

Dear Parishioners,

The Diocese of Springfield will ordain married men to the permanent Order of Deacon in June of this year. This bulletin insert will begin an overview of instruction on the office, functions and responsibilities of this ordained ministry. As we receive permission to reprint other information, it, too, will be included. The information below is reprinted from our Diocesan Web Site: [www.dio.org](http://www.dio.org). As you know, Little Flower Parish is assisting with the formation of one candidate: Scott Keen.

## The Permanent Diaconate



### The Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

A deacon serves the Church in the name of Jesus Christ as an ordained minister. Like bishops and priests, the deacon shares the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Deacons existed from the very earliest days of the Church, and are mentioned several times in the New Testament. Some men serve as deacons about a year before they are ordained priests; they are commonly called *transitional* deacons. Other men, married and single, serve as deacons for life; they are commonly called *permanent* deacons. While the diaconate existed throughout the history of the Church, gradually most deacons were on their way to the priesthood. Vatican Council II called for the restoration of the diaconate as a *permanent* ministry in the Church.

In 2002, Bishop George J. Lucas implemented the first permanent deacon formation process in the history of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

### Ministry of the Deacon

The word *deacon* in Greek means servant. Vatican Council II explained that deacons serve the Church by being "dedicated to the People of God in the ministry of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity." (*Lumen gentium*, 29)

The ministry of the liturgy includes assisting the priest at Mass and other liturgies, proclaiming the gospel and preaching the homily, baptizing, assisting at marriages, exposing the Blessed Sacrament and bestowing the benediction, administering sacramentals, bringing Viaticum to the dying, and presiding over funerals and burials.

The ministry of the word includes preaching, presiding at liturgies of the word, providing catechetical instruction, and being involved in the various teaching works of the Church.

The ministry of charity includes the great and various charitable works of the Church. Since he is ordained as a public servant of the Church, the deacon's charitable works are in many ways his special charism. He works with the aged and poor, the sick and suffering, the imprisoned and the burdened, the lowly and the needy, the elderly and all in special need of Christ's presence.

### Deacon Formation

The Church requires that the formation of a permanent deacon lasts five years. During the first year, the person is known as an *aspirant*. This is a special period of discernment for him and an opportunity to learn more, with other aspirants, about the vocation to be an ordained deacon.

During the next four years, he is called a *candidate*. His formation focuses on immediate preparation to become a deacon. During these five years (*aspirancy* and *candidacy*), the formation of the future deacon focuses on four areas of growth and development: the human, the *spiritual*, the *intellectual*, and the *pastoral*.

Aspirants and candidates gather one weekend each month (Friday evening through Sunday afternoon) at Quincy University where they are enrolled in a Master of Theological Studies curriculum. The weekends also include events to enhance their human, spiritual, and pastoral formation.

Aspirants and candidates also spend together a week every June on retreat. They meet with their personal spiritual director once a month. They pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* daily, attend Mass on weekdays when possible, and celebrate the sacrament of penance regularly.

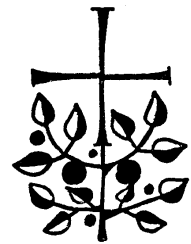
Aspirants and candidates can expect to spend 7-10 hours a week pursuing academics between the formation weekends. In addition, they are assigned to serve in a parish or institution 5-10 hours a week during their five years of formation.

The wives of aspirants and candidates are invited to take part in their formation gatherings. Wives must give their consent before their husbands are ordained.

The formation of a new group of deacon aspirants begins every two or three years in our diocese. Interested men are strongly encouraged to enroll in the diocesan *Lay Ministry Formation Program* in years when a new deacon formation group is not beginning.

### **Ministry as a Deacon in the Diocese**

After his ordination, the deacon will be assigned to a parish or institution where he will perform the ministry assigned by the bishop. He will be assigned where the bishop discerns the need for a deacon (in some place near his home and family, but not necessarily in his home parish). He may also be assigned to non-parochial ministry such as hospital ministry, campus ministry, prison ministry, charitable works, etc. It is *presumed* that the deacon will sustain himself and his family through a secular profession and will volunteer 10-20 hours per week to his Church assignment. He may, however, be *employed* by the Church (e.g., as a parish life coordinator, pastoral associate, etc.)



The deacon is required to pursue structured continuing formation opportunities. He must make an annual spiritual retreat.

### **Qualifications to Begin Deacon Formation**

--Solid faith in God and God's redemptive concern for all peoples, as revealed in Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the Catholic Church.

--Deep and growing spirituality, living relationship with the Lord Jesus through daily prayer; openness to continued human and spiritual growth; Eucharistic devotion; regular celebration of the sacrament of penance; Marian devotion

--Full Christian initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist) in the Catholic Church; be a Catholic for at least four years

### **Active and full participation in the life of the Church**

--Strong desire to serve the People of God: prior and continuing record of service in works of charity and mercy

--Adherence to the teaching of the Church, even in the privacy of one's personal life

Potential for transparency and credibility as an ordained minister of the Catholic Church

--If married: stable, mature, and valid marriage for at least seven years, and *consent* of wife to pursue the deacon formation process; commitment to life-long celibacy should the wife precede the deacon in death

--If single: demonstration of, and commitment to, life-long chaste celibacy (*Permanent deacons may not marry after ordination.*)

--Proven desire and ability to collaborate

--Academic ability to pursue graduate level courses

--Good health: physical and psychological

--Normally, at least 32 to begin the deacon formation process, and not over 62 at the time of ordination

--Reside in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois for at least two years

--Recommendation and support of one's pastor and parish community