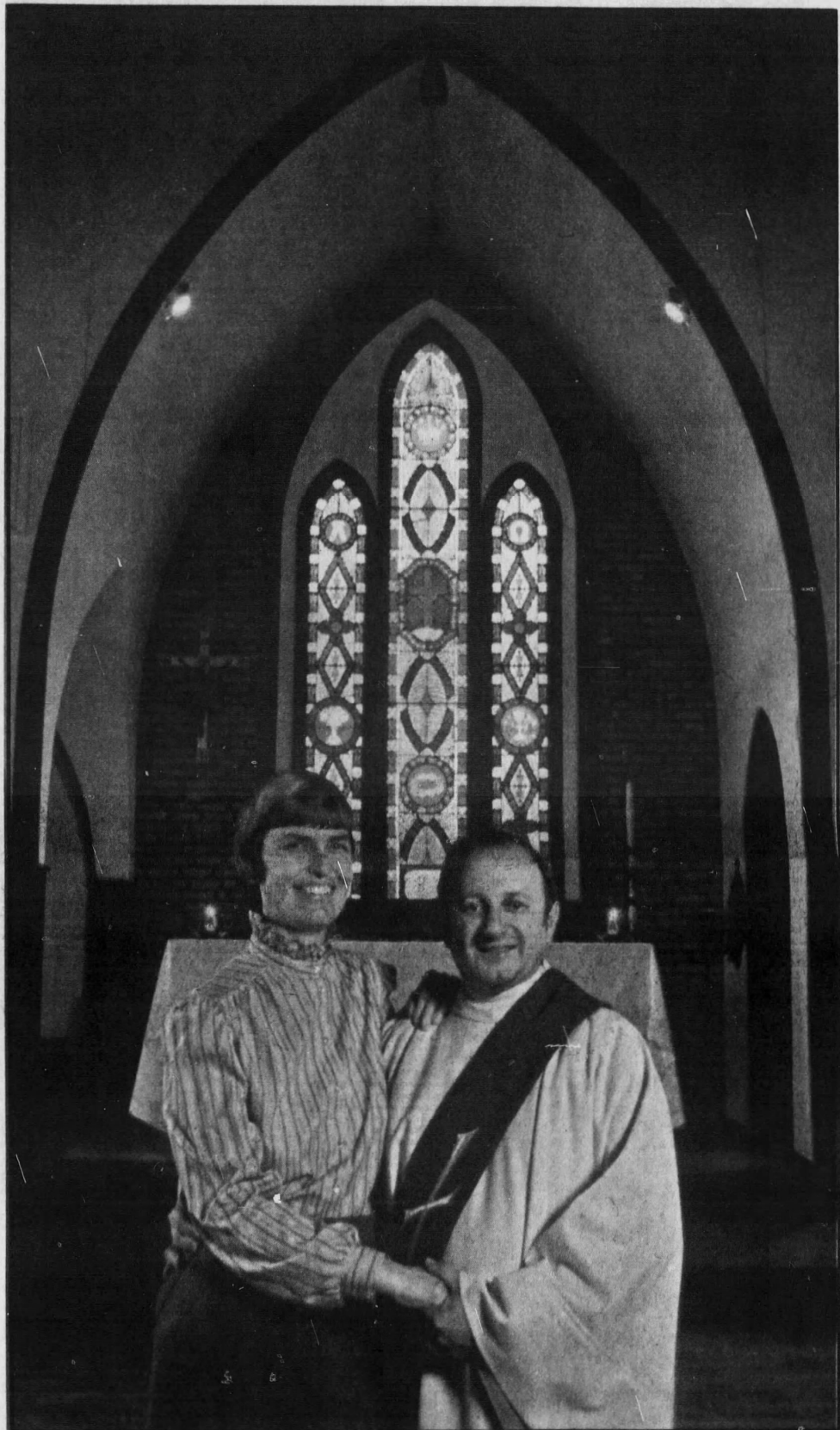
He performs weddings; conducts funerals; baptizes; visits the sick in hospitals and nursing homes; and teaches religious classes, including those for conversion, confirmation and in preparation for marriage. He also attends weekday parish meetings and gives workshops to religious education instructors in parishes other than the six he serves.

Prave earns his living as chairman of the Mynderse Academy English Department in Seneca Falls. He also serves on the Union Springs school board.

"I'm busy. There aren't that many evenings I don't have some kind of appointment," he said. Prave said he has to set priorities on everything he does. Being a deacon is very rewarding personally and provides greater opportunities for service, he said.

Prave said he doesn't sense many changes in his lifestyle. He was busy with other activities, such as Union Springs Lions Club, before being

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Deacon John Prave stands with his wife, Karen, inside St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Union Springs.

RICHARD MARSHALL/Journal Staff

Deacon

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ordained into the diaconate. He dropped those activities and substituted church service.

But there are other changes. Prave said he is more sensitive to spiritual growth, he reads at leisure more to keep up with what is happening in the church than for pleasure, and he didn't get much fishing done this summer.

His oldest daughter, Kathie, said life with a deacon is "kind of exciting." She gets to meet more important people than the average church member. That list includes Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who heads the Rochester Diocese; Msgr. George A. Cocuzzi, who heads the diaconate program, and Sister Mary Hilaire Gaelens, who formerly assisted Cocuzzi. Kathie said she also enlarged her circle of friends through camping trips with families of other deacons.

"If I have a question about religion, father usually knows the answer. I don't have to wait to ask the priest," she said.

Kathie, 17, said she notices time more on Sunday than any other day; the family has to be at church at least 10 minutes before the Mass begins and stays a few minutes afterwards while her father greets parishioners.

The real time involvement for the family, she said, was during the four years her father took weekend seminary classes in Rochester. The children went from school one Friday a month to the home of Valmai Vazquez Scanlon of 13 Seminary St., Union Springs, and were picked up about 5 p.m. Sunday. But since ordination, that returned to normal, she said.

Michelle, 15, said she notices less difference than Kathie. The diaconate is fine for the family, she said, "because Daddy likes it."

And John, 14, said his father has been involved in either study or church service for nearly half of his life. "All I remember is his going to classes," the younger John said.

Prave's wife, Karen, says she shares his ministry: "we're both very much involved in education." She teaches earth and physical sciences at Romulus school district.

She went with him to classes at the former St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester and then to St. Bernard's Institute at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School. About a third of their 20 years of marriage has been involved with the church.

"We are together — and separately — more busy than ever before. Our marriage joy has not changed. We have to be more conscious about making time for each other," she said. Karen said that sometimes they just make a date.

Beyond church work, Karen said, their life is busy just because they have teenagers who are involved in their community. Kathie both takes and teaches dancing; Michelle plays French horn in the Syracuse Youth Symphony; and the younger John is working on his Life rank for Boy Scouts and plays basketball. It seems someone always has to be taken somewhere, she said.

"There are lulls, which are wonderful," she said.

Karen said, "I strongly feel John is a deacon because the Holy Spirit led him to become one. Because of his study, the Holy Spirit is a force in our lives. The spiritual level of our lives definitely has changed."

"He's a very gentle, loving man. He was before ordination, and he is now. The difference is spiritual growth."

"I'm spiritually fed by John's

homilies. He really knows how to touch and affect people," she said.

Parishioners at St. Michael's are very loving and very supportive, Karen said; they have a strong sense of pride that John is a deacon. She said typical comments to her are, "John is doing a very fine job;

you must be proud of him; that was a fine homily John gave Sunday."

When the time in the Mass comes to offer the sign of peace, Prave goes down an aisle and shakes hands most of the time. Occasionally, someone also will get a hug. But Karen gets a kiss of peace.

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