

The Sacrament of Service

Vocations come in many forms.

When we talk of vocations, our Church consistently focuses on vocations to the priesthood and religious life, rightly praying for their increase. But there are other vocations that are integral to our Catholic lives and to the life of our Church. Married life is one such vocation (I'll be focusing on marriage in a future column) as is single life. Another is the Sacrament, the Holy Order of Deacon.

Deacons can trace their roots to the earliest days of the Church. Like the 72 disciples who joyfully came together from the various lands to which Jesus had dispatched them, so do the 16,000 deacons serve today in the Catholic parishes of our nation.

Often serving in their home parishes – the very communities which encouraged them toward ordination – our permanent deacons, most of whom are married, begin their ministry first as ministers to their own families. Then, these husbands and fathers bring the example of Christ's love and fidelity to serve the larger family of God's people.

Pope Paul VI, upon restoring the permanent diaconate following the Second Vatican Council, called deacons "A driving force for the Church's service or 'diaconia' toward the local Christian communities, and as a sign or sacrament of the Lord Christ himself, who 'came not to be served but to serve.' "

In fact, the very word "diakonia" in Greek means service. Allowed by the Holy Spirit to blossom into its fullest expression, the diaconate provides a challenging ministry for those dedicated to Gospel lives of justice and charity.

How diverse and far-reaching is the ministry of deacons? They:

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