



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

The Ministry of the Deacon

The Deacon exercises the ministry of the Church in a three-fold way:

The ministry of the Word

The deacon proclaims the Good News both in word and deed, in preaching homilies, as well as teaching, counseling, proclaiming in the marketplace, and witnessing in marriage and family. (ND 79) He is an evangelizer and teacher. The deacon proclaims the Gospel and by virtue of his ordination, he may preach. The deacon is a catechist helping to provide religious formation of candidates and families preparing for sacraments. He is expected to live the word in his professional life and be an example of morality and ethics. (ND 31) In his ministry of the Word, the deacon responds to the commission given him at ordination: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach." The deacon is a life long student of God's word which must be deeply rooted in his own life.

The ministry of Liturgy

The Eucharistic Liturgy is the source and summit of the Church's activity. It is here that "the deacon is a visible, grace-filled sign of the integral connection between sharing at the Lord's Eucharistic table and serving the many 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." (ND 33) The deacon's ministry within the Mass reflects his mission and ministry in the world. (ND 35) The deacon assists at the altar of worship as public witness of service to the People of God. When he ministers in the Eucharistic Assembly, he brings with him the needs of the community to be raised up in prayer. "In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the deacon does not celebrate the mystery; rather, he effectively represents on the one hand, the people of God and, specifically, helps to unite their lives to the offering of Christ; while on the other, in the name of Christ himself, he helps the Church to participate in the fruits of that sacrifice." (ND83) It is the deacon who sends the assembly forth from the Liturgy to reach out in love and service to those in need of the Lord's help. The deacon is the ordinary presider of Liturgical Prayer in the absence of a Priest; he is an ordinary minister of the Rites of Christian Funerals, Matrimony and Baptisms.

The ministry of Charity and Justice

The deacon's ministry of charity and justice cannot be separated from his ministry of word and liturgy. His ministry of the word flows to his ministry at the altar which then seeks to animate the congregation to live their baptismal call to charity and justice by his example and leadership. "The deacon's service begins at the altar and returns there." (ND 37) The deacon sacramentalizes service and is to proclaim the word in the way he lives his life. He then challenges others to live out their baptismal vocation of service and justice to their brothers and sisters. (ND 32) The deacon leads the Church in what we traditionally called the "Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy." "As an ordained participant in the Church's ministry of charity and justice, the deacon assumes the duties entrusted to him by his bishop with humility and enthusiasm. At the core of his spirituality, a deacon puts on Christ and is guided by the love of Christ in caring for all in his charge: 'Charity is the very soul of ecclesial communion'." (ND 84) He is a man of advocacy and action. During the rite of diaconal ordination, the bishop prays that the deacon will be "full of all the virtues, sincere in charity, solicitous towards the weak and the poor, humble in their service . . . [and] may . . . be the image of your Son who did not come to be served but to serve." Therefore, "by word and example," the deacon places himself "at the constant service of [his] brothers and sisters." This service



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will include diocesan and parochial works of charity, including the Church's concern for social justice. It will also extend into Christian formation—working with youth and adults in promoting justice and life in all its phases—transforming the world through personal witness in conformity with the Gospel of life and justice. The deacon must strive, therefore, to serve all of humanity “without discrimination, while devoting particular care to the suffering and the sinful.” Ultimately, the deacon's principal diakonia—a sign of the Church's mission—“should bring [all whom he serves] to an experience of God's love and move [them] to conversion by opening [their] heart[s] to the work of grace.” (ND 85)

The deacon is a servant leader. At the Last Supper, after Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples, he then commissioned them: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (Jn. 13:15) This is one of the commissions Jesus gave to his Apostles that is continued on through apostolic succession in his bishops today. The deacon assists the bishop in attending to this responsibility. It can be said that the deacon helps the bishop in his mission of calling people to holiness by caring for their wholeness.

If you would like more information about or are interested in the diaconate, please contact the Director of Formation at one of the numbers listed below.

You can also find more information on the diaconate on the Internet at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/diaconate/>.