

A man of many titles

Fr. Bill Korpi's path to the priesthood took many twists and turns

By **LISA SOCARRAS**
For the Catholic Herald

Father Bill Korpi has been a husband, father, grandfather and now a priest. He seriously considered the vocation of priesthood at two times in his life — first in 1965, at the age of 20, as he neared his departure from the Army and thought about marrying his sweetheart, Vincenza “Vinnie” Fimia. On a retreat at Mission San Miguel in California, he prayed and felt God urging him to marry. Years later, after his wife died in 2003, prayer steered him in a different direction — toward the priesthood.

Now parochial vicar of Church of the Nativity in Burke, Father Korpi was ordained in June 2008 at the Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington. He attended Blessed John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass., which specializes in late vocations, serving 124 dioceses and 20 religious orders in America.

Ranging in ages from 30 to 60, the seminarians come from diverse professions, including business, medicine, education and service industries ready to serve God as priests. Father Korpi left a career in finance to follow God's call.

Long before the priesthood, Father Korpi spent his life serving the Church. As a permanent deacon since 1988 and throughout his 35-year marriage, the years were filled with service. He and his wife spent years instructing couples as they prepared for marriage, teaching them how to balance family finances and raise children. Their example of love and fidelity impressed many, living



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Fr. Bill Korpi served as a permanent deacon before his wife of 35 years died and he felt called to the priesthood.

At age 14, he was sent to a Lutheran seminary high school because his parents and pastor thought he had a vocation. Father Korpi returned home after a year because he said he was “too young and immature.”

His faith journey continued in the Army when he was stationed in Greenland and had the opportunity to talk with a Catholic priest after attending Mass with a friend.

“I asked him the typical questions about statues, confessions, all the misconceptions,” he said. After talking on several occasions, the priest encouraged him to further

degrees in education and business.

In 1968, he and Vinnie married and bought a house in Falls Church, where they joined St. James Parish. They adopted their son, Michael, in 1978. Together, they were involved in Church ministries including the children's liturgy committee. Father Korpi taught ninth-grade religious education and was motivated to study theology to further his spiritual knowledge.

“The kids were defeating me,” he said.

He attended the Notre Dame Graduate School of Christendom College in Alexan-

later was assigned to Nativity. Today, the two work together again as parish priests.

While at St. Philip, Father Martin gave Korpi the opportunity to serve in many capacities.

“Father Martin told me that he wanted me to do all I could do as a deacon,” Father Korpi said. “I preached every Sunday. I served as (director of religious education). I did marriage work.”

After serving for 10 years as a deacon at St. Philip, Father Korpi was assigned to Nativity where he served for 10 more years as deacon. During those years, he and his wife became the adopted grandparents of four sisters who had lost their grandfather.

At Nativity he assumed an additional area of responsibility — annulments. This would lead to a ministry he has found extremely rewarding.

“It began with a woman bringing her mother in who had been sitting in the back of church crying for years,” he said.

Her mother had been divorced, but did not remarry. Unknowingly, her mother was able to receive holy Communion thanks to the investigation and explanation by Father Korpi. This motivated him to help others with similar problems. He held seminars on annulments and large crowds showed up. Today he continues this healing work through the priesthood.

“The restoration of one person gave me the zest to help others. It's like coming back to life. The Church is with them,” he said.

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Long before the priesthood, Father Korpi spent his life serving the Church. As a permanent deacon since 1988 and throughout his 35-year marriage, the years were filled with service. He and his wife spent years instructing couples as they prepared for marriage, teaching them how to balance family finances and raise children. Their example of love and fidelity impressed many, living out their vocation as they struggled with Vinnie's illness of multiple sclerosis. Father Korpi and their son, Michael, cared for her in their home as the disease progressed.

For Father Korpi, a lifelong relationship with Christ began in his early years in Michigan. Raised a Lutheran in a small town, he remembers the first time he stepped inside a Catholic church.

"I was around 10 years old, riding my bike and I saw the door of the Catholic church was left open and I snuck in," he said.

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"I asked him the typical questions about statues, confessions, all the misconceptions," he said. After talking on several occasions, the priest encouraged him to further study the Faith.

"He told me, 'I think you're ready for instruction,' and six months later I became a Catholic," he said.

While in Greenland, his unit made periodic trips to Fort Belvoir in Virginia. On one of those visits, at age 19, Father Korpi met Vinnie, a nice Catholic girl and the woman he would later marry. He left the Army in 1965, moved to Virginia and began a career in financial management, attending college at night, earning advanced

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He attended the Notre Dame Graduate School of Christendom College in Alexandria in the evenings.

While working downtown in Washington, D.C., Father Korpi attended noon Mass at St. Patrick Church and learned about the permanent diaconate program.

At the same time, St. James had a deacon assigned to the parish and Father Korpi was inspired to apply to the program himself. He was accepted and ordained to the diaconate in 1988. He was assigned to St. Philip Parish in Falls Church where he assisted Father Richard Martin, the former pastor, who

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In 2003, while a deacon at Nativity, his beloved Vinnie died. At the end of that year, after much prayer, he decided to apply for the priesthood. After his ordination, he was assigned to St. Mary Parish in Fredericksburg and then to Nativity. In addition to his parish responsibilities, he is a spiritual director for Arlington Diocese Cursillo.

One of his favorite mottos hangs on the wall of his office, taken from *God's Little Instruction Book*: "Sorrow looks back. Worry looks around. But faith looks up."

Socarras is a freelance writer from Annandale.