

Diaconate Program Meets Needs of Church

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At the first meeting of the Permanent Diaconate Task Force Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, executive director of the program, delivered the following address:

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's recent Pastoral Letter, Living Stones, had as its primary purpose to set forth pastoral priorities for our diocese in the immediate future. That letter contains a clear and unequivocal statement about the introduction of the permanent diaconate. Both in writing and in his conversations with me, Bishop Hogan has explicitly indicated that the Permanent Diaconate program is one of his top-ranking priorities.

In furtherance of his plan to introduce this program, Bishop Hogan has asked me to serve as executive director of the program, and I have been pleased, amid the press of other responsibilities, to accept. Father Sebastian Falcone has been asked to serve as coordinator, and he has accepted.

The decision to call into being a Task Force which has the overall responsibility for implementing the mandate of the bishop, and the decision to divide the Task Force into four sub-committees came from myself as executive director and from Father Falcone as coordinator.

After consideration of various

possible formats, this design appeared to us to be the best approach. First, the program must be mounted within an already existing complex network of working relationships and already existing ministries. Second, a small group, for all of its expertise, would be hard put to handle, within an appropriate time line, the many agenda items that must be faced if a workable program can be initiated. Third, it is our calculated judgment that a quality program can and will emerge from a broadly based group that embodies, on the one hand, pastoral expertise and, on the other, field experience.

The design of the Task Force and its sub-committees, as a general working format, has the approval and support of Bishop Hogan. It will be our responsibility to validate that decision.

The plan to introduce the Permanent Diaconate into the diocese of Rochester is not based on a spirit of competitiveness with other dioceses, nor on a nostalgic throwback to historical forms that once were, nor on developing a status symbol or a reward system in support of "pious types who aspire to a mini-priesthood," nor on a desire to sharpen the line of demarcation between ordained and non-ordained ministry.

Our program is in response to a variety of needs — genuine needs

at that: the needs of persons, mainstream as well as marginal, who must be reached effectively if the Church is to carry out her mission; the need of the Church to broaden the range and heighten the impact of her service; the need to specify more clearly the roles and functions which belong to the total ministry of the liturgy, of the word and of charity; the need to anticipate emerging needs as we head into the future with its increasing challenges to the Church vis-a-vis her stance towards the world.

Accordingly, as a permanent and independent ministry in its own right, the permanent diaconate should not be seen as a temporary expedient to offset the shortage of priests. The permanent diaconate calls for a careful delineation of the entire ministerial commitment of the Church, in order to enrich the Church's capacity truly "to care as Jesus cared." The permanent diaconate is a sacramental expression of the Church's desire to be more perfectly Church: community of faith in search of authentic service.

The question of ordaining women as deaconesses and more so as priests cannot be considered a proper and direct concern of this Task Force at this time. Our primary aim and purpose is to launch a diaconal program within the current provisions of the Church. Having said that, however, there is need to add: there is a strong, justifiable imperative for this group to look beyond its formal mandate. Just what degree of involvement can be made towards this longer view (e.g., through moral support, consciousness raising, advocacy stances, and direct action) will depend upon and be the measure of this group's energy and wisdom.

Those who might wish to stand in judgment about this Task Force and its mandate with a verdict: "Not enough!" might well keep in mind that stages of fuller development, in every area of human endeavor, depend on prior advances. We do not wish to sound patronizing, but we do wish to temper sensitivity with a sense of history.

The Permanent Diaconate Program in our diocese must be a sign and a response to the fuller presence of the Spirit in our midst. It is not more hands and heads and hearts that we need in the ministry, but more effective embodiments of the Spirit of God blowing where He wills and empowering us in greater measure to meet the needs of His People and His creation. Consequently, the Permanent Diaconate is a blending of divine-human factors which enables the Church of Rochester to understand and

serve the religious experience and the human aspirations of those who, for whatever reason, make this diocese their home or place to be.



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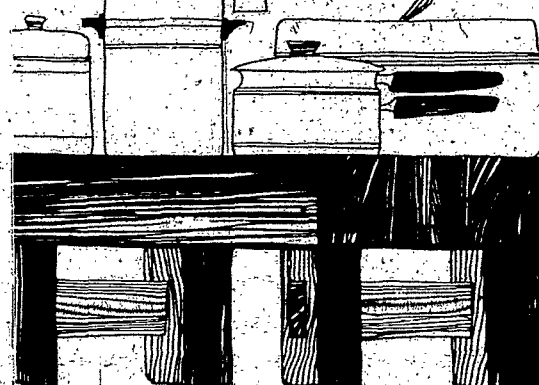
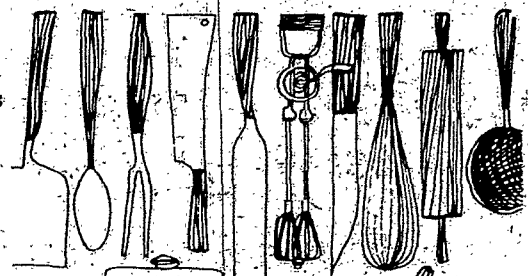
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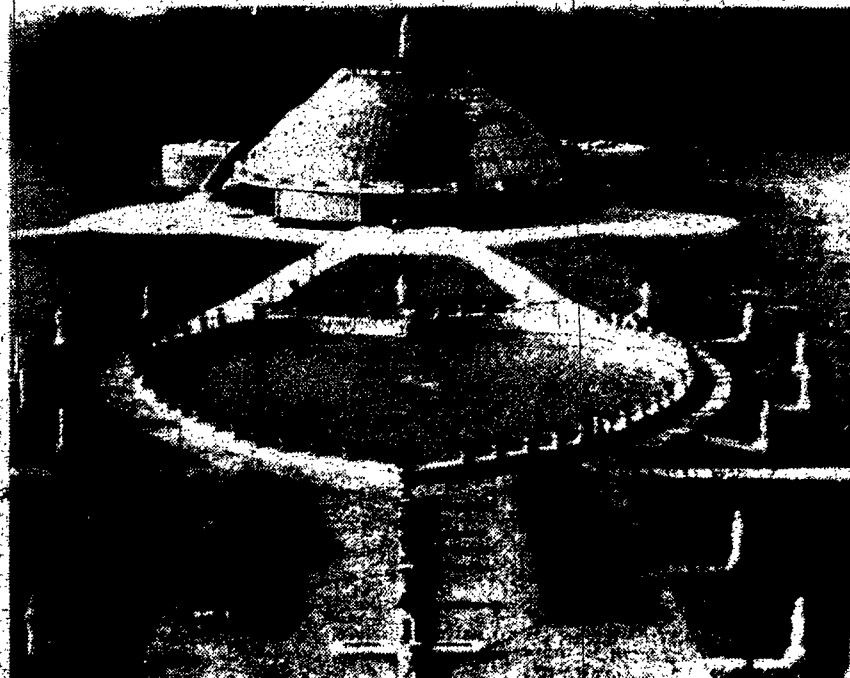
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