

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

Ordained for Service and Charity

On Saturday, August 16th nine married men will be ordained to the Permanent Diaconate for service in the Diocese of Des Moines. As their biographies in another section of this edition of *The Mirror* attest they come from a variety of parishes stretched out across the diocese.

Along with their wives, they have been engaged in a demanding four year program of formation as they seek to appropriate to themselves the identification of the icon of “Christ the Servant.”

Service was the task of the first seven deacons who were identified by the early Church community (Acts of the Apostles, 6). In order to be able to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word, the twelve Apostles and the community of disciples chose the seven, “filled with the Spirit and wisdom” for the ministry of waiting on tables being particularly attentive to the needs of those coming from different traditions. “They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.”

Over time, the permanent diaconate was not conferred and it was not a feature in the life of the evolving Church. Suggestions for the restoration of the permanent diaconate occurred as early as the Council of Trent in the 16th Century. In 1963 the Second Vatican Council called for its restoration and this was implemented in June of 1967 by Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic letter, “*Diaconatus Ordinem.*”

The idea for the permanent diaconate surfaced early in the Diocese of Des Moines. It is reputed to be among the first three dioceses in the United States to reinstitute the order. It began when four men from Council Bluffs who had participated in Cursillo training suggested their church service/leadership could be enhanced through ordination to the diaconate. The bishop agreed. The four pioneers from Council Bluffs were joined by six from Des Moines. Following a formation process that was somewhat experimental, eight of the candidates were ordained deacons by Bishop Dingman in 1972.

The nine men due to be ordained on August 16th constitute Cohort XIV. Thus, groups of varying numbers begin a four year process following the ordination of the immediately preceding cohort. An application process is conducted both for the benefit of the candidate and the Church in order to ensure that there is good match. Obviously, there is a range of opportunities for service in the Church, and harking back to the first selection process in the Acts of the Apostles certain individuals possess the qualities for the diaconal ministry.

Presently, some 16 men have been identified to constitute the Anglo component of Cohort XV. In addition five to ten candidates have surfaced to be a part of the Hispanic dimension of Cohort XV. It is anticipated that the groups will mingle for the pastoral training which occurs

principally in Des Moines. The academic portion which has taken place at Conception Seminary in Conception, Missouri will be divided. The Anglo candidates will continue to be trained at Conception. The Hispanic members will be under the tutelage of the Archdiocese of Chicago with classes being conducted in Des Moines in Spanish.

Naturally, the nine candidates being ordained on August 16th are tremendously excited along with their families and friends. Each new deacon will receive two assignments from me, their bishop, each dimension of equal importance. The first is the parish appointment where they will serve under the direction of the respective pastor. Most often we experience deacons in their liturgical role. They assist the priest at Mass and can proclaim the Gospel and preach. They can also preside at weddings, funeral and communion services and bring Viaticum to the dying.

The second part of the deacon's ministry is to that of Ministry of Service and Charity. In that capacity, the deacon becomes identified with a service to those in special circumstances (e.g. marriage and family life) or to the poor and those at the periphery of society (e.g. the homeless, the incarcerated, the physically or mentally challenged). In the totality of their ministry the deacons strive to be that icon of Christ, the Servant,

The deacon as bridge builder is not envisioned merely to fulfill a particular role – for instance, being the baptism instructor in a given parish. Rather, as an ordained minister he is expected to be a “bridge builder.” In that capacity, he develops an understanding of the total ministry of a particular parish, and comes to know as many parishioners as he is able in order to assist the parishioners in becoming active in a particular ministry. The involvement of individuals in parish life stimulates personal spiritual growth as well as building community.

The same intermediary service holds true for the deacon in the service and charity realm. He is expected not only to have a personal role in outreach but be one who facilitates a pathway for others to join in bringing the love of God to our suffering sisters and brothers either in service or in promoting social justice.

The nine being ordained deacons will join the ranks of 52 active permanent deacons and 32 retired. The original four Council Bluffs deacons brought inspiration to the entire Des Moines Diocese. And for fifty-two years deacons and their wives have been sources of enormous grace and benefit to our diocesan community. Having come to know the nine being ordained, I am filled with hope that this rich tradition will continue and flourish in the days ahead.