

# Remember deacons too

While I realize this is the Year for Priests, I would hope in the not too distant future we might celebrate the Year for Deacons. As I look around and back in my own life of ministry, I'm impressed by how impressive deacons are and have been.

I think back to Bob Nohe, one of the earliest deacons in our archdiocese. Bob was truly a prince of a man. He was a wonderful father and husband, a man who came to serve and not be served.

Frequently, I see Deacon Ray Moreau. Ray has a ministry of administration. This is hardly a "flashy" ministry, but where would the world be without administrators?

I often think of Deacon Herman Wilkins, who ministers at Our Lady of Hope, St. Rita's and throughout the Dundalk area. Herman was born to be a minister of the Gospel, one with preaching, teaching and administering skills.

In literally every parish I visit for talks or retreats, I meet deacons involved in a myriad of parish ministries. As one little boy put it: "Thank God for God! What would we do without Him?"

It certainly is true that we can thank God for deacons. What would we do without them?

Recently I had the honor of being one of the concelebrants at St. Ignatius Church in Hickory for the 25th anniversary of Deacon Bob Lehr.

What a gift Bob has been to the church. Not only did he perform ministries of communion to shut-ins and help folks through the annulment process, but he also ran the parish for a while.

When the pastor, Father Ken Farabaugh, was killed in a tragic automobile accident, Bob took over supervision of the building of the magnificent present church. Daily he would visit the work site, and Father Jim Barker credited him for resisting external pressure to change the design of the church building.

Bob has every reason to be enormously proud of a life well lived as a husband to

Carol, father to Charlie and John, and a quarter of a century of solid service to the church. Yet, Bob is going through a period of anxiety and depression and is not currently in a role of active ministry.

From my own experience, with strokes in my eyes and blood clots in my lungs, the most challenging times of ministry have been when I could not minister. Yet, ironically, those challenging periods have given me insights and understanding of God and life that I could get no other way. The poet was right who said, "They also serve who only sit and wait."

We are human beings, not human doings. We often are measured by, or measure ourselves by, what we do. But in our "beingness" we honor God in a deeper way. "Be still and know that I am God."

In my mind, I've often compared Bob to the great St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was a brilliant 13th century theologian who's "Summa Theologica" dominated Catholic theology for 800 years. Aquinas literally wrote the book on God.

Yet, the saint who spent his life teaching and writing about God spent years and years before the end of his life in total silence. He referred to all that he had written as "so much straw." Was he clinically depressed? Did he have a breakdown? Or, as most commentators suggest, had Aquinas had a mystical experience of God and realized how inadequate all human language is?

Allowing ourselves to be the beloved of God is the greatest sermon any of us could give. Bob may yet say and do many more things in life. But in his silence, he is in the company of one of the greatest saints in history.