

# Ordinations 2022: Soon-to-be priests ready to serve the Church

by Abbigail Saffert  
Prairie Catholic correspondent

Three Diocese of New Ulm seminarians will be ordained priests on Saturday, May 28, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. at the Church of St. Mary in Sleepy Eye. If a new bishop of the diocese has not been appointed at that time, Bishop Emeritus John M. LeVoir will return to the diocese to ordain the men.

## DEACON THOOFT

Thoughts about the priesthood came early for Deacon Tanner Thooft. It was in second grade, when he attended regular Saturday night Mass with his family, that he wondered what it was about the priest celebrating Mass that drew so many people there each week.

“I remember being really intrigued by that,” Thooft says. “There must be something special, something different here.”

Thooft questioned his parents about it afterward. Living and working on a farm with his family were the two most significant features of his life, so he asked where his parish priest’s family and farm were. When his parents told him that the parish and community were the priest’s spiritual children, Thooft initially thought that this path wasn’t for him. But yet, he wondered what would make someone give up a family to pursue the priesthood?

The question of what was so important about the priest’s role stuck with Thooft through Catholic school and into high school when he had the opportunity to go on a retreat. At the time, he wasn’t much interested in the retreat. “I didn’t want to get anything out of it - just get out of school.”

However, during a time of quiet prayer on the retreat, Thooft found himself walking the Stations of the Cross and feeling the sense that something in life wasn’t quite right. “I couldn’t put my finger on it,” he recalls. “I’ve got friends, good grades, teachers like me; I love my family. But there’s something that’s off.” In praying and speaking with God, Thooft realized that doing things his way wasn’t leading to happiness, and that proved to be the turning point that led him to seminary. In seminary, Thooft was

influenced by the example of faithfulness and holiness from his father. He recalled his dad bringing the problems and decisions of everyday farm and family life to Mass each week and laying them at the foot of the altar.

“This is what you do as a priest,” Thooft says. “You have nothing of yourself to offer. You bring the parish to the Lord, lay them at the foot of the altar, and offer the sacrifice of the Mass for them.”

Thooft also drew on the lessons of the farm. “With the farm, you really have to learn to rely on God,” he says. “You do your best. . . work and do everything perfectly, but it’s still up to God whether things work out.”

This focus on God in everyday life is also one of the aspects of the priesthood Thooft is looking forward to most.

“One of the great joys will be to visit with farmers and families, to walk into their everyday life, into the joys, sorrows, great things, disasters. And I am bringing Christ into this situation, whatever is happening. Even something like fall harvest, to put in the bulletin that Father’s day off is Monday, and he would love to help in the fields. The Lord loves these things. He’s given you the vocation to be a farmer, so do it well, and you’re serving Christ - when you go to work, to the grocery store, whatever you’re doing.”

## DEACON HANSEN

Deacon Nathan Hansen started to consider the priesthood after watching his father become a permanent deacon for the diocese in 2012.

“As I was thinking about what I wanted to do and what my mission is, I started praying and asking God what His plan was, so I just kept my heart open,” Hansen says. “I kind of thought about the Old Testament stories, where God calls you, but no one had called me like that.”

While thinking and praying about the decision, Hansen enrolled in a community college in Hutchinson, Minn. On the drive to and from school, he listened to clergy speak on *Relevant Radio* and thought he could see himself as a priest. “There’s a lot of good a priest can do, and I found myself with a



Deacon Tanner Thooft  
Scott & Debbie Thooft  
St. Edward, Minnesota



Deacon Nathan Hansen  
Deacon John & Ruthann Hansen  
St. John, Darwin



Deacon Joshua Bot  
Deacon Bruce & Juanita Bot  
St. Edward, Minnesota

desire to help people,” he recalls.

Hansen remembers falling asleep one night thinking that he had no desire to spend his life behind a desk. “There’s no peace; there’s no joy there. I told my parents and said I think I might be called to be a priest instead of spending the year trying to become an engineer.” With his parents’ support, they all went out to coffee to discuss this new path. Through this conversation, Hansen decided to take a year off to discern. “That was really life-giving for me to have that time to process and discern,” he says.

The discernment led Hansen to begin speaking with the vocations director for the diocese, but he remained unsure. He took a construction job, but “as much as I enjoy working with my hands, there was still no joy or peace.”

Hansen’s next step finally became apparent on a TEC retreat (Together Encounter Christ) where young adults explore and deepen their faith. “I encountered a guy who said ‘seminary is a place for young men to pursue the ways of God.’”

“That was clear,” Hansen said. “That’s where I want to be.” He called the vocations director and entered the seminary.

Hansen jokes that studying philosophy in seminary “wasn’t what got me out of bed in the morning.” At one point while studying in Rome, he recalls seeing another man who loved philosophy and thinking: “Lord, I’m not like him. Why should I keep going?” Hansen remembers walking by a little chapel and having the sense of the Lord saying, “Nathan, I call who I call.”

“It’s not I who chose Him, but He who chose me,” says Hansen.

Through this and many other moments, God continued to lead Hansen through seminary. He remembers praying, “Well Lord, if you want me to go, you’ve got to make it happen.”

Hansen looks forward to seeing the Lord’s work as a priest in the people around him. As a kid, he remembers going with his parents to daily Mass and listening to the older generations telling stories over coffee and donuts afterward.

“What every priest needs to do is listen to his people. I think I learned that when I was young,” says Hansen, recalling the stories and lessons from those early times. He continues to look forward to “really encountering the people, being with them and seeing what God is doing with their lives.” He also hopes to be a good administrator and to be a faithful steward of the gifts his parish staff brings to the table, “to help take that from being a job to being a vocation and having an encounter with the Lord, learning to thrive with the Lord and doing his work.”

## DEACON BOT

For Deacon Joshua Bot, discernment started with a game of chess. When his parish priest came to the family’s home for dinner, Bot, then a second-grader, challenged him to a chess match. “I lost in two moves, which immediately earned my respect and admiration for him,” remembers Bot. “However, I started from that time to see priests as more approachable, which eventually led me asking myself whether I might be called to that.”

Bot pursued that question by visiting St. John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul to consider whether to enter. “I got to know the seminarians, and I saw that

fraternity they had. It was different from any other group of guys that I had been a part of up to that point. It was a group of guys who all wanted to grow in holiness and serve God’s Church, while supporting one another in doing so.”

Bot decided to enter the seminary, and in his third year, he spent time studying and praying in Rome. While there, a retreat experience became a turning point for him. “I was just praying to God asking him if this was something that I could really do, and be fulfilled in doing,” said Bot. Being a husband and father was also something Bot had a deep desire for, so he spent time praying for clarity. “As I prayed that prayer, I closed my eyes and saw myself as a husband and father in a perfect family, with an awesome job. However, even though everything was perfect, I didn’t feel fulfilled,” he recalls. When thinking of himself as a priest, though, even imagining a situation where everything was going badly, Bot still found a sense of peace and fulfillment. “It was as if God was saying, ‘Even if all you had left was me, I would still be enough for you.’ It was at that point that I really made my decision.”

Bot is looking forward to many aspects of being a priest. “I look forward to serving God and living my life giving myself to Him and his people by saying Mass, hearing confessions, and serving the people of God.”

**The Diocese of New Ulm priest ordination on May 28 will be live-streamed at [www.dnu.org](http://www.dnu.org). A recording of the Mass will remain on the website for on-demand viewing.**