Holy See gives approval for diocesan ordination

By Dino Orsatti

STEUBENVILLE — Former Pentecostal minister, Transitional Deacon Drake A. McCalister, has been given approval by the Holy See to be ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Steubenville.

Diocese of Steubenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton, who received the letter from the Holy See on Nov. 6, said he will now ordain Deacon McCalister Dec. 19, 5pm, at Holy Family Church, Steubenville. A reception will follow.

“Thanks be to God! And a strong sense, a sobering sense of the increased responsibility and accountability that comes with ordination to the priesthood,” said Deacon McCalister when he received the news from Rome.

Deacon McCalister, a husband and father of five, will also become the first married priest to be ordained in the Steubenville diocese. Since 1967, the Holy See has granted dispensations to Protestant clergy converts, on a case-by-case basis. Apostolic celibacy, however, remains both the norm and the ideal for the Catholic priesthood.

Deacon McCalister said he is not an advocate for the end of celibacy in the priesthood, adding, “While I joyfully take this next step, there is a strong awareness that saying yes to Jesus in the priesthood is also saying yes to taking up my cross in a deeper way. I don’t know that anyone is ever excited for the cross, but it is joyfully embraced (see, Hebrew, Chapter 12, Verse 2) when viewed through the eyes of the saving work of Jesus.”

The letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to Bishop Monforton stated that Pope Francis, on Sept. 26, granted the dispensation for Deacon McCalister and was subject to the following conditions: “With regard to the church’s traditional discipline of priestly celibacy, it must be ensured that clergy and faithful are helped to understand this exception to the traditional discipline; the candidate must be informed of and agree to the condition that remarriage, in the case of his wife’s death, will not be possible after ordination; and the candidate will not be permitted to transfer to another country to take up priestly duties without the approval of the Holy See.”

Deacon McCalister was part of the first diaconate class in the Diocese of Steubenville in 2010, when Bishop R. Daniel Conlon, now bishop of Joliet, Illinois, was shepherd of the diocese. Deacon McCalister said he “felt the Lord calling him to inquire about a dispensation for the priesthood,” and Bishop Conlon agreed with the idea. The process continued with Bishop Monforton.

The transitional deacon was scheduled to be ordained June 21, but prior to the ordination, the Diocese of Steubenville discovered it had not submitted the final materials requesting this dispensation to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The materials were then sent to the Holy See as soon as the discovery was made.
“The brief delay served to help me grow in patience and to reinforce in me that when it comes to priesthood, I cannot say I ‘should’ have received something at a certain time. The Lord’s timing is perfect. The call to holy orders is from the Lord and granted by the church. It is not mine to take, but to receive,” said Deacon McCalister.

While being the first married priest to be ordained in the diocese, he will not be the first married priest to serve in the diocese. Father Raymond Ryland, who was a minister of the Episcopal Church who converted to the Catholic faith, was ordained in the Diocese of San Diego and moved to Steubenville with his wife in 1998. He served at Holy Family and St. Peter parishes from 1998 until his death in 2014.

Deacon McCalister’s first assignment as a priest will be parochial vicar to Msgr. Gerald E. Calovini, pastor, Holy Family Parish, Steubenville, as well as assisting with hospital and nursing home ministries. He will also continue his position as coordinator of the catechetical practicum at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

When asked what he’s most excited for in his priesthood, Deacon McCalister said, “Mass and mission; life in the spirit and engagement in the mission, those are the two things that I am most excited about.”