

I have come to serve

It was 2 a.m. I was in the midst of a four-hour layover in the Anchorage, Alaska, airport, drowsy and sluggish and looking forward to my connection to Japan to visit our military members and their families. I was in no shape or mood for evangelizing, but off to the side sensed someone approaching.

He was in his early 20s, quite disheveled in attire, thoroughly ring-pierced, with orange and yellow hair spiked in all directions. He had just left a small band of similarly festooned urchins who were eyeing his expedition in my direction.

He stopped and politely asked if I would sign the book he presented to me - it was a Bible! With relief, I complied.

“Are you a man of God?” he asked - obviously the Roman collar intrigued him.

“I hope so,” I responded.

“Do you spend your life preaching about Jesus?”

“I do my best,” I answered him.

As he headed back to his cohorts, I heard him say, “Cool man, how cool it could be. To spend your life preaching about Jesus!”

The “Evangelizer” became the evangelized!

The last two Saturdays have seen the ordination of 18 men into the Order of Deacon. 14 permanent deacons and 4 “transitional” deacons, i.e. seminarians hopefully to be ordained to the priesthood a year from now. Our 14 new permanent deacons are all married and have families. Their backgrounds are rich in diversity, talent and

experience. This renewal of the permanent diaconate is a gift of the Second Vatican Council.

The responsibilities of every deacon in assisting the bishop and priests are threefold: to be ministers of the Word, of the altar and of charity. They are, in word, deed and example, to “preach about Jesus.” At the time of his ordination, each new deacon is presented with the book of the Gospels with the exhortation:

“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.”

Good advice for every baptized Christian, but a special reminder for these men ordained – given the special grace – to “preach about Jesus.”

Parishes and other faith communities privileged to have the service of deacons need not be convinced of their singular value. Just ask their pastors! And that value will only increase in the coming years as our Church contends with fewer priests to meet the needs of a growing Archdiocese.

The next deacon group enters formation this September with candidates admitted only by recommendation from their pastor, based on their life of service as laymen.

Like Christ Himself, the Church exists to serve God’s people and the Order of Deacon is a constant reminder – indeed, a personification – of our Church’s servant identity.

If you are fortunate enough to be served by a deacon, take a fresh look at his unique contributions to our Catholic family. And maybe you, too, might echo the words, “Cool man ... to spend your life preaching about Jesus.”

For that, in fact is what we are all called to do.