



# Parish Couple of the Month

## April 2021

### Deacon Mike & Sheila Anderson

Believing the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ to be the core message of Christian Faith, the story of Deacon Mike and Sheila Anderson began with their own experiences of “Dying to Self, Rising, and Going Forth” during a Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) retreat weekend.

Sheila was born and raised in the traditional Catholic family. She was the fifth child of eight. Her parents were very involved in the Catholic Church, Catholic schools and have been members of the same parish for over sixty years in Denver - and counting. She and her 7 siblings were all sent to Catholic grade school and high school. Sheila, whose faith has always been important to her, remembers seeing the priests in clerics and nuns in their habits, so committed to their faith, and thinking “This has got to be true. They wouldn’t make all of this up.” All the Sacraments were special and very important for Sheila. She remembers her First Communion as very special, and after receiving the Holy Eucharist, kneeling and praying in her white dress and veil in the pew... even as some others were not so impressed. The sacrament of Confirmation was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then on to Catholic High School. After graduation, Sheila lived with a friend who had had a baby during high school. The roommate’s sister was involved in the TEC community. She invited the two of them to come along on a retreat weekend and Sheila found it to be a great way of deepening her faith and becoming part of a community. She became involved in many of the activities and programs for TEC, which was a perfect fit for her to continue in service to others, as her parents had shown.

Mike, on the other hand, had not been brought up with any faith. His military family moved almost every three years and in high school they moved to Georgia. While playing football, it was on the field where he met his best friend and then his family. Often upon arriving at his friend’s house, his mother June always had food waiting for them and when things quieted down, she would mostly talk with Mike about the love and mercy of God, and then the Catholic Faith. After high school, Mike turned down a football scholarship to work on a sailboat in Hawaii. The first time he returned home for Christmas, he went to visit June, soon to be his God-Mother, and told her he wanted to join the Church. The following Saturday, Mike was baptized, and fully received into the Faith all in one afternoon. This started him on his path, moving to Colorado to attend school in Boulder, attending Mass on a regular basis, and slowly learning about his new faith. One day a friend of his told him not to make plans for the weekend, and they took him on a surprise TEC retreat! It was at this event where Sheila and Deacon Mike met... sort of. “I saw her and thought, hmmm, I think she’s too young”. Sheila, who always thought she would marry a mountain man, said to her friend, “That’s the man I’m gonna marry”. They didn’t actually meet that day, but eventually, serving together on various programs, taking lunches to shut ins, visiting youth at a detention facility, and others, they met and a little over a year later were married.

Their relationship has always been bonded in service. They credit this to the example Sheila’s parents had modeled. They have always served – giving constantly to their parish and community. After moving to Gunnison, they served on the parish council, church maintenance, liturgical environment, religious education, liturgy committee, Knights of Columbus and so on. Mike had been considering the priesthood before meeting Sheila, and something kept tugging at him to a deeper service. While Sheila was sitting with their kids in Mass, he would be up front playing music, unaware of Deacon Lloyd’s assistance at the altar, his service of taking communion to homebound, and many other areas of ministry in the community. Eventually, after completing a 2½ year pastoral ministry course through the diocese with Deacon Joe and Bev, Deacon Vince and Joanne, Deacon Bob Brotherton

(who no longer lives in the valley), Mike became aware of the diaconate, but the timing wasn't right. They still had two of their five children in high school and felt they should wait. A few more years passed and Mike and Sheila decided to attend an informational meeting. It was then they applied to the program. Mike was 55+ years old and felt he may be too old to be accepted, but they began the discernment process and moved forward with taking the classes together and in August 2013, they were accepted and fully-in, working together towards Mike's diaconal ordination.

Deacon Mike and Sheila complement each other in many ways. Sheila's gift to see Christ in every person and recognizing that God has put her where He needs her each day, she touches so very many lives with her love and understanding. She is blessed to be working at the elementary school, and considers it to be her ministry. Her gift has helped Deacon Mike to develop his 'radar' to recognize when people are hurting and in need. Their faith is amazing, knowing God will take care of them – always. In fact, prior to joining the diaconate program, Deacon Mike went through a battle with cancer, believing this humbling experience was God's way of putting him in the right frame of mind for this ministry. They both feel very blessed and life's experiences have solidified this time after time.

Deacon Mike and Sheila know God never rests - constantly working in our lives. Starting at birth. Mike's mother was raised Catholic but stopped practicing after she married. Ironically, when she was close to giving birth, she was driving through San Pedro (St. Peter), California when she went into labor, eventually giving birth to him at St. Mary's Hospital, forever connecting him to Our Blessed Mother. Deacon Mike's favorite Saint is Mother Theresa of Calcutta, admiring her for her service to the poorest of the poor. "She could have had an easier life, but she rejected this and knew she was where God wanted her to be". "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, in prison and came to visit me." Matthew 25:35-36.

Certain passages of scripture and the lives of the Saints are a glimpse into the faith for all of us. Sheila has always relied on our Blessed Mother. She knows Mary is always with us and brings us peace. Even as a child, a shadow cast in Sheila's bedroom in the dark of night, reflected Mary's image, bringing peace and comfort to her. The Beatitudes are another source of peace for Sheila.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
  - Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.
  - Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.
  - Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
  - Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
  - Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.
  - Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
  - Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (Matthew 5:3-12).

All the little things we learn along our journey. Many we forget; but there are some that are never lost. For example, when two young adults, who met at a Teens Encounter Christ retreat realized that "you may be the only Christ someone meets that day." **Amen! Thankyou Deacon Mike and Sheila for all your gifts of time and talent and bringing the hope of Christ each day.**