

I Never Saw It Coming

In late 1997, the Diocese of Manchester invited men of the diocese to inquire about the permanent diaconate. My wife and I attended an information session on a cold night in January in the basement of St. Joseph church in Salem. That winter, over 200 men attended one of these sessions, and 27 were eventually selected to join the formation program which was to begin in the fall of 1998. *I Never Saw it Coming*, but for whatever reason, I was one of those 27.

After our ordination in April 2002, all the new permanent deacons anxiously awaited to hear our parish assignments. I assumed I wouldn't be assigned to our parish, St. Matthew in Windham, because they already had a deacon, or in Salem, where we live, because St. Joseph also already a deacon. But I just assumed I'd be assigned to another parish down the road from where we lived at the time. When the letter of assignment arrived, I learned that I was assigned to St. Patrick in Pelham. *I Never Saw that Coming...* in fact, I had to drive to Pelham to find where St. Patrick was! (I had only ever been in Pelham once, when our kids when quite young, to attend Old Home Days.)

To be honest, it was initially a bit of an adjustment. We had become so comfortable at St. Matthew, and very much a part of the parish community. Our kids received their sacraments there, I was a lector, Claire in the choir and we were both involved in a lot of different parish activities. It felt like home. So for both of us, moving to a new parish was a little scary. Today, as I write this, I realize that we now think of St. Patrick as our parish home, as much or more than we did in our previous parish. *We Never Saw that Coming.*

Sixteen months ago, something happened that *None of Us Saw Coming*. The COVID 19 pandemic caused the whole world to pause, and for many, it was a chance to think/rethink how we wanted to conduct our lives going forward. During this time, I particularly enjoyed watching Cardinal Dolan say Sunday Mass from St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. In a recent homily, Cardinal Dolan told of a conversation he had with an older woman who said she enjoyed watching Mass in her living room, and wasn't sure she was ready to "come back to church." She went on to say she liked watching from the comfort of her couch, in her pajamas, with a Bloody Mary on the table next to her. To which the Cardinal replied, "Now, Mom, that's not exactly the right spirit."

The Cardinal was right, people have returned to church, and that's a wonderful thing. But during the pandemic, I did a lot of reflecting, and *I Never Saw This Coming* so soon, but I recently decided it's time for me to retire from active ministry in the Diaconate.

I'm grateful and blessed to have been at St. Patrick Parish for past 19 years. While some might say that having had five different pastors in 20 years has been a difficulty for St. Patrick Parish, I have found it to be a blessing. Each one taught me different things and helped to develop me as a deacon. To all of them, I am very thankful. I'm also grateful to the entire St. Patrick Parish community. I thank you for welcoming me and making me a part of your community here in Pelham.

But perhaps I'm the most grateful for the fact that after 19 years, I can probably finally say that I wasn't a "blow-in" to Pelham. *I Never Saw That Coming*, and I never anticipated the blessings I would receive from the people and the community at St Patrick Parish.

I will miss you all, and I encourage you to look for the hand of God's providence in *the things you never saw coming*.

Fondly,

