

# Two seminarians set to be ordained priests for diocese in June



Next month, Deacons John Hayes (left) and Shawn Polman will take the final step in their eight year discernment journey toward priesthood. *(Photo by Sam Patet)*

by Sam Patet  
*Prairie Catholic* Correspondent

This summer, the Diocese of New Ulm will have not one, but two reasons to celebrate when Deacons John Hayes and Shawn Polman are ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John M. LeVoir.

“I can both believe it and am excited for it, and also healthfully nervous about it,” Deacon Hayes said about his upcoming ordination.

Deacon Polman agreed. “Just last week, we had to write a letter to the bishop petitioning him to ordain us to the priesthood,” he said, referencing a letter he wrote to Bishop LeVoir in early February. “As I was writing that letter to the bishop, it was just really surreal that it [ordination] was already here.”

Both 26, the two have been studying for the priesthood the past eight years at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. While certain parts of their vocation stories are similar – they both felt called to the priesthood at a young age, and they both entered the seminary after graduating from high school – other aspects are unique.

**Prayer gives Deacon Hayes the confidence to say yes**  
Deacon Hayes first felt called to the priesthood in the second grade. “The Lord, for whatever reason, gave me the grace ... to know my vocation at a very, very young age,” he said.

His mom, Patti Hayes, agreed. “Probably in about second grade. I’m guessing that that was the first indication that we noticed,” she said.

Deacon Hayes’ desire to be a priest remained steady throughout his childhood. In high school, though, he struggled with saying yes to that call, largely because he worried what his classmates would think.

“I wanted to fit in a little bit more, so I also wanted to become a mechanical engineer, or there’s a point in time when I wanted to be a philologist and work with languages,” he said. “But in all those instances, I never felt any peace.”

He said it wasn’t until he began praying and receiving the sacraments more often that he began to hear the Lord’s voice and receive the confidence he needed to say yes.

That “yes” he gave as a high schooler led him to the seminary: four years at St. John Vianney College Seminary and another four at the St. Paul Seminary. He enjoyed those eight years, particularly the “good, holy, wholesome” friendships he formed.

“Most of the formation I’m slightly convinced actually happens through the friendships, through ... having someone see you as you are in all of your goodness and then all of your imperfections and then seeing that I am loved in these,” he said.

Deacon Hayes’ father, Tom Hayes, enjoyed getting to meet his son’s friends. “We’ve enjoyed all of the seminarians ... and just making them part of our family along the way here,” he said.

When asked what advice he had for men thinking about the priesthood, Deacon Hayes gave a simple answer: Follow the Lord.

“If you listen to him calling your name, there’s no need to fear,” he said. “He’ll make everything go as needed.”

### Deacon Polman perseveres through schoolwork with help from St. John Vianney

Deacon Polman’s mom remembers the first time he told her he wanted to be a priest.

“He came to me when he was five years old and said he wanted to be a priest,” Jean Polman said. “When he graduated from high school, he still held to the belief that he wanted to be a priest. So we supported him.”

His dad, Ron Polman, also backed his decision and said he’s seen his son grow during his time in the seminary.

“He’s grown very strong in his faith,” Ron said, not only in knowing the Church’s teachings but also being able to share that with others.

“He’s doing what he’s called to do,” Ron said. “He seems really happy, and so I’m happy for him.”

One of Deacon Polman’s favorite

## Join the Celebration!

Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon John Hayes and Deacon Shawn Polman for the Diocese of New Ulm will be held Saturday, June 6 at 10 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, New Ulm. A reception will follow at the St. Anthony Elementary School gymnasium, New Ulm.

*Due to social distancing precautions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the liturgy may be open only to the deacons’ immediate families and priests of the diocese. However, the diocese will livestream the liturgy starting at 10 a.m. For updates regarding plans, visit [www.dnu.org](http://www.dnu.org) or call the diocesan Office of Communications, (507) 233-5332.*

experiences in seminary was ministering at St. Michael’s Catholic Church in Farmington. He served there during his four years at the St. Paul Seminary under the mentorship of the parish’s pastor. This extended internship gave him plenty of opportunities to experience the day-to-day life of a priest, from teaching classes and preaching at Sunday Mass to making communion calls and visiting the homebound.

“Seeing the joy in that ... helps me to look forward to the parish and just being with the people of God,” he said.

Still, seminary wasn’t always easy. “I’m not an academic, so school comes difficult for me,” he said. He credits St. John Vianney – the patron saint of priests who himself struggled with schoolwork – for

helping him persevere.

“I struck up a relationship with him in prayer,” Deacon Polman said. “It was kind of his intercession that helped me to persevere in the seminary. Some days, classes were just really hard and I wanted to give up. But I’m like, ‘Well, if St. John Vianney could do it, I can do it.’”

Eight years later, his hard work is coming to fruition. And while he’s nervous to take on all that will be asked, he’s at peace knowing that the Lord will help him.

“The demands are really high in the priesthood, but at the same time, the Lord’s patient with each one of us,” he said. “He works with our gifts and talents even though we may not be perfect at times.”

## Your future priests - a snapshot

### DEACON JOHN HAYES

**Age:** 26  
**Parents:** Thomas and Patricia  
**Siblings:** David (29), Anna (28), and Daniel (23)  
**Home parish:** Church of St. Gregory the Great, Lafayette School, New Ulm; University of St. Thomas, St. Paul  
**Seminary education:** St. John Vianney College Seminary (2012–2016), St. Paul Seminary (2016–2020)  
**Seminary apostolic service:** Volunteer at Sharing and Caring Hands, religious education teacher, RCIA teacher, organ teacher, and Mass accompanist  
**Hobbies:** Reading, cooking, music, and calligraphy

**Mass of Thanksgiving:** Sunday, June 7 at 9:30 a.m. at St. Gregory the Great, Lafayette

### DEACON SHAWN POLMAN

**Age:** 26  
**Parents:** Ron and Jean  
**Siblings:** Katie (29) and Kari (23)  
**Home parish:** Church of St. Mary, Cottonwood  
**Education:** Lakeview Public School; University of St. Thomas, St. Paul  
**Seminary education:** St. John Vianney College Seminary (2012–2016), St. Paul Seminary (2016–2020)  
**Seminary apostolic service:** Praying the Rosary regularly outside of Planned Parenthood, parish faith formation instructor, and tutoring children at Mary’s Place homeless shelter.  
**Hobbies:** Watching baseball (Minnesota Twins!), summer activities: hiking, camping, etc.

**Mass of Thanksgiving:** Sunday, June 7 at 3 p.m. at St. Mary’s, Cottonwood