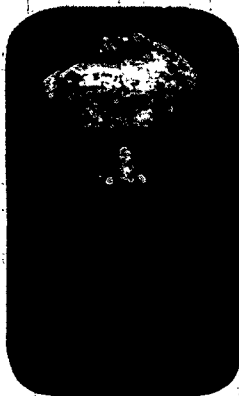


DEACONS: Ministry of Service

In the past three years, the people in several of our diocesan parishes have become accustomed to working with new members of the parish staff, the deacon interns.



These young men, having completed their formal education at St. Bernard's Seminary, are assigned to a parish for several months of internship under the supervision of the pastor and his staff. This is much like the medical profession where young medical interns receive additional training in a hospital setting.

This practice of using deacons for the ministry to the Church is not an innovation in our time, but the restoration of a practice of very ancient origin.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the twelve chose seven deacons to minister to the widows of the community (Acts 6:1-6).

The Fathers of the Church also bear witness to the ministry of the deacon. St. Ignatius of Antioch declares that the office of the deacon is nothing more than "the ministry of Jesus Christ". In the Teaching of the Apostles, deacons are described as the "bishop's ear, mouth, heart and soul", since at that time, they were assigned not to parishes, but were at the Bishop's personal disposal.

In speaking of the office of deacon, Vatican Council II says:

At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed "Not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service. . . It is the duty of the deacon . . . to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying . . . and to officiate at funeral and burial services.

You will see, therefore, the young deacon interns carrying out these duties of the ministry. But they will do it only on a temporary basis.

After several months of such service, the entire parish where they are stationed will be asked to celebrate as the young deacon is ordained to the office of priest.

Soon, however, we hope to establish in our diocese what will be known as the permanent diaconate. Already, our diocesan Personnel Board is interviewing for a director of such a program.

The ministry of the permanent deacon, restored by Vatican II, will involve the same duties as the deacon interns now perform. But these men will always remain deacons, not advancing to priesthood at a later date. Not necessarily called to celibacy, they will live with their wives and families rather than in a rectory with other priests.

After special and comprehensive training, permanent deacons will be ordained and assigned to parish ministry where they will carry out all regular duties of the deacon. They will perform all the liturgical duties except the celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance.

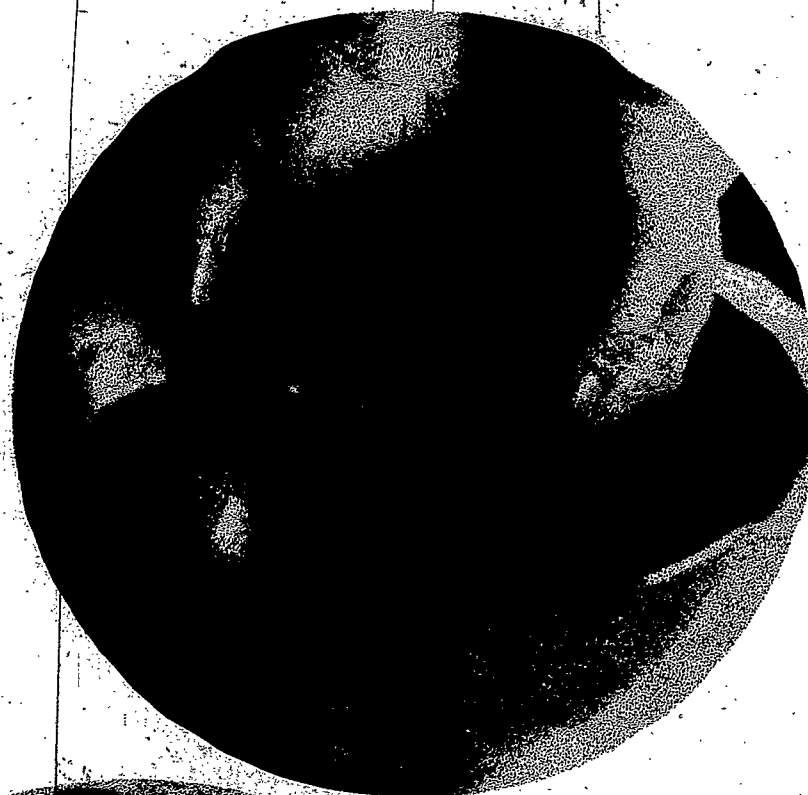
In some dioceses, they have been assigned as assistant and co-pastors.

As we draw to a close our series on ministries, I think that you are all more aware of the difficult task we are undertaking. The training of lectors, acolytes and permanent deacons must, if they are to flourish, be established on solid ground.

This is not being done as a new fad nor as a promotion of a gimmick. The ministries are a means of better serving God's people, an obligation we all share as Christians.

Pray with me, then that the programs we initiate may be guided by the Spirit of God who ever renews the face of the earth. And then listen for his call to you, as he leads you to share in the ministry of Christ Jesus.

Part 4 of 4 MINISTRY TODAY



Deacon Bob Gaudio, studying (left) can perform baptisms (above) while still a seminary student. As their responsibilities have increased deacons have assumed more liturgical duties (below).

