



From the Deacon's Desk

Happy Fiftieth Anniversary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the modern permanent diaconate in the United States. Vatican II restored the order in 1968, and the first U.S. formation classes began in 1968. Seven men were ordained as permanent deacons in 1971; there are now over 18-thousand deacons with over 2,000 men in formation every year since 1975.

Acts 6:1-6 tells the story of the first permanent deacons. Peter ordained them to assist with the more practical needs of the communities, but they did much more. St. Stephen, one of those first seven, was stoned to death for preaching. He's recognized as the church's first martyr.

The modern diaconate traces its roots to the German concentration camps of WW II. Priest-prisoners were held at Dachau. There, they discussed how the church could serve the survivors of both the camps and the civilian victims of six years of war. They saw the permanent diaconate as a solution; that vision was realized at Vatican II.

Even after 50 years, there is still much confusion about deacons. The role of all ordained ministries is to be modeled on the life of Christ, and that of deacons especially was and still is, that of Christ the servant. A deacon, like a priest and bishop, has the sacramental grace of ordination. He is a cleric, ordained "not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service". Through his ordination, the deacon acts "in imago Dei" – in the image of God". A deacon is a servant in three areas: Word, Liturgy and Charity. Ministry of the Word includes proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, and teaching. Liturgical ministry involves spoken parts of the Mass; he serves as an ordinary minister of Communion. Charitable ministries vary widely depending on the community's needs. [My ministry of charity is at the county jail]. A deacon, with the consent of his wife, makes a lifelong commitment to service in the church. [Yes, I'm married; but should my wife die, I will be bound by the rule of celibacy].

July 22-26, 3,000 deacons, wives, priests, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals will gather in New Orleans to commemorate this anniversary. Kathy and I will be there; please pray for us.

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