



The MESSAGE

Southwestern Indiana's Catholic
Community Newspaper

August 21, 2026

Volume 56, Number 49

www.evdiomessage.org

**Congratulations,
educators,
on milestone
years of
service and
retirements!**

On Aug. 4, Diocese of Evansville Catholic School administrators and teachers with milestone anniversaries in 2026, as well as those retiring, were formally recognized during the annual Back to School Mass. Congratulations to all!

See photos and more on page 8.

Walking Together in Christ

By MICHELLE PRIAR

Superintendent of Schools,
Diocese of Evansville

Special to The Message

As our school hallways fill up with students and staff and the excitement of a new school year is underway, I find myself reflecting on the incredible privilege it is to serve the Catholic school community in the Diocese of Evansville. I've served as a teacher, principal, associate superintendent and now superintendent in our diocese and have had the honor of walking this journey with so many wonderful people.

This year, as students, teachers and staff return to the classroom, we do so celebrating this year's theme, Walking Together in Christ. I believe this captures the very heart of what it means to be a part of our Catholic school family. For our students, teachers and staff, families and communities, this is more than just a slogan or a tagline but rather an invitation to view the school year as a shared journey. None of us walks alone: the nervous mom dropping her child off on

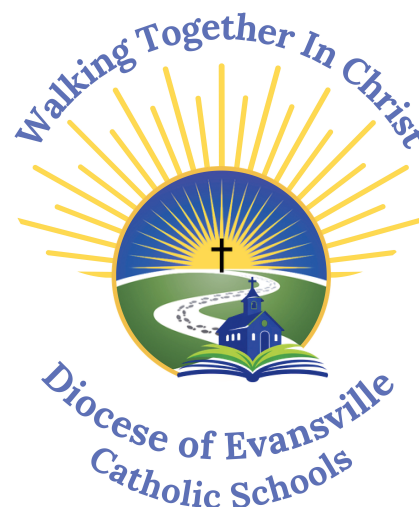
that first day of kindergarten, the senior preparing for graduation or the brand new teacher who is just entering the teaching profession. We're all travelers walking a road guided by the same light of Christ.

For students, walking together in Christ means learning to be good companions to one another — including a classmate who sits alone at lunch or helping a new student who is still getting acclimated to new surroundings. Our Catholic faith doesn't work in isolation but is lived out through kindness and understanding.

For our teachers and staff, this theme is a reminder of the sacred responsibility that we carry to help students grow closer to God. It's a daily choice to walk alongside our young people not just as instructors of knowledge but as witnesses to the Gospel. I'm continually inspired by the dedication of our faculty and staff who give so much of themselves to form the minds and hearts of our young people.

For our parents and families, walking together in Christ is a call to partnership.

See **BACK TO SCHOOL**, page 2



Deacon Jack Tuinier 'always had a call to ministry'

By JOHN ROHLF

The Message assistant editor

*Editor's Note: Over the past couple of months, we conducted interviews with the newly ordained permanent deacons shortly before or shortly after the Aug. 8 ordination. Over the next few months, we will publish stories in **The Message** in the order the interviews were conducted. We will also post video from our interviews on our Facebook and YouTube pages.*

After a period of time discerning the priesthood earlier in his life, Deacon Jack Tuinier said his skills, gifts, knowledge and needs of the church were "coalescing around the permanent diaconate."

Deacon Jack Tuinier is one of 16 men who were ordained to the permanent diaconate during the Rite of Ordination to the Sacred Order of Deacon Aug. 8 at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville. Deacon Tuinier is assigned to St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Dale. As the lone member of the 2026 diaconate class who is not married, Deacon Tuinier made a promise of celibacy during the ordination.

Originally from Kalamazoo, Michigan, Deacon Tuinier came to the area in 1992, when he went to St. Meinrad College. After graduating college, Deacon Tuinier decided to stay in the area and suggested his parents move here with him.

"They had me after 25 years of marriage, so I figured it would be easier for me to have them close by than me going back and forth," Deacon Tuinier said. "So they thought yeah, that was a new adventure for them as well. So they moved down. So we all got here in 1997 and we've been living here ever since. And I just love the area here."

Despite not being raised Catholic, Deacon Tuinier said he had a Catholic influence in his life from an early age. He was raised Lutheran, but Deacon Tuinier attended a Catholic grade school, which was across the street from where he lived. Deacon Tuinier's parents wanted him to have "a good, strong Christian education," he said. Growing up, Deacon Tuinier said his



The Message photo by Megan Erbacher

Deacon Jack Tuinier, who is one of 16 men ordained to the permanent diaconate Aug. 8 at St. Benedict Cathedral, holds the Book of Gospels during the Rite of Ordination to the Sacred Order of Deacon.

parents were very religious and they had faith talks, prayed and read the Bible.

In his junior year of high school, Deacon Tuinier made the decision to enter the Catholic Church.

Deacon Tuinier believes being exposed to different faith perspectives growing up was "immensely helpful" not only in his personal life, but also in his ministry. Deacon Tuinier has worked at Christ the King Parish in Ferdinand for the past seven years, where he is the Director of Youth Ministry and Faith Formation.

"When I'm approached by a non-Catholic or when I have non-Catholics who are wanting to come into the

church through the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) process, I get where they're coming from . . . When Catholics have misunderstandings, I know exactly where those misunderstandings are coming from. I can relate to that. And so I can kind of shift the focus and shift them back a little bit on track."

Deacon Tuinier added he would never trade his faith upbringing, adding it also helped him develop his love for scripture.

Years before entering the permanent diaconate Class of 2026, Deacon Tuinier previously discerned the possibility of entering the priesthood. This began as

See **DEACON**, page 5