



DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST

Permanent Diaconate



So what is the Permanent Diaconate, what is a deacon?

Deacons come from all walks of life.

It is safe to say that Deacons remain a bit of a mystery to many Catholics.

Maybe not so much with us in this room, but many of our Catholic brothers and sister are unfamiliar with permanent deacons.

The re-institution of the permanent deacons is pretty recent.

All of this growth has been in the decades following the Second Vatican Council's decision to reintroduce the diaconate "**as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy**," so about 60 years.

Since the reintroduction the Diaconate, it has grown to a community of around 50,000 deacons worldwide (49,176 per 2021). With 47% being in the US.

It is estimated that the US has 20,888 deacon 13,718 active in 2023



Questions that we sometimes hear; are they clergy, laity or perhaps a kind of hybrid?

And really the hybrid is not a bad description- Straddle the fence –

The Catechism of the Catholic Church , tells us that deacons- uniquely participate in Christ's mission and grace through the sacrament of Holy Orders, which imprints a permanent character aligning them with Christ as servants. (ccc1569).

Where the priest is persona Christi the Head, the deacon is persona Christi the Servant.

As Christ the Servant we stand in both the Church and World(secular) we bring the two together. We are ordained to serve.

Where does the Permanent Diaconate come from?



The first deacons believed to be the seven disciples requested by the apostles to assist them in distribution of provisions to the Greek widows of Jerusalem. Acts 6:1-6

In the first generation of the Church, the Holy Spirit led the Apostles to select seven men as “Deacons” who could free the bishops of their more secular and temporal duties.

We hear in the Act of the Apostles

*“So the **Twelve** called together the community of the **disciples** and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table.*

*Brothers, select from among you **seven** reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, where as we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*

The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. Acts 6:2-6

**Deacon: Derivative of the Greek noun, *diakonos*:
meaning servant, minister, or attendant-
emissary or go-between**

“Similarly, deacons must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Moreover, they should be tested first; then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”

Not actually referenced significantly until in the New Testament...1 Timothy 3:8-13

Deacon: Derivative of the Greek noun, *diakonos*:
meaning servant, minister, or attendant-
fuller understanding-- emissary or go-between

In his letter to Timothy, St. Paul describes the qualities of a deacon.

He says they are expected to exhibit seriousness, honesty, moderation in alcohol consumption, and not be driven by greed. They must faithfully uphold the mysteries of the faith with a clear conscience. Those who are married should be faithful to one spouse and manage their families responsibly. (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

These are still the qualities we look for in a Deacon 2000 year later.

- St. Stephen ordained by St. Peter



St. Lawrence

I will touch a little more on the History of the Permanent Diaconate

As I mentioned earlier, the Second Vatican Council restored the diaconate to its permanent place within the hierarchy of the Church, however its roots stretches back much further in our Church history to the apostolic times.

In the first generation of the Church, the Holy Spirit led the Apostles to select seven men as “Deacons” who could free the bishops of their more secular and temporal duties.

Later, during the Patristic Period, deacons became the bishop’s right-hand man often given the responsibilities of financial management along with the distribution of food and alms to the poor. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in A.D. 108:

Despite this influence, by the 8th century, the diaconate shifted from a permanent to a transitional order, being a preparation stage for the priesthood.

The permanent Diaconate faded away

Renewal of the Permanent Diaconate?

World War II: Largest religious communities in Europe-

- Priests imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps envisioned and speculated that deacons could have accomplished much good

Pope Pius XII (1957): In favor of the diaconate but said “the time is not yet ripe”

Pope Paul VI (1967):

- Wrote the apostolic letter, *Diaconatus Ordinem*, that gave specific directives for the restoration of the permanent diaconate
- Published additional “norms” in 1972 that were the basis for the current update

During the Second World War the restoration was discussed **at the largest religious community** in Europe, the **infamous concentration camp at Dachau**.

There, priests speculated what the Church would be like after the war if a married diaconate were restored.

These discussions were written down and circulated after the war, eventually finding their way into theological journals.

The question of restoring the diaconate was posed to Pope Pius XII in 1957, who remarked, “The idea, at least for today, is not yet ripe.”

Shortly thereafter, the time was ripe, On September 29, 1964, in four separate votes, the Council Fathers approved the restoration of the Diaconate as a permanent Order, in its own right, a full part of the three fold hierarchy of Holy Orders: bishop, priest and Deacon.

On June 18, 1967, Pope Paul VI issued a document that re-established the general norms for restoring the permanent diaconate for the Western Church.

Renewal of the Permanent Diaconate?

Bishops of the United States (1968):

- **Petitioned the Holy See for authorization to restore the permanent diaconate (May)**
- **Pope Paul VI agreed to the petition in August 1968**

**Diocese of Des Moines ordained first Deacon
Community June 4th, 1972**

The first deacon in the United State was ordained by Bishop Fulton Sheen in 1969

Following the directions of the Second Vatican Council, the Diocese of Des Moines established the Permanent Diaconate beginning formation in 1970. With the ordination of it's first 9 Permanent Deacons in 1972.

Since then we have ordained 16 communities and have our 17th in formation.

What is a Deacon

The Deacon as Sanctifier

In the context of the Church's public worship, because of its centrality in the life of the believing community, the ministry of the deacon in the threefold *diakonia* (*service*) of the **Word**, of the **Liturgy**, and of **Charity** is uniquely concentrated and integrated.

“Strengthened by sacramental grace, they are dedicated to the people of God, in conjunction with the Bishop and his body of Priests, in a service of the liturgy of the Word and of charity.”

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Charity

In his formal liturgical roles, the deacon brings the poor to the Church And the Church to the poor.

Likewise, he articulates the Church's concern for justice by being a driving force in addressing the injustices among God's people.

- ◆ *Visiting the sick/homebound*
- ◆ *Visiting jails/prisons*
- ◆ *Assisting the elderly*
- ◆ *The eyes and ears of the Bishopserving as he would*

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The Word

*The deacon's service **begins at the altar and returns there**. The sacrificial love of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist nourishes him and motivates him to lay down his life on behalf of God's people.*

- **Proclaiming the Gospel**
- **Preaching Homilies**
- **Scripture Study**
- **Baptism & Marriage Preparation**
- **Living the Gospel**
- **Evangelize through personal witness of the faith at home, work, and civic life**

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Liturgy

In the deacon, in a unique way, are represented the integral relationship between the worship of God in the liturgy that recalls Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice sacramentally and the worship of God in everyday life where Jesus Christ is encountered.

- **Serves at the altar**
- **Baptizes**
- **Witnesses marriages**
- **Officiates at wakes & funerals**
- **Leads prayer services**

The ministry of Liturgy, in a unique way, represents the integral relationship between the worship of God in the liturgy that recalls Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice sacramentally and the worship of God in everyday life where Jesus Christ is encountered

You might see the deacons; assisting bishops and priests in liturgical celebrations, particularly the Mass, distributing Holy Communion, aiding in marriage ceremonies, proclaiming the Gospel and preaching, overseeing funerals, and engaging in various charitable ministries (1569).

If you can imagine a ministry that is being done today, there is probably a deacon doing it somewhere.

Living History Farms Oct 4th 1979



“ So these are Deacons ”

One of the noteworthy points in our history is Oct 4th 1979 when St John Paul II –Visited Living History Farms
Deacons Larry Knotek (72) and Bob Howe (77) assisted (now) St. Pope John Paul II at Living History Farms Oct 1979.

***rumor* When Pope John Paul II was introduced to the Deacons he said
“So these are deacons”**

The 2 Deacons are wearing brown Dalmatics.

The Dioceses of the United States were among the first dioceses to have deacons and the diocese of Des Moines was one of the first 3 in the US.

Deacon Community

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- **60 active deacons**
 - **47 retired deacons**
 - **13 eligible to retire this year (20 before 2028 ordination)**
 - **18 Candidates in Formation**

 - **80 parishes**
 - - **39 with deacons**
 - - **41 without deacons**

Current Diaconate

60 Active Deacons

47 Retired

20 eligible to retire in the next 3 years 1/3rd

Current Formation Class Cohort XVII

- **18 Aspirants**

17 couples & 1 widower

- **Men's ages**

Range = 41-56 Average = 48.5

- **Two couples from Council Bluffs area**

- **One couple each from Leon & Harlan**

- **14 couples from Des Moines and surrounding area**

Starting 3rd year of Formation- Candidacy Phase

Ordination scheduled for September 2028

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Future Formation Class - Cohort XVIII

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- Bishop issues the Call to Inquiry October 2025
 - Admission and Scrutiny Phase Nov 2025- April 2026
 - Formation starts Sept 2026
 - Ordination Sept 2031

 - Formation Process
 - 2 years Aspirancy
 - 3 years Candidacy

Ongoing Formation

\$1400 parish assessment per Active Deacon(s)

- Ongoing formation – required 5-year post ordination
 - Year 1-3 - monthly study days – structured curriculum
 - Year 4-5 - self guided study (advance courses, spiritual direction, etc.)
- After 5-year - 24 hours required formation yearly
 - Fall and Spring Study Days & Summer Convocation accounts for 16 hr.
 - Josephinum Connect –Virtual learning for Permanent Deacons 8 hr.

Ongoing Formation

\$1400 parish assessment for an Active Deacon

- Yearly Spiritual Retreat- Diocesan offered in the Spring.
 - May attend other (partial reimbursement)
- Misc. workshops, seminars, conferences (diocesan sponsored)
- Outside Misc. workshops, seminars, conferences (partial reimbursement)



Questions