



JOURNEY TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Deacon LaRocca to be ordained on Sept. 6

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — As he draws closer to his priesthood ordination, Deacon Hunter LaRocca said that his prayer has been, “Lord, I just want to be a good priest. Please make me a good priest. This is all I want to do.”

His Excellency, Bishop Glen John Provost, will ordain Rev. Mr. Hunter Thomas LaRocca to the Sacred Order of Holy Priesthood for the Diocese of Lake Charles at 10:00 a.m. Saturday, September 6, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

“I never thought I was the most worthy person to undertake something as important as becoming a priest, nevertheless, I feel convicted that this is what God wants from me,” LaRocca shared. “I pray that He will give me the grace to live out this vocation with fidelity.”

A parishioner of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Lake Charles, Hunter is the 29-year-old son of Kurt and Kara Smith of Oberlin, and the late Barry LaRocca. He is also the younger brother to Ryan LaRocca.

A graduate of Lacassine High School, it was during his college years when Hunter took notice of how God was speaking to him through others.

“I first heard the call to the priesthood in my twenties, but it was as early as grade school when people were telling me that I would make a good priest,” he recalled. LaRocca admits dismissing their comments thinking the priesthood was not for him.

“I think the calling was more evidenced when I had a reversion back to the Catholic faith as a young adult. I started thinking about what God wanted me to do with my life,” said LaRocca, who was working in the banking industry at the time.

“The more often people would comment on how I would be a good priest, I would stop and think to myself, ‘Alright God, what are you trying to tell me through these people? You obviously have something to say to me,’” Deacon LaRocca noted, ready to place his life in God’s hands.

Hunter credits a year of living at the Vianney House, with Father



Deacon Hunter LaRocca

Nathan Long as director at the time, in helping him realize he was ready to apply to Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

“When I finally saw more specifically what a priest does day in and day out, I really felt called to this vocation,” he said. “I finally started to see more and more of myself in the role of a priest, and I felt peace in that.”

Deacon LaRocca’s advice to those discerning a vocation to the priesthood is first and foremost prayer. From his earliest memories of childhood, prayer is something that has always been a part of his life.

LaRocca also encourages young men not to be afraid of committing to a decision for fear of not knowing how things will turn out.

“Even if a man has discerned that he wants to go to seminary and then ends up leaving, he will be a better person for it in the long run,” he said. “I always felt a sense of belonging at the seminary. The community of brothers was the best part and is the thing I miss most.”

A few books that proved helpful during LaRocca’s discernment process include *An Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis, and *To Save a Thousand Souls* by Father Brett Brennan.

Diaconate Assignment

Deacon LaRocca has been serving at the Cathedral after completing his philosophy and theological studies at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans with a Master of Divinity degree in December 2024.

His diaconate assignment these past eight months has been “nothing short of eventful,” he said.

“Since I came into a parish right in the midst of the busiest time of the year, it was quite a different thing to experience compared to summer assignments. It was great to see the Cathedral in full swing, especially with extra diocesan events,” he remarked. “Having a school also provided more things to be a part of — school Masses, teaching a class, Catholic Schools Week, graduations, ceremonies, and more.”

LaRocca said that while he did gain experience through various ministries as a seminarian, taking on the role as deacon being able to celebrate the sacraments of baptism and marriage, preaching and serving as a deacon at Mass, and being able to bless objects and people, has been a “huge blessing and a joy.”

“I have been preparing for the past five to six years to serve the people of this Diocese, and now I am seeing that preparation coming to fruition,” he said. “That is one of the most beautiful things to witness, and I am blessed every day that the Lord allows me to see how He is working in the lives of His people.”

Next to the sacraments, one of LaRocca’s favorite things about being a deacon is preaching homilies.

“My first homily was very nerve wracking, however, overtime I have become much more comfortable in my own preaching style and delivery,” he commented. “One rule of thumb I stick to with preaching is ‘land the plane.’ I never try to go too long. Conciseness and brevity is the key.”

Living Out His Vocation

When asked how he can be a vessel to keep the Light of Christ shining for younger Catholics in the Diocese of Lake Charles, Deacon LaRocca has observed that younger people today are looking for others who are genuine and authentic.

“As a Church, we need to show the younger generation that there is joy in every vocation, whether it is Priesthood, Religious, Consecrated, or Married life,” noted LaRocca. “I know for me, I was always inspired by priests who lived out their vocation with an immense amount of joy who were authentic and genuine about it.”

Hunter said he is grateful for the prayers and support of his family. In addition, he has been encouraged



Deacon Hunter LaRocca offers a special blessing to his mother and stepfather, Kara and Kurt Smith of Oberlin, following his diaconate ordination earlier this year on Saturday, March 29, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Deacon LaRocca will be ordained to the Holy Priesthood on Saturday, September 6, in the Cathedral.

along his journey through the support of many priests.

“One of the biggest inspirations for me has been through the example of so many of priests serving in our diocese who live out their vocation with joy and fidelity,” he shared. “I would also add that Bishop Provost has been a huge inspiration and a model to follow for how to live out a life of service to the Church.”

Deacon LaRocca is grateful for the formation he received in the seminary, acknowledging that trusting in the process was one of the hardest parts.

“Seminary formation is when the Church tries to form the man in four different ways — human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. For someone to basically change who they are as a person as a whole is not easy,” said LaRocca. “But this is because the Church deserves

only the best when it comes to Her priests.”

Since being ordained a deacon earlier this year on March 29, Hunter said that he has already seen the grace of God at work in order for him to live out his vocation as a priest.

“The Lord has truly given me the graces needed to carry out my ministry,” he said. “I find it a privilege and an honor to lay down my life for Christ trusting that the Lord will allow me to be that vessel and instrument for His grace.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE: *Before the conclusion of the Liturgy of Holy Orders, the first priestly assignment for LaRocca will be announced. The ordination will be live streamed on the Lake Charles Vocations Facebook page for those unable to attend. A reception will follow in the Ave Maria Hall. The Cathedral is located at 935 Bilbo Street.*

TO BENEFIT VOCATIONS FOR DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

Seminarians triumph over Priests in Wiffle Ball three-peat



2025 WIFFLE BALL CHAMPIONS: A team of Seminarians held on to their championship title for the third year in a row claiming an 11-5 victory over a team of Priests during the 2025 Bishop’s Invitational Wiffle Ball Classic. The annual fundraiser for the Serra Club that supports the Office of Vocations in the Diocese of Lake Charles took place on Saturday, August 2, in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Family Life Center gymnasium. Before the game began, Bishop Glen John Provost led everyone in praying the Prayer for Vocations. As Wiffle Ball Champions, the Seminarians received a \$2,000 check for the Seminary Burse Fund, while the Priests received \$1,000 for the Priests Retirement Fund. The champions, from left, are Ezekial Richmond, Liam Leonard, Justin Fontenot, Deacon Hunter LaRocca, Luka Hagen, Owen Bailey, Nicholas Poncho, Logan Guillot, Cameron Fontenot, and Philip Seilhan. They are joined by Serra Club President Dr. Keith DeSonier, far right. LaRocca, who will be ordained to the Priesthood on September 6, jokingly remarked, “It always feels good to be a winner, but I know that could all change next year since I will be moving to the team of Priests.” For more information on the Office of Vocations, visit www.lcvocations.com or email michael.caraway@lcdioocese.org.

(Photography credit: Matthew Johnson)



LIVE AUCTION RAISES \$1,525: A live auction of several items during the fourth inning stretch helped raise funds for the Serra Club that supports the Office of Vocations. High bidders, from left, are Toby Richmond from St. Pius X Parish, \$225 for wiffle ball autographed by Logan Guillot (seminarian) and Father Michael Caraway (Vocations Director); Tyler Pedersen from St. Francis de Sales Oratory, \$600, autographed T-shirt by TEAM PRIESTS; Michelle and Kevin Fontenot from St. Pius X Parish, recipients of autographed T-shirt by TEAM SEMINARIANS, \$400; Donna Suarez from Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, \$200, statue of Pope St. John Paul II; and Annette Simmons of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish, \$100, commemorative Wiffle Ball DVD.

(Photography credit: Matthew Johnson)



Veritas 2025 will feature Mike Aquilina on Sept. 13

LAKE CHARLES — The 14th annual Catholic *Veritas* Conference in the Diocese of Lake Charles will feature author and songwriter Mike Aquilina as keynote speaker on Saturday, September 13. This year's theme is "The Church Fathers."

An internationally acclaimed speaker on the Church Fathers, Aquilina co-founded the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology with Dr. Scott Hahn. He serves as contributing editor of *Angelus News* and general editor of the *Reclaiming Catholic History* series. He has hosted 11 television series on EWTN and is past editor of *New Covenant* magazine and *The Pittsburgh Catholic* newspaper.

Veritas, which is Latin for Truth, will take place at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Family Life Center, 3939 Kingston Street, with doors opening at 8:00 a.m.

The conference will explore the life and writings of the early Christians, especially those who contributed substantially to the development and growth of the Church we know today, helping us understand our beliefs more concretely and come to appreciate how deeply we, as Catholics, remain rooted in the apostolic times.

The conference is an event for all adult Catholics, consisting of keynote addresses, breakout sessions, prayer, lunch and vendors. It begins with Mass at 8:30 a.m. in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church, 3939 Lake Street, followed by the Welcome and Keynote at 9:30 a.m. in the Family Life Center.

In addition to the keynote, other highlights include breakout sessions by local clergy and lay presenters. Returning this year will be two sessions in Spanish. Another returning favorite will be exhibits by local Catholic organizations, artists, and businesses.

Breakout session presenters include:

- **Father Jeffrey Starkovich** — Pastor of St. Pius X Catholic Church in Ragley.
- **Father Nathan Long, V.F.** — Pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church in Lake Charles and Dean of the North Central Deanery.
- **Father D.B. Thompson, JCL** — presenting in both English and Spanish, Father Thompson will speak on "The Church Fathers/Padres de la Iglesia." He is Promoter of Justice and serves as a judge in the Office of Tribunal.
- **Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, R.S.M.** — Executive Director for Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana. Sister Marie Josepha's topic will be "Living in Community According to the Wisdom of Saint Augustine."

2025

VERITAS
CONFERENCE

September 13, 2025

The Fathers of the Church

Keynote Speaker: Mike Aquilina

Mike Aquilina is author of more than seventy books on Catholic history, doctrine, and devotion. He is co-founder, with Scott Hahn, of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, based in Steubenville, Ohio.

September 13th, 2025. Early Registration \$30 until August 31. Lunch \$7.
Register at: lcdiocese.org/resources/event-registration or call 337-439-7400

- **Jared and Jennifer Watson** — The Watsons are parishioners of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. They will speak on "Living the Faith of Family Life."
- **Miguel and Estele del Rosal** — presenting in Spanish on "*La Gracia del Espiritu Santo en los Sacramentos del Bautismo y la Confirmacion*" (The Grace of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation) Miguel and Estele are parishioners of St. Henry Catholic Church.

Follow the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lake Charles Facebook page at facebook.com/lcdiocese/events for updates on breakout session speakers.

Online registration is \$30 per person through August 31 and \$40 per person September 1 through noon September 12. Parish groups of six or more receive an additional \$5 off per person.

To register online, visit <http://www.lcdiocese.org/resources/event-registration> and click on *Veritas* Conference. Registration forms are also available in the parishes of the Diocese of Lake Charles and at the Office of Religious Education, 1201 Ryan Street, Lake Charles.

Cash (when paying in person) and check payments are accepted with paper registration.

Call 337-439-7400, Ext. 309 or email veritas@lcdiocese.org for more information. Please note that registration is non-refundable. On-site registration will be available at the door on the day of the event.

A limited number of box lunches may be purchased separately for \$7.00 per lunch, which are pre-purchase only.

The conference schedule, which is subject to change, is as follows:

- **8:00 a.m.** — Doors open, Registration and Exhibits in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Family Life Center, 3939 Kingston Street
- **8:30 a.m.** — Mass in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church, 3939 Lake Street
- **9:30 a.m.** — Welcome and Keynote: Mike Aquilina, Family Life Center
- **10:45 a.m.** — Break and Exhibits
- **11:15 a.m.** — Breakout Session I
- **12:00 p.m.** — Lunch, Exhibits, Confession
- **1:10 p.m.** — Announcements
- **1:15 p.m.** — Keynote: Mike Aquilina
- **2:30 p.m.** — Breakout Session II
- **3:30 p.m.** — Conclusion

Upcoming Around the Diocese

International Culture Festival is Sept. 20 at LC Event Center

LAKE CHARLES — The International Culture Festival — a family evangelization event — is planned Saturday, September 20, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Lake Charles Event Center. Admission is free.

The indoor festival is a way to evangelize through culture that we are all children of God.

"It will be similar to the Three Kings' Day celebration held in January the past several years at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church," said Ricardo Ruvalcaba, one of the event organizers with the International Club of Southwest Louisiana. Ruvalcaba also serves as Spanish Pastoral Assistant for the Diocese of Lake Charles.

"When Jesus said to Peter, '*Duc in altum*' (Latin), 'Put out into the deep,' I believe Jesus meant that he wants his followers to always 'think big,'" said Ruvalcaba.

The six-hour festival will feature a wide variety of international dances, entertainers, international food, educational talks, an international art exhibit, an a cappella singing competition, regional costume contest, and a photo exhibition of the play "*The Luminous and Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary*," presented annually by St. Henry Catholic Church.

"The festival is a great opportunity to meet people from different cultures without having to travel far," said Ruvalcaba.

Local Food Drive for Abraham's Tent planned Aug. 24

LAKE CHARLES — The annual "Clean Out the Freezer and Pantry Day," sponsored by Sportsmen For the Hungry, in affiliation with Hunters For the Hungry, is scheduled for Sunday, August 24, 2025, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the Pathology Laboratory Parking Lot, located at 830 West Bayou Pines Drive. A convenient drive-thru drop-off service will be provided near the Lake Street parking lot entrance.

Southwest Louisiana residents are encouraged to clean out their freezers and pantries to help feed the hungry in the local community. Donations of wrapped and labeled frozen meat and fish (wild and domestic), canned or boxed foods, rice, cooking oil, seasonings, vegetables and paper goods will be accepted.

All donations will be delivered directly to Abraham's Tent, a local non-profit organization whose mission is to provide food for the poor and hungry in Lake Charles every day of the year.

'Loving Through Loss' Workshop is Aug. 23

RAGLEY — Red Bird Ministries, in partnership with St. Pius X Catholic Church, will present "Loving through Loss," a couples workshop for grieving families of the loss of a child from pregnancy through adulthood.

The workshop will take place on Saturday, August 23, at St. Pius X Catholic Church, 16816 Highway 171. Check-in will begin at 8:15 a.m. and the workshop will conclude with 4:00 p.m. Anticipated Sunday Mass.

Free registration is required for material preparation. Families will be grouped by age of loss.

For more information, please contact St. Pius X Parish Office at 337-725-3719 or email pastor@spx.church.



Bishop Provost blesses new prayer garden at OLQH

By Sarah Richard
Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish

Bishop Glen John Provost blessed a new prayer garden at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church on Sunday, July 13, 2025.

Two years ago, a family from Our Lady Queen of Heaven approached Monsignor Daniel Torres, Pastor, with a desire to establish a prayer garden to honor Our Lady of Lourdes. At the same time, Monsignor Torres had also been reflecting on creating something on the north side of the church in honor of Our Lady.

After many consultations, several drafts

of the garden design, and the assistance of parishioner Gayle Zembower, a final plan was accepted. With the work having reached completion, a beautiful sacred space has come to life.

The garden features statues of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette, inviting all who visit the prayer garden to contemplate the grace of the apparitions at Lourdes and the message of prayer, penance, and healing. There are also multiple plaques — highlighting the Glorious, Joyful, Sorrowful, and Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary — that line the surrounding walls near the garden.

The donor for the project wishes to remain anonymous and hopes that all who visit will be able to pray the Rosary, ponder its mysteries, and offer intentions for their families, the living and unborn children of the world, and for healing and protection in their daily lives.

You are cordially invited to visit at any time to pray, reflect, or simply sit in silence, asking for the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette. May this prayer garden be a blessing to all who enter it, and a reminder of Mother Mary's maternal care for the Church and for each one of us.