

# ***THE DEACON: ICON OF JESUS CHRIST THE SERVANT***

## **PASTORAL LETTER**

### **OF THE BISHOP OF MARQUETTE MOST REVEREND ALEXANDER K. SAMPLE TO THE PRIESTS, DEACONS, AND FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE**

#### **PREFACE**

The restoration of the diaconate as a permanent ministry in the Latin Church following the Second Vatican Council is seen as “a great and visible sign of the working of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Over the years much has been written about the essential identity, role and ministry of the permanent deacon in the life of the Church. There is no doubt that the restoration of the permanent diaconate has been a source of tremendous grace and blessings for the Church. Alongside such blessings, however, there have been some misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the essential identity of the permanent deacon that have led to some confusion regarding his ministerial role in the life and mission of the Church.

The Diocese of Marquette has certainly been the grateful beneficiary of the restoration of this ministry since the ordination of our first permanent deacon in 1981. Since that time this local Church has been richly blessed by the witness and sacrifices of the fine men who have received ordination as permanent deacons. We give thanks to God for them and their ministry. Our diocese, however, has not been spared some of the same misunderstandings, misinterpretations and confusion that have been evident in the universal Church.

To help study and address some of these important issues surrounding the life and ministry of the permanent deacon in the Diocese of Marquette, a Diaconate Study Committee was formed in January of 2008 to lay out a vision for the future direction of the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Marquette.<sup>2</sup> The principal task of this Committee was to address the following issues and questions:

- The essential identity of the permanent deacon in the life of the universal Church.
- The essential role of the permanent deacon in diocesan and parish ministry within the local Church of the Diocese of Marquette.

---

<sup>1</sup> Blessed John Paul II, Address to Permanent Deacons, Detroit 1987

<sup>2</sup> The members of the Study Committee were: Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample, Deacon Scott A. Jamieson, Deacon Robert LaCosse, Deacon Michael P. LeBeau, Deacon Vincent W. Beckley, Deacon Robert M. Cross, Rev. Robb M. Jurkovich, Rev. Dino F. Silvestrini, Rev. Christopher B. Gardiner, Sr. Ellen Enright, IBVM, Mrs. Nancy Cross and Mr. Steve Lynott.

- Where and how many permanent deacons do we need and in which specific ministries and apostolates within the diocese?
- The qualifications and qualities needed in those men recruited for the permanent diaconate.
- The formation process for the permanent diaconate.
- Particular issues and concerns that have been encountered in light of the experience of the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Marquette.

The Committee's work evolved and resulted in thoughtful and meaningful discussions and conclusions regarding this important ministry in the life of the Church. The fruit of the Committee's work is presented here. These reflections and conclusions should in no way be seen as a criticism of the history of the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Marquette. Rather, they should be seen as a maturing of our understanding of the diaconate in light of that history and experience.

## I. INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction, some things need to be said as a foundation for our common understanding of this ordained ministry in the Church. It is essential to understand that the diaconate is first and foremost completely about service – *diakonia*. We often hear that description, but we need to understand it on a more profound level.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders has three degrees: diaconate, priesthood and the episcopacy. The ordination of a priest or bishop imparts a sacred character and grants ministerial participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, our Eternal High Priest.

The ordination of a deacon, on the other hand, is not an ordination unto priesthood, but unto service. Many people most closely identify the ministry of the deacon with his role in the sacred liturgy, but this is not his essential identity and role. His service in the liturgy is only a reflection of his true identity brought into the public worship of the Church. His essential identity is as one who serves. That is why there are special ministries that are particularly suited to the deacon as servant. These include ministry and service to the poor, to the imprisoned, to the sick and to those who are abandoned and lonely, the modern day “widows and orphans.” (*cf.* Acts 6)

But questions naturally arise: Why does one need to be a deacon to do these things? Should not all the disciples of Jesus Christ be engaged in such apostolates of service? In other words, what is “new” that is brought about by sacred ordination as a deacon?

The National Directory on the Permanent Diaconate, quoting from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, helps us answer these questions:

“The Sacrament of Holy Orders marks deacons ‘with an *imprint* (character) which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself the “deacon” or servant of all.’ For this level of Holy Orders, Christ

calls and the Church asks the bishop to ordain deacons to be *consecrated witnesses to service*.”<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added)

Consecrated, witness, service – all three words are important in this understanding. The permanent deacon is set aside and consecrated in the midst of the Church as a witness to the service of God and neighbor to which all the disciples of Jesus Christ are called. By his ordination, the deacon is configured to Christ, the Servant and Son of God, who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>4</sup>

This understanding serves as a constant reminder that Christian discipleship for the ordained, laity and religious alike is not about oneself. Ordination to the permanent diaconate is not about achieving some special status or recognition in the Church. The deacon is ordained to be a servant of Christ to his people, and a humble aid to the ministry of priests and the bishop.

The call to diaconate ordination, though a personal one, is authenticated by the Holy Spirit through the bishop to meet a specific “need and desire of the Christian community”<sup>5</sup> for service in the diocese. Just as the first deacons were chosen and ordained by the Apostles to meet a specific identified need of the early Christian community<sup>6</sup>, so it is in the Church today. Where a need has been identified that particularly suits the ministry of a deacon, a man may be called forward and ordained to minister to that need by the bishop, successor to the Apostles.

The diaconal witness is lived in the midst of the world. The permanent deacon is often said to have a “foot in both worlds”, i.e. he is an ordained minister of the Church, but usually also has secular employment and other responsibilities in the secular order. Blessed John Paul II drew attention to this in a general audience in 1993:

“The deacon’s tasks include that of ‘promoting and sustaining the apostolic activities of the laity.’ To the extent that he is more present and more involved than the priest in secular environments and structures, he should feel encouraged to foster closeness between the ordained ministry and lay activities, in common service to the kingdom of God.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, all that has been said about the permanent deacon as servant in the image of Jesus Christ is reflected in the deacon’s liturgical function at the altar, where he is often more visible. His true service at the altar brings into the sacred liturgy a powerful and important reminder to all of us that the Church has an essential diaconal character and identity – to serve the world in witness to the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>3</sup> USCCB, National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States (NDPD), #28

<sup>4</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, *Ad Pascendum*

<sup>6</sup> Acts 6:1-6

<sup>7</sup> NDPD, #30

## II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

A foreshadowing of the office of deacon in the Church predates the New Testament. In the Prayer of Ordination for deacons the “sons of Levi” are recalled. Moses, instructed by God, established an order of men, the Levites, who represented the people in service to the priests and to minister in the former tabernacle of the old covenant.<sup>8</sup>

As referenced above, the institution of the Order of Deacons by the Apostles arose from an early necessity of service in the Church that was too demanding for the Apostles to manage alone. The solution was to appoint seven men of good repute to assist them in the daily ministry. Through prayer and the laying on of hands they entrusted to those chosen men the ministry of serving at table.<sup>9</sup> St. Paul describes the particular qualifications needed for a man to be appointed to the office of deacon.<sup>10</sup> We can ascertain from other texts of the New Testament that deacons in the early Church preached (Stephen and Philip)<sup>11</sup>, baptized (Philip)<sup>12</sup>, and served the early Church community<sup>13</sup>. With the spread of the Faith in the early Church, deacons began to have a liturgical function.<sup>14</sup>

Emphasized throughout the Gospels, the Greek word that became the designation for the office of deacon, *diakonia*, was grounded in Jesus Christ himself. Jesus offered himself in total service to the Father:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”<sup>15</sup>

“But I am among you as one who serves (*diakonia*)”<sup>16</sup>

In conformity to Jesus the Servant, an essential character of the Church is to be servant of God and his people. The deacon is an icon of this servanthood in the midst of the Church.

In the early second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch, in many references to deacons, considered a Church without the Orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons unthinkable. In his *Letter to the Magnesians*, he wrote:

---

<sup>8</sup> See especially the Book of Numbers, chapters 1 and 8

<sup>9</sup> See Acts 6:1-6

<sup>10</sup> 1 Timothy 3:8-13

<sup>11</sup> Acts 7 and Acts 8:4-13

<sup>12</sup> Acts 8:36-38

<sup>13</sup> Acts 6:1-6

<sup>14</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch joins *episkopoi*, *presbyteroi* and *diakono*i to the Eucharist, indicating a liturgical function

<sup>15</sup> John 6:38

<sup>16</sup> Luke 22:27

“I exhort you to be careful to do all things in the harmony of God, the bishop having primacy after the model of God and the priests after the model of the council of Apostles, and the deacons, who are so dear to me, having entrusted to them the ministry of Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

Among other early references to the order of deacon are those made by St. Polycarp, St. Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus of Lyons.

As the order of deacon became more prominent throughout the early centuries of the Church, the deacon became the functional arm of the local bishop. He assisted the bishop during the sacred liturgy, exercised responsibility for the temporal affairs and goods of the Church, and distributed alms to the poor. As the bishop's advisor, legal representative and confidant, he was often the logical choice to succeed the bishop upon his death, after receiving priestly and episcopal ordination.<sup>18</sup>

By 400 A.D. abuses of power and conflict with the order of priests, often over monetary compensation, are cited as factors that contributed to the decline of the diaconate as a permanent order within the Latin Church. Social changes within the Church led to the development of monasteries and religious orders that assumed responsibility for charitable institutions, further contributing to a reduction in the need for deacons who had formerly ministered to these needs.<sup>19</sup> Over the centuries that followed, many factors contributed to a chain of events that, by 800 A.D., resulted in the diaconate being reduced to a transitional step toward the priesthood in the Latin Church.<sup>20</sup> Since the Order of Deacon had apostolic roots going back to the New Testament, it could not simply be abolished in the Church. The solution at the time was to make it a step toward the fuller Order of the Priesthood.<sup>21</sup> In the Churches of the East, the diaconate remained a permanent ministry and order.

In Germany during the 1950's, a proposal was stirring to restore the diaconate as a permanent order within the Latin Church.<sup>22</sup> In the 1960's, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council proposed to the universal Church that the ministry of the deacon came from the Apostles, and as such, should be restored as a permanent order in the Church:

“It will be possible in the future to restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy.”<sup>23</sup>

Assigned once again to the deacon were his traditional ministries of administering baptism, ordinary minister of Holy Communion, witnessing of marriages, bringing viaticum to the dying, proclaiming the Sacred Scriptures,

---

<sup>17</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*, chapter VI

<sup>18</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia (1908 edition) under “Deacon”

<sup>19</sup> Lynn Sherman, *The Deacon in the Church* (New York, Alba House, 1991; p.23)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 19-21

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21 (citing Wilhelm Schamoni, *Familienvater Als Geweith Diakone*)

<sup>23</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #29

exhorting and instructing the people, officiating at funeral rites, and being dedicated to charitable works.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to the Church's missionary activity, it was believed that catechists and those governing remote communities of faith would be strengthened for their apostolate through the sacramental grace of diaconal ordination resulting in a more fruitful ministry.<sup>25</sup> This was in response to a concrete reality in the life of the Church in certain developing countries where many communities of faith were in remote areas that very seldom had the opportunity to receive the ministry of priests. Lay catechists took care of those communities and helped foster the life of the Church there. It was thought that if some of these lay catechists could be ordained as deacons, their ministry would be enhanced and they also would be able to celebrate certain of the sacraments in the absence of priests (baptisms and weddings) as well as preside at funeral rites and serve as ordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

The permanent diaconate was formally restored by Pope Paul VI in 1967, and it has grown steadily since. In 1975, for example, there were 898 permanent deacons in the United States and by 1985 there were 7204. As of this writing there are more than 16,000 permanent deacons in the United States.

### III. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

#### The Deacon and the Sacramental Church

The Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist) ground the common vocation of all Christ's disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world.<sup>26</sup> From these the Holy Spirit calls through the Church some men to ordained service. Though the Catechism of the Catholic Church differentiates two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ (the presbyterate and the episcopacy)<sup>27</sup>, and the diaconate is not among them, yet all three orders are conferred by sacramental ordination, that is by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The diaconate is intended to serve the other two orders.<sup>28</sup>

Repeated here is what was cited above in the preface:

“The Sacrament of Holy Orders marks deacons ‘with an *imprint* (character) which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself the “deacon” or servant of all.’ For this level of Holy Orders, Christ calls and the Church asks the bishop to ordain deacons to be consecrated witnesses to service.”

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, #16

<sup>26</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), no. 1533

<sup>27</sup> CCC, #1554

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Ordination to the diaconate confers an outpouring of the Holy Spirit configuring the deacon to Christ's consecration and mission. The deacon is therefore "a cleric who is ordained to *diakonia*, namely a service to God's People in communion with the bishop and the body of priests."<sup>29</sup>

### **The Deacon and the Word: Evangelizer and Teacher**

Because the deacon sacramentalizes service, by virtue of ordination he will proclaim the Gospel and preach in such a way that he first witnesses its empowerment in his own life. By his own faithful practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the permanent deacon "by word and example...should work so that all the faithful, in imitation of Christ, may place themselves at the constant service of their brothers and sisters."<sup>30</sup>

### **The Deacon and the Liturgy of the Altar**

The diaconal ministry of charity cannot be separated from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and Christ's mandate on essential care for the poor is linked to the Eucharistic sacrifice. All ministries in the Church, including that of the permanent deacon, are incomplete without the Holy Eucharist and in fact draw their life from the same Eucharistic mystery.

"For the Church gathered at worship, moreover, the ministry of the deacon is a visible, grace-filled sign of the integral connection between sharing at the Lord's Eucharistic table and serving the many human hungers felt so keenly by all God's children. In the deacon's liturgical ministry, as in a mirror, the Church sees a reflection of her own diaconal character and is reminded of her mission to serve as Jesus did."<sup>31</sup>

This sign of the deacon's liturgical ministry is especially manifest when he is assisting the bishop in the celebration of the Eucharistic ministry. The heart of diaconal ministry is the inseparable link between the deacon's liturgical service at the altar and his service to the poor in the community. "In his formal liturgical roles, the deacon brings the poor to the Church and the Church to the poor."<sup>32</sup>

### **The Deacon in the World of Work**

Because he stands with a foot in two worlds, the permanent deacon's ministry and witness is distinctively in the world of work and society. Therefore, the theological principles of social doctrine developed over time by the Church must be formative for an effective diaconate. Human work, especially that of the permanent deacon, is to be imbued with "a spiritual and moral character that

---

<sup>29</sup> NDPD, #29

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* #32

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, #33

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, #37

gives work its genuine value and workers their specific dignity.”<sup>33</sup> Too often the transforming Christian message in the area of human labor is obscured and the deformities of society distort the divine image in men and women. The deacon is to witness in his own life and labor the truth of the dignity of the human person and human work.

### **The Deacon and Charitable Work**

Of his threefold ministries of the Word, the liturgy and charity, the deacon's distinctive call is to charity. In his address to permanent deacons in the United States during his apostolic visit to Detroit in 1987, Blessed John Paul II touched profoundly on this aspect of the deacon's ministry. Our Holy Father of beloved memory said it best:

“...Today's world is not lacking in opportunity for such a ministry [of charity]. So many of the world's people are oppressed by injustice and the denial of human rights. Still others are troubled or suffer from loss of faith, or are tempted to give up hope. In the midst of the human condition it is a great satisfaction for me to learn that deacons in the United States are involved in direct service to the needy, to the ill, the abused and battered, the young and old, those who have known suffering in their marriages, the homeless, victims of substance abuse, prisoners, refugees, street people, the rural poor victims of racial and ethnic discrimination. As Christ tells us, as often as you did it to one of my brothers, you did it to me.”

“In a world hungry and thirsty for convincing signs of the compassion and liberating love of God, the deacon sacramentalizes the mission of the Church in his words and deeds, responding to the Master's command of service and providing real-life examples of how to carry it out.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Summary: “I am yours”**

In this brief theological reflection on the life and ministry of the permanent deacon, it is clear that very deep foundations support the deacon. Appropriating and living the truth will take the spiritual practices of prayer and devotion to Our Lord and Our Lady exercised during a lifetime through which the deacon prays with Pope Benedict XVI, “‘I am yours.’ Let us pray to the Lord that we may learn to say these words with our whole being. Thus we will be in the heart of the Word. Thus we will be saved.”<sup>35</sup>

## **IV. TOWARD A DIACONAL SPIRITUALITY**

---

<sup>33</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 4.2

<sup>34</sup> NDPD, #38

<sup>35</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Opening Address to the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 2008

The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States says<sup>36</sup>:

“The primary sources of a deacon’s spirituality are his participation in the sacraments of Christian initiation, as well as his sacramental identity and participation in ordained ministry. For a deacon who is married, his spirituality is nurtured further in the Sacrament of Matrimony, which sanctifies conjugal love and constitutes it as a sign of the love with which Christ gives himself to the Church. For the celibate deacon, loving God and serving his neighbor roots his whole person in total and undivided consecration to Christ. For each deacon, his model *par excellence* is Jesus Christ, the Servant, who lived totally in service of his Father, for the good of every person.<sup>37</sup> To live their ministry to the fullest, ‘deacons must know Christ intimately so that He may shoulder the burdens of their ministry.’<sup>38</sup>”

“Deacons are obliged to give priority to the spiritual life and to live their *diakonia* with generosity. They should integrate their family obligations, professional life, and ministerial responsibilities so as to grow in their commitment to the person and mission of Christ, the Servant. Clerics have a special obligation to seek holiness in their lives ‘because they are consecrated to God by a new title in the reception of orders as dispensers of God’s mysteries in the service of His people.’<sup>39</sup>”

Blessed John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, at the close of the Jubilee Year 2000 said: “Every single baptized Catholic, by virtue of being a Christian, by virtue of being baptized, is called to the fullness of holiness.”<sup>40</sup>

The primary foundational principle of the call to diaconal ministry begins with this call to holiness. A man who presumes to hear a call from God to the diaconate must answer first to God’s call to personal holiness. Has the prospective permanent deacon set as his life’s goal steady growth in the Holy Spirit toward oneness with God in Christ Jesus and His Church? If married, does his wife share with him this heart’s desire? These are the first and most important questions that will frame all further steps toward acceptance in diaconal formation, and to final ordination to the Order of Deacon. The discernment process begins and ends with the evidence of the growth in holiness in a man’s (and his wife’s) life.

The permanent deacon will “re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of Christian living.”<sup>41</sup> He will courageously help those in his community,

---

<sup>36</sup> NDPD, ## 62-63

<sup>37</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacon (BNFPD), USCCB, 1998, #11

<sup>38</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, USCCB, 1998, #50

<sup>39</sup> Code of Canon Law (CIC), c. 276:1

<sup>40</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001)

<sup>41</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Diaconatus Ordinem* VI, 28, 1-4

together with the pastor and the staff of his parish, to rediscover, reawaken, and appropriate the call to holiness. With this goal held before him, the deacon will center his efforts to fulfill what Blessed John Paul II desired, that the “parish of the new millennium becomes a training place for holiness and a school for prayer.”<sup>42</sup>

Central to this rule of growth in holiness is the permanent deacon’s adherence to the Divine Office of the Church (the Liturgy of the Hours).<sup>43</sup> Upon acceptance into the diaconal formation program, the candidate, and later the permanent deacon, is required to pray the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church. The other hours of the Liturgy of the Hours are strongly recommended, but not obligatory. In essence, the deacon should pray as much of the Liturgy of the Hours as possible, depending on the circumstances of his life. Especially recommended to the permanent deacon is the Office of Readings, which is a constant immersion in the Sacred Scriptures and the spiritual and theological writings of the Fathers and saints of the Church, which will constitute part of his ongoing education and formation.

The requirement of diaconal candidates to pray the Liturgy of the Hours as outlined above becomes a grave obligation he accepts through the promise he makes to the bishop on the day of his ordination.

It is further recommended, when possible, as a profound aid toward a permanent deacon’s and his wife’s spiritual unity, that the deacon and his wife pray some of the hours of the Liturgy of the Hours together. This prayer of the whole Church, the golden cord of love, like no other, spanning all of Sacred Scripture, the holy writings of the Fathers of the Church, the saints, and the timeless universal psalms, canticles and prayers, unites all those who love and serve God.

The permanent deacon’s family in the heart of the parish will model what a Christian family is<sup>44</sup>, as outlined above. Only God’s help through family prayer, undertaken steadily and daily, can support such a difficult task in a culture that is corrosive to Christian family values. The permanent diaconate formation program and the deacon community will enlist its prayer and energy to work with the deacon’s family to clear hurdles to a true Christian family life, but the prospective deacon and his wife must realize, from the outset, how entrance into the Order of Deacon will lay a holy expectation of spiritual growth on the whole family.

Inherent to the call to holiness and the spirituality of the permanent deacon, it must be kept in mind that the charitable and service ministry done by the deacon flows supernaturally from his sacramental identity as one who is configured to Christ the Servant.

## **V. THE ROLE OF THE PERMANENT DEACON’S SPOUSE AND FAMILY**

---

<sup>42</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001)

<sup>43</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Ad Pascendum*, 8 a.b.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Diaconatus Ordinem* III, 12.13

“The majority of permanent deacons in the United States are married. These men bring to the Sacrament of Holy Orders the gifts already received and still being nurtured through their participation in the Sacrament of Matrimony. This latter sacrament sanctifies the love of husbands and wives, making that love an efficacious sign of the love of Christ for the Church. Marriage requires an ‘interpersonal giving of self, a mutual fidelity, a source of [and openness to] new life, [and] a support in times of joy and sorrow.’ Lived in faith, this ministry within the domestic Church is a sign to the entire Church of the love of Christ. It forms the basis of the married deacon’s unique gift within the Church.”<sup>45</sup>

“A married deacon, with his wife and family, gives witness to the sanctity of marriage. The more they grow in mutual love, conforming their lives to the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexuality, the more they give to the Christian community a model of Christ-like love, compassion and self-sacrifice.”<sup>46</sup>

In the aftermath of the sexual revolution and no-fault divorce, when discord and confusion reign in many Catholic families, it is to reaffirm the sublime truth of marriage that the deacon, his wife, and his family must exemplify the eternal principles that are the foundation of the marital covenant. These eternal principles include the affirmation that marriage is a permanent covenant between one man and one woman for the whole of life, rooted in fidelity to one another and always with openness to the procreation and education of children.

“The married deacon must always remember that through his sacramental participation in both vocational sacraments, first in Matrimony and again in Holy Orders, he is challenged to be faithful to both. With integrity he must live out both sacraments in harmony and balance. The wife of a deacon should be included with her husband, when appropriate, in diocesan clergy and parochial staff gatherings. A deacon and his wife, both as a spiritual man and woman and as a couple, have much to share with the bishop and his priests about the Sacrament of Matrimony. A diaconal family also brings a unique presence and understanding of the domestic family. ‘By facing in a spirit of faith the challenges of married life and the demands of daily living, [the married deacon and his family] strengthen the family life not only of the Church community but of the whole of society’.”<sup>47</sup>

The family is the primary community accompanying a diaconal candidate on the formative journey. For married candidates, the communion of life and love, established by the marriage covenant and consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony, offers a singular contribution to the [diaconal] formation process. The single candidate’s family also contributes to his formation; those responsible for implementing the formation process should consult with the candidate to ascertain the strength of his support from his family and friends to ensure that his vocation is also encouraged and fostered.”<sup>48</sup>

## VI. PARTICULAR ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

---

<sup>45</sup> NDPD, #66

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, #68

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, #212

## Recognition of permanent deacons as clergy and the relationship with the pastor

Through the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders at the hands of the Bishop of Marquette, a permanent deacon becomes a cleric (a member of the clergy) and is incardinated into the Diocese of Marquette.<sup>49</sup> He is no longer a member of the laity of the Church, and so the often heard reference to him as a “lay deacon” does not apply.

As a cleric, the permanent deacon enjoys all the rights afforded him in the Code of Canon Law and is also subject to all of the obligations required of him under the same law.<sup>50</sup>

Also, “through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration [in the Rite of Ordination], [the deacon] is constituted a sacred minister and a member of the hierarchy. This condition determines his theological and juridical status in the Church.”<sup>51</sup>

In this light it is important to recognize the permanent deacon’s new status in the Church as a result of his ordination. Although recognizing that his primary ministry as a deacon is to be one who serves in the image of Christ the Servant, due respect should be afforded him as a sacred minister of the Church.

The permanent deacon has a special relationship with the bishop and the priests of the diocese. “[Deacons], sustained by the grace of the Sacrament [of Holy Orders] in the ministry of the liturgy, of the word and of charity, are at the service of the People of God, *in communion with the Bishop and his priests* (emphasis added).”<sup>52</sup> The diaconate is intended to help and serve the orders of the episcopacy and priesthood.<sup>53</sup> “The principal function of the deacon, therefore, is to collaborate with the bishop and the priests in the exercise of a ministry which is not of their own wisdom, but of the word of God, calling all to conversion and holiness.”<sup>54</sup>

Particular attention must be paid to the relationship between the permanent deacon and his pastor, especially when he is assigned to parochial ministry or has faculties to be exercised in a particular parish or mission. The pastor and all priests serving in the parish or mission must recognize the deacon as a collaborator in ministry and as one who shares with them in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Even though the permanent deacon is there to help and serve the pastor, his dignity as a brother in Christ and as a sacred minister of the Church must be respected. The deacon, for his part, must remember that the pastor is the one whom he helps and serves under the authority of the bishop. Mutual respect and charity should govern this relationship.

---

<sup>49</sup> Code of Canon Law, c. 266, §1

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* cc. 273-289

<sup>51</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Directory for the Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacon, #1

<sup>52</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #29

<sup>53</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1554

<sup>54</sup> Directory for the Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacon, #23

To be avoided at all cost is any sense of rivalry or competition between priests and deacons. All must remember that they are there to serve Christ and the Church. A sense of selfless service to Christ and the People of God should animate the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. The permanent deacon must remember that the pastor possesses the ultimate authority in the parish or mission, always under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

When a pastor has a permanent deacon serving in the parish or mission entrusted to his care, he should show particular solicitude toward the deacon and assist him in the development of his diaconal life and ministry. The pastor should mentor the deacon, guiding him and teaching him how to be the best minister of Christ that he can be, seeking to realize his full potential. The deacon should be humble and open to the direction and guidance of his pastor.

Regular and open communication should exist between a pastor and the permanent deacon. This will help build a strong relationship as the pastor and deacon collaborate in ministry for the good of the people entrusted to their care.

### **The permanent deacon's role within the pastoral team**

Permanent deacons are ordained for service within the Diocese of Marquette and exercise their distinctive ministry in communion not only with the bishop but also the priests. A deacon is assigned by the bishop to a ministry in fraternal association with any priests assigned to the parish and/or mission. This ministry is exercised under the moderating authority of the pastor.

It is necessary that the permanent deacon understands that part of his mission is to inspire and promote the apostolate of the laity. The responsibility for the laity's participation in the life and mission of the Church is bestowed through the Sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened through the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. God also bestows unique charisms to the individual members of the faithful which must be appreciated. The permanent deacon may very well be called to exercise his ministry in collaboration with others who are hired, appointed or called to work within the formal structures of a particular parish or mission. If the parish staff includes professed religious, the religious person's vows and obligations to their respective religious community should be noted and accepted. This is parallel to the obligations of married persons (deacon or lay) to their family and possible other employment. A single person's obligations to family and other employment should also be noted and accepted.

If a deacon is assigned to a parish where laity and/or professed religious are working, the ministries and other works of the apostolate should be carefully delineated and agreed upon by those appointed or called to serve the needs within the parish (i.e. priests, deacons, religious and/or laity). This is accomplished under the guidance and supervision of the pastor. The particular vocations of those persons (married, ordained, religious, single) must be respected. As ministries and apostolates are discerned by reflecting on each person's particular gifts, charisms and vocational call, these ministries and apostolates are assigned and there should be mutually agreed upon job

descriptions. If the staff in a parish is changed through the addition or subtraction of members, and/or the appointment of a new pastor, associate pastor or deacon, the assigned responsibilities should be further reflected upon and possibly re-evaluated in light of these changes.

It should always be remembered that all are working for the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, acknowledging and accepting different charisms and vocations. Never should an atmosphere of competition prevail in the pastoral setting.

### **The permanent deacon's pastoral assignment**

In the Introduction to this Pastoral Letter, it was pointed out that, in the Acts of the Apostles, the first deacons were called forth and ordained to meet a specific need in the early Church. This will also be the case as we move forward with our formation program for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Marquette. A man will not be ordained to simply "be the deacon" at a particular parish or mission. There must be a specifically identified need in the community, authenticated by the Bishop in consultation with the local pastor, for which a man will be called forth to minister as a permanent deacon. In other words, the deacon will need to have a particular service ministry or *diakonia* for which he will be ordained. This new direction will be reflective of the fact that the deacon's primary ministry is not in the sanctuary but in the service of charity.

This will be reflected in the letter of assignment once a man is ordained to the permanent diaconate. The assignment letter may read that the deacon is assigned to a particular parish or mission *to minister in a particular area of need* (e.g. to the poor of the community, to the sick, to the elderly, to the imprisoned, to the youth, as a catechist, etc...). The deacon could also be assigned to some broader diocesan or regional ministry with diaconal faculties in a particular parish or mission.

This does not mean that the permanent deacon could never engage in some other area of ministry as his diaconal ministry matures. It does mean that he must always have some particular focus of his diaconal ministry on specific needs in the community.

Permanent deacons are not ordained for any particular parish, even their own. They are ordained for service to the Church, a service exercised in the Diocese of Marquette under the authority of the Bishop. Deacons must therefore be prepared for the fact that their assignment could change as the needs of another parish or the diocese arises.

### **Ministry agreements**

When a permanent deacon is assigned to a particular ministry in a parish, mission or on the diocesan level, a ministry agreement will be drawn up which will outline the expectations of the deacon's ministry. This agreement will be between the deacon and his pastor, or between the deacon and his supervisor in

ministry. It will clearly delineate the extent and limits of the deacon's ministry in relationship with his pastor or supervisor.

The intent of such an agreement is to have a clear and common understanding in writing that becomes a reference point. It seeks to make sure that the deacon is able to balance family, work and his diaconal ministry without unreasonable expectations being placed upon him in ministry. It also seeks to hold the deacon accountable for the ministerial obligations for which he is responsible in his diaconal assignment.

The ministerial agreement should be reviewed on an annual basis and adjusted as needed, especially as the deacon may transition to other areas of service ministry.

### **The permanent deacon and preaching**

The Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church gives the deacon (permanent and transitional) the faculty to preach everywhere, with at least the presumed permission of the rector of the church, unless this faculty has been restricted or removed by the competent Ordinary (c. 764).

In the case of a permanent deacon, the competent Ordinary mentioned above is the diocesan bishop. In the Diocese of Marquette, unless the faculty has been limited in a particular case, permanent deacons possess the faculty to preach anywhere in the diocese with the consent of the pastor of the parish.

It is to be noted that preaching is not a canonical *right* of the deacon, but just what the canon says, a *faculty*.

An important distinction needs to be made between the universal faculty to preach and specifically preaching the homily at Mass. Canon 767 directs that the homily at Mass is reserved to a priest or a deacon. That can be the celebrant, a concelebrating priest, or an assisting deacon. It should be noted that this canon is not expansive, but restrictive. It seeks to *restrict* who may preach the homily at Mass. Only those in Holy Orders may preach the homily at Mass. Lay persons may not give the homily.

This distinction needs to be made because "preaching" is too often reduced to simply the homily at Mass in the minds of many people. Preaching on the part of the permanent deacon, taken in the *broadest* sense, encompasses many things. A permanent deacon "preaches" first of all by the witness of his life, especially in his marriage and family life. He also has the opportunity to "preach" in the marketplace through his teaching and witness to those he encounters in the daily regimen of his life and work. Finally he exercises his role as teacher in the various catechetical roles that he fulfills within the Church.

But preaching, taken in its strictly *liturgical* sense, also involves much more than simply the homily at Mass. The permanent deacon has the opportunity to preach in various liturgical and ecclesial contexts. These include, but are not limited to: wake services, the funeral liturgy outside of Mass, baptisms, wedding celebrations outside of Mass, liturgies of the Word outside of Mass, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, during the Liturgy of the Hours, and other prayer and liturgical services.

As regards the preaching of the homily at Mass, one must begin with a basic principle. The liturgical norms presume that the one who presides at a liturgical service, or who is the principal celebrant at Mass, is also to give the homily. This should be the ordinary practice.

This principle is born out by both the universal Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (DMLPD) and the General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM):

*“When the deacon presides at a liturgical celebration, in accordance with the relevant norms, he shall give due importance to the homily...”*<sup>55</sup>  
(emphasis added)

*“The homily [at Mass] should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself...”*<sup>56</sup> (emphasis added)

Now it is true that the permanent deacon *may* give the homily at Mass, but a closer look at the liturgical norms is necessary to understand the circumstances under which this would be the case:

*“The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to the deacon...”*<sup>57</sup> (emphasis added).

The key words and phrases here are “occasionally” and “according to circumstances.”<sup>58</sup>

The sum effect of the two phrases taken together is this: *From time to time, if common sense suggests that it is a good idea in this particular concrete instance*, the deacon may be entrusted with the homily by the priest celebrant. The other effect of these two phrases taken together is to rule out the notion of the deacon preaching the homily at Mass on a routine or scheduled basis. He may preach the homily at Mass for some identifiable advantage for the faithful in the congregation, but not on a regular basis.

---

<sup>55</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998), #25

<sup>56</sup> *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*, #66

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> To fully understand the meaning and intent of these key words and phrases, it is necessary to go back to the original Latin of this norm:

“Homilia de more ab ipso sacerdote celebrante habeatur vel ab eo committatur sacerdoti concelebranti, vel *quandoque, pro opportunitate*, etiam diacono...” (emphasis added)

The key words here, corresponding to those referenced above, are “quandoque” and “pro opportunitate.”

“Quandoque” carries the meaning of “from time to time” or “now and then.”

“Pro opportunitate” is also significant here. It carries the meaning of “as appropriate”, “as circumstances indicate”, “if common sense suggests” or “if it is deemed opportune”

In this context, it should be noted that it is the primary obligation of priests, especially the pastor, to ensure that the Word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish (c. 528). It is his special obligation, therefore, to regularly preach the homily at Mass. On the day of his ordination, the priest makes this solemn promise to preach the Gospel. The permanent deacon is ordained to assist the bishop and priest in the role of teaching the faith, but the primary responsibility for this in the parish setting rests with the pastor.

It should also be noted that Canon Law gives the diocesan bishop the authority to restrict or remove the faculty to preach (c. 764), but not to expand it beyond that which is envisioned by canon law and the liturgical norms.

In conclusion, then, two diocesan norms for permanent deacons preaching the homily at Mass are to be observed:

1. The permanent deacon may be entrusted with the homily at Mass on certain occasions, in other words from time to time, as circumstances suggest. This should not occur, however, on a routine or regularly scheduled basis
2. According to paragraph #66 of the General Instruction to the Roman Missal, it is for the priest celebrant of the Mass to make the determination as to when the permanent deacon may be entrusted with the homily. This determination should be made under the direction of the pastor of the parish where the homily is delivered.

The pastor and the permanent deacon assigned to the parish should have a discussion and come to an understanding as to when it is opportune that the permanent deacon be entrusted with the homily at Mass.

The permanent deacon should pay careful attention to the other opportunities he has to preach at liturgical services and in the course of his daily living in witness to Christ and the teachings of the Church.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

### **Entrance requirements to the diaconal formation program and the screening committee**

In his first letter to St. Timothy, St. Paul outlines the qualities a man should possess in order to be a deacon.<sup>59</sup> No less should be expected in our own day, and candidates for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Marquette must have certain qualities and qualifications. As a result of the work of the Diaconate Study Committee and in the light of all that has been written above which summarizes the Committee's reflections, the following will be the entrance requirements to diaconal formation as the Diocese of Marquette moves forward with its permanent diaconate formation program.

---

<sup>59</sup> 1 Timothy 3:8-11

The applicant who feels a call to the permanent diaconate must...

- be a male, baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church for a minimum of five years, active and faithful in the practice of the Faith
- be actively involved in the Church, registered in a parish or mission, well known, and highly recommended by his pastor and fellow parishioners
- have demonstrated active service, works of the apostolate, and leadership in parish and/or diocesan ministry
- enjoy a sound ethical and moral reputation in both the Church and civic community
- be free from all canonical irregularities and impediments for the reception of Holy Orders
- possess natural gifts for ministry, demonstrate maturity and balance, and enjoy good physical and mental health with no condition that would impede diaconal ministry
- be prayerful and committed to further spiritual formation
- be at least 35 years old and no older than 60 at the time of ordination
- have successfully completed at least two years of college, be able to do advanced academic work and understand theological concepts
- be married once for at least five years in a stable and sacramental marriage, enjoying the full support of his spouse who will participate actively in the formation program. Potential candidates who have been divorced will not be admitted into the diaconate program. If a candidate, already accepted, begins to experience serious marital discord, separation or divorce, the candidate will withdraw from the program
- be willing to remain celibate if his wife precedes him in death
- (if widowed) have at least two years to heal and recover from the loss of his spouse
- (if single) enjoy a stable, settled life, a history of healthy relationships, and be able and willing to accept the gift of celibacy, understanding the full implications of this charism
- (if a history of substance abuse exists) have achieved sobriety for at least five years and continue to participate in a "recovery" program
- (if a history of grave addictions exists, e.g. gambling, sexual, etc.) have demonstrated a freedom from these addictive behaviors for at least five years and continue to participate in a "recovery" program

In addition, as stated above, there must be a clearly identified specific need in the community, authenticated by the Bishop in consultation with the pastor, for which the man would one day be ordained to service. Without such a genuine need being identified, a man will not be admitted to the aspirancy program.

A dispensation from any of these requirements, only for a grave reason, is reserved to the Bishop of Marquette.

To assist the Bishop in the process of accepting potential candidates, a *Permanent Diaconate Screening and Admissions Committee* will be established. The purpose of this committee will be to discern and make recommendations to the bishop as to the suitability of a man to enter the aspirancy program or for an aspirant/candidate to continue on the path toward ordination as a permanent deacon in the Diocese of Marquette. The membership of this committee will be as follows:

Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program  
Director of the Department of Ministry Personnel  
A permanent deacon  
A permanent deacon's wife

The latter two will be appointed by the Bishop.

Profound gratitude is expressed to those members of the Diaconate Study Committee for their diligent and generous service. The results of their work, this pastoral letter and the future direction of the permanent diaconate program in the Diocese of Marquette is hereby entrusted to the loving care of Mary the Mother of God, who was the humble handmaid of the Lord, and also to the intercession of the early deacon martyrs of the Church.

From the Chancery of the Diocese of Marquette, June 9, 2011. *Memorial of Ephrem, Deacon and Doctor.*



Most Reverend Alexander K. Sample  
Bishop of Marquette