

July 2018
In the Heartland

Blessed with 17 New Deacons

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August 4th was a banner day for the Diocese of Des Moines. Seventeen men were ordained to the permanent diaconate.

Ours was one of the first dioceses to restore the reinstated diaconate nearly five decades ago. As a result, the corps of deacons has grown to 90, 59 of whom are active. The remainder have retired.

Similar to many pursuits in life, deacons first receive an inkling of such a vocation by attraction to the activity of deacons they observe. The deacon assists at the altar. He preaches and presides at baptisms, weddings and funerals. Possible candidates also sense in these times, when priests are stretched in so many directions, that they might be of valuable assistance to the priests.

As the diaconal candidates grow in their formation, there evolves a deeper sense of purpose. They are blessed with insight to see themselves morphing into the very person of Jesus. They take on his being, they identify themselves with the Christ, the icon of service. Diaconate was instituted in the early Church when the Apostles pinpointed the need among their members for assistants who would serve

at the table. Eventually, the Apostles prayed over and laid hands on seven men of good character and reputation. Thus, began the Order of Deacons.

The deacons are not “little” priests. They are an order unto themselves and comprise an identity which provides meaning and engagement in mission for the Church. Their ministry is centered on three anchors.

The Word: The deacon is immersed in the Gospel, in the Word of God which gives voice to his prophetic character. During the ordination rite, the deacon is handed the Book of the Gospels by the bishop with the accompanying guidance: “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach.”

The Scriptures communicate the mind and heart of God. The ministry of the deacon seeks to plant this Word in the hearts of the faithful.

The Liturgy: The deacon is called for service at the altar. In this role, he witnesses the reality that Jesus is the bread of life. It is he who provides the sustenance for the ongoing journey. This Eucharistic Jesus points the way to life that will never end and to which all of us should direct ourselves. It is the likes of deacons who lift our eyes and point the way.

“Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For in him, the Father, God has set his seal.”
(John 6, 27)

Charity. The deacon is to guide us in the pathways of love in the practical, down-to-earth tasks comprising his routine. Leading others, he finds the way to jails and prisons, to the habitation of the homeless, to the treacherous routes of refugees and immigrants, to the lonely, sick, abandoned, to the desperately poor, hungry for attention, a soothing word, even a hug. He fulfills the mandate of love espoused by Jesus, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Accompanying the deacons in the four year course of preparation are their wives. They, to a person, acknowledge the benefit they have experienced as partners in formation. To some degree, they will also share in the ministry of the deacon. Otherwise, they exercise their significant talents in different outreach and service. They are an invaluable gift to the life of the Church.

Heartiest congratulations are extended to our 17 new deacons and their wives. In The New Moment they bring a fresh burst of the Spirit enlivening our diocesan family.