

## SIX DEACONS HONORED WITH DIOCESAN MEDAL OF HONOR



*Six deacons who have served their parishes and the diocese well and faithfully for a long period of time received recognition at the close of the Mass of Ordination June 20. Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, presented each man with the Diocesan Medal of Honor. Father Joe Callipare, the Vicar for Deacons, read the following remarks about the service of each of the deacons.*

### **Deacon John Morgan**

Deacon John Morgan was ordained to the diaconate on May 10, 1980, a member of the first group of men to be ordained to the permanent diaconate for our diocese. While John's parochial assignment was St. Paul Parish, Pensacola, his years as an active deacon were spent in service to the administration of the diocese particularly in the areas of real estate, property development and construction. John also served as co-director of the Permanent Diaconate Program, and subsequently as Director of the Permanent Deacon Formation Program and Director of Permanent Deacon Personnel.

John's parochial ministry has centered on the sick and the shut-ins of St. Paul Parish. He assisted many a parishioner in preparing for death over the years. John brought together a number of St Paul parishioners and assisted in their training so they could join him in bringing the Eucharist to those parishioners who were unable to attend Mass. As a member of the parish Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) team, John faithfully for many years led the "Breaking Open of the Word" with the candidates every Sunday.

His Holiness, John Paul II bestowed upon Deacon Morgan the Pro Ecclesia Award on September 24, 2000.

John retired from parochial diaconate ministry in 2007, and from diocesan administration in December 2008.

### **Deacon Walter Richardson**

Deacon Walter Richardson was also ordained to the diaconate on May 10, 1980 in that historic first class.

While Walt's parochial assignment was St. Mary, Fort Walton Beach, his diaconal ministry extended beyond the boundaries of St. Mary's. He was instrumental in bring to our Diocese the Cursillo Movement. Because of his 30 years service in the U.S. Air Force, Walt shared his diaconal ministry as needed at Eglin Air Force Base. During the mid-1980's when there was a significant change in parish priests at St. Mary, Walt stepped in and coordinated the RCIA for one year, and then become an RCIA team member for a number of years. Walt was responsible for setting up the first Diocesan Black History Mass through the involvement of the Catholic African American Cultural Awareness Group of Okaloosa County. If we were to ask Walt how he feels, he would reply, "Too blessed to be stressed." Walt truly has a smile on his face and a love for his faith. While retired from active diaconal ministry, Walt has set up an "office" on the side pew of St. Mary Church where he can be found praying, listening and sharing.

### **Deacon Bradley Seabrook**

Deacon Bradley Seabrook, like the two previous honorees, was ordained on May 10, 1980. Bishop Rene Gracida appointed Bradley co-director of the Diocesan Office for Black Catholics in May of 1980, a position he held until March of 2003. On January 7, 1981 Bradley's first parochial assignment was to St. Anthony Parish, Pensacola to assist the needs of the parish and the pastor. He has given tirelessly to his community, especially to the children where he hand-delivered to every third grader in the county a dictionary. He helped establish the order of the Knights of Peter Claver in Florida in late 1970 and served as Grand Knight. He is also an honorary life member of the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus.

In 1993, Bradley requested a change in his parish assignment from St. Anthony to St. Jude Parish, Cantonment and St. Elizabeth Parish, Barrineau Park where he continues to serve. Bradley served on the board of directors of the National Black Catholic Congress and worked to provide the resources to help implement the pastoral plans that came out of each congress. Bradley officially retired as the director of the Office of Black Catholics in March 2003, but continues to serve his parish and the people he loves.

### **Deacon Robert Saxer**

Deacon Robert Saxer was ordained on May 23, 1981. Bob's parochial assignment has been to St. Mary Parish, Fort Walton Beach. In the early days, Bob's diaconal ministry to the parish was primarily focused on liturgy and homiletics given his productive pediatric practice at that time.

Bob's diaconal ministry has reached out beyond the boundaries of St. Mary's. Bob is a member of the Catholic Medical Association, and since his retirement from the practice of medicine he has been twice president of C.M.A. He was a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Medical Ethics and co-

founder of the Florida Catholic Medical Association. Bob's medical background along with his study of medical ethics has made him a fearless and tireless preacher in the area of pro-life issues. And over the years, Bob has served as a valued confidant to many of St. Mary's priests.

### **Deacon Charles Wolf**

Deacon Charles Wolf was ordained on May 31, 1989. Charlie's parochial assignment has been to St. Mary, Fort Walton Beach.

Charlie dedicated his diaconal ministry to the care of the sick, especially those Catholics who were patients at the Fort Walton Beach Medical Center. Since religious affiliation is listed only by denomination at the hospital, Catholics are not designated by their parish. Charlie visited each and every Catholic in the hospital and made sure that their pastors knew they were in the hospital. If the Catholic was not affiliated with a parish, Charlie always made sure the patient knew a priest was available for them, especially for confession and anointing of the sick. And some times, Colonel Deacon Wolf decided the patient needed a priest whether the patient wanted one or not! At 90 years of age, Charlie continues to serve.

### **Deacon Gerard Williamson**

Deacon Gerard "Jerry" Williamson was ordained on June 6, 1992. His parochial assignment is St. John the Evangelist Parish, Pensacola.

Jerry has exercised his diaconal ministry in numerous ways. At the parish level Jerry has coordinated RCIA, prepares parents and godparents for infant baptism, visits the sick and coordinates those who visit the sick. From October of 2000 to April 2001 he served as administrator of the parish during the sabbatical of the previous pastor. Today, Jerry is director of St. John Catholic Cemetery.

During the 1990's Jerry gave his time the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal as an Auditor. This was a position he held until he assumed the position of Director of Permanent Deacon Formation, and Director of Permanent Deacon Personnel in 2001. During the past five years, his primary focus has been directed to the formation of the class which was ordained today.