

As a deacon, he comes third

God is first, my neighbour second

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At the high point of the celebration of ordination, the candidate kneels before the bishop, and in a powerful and simple gesture which goes right back to apostolic times, the bishop places his hands upon the head of the candidate and so ordains him a deacon forever.

When priests are ordained, all priests who are present join in laying hands upon the newly ordained priest, and when a bishop is ordained all bishops present do the same for the newly ordained bishop, since ordination to the priesthood involves entry into the community of the priests of the diocese, and ordination as a bishop involves entry into the worldwide college of bishops, successor of the college of the apostles. But a deacon is ordained by the bishop alone, as he is more directly and personally linked to the bishop in the ministry of service.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

The prayer of consecration is prayed by the bishop: "Lord, look with favour on this servant of yours, whom we now dedicate to the office of deacon, to minister at your holy altar. Lord, send forth upon him the Holy Spirit, that he may be strengthened by the gift of your sevenfold grace. May he excel in every virtue: in love that is sincere, in concern for the sick and the poor, in unassuming authority, in self-discipline and in holiness of life."

The new deacon is then vested with the stole and the dalmatic, and kneels before the bishop to receive the Book of the Gospels. The bishop then gives him the sign of peace, and the Eucharistic liturgy continues, with the deacon exercising his ministry for the first time.

A person who senses that he may be called by God to be a deacon should first of all become informed about the ministry of deacon. There are several books and videos on this subject, but the two documents from the Holy See are essential reading: *Directory for Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* and *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*. He should pray about this possible vocation, and discuss it with a spiritual director, and with his pastor.

A candidate for the diaconate must for many years have given evidence in his life of a generous willingness to serve his parish, and the wider community. A deacon is ordained to serve, and the inner disposition to imitate Christ the servant cannot begin at ordination: it must already be present within the life of the potential deacon.

He must be a mature, humble and generous man, who seeks only to help other people. As with all Christians, but especially if he seeks to be ordained to the ministry of service, he must have as his motto, deep within his heart: "I am third." God is first, my neighbour is second and I am third.

FAMILY SUPPORT

If the person considering the diaconate is married, it is absolutely necessary that his wife and family wholeheartedly support his desire to proceed towards ordination as a deacon.

The Code of Canon Law states: "a candidate for the permanent diaconate who is not married may be admitted to the diaconate only when he has completed at least his 25th year; if he is married, not until he has completed his 35th year, and then with the consent of his wife" (Canon 1031).

If he wishes to proceed, he should obtain an application form, and begin the process of

discernment and selection. The archdiocesan diaconate admissions committee, along with the diaconate formation director, will consider all applications, and set in motion an extensive process of discernment which includes interviews, written submissions, psychological testing, personal references, etc. After the process of discernment and selection is completed — a process which will take several months - they will submit a recommendation to the archbishop concerning whether a possible candidate should proceed.

FOUR-YEAR PROGRAM

If selected, the candidate will begin a four-year program of formation and discernment. Each year it will involve a gathering of all of the deacon candidates once a month for 10 months for instruction and formation. Each week of the month the candidates will meet in smaller groups to discuss the material that is being considered that month.

The formation program involves classes, discussion and times of prayer. In the course of the four years there will also be practical experience both of the ministries of service, and of liturgical ministry. The wives and families of the candidates are also invited to participate in various elements of the formation program.

As the process unfolds, both the candidate and those entrusted with his formation will continue prayerfully to discern whether he is called to the diaconate, and at various stages he will be invited to apply for ministries leading up to ordination, such as reader and acolyte. Finally, he will apply for ordination as a deacon, and if called to this order, will be ordained to give his life in service to the people of our archdiocese.