

# **DEACONS**

## **Diocese of Cleveland**

### **Ordained Ministry of Service**

Whether ordained or non-ordained all work together to make the Church a fuller sign of Christ's presence. The Church's mission is to carry out the mission of Christ and this is done by different people doing different ministries, working together for building up of the Kingdom of God.

While there are diverse ministries in the Church, the ordained ministries are those of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon. These are three complementary ways of sharing Christ's ministerial priesthood.

The ministry of deacon is found in the New Testament (I Timothy 3, 8-13). That order today is being adapted to meet the contemporary opportunities for service to the People of God. There is an ever-present need for persons in contemporary society to hear the message of Christ and to experience the witness of service in His name.

While the Diaconate is one form of Christian service, it is an authentic form of ministry in itself, distinct from but related to the ordained priesthood.

The deacon assists the bishop in a special way by discovering needs of charity and by responding to those needs. The deacon is a sign of the Church serving the world.

### **WHO IS A DEACON?**

Jesus came as the Servant of the Father doing the will of the Father and giving us an example of service.

The Church as servant, carries on the mission of Christ, not to be served but to serve. The Deacon is a man of faith called by the Church to serve God and God's people as an official representative of the Church in loving service to others. He is a witness to the serving Christ. Sacramental ordination to the Diaconate is a sharing in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ and in the Church's ministry of service.

A deacon must be sensitive to the needs of men and women and ready to give of himself by responding to the needs of everyone especially the poor and the alienated. His identity is that of service.

While bishops, priests, deacons and laity often perform similar functions, a deacon is ordained to the Ministry of Charity, of Word and of Liturgy. Priests and deacons are collaborative associates of the bishop and both are under the direction of the bishop.

By ordination the deacon:

- is called to diaconal service which effects a new relationship to the Holy Spirit.
- is publicly acknowledged by the Church as one called by the Spirit for the good of the entire community of believers.
- is united in a fraternity of service and sacramental ministry to the bishop and all ordained priests and deacons.
- publicly commits himself to the responsibility of communicating God's word and announcing His Kingdom in and through the Church.

Whether married or single, the majority of deacons continue to support themselves through their own profession or occupation. By continuing in their occupation, Deacons have the opportunity to bring the presence of Christ to the marketplace in a unique way. They become a valuable sign and symbol of Christ and the Church serving the world, thereby helping to eliminate any separation between the Church and the world. Ordinarily, Deacons offer their ministry freely to the Church and receive no monetary compensation for their service.

### **WHY DEACONS?**

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council anticipated the Church's growing need for the ministries of Sacrament, Word and Charity which at the time were principally shared by bishops and priests only. The bishops of the council reflected on the ministry of the deacon as exercised in the early Church and decided to restore the Diaconate as a permanent ministry open to married and single men.

The Church today needs the service of deacons. The deacon will be able to bring a special sensitivity in ministering to the needs of the family; to single parents; to students; the aged; the sick; the imprisoned; the chemically dependent; the economically disadvantaged, etc.

The deacon will complement and enrich the work of his brother priests and bishops. He will foster and encourage the laity in their baptismal call to ministry. The ordained ministry of the deacon is an opportunity for a man of strong faith to generously give himself to the pressing needs of people everywhere

### **WHAT DOES A DEACON DO?**

Deacons are ordained for the service of the diocese. Appointments are made by the bishop and are usually to a parish but they can be to an institution or special apostolate of the diocese.

The work the deacon performs depends upon his own abilities; the needs of the diocese; and the local community he serves. His work involves various kinds of service.

Some examples of possible ministry are:

#### **PARISH SERVICE**

- Liturgical celebrations (baptisms, marriages, preaching, presiding at prayer, communion, and funeral services)
- Religious Education
- Ministry to the sick, aged, and dying
- Pastoral Counseling
- Widowed and divorced
- Youth
- Prayer groups
- Evangelization and RCIA

#### **SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES**

- Service to various minority communities
- Prisons
- Hospitals and Nursing Homes
- Chemically dependent

- Physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped
- And many other important ministries already existing or yet to be discovered

Charitable service is the main area of the deacon's ministry. All Christians are called to charity but the deacon is the one who is officially sent or ordained by the Church to bring Christ and His good news to those in need. The deacon inspires and supports others' works of charity by his actions and deeds, taking care not to minimize, degrade or overshadow the efforts of others.

What distinguishes a deacon from the lay person is his ordination through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Thus, the deacon is called by the Church to share in the ministry of Christ on behalf of the Church and the world.

### **WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?**

The deacon is called personally and ecclesially to serve after the manner of Jesus. He is first and foremost a Christian man in his usual employment and lifestyle, trained and formed by additional study and prayer for a special ministry to the community as an ordained minister. To be accepted into the Diaconate training program in Cleveland it is required that a man:

1. Be at least 31 years old at time of application for the Diaconate. (minimum age for ordination is 35)
2. Be a Roman Catholic of sound moral character, mature faith and have a sense of vocation to service.
3. Demonstrate prayerfulness and be open to further spiritual formation.
4. Have attained at least a high school diploma and have the ability to complete undergraduate college level studies.
5. Be of sound physical and mental health.
6. Be attuned to the needs and life of the Church today.
7. Have demonstrated active service, apostolic involvement and leadership among the People of God. He must be an active member of his parish for at least three years.
8. Have proven stability in his secular employment and family life.
9. If married, have the enthusiastic support of his wife and family. He must be in a valid Catholic marriage for at least five years.
10. Demonstrate the basic potential to develop the ministerial skills of relating to people, speaking well, and being a spiritual leader.
11. Have the support of a sponsoring pastor or institution who would welcome his ministry.
12. Be able to represent the Church with intelligence, Christian dignity and prayerful service.

The best credentials a candidate can bring to the Diaconate is his past performance: personal, familial, professional, ecclesial, and social.

### **THE TRAINING PROGRAM?**

The formation and preparation of candidates for the Diaconate in the Diocese of Cleveland is on a part-time basis over a period of four (4) years.

- The Diaconate Formation Program begins with an orientation day in the Fall.
- There is an annual Retreat for candidates and their wives.
- The major share of expenses is assumed by the diocese.

The Diaconate Formation Program consists of family, spiritual, theological, and pastoral formation.

- 1. FAMILY FORMATION** - The wives and children of the candidates have opportunities for personal and family growth along with the candidates themselves, e.g., Family Weekend, family cluster sessions for families to share together. Proper understanding of the Diaconate and positive support on the part of the wives and the children of the candidates are essential to a satisfying and successful diaconal ministry. The first commitment of the candidate is to his family.
- 2. SPIRITUAL FORMATION** - The spiritual aspect of the program consists in opportunities designed to help the candidate understand himself and his potential for spiritual growth. It seeks to provide motivation, inspiration, and information so that he can pray better and integrate his study, daily work life and family life. A life of prayer and a life of service come together in the person of the candidate.
- 3. THEOLOGICAL FORMATION** - The theological formation seeks to provide adequate theological training for effective ministers of the gospel. The deacon, therefore, would have enough knowledge of theology to be competent and comfortable in the specific ministry he exercises. Required courses would include sacred scripture, catechetics, homiletics, liturgical-sacramental theology and some areas of systematic theology.
- 4. PASTORAL FORMATION** - The pastoral formation aspect of the program serves to help the candidate in providing field experience under supervision, assisting the candidate in acquiring ministerial skills and pastoral sensitivity. It seeks to derive a theological awareness from the actual context of ministry. It helps him to test out his capabilities and interests, his strengths and weaknesses. It provides an opportunity to deepen faith and strengthen commitment to service. It seeks to provide an arena for the integration of the spiritual, theological, and pastoral aspects of formation. The Pastoral Formation Program is conducted with the assistance of the candidate's pastor and parish.

## **APPLICATION**

The Diaconate Office welcomes applications from men of all communities and backgrounds. In order for the Good News to become incarnate it is necessary for the Church to have ordained ministers in all of the various communities. The presence and witness of deacons from all communities will more successfully identify community needs and advance the response of Christian service.

The Diaconate is open to all men of the Catholic community who meet the basic requirements. Where special circumstances exist, e.g. special language or cultural needs, then in so far as possible and feasible, adjustments will be made to meet those needs.

The man interested in becoming a Deacon in the Diocese of Cleveland should:

1. Write to the Director of the Diaconate Office requesting information about the Diaconate and indicate interest in applying to the Program.
2. Complete a formal application (obtained from the Diaconate Office) and submit it to the director accompanied by the requested documentation.
3. Experience a screening process of approximately six months which will determine eligibility for acceptance into the formation program. Interviews are conducted for both the applicant and his wife.
4. Receive an affirmative acceptance from the Admissions Committee.

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