

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

I Have Come to Serve

At last weekend's Liturgies the Church of Rochester marked a new milestone as the Permanent Diaconate Program was inaugurated in our twelve county diocese. After long, careful planning, we are now ready to introduce the Permanent Diaconate as a ministry in our local Church. The restoration of this ministry was mandated by the Second Vatican Council, and authorized by Pope Paul VI.



In 1968, ten years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops requested and obtained permission to restore this ministry here in our country. Well over one hundred dioceses have already begun this ministry. Now that our homework is completed, it is our turn to implement the program. You may recall that in my Pastoral Letter, LIVING STONES, of November 28, 1975, I outlined some specific tasks that I would like to see accomplished. First among them was the establishment of the Permanent Diaconate Ministry:

I wish to have the permanent diaconate operating within this Diocese in two years. I regard this as a pastoral necessity. There is a special need for this new form of ministry and leadership in our urban ministry where minorities urgently need access to the ordained leadership of the Church of Rochester. They have many gifts to offer us and I think the diaconate is the best path to receive these gifts. I also think that this form of ministry is needed in the ONE PRIEST rural areas of our Diocese which often have sprawling parishes. There are also PARTICULAR MINISTRIES which may be able to benefit from the diaconate — such as hospital ministry, prison ministry and youth ministry. The role of the diaconate must be carefully evaluated and I would ask that St. Bernard's take a leadership role in training the deacons. I will direct my staff to begin work on this immediately, but I will also rely on the acceptance and support which can only come from the Church-at-large.

Today, dear Readers, I would like to share a few of my prayerful reflections with you as this new ministry is begun in our diocese. Recently I had occasion to read a magnificent document published by our National Council of Catholic Bishops entitled, AS ONE WHO SERVES. This fine publication speaks to all of us who are called to be servants to one another. How aptly this phrase, "As One Who Serves," sums up what the diaconal ministry is all about!

Our blessed Lord gives us the example of who is the greatest in the Kingdom.

"A dispute arose among them about who should be regarded as the greatest. He said: 'Earthly kings lord it over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called their benefactors. Yet it cannot be that way with you. Let the greater among you be as the junior, the leader as the servant. Who, in fact, is the greater — he who reclines at table or he who serves the meal? Is it not the one who reclines at table? Yet I am in your midst as the one who serves you.'" (Luke 22:24-27)

Christ is indeed the archetypal deacon for He comes to each of us as one who serves. As your bishop, I am called to be a servant to our entire diocesan family. But since I am only one person, I need the assistance of many people to help me in my duties of teaching the truth, healing wounds and celebrating the goodness of God among us. All of you who, in any way, are called to the roles of leadership are the extension of my presence in the Church. In a special way the deacons help me carry out my ministry of service to God's people in need.

I have meditated on this important ministry and I wish to continue to share with you the thoughts and words that came to my mind as I delved into the Scriptures and historical sources for the ministry of the diaconate. Hopefully, you will find these helpful and rewarding:

1. Just this past Sunday we read in the sixth chapter of the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES where the community called some of its members to a ministry

of service: "Seven men acknowledged to be deeply spiritual and prudent" were chosen to distribute food daily and take care of the needs of the early Christian community.

2. St. Ignatius of Antioch, a great and undaunted spokesperson of the Church martyred during Trajan's reign (A.D. 98-117), had these words to offer:

"Everyone must show the deacons respect. They represent Jesus Christ, just as the bishop has the role of the Father, and the presbyters are like God's council and an apostolic band. You cannot have a church without these." (Trallians 3:1)

"Let the bishop preside in God's place, and the presbyters take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus, Christ who was with the Father from eternity and appeared at the end (of the world)." (Magnesians 6:1)

Max Thurian, of the French monastic community of Taize, France, (a Protestant group of monks) says this in his study of the orders of ministry in the primitive Church as manifested in the Letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch:

"The bishop appears as the sign of the authority of God, of the Father or of Christ, in the Church. The presbyters represent the authority of the Apostles around Christ, united in the presbyterate, as the senate of God, the senate of the Apostles, the precious spiritual crown. The deacons exercise the service of Christ himself; they are the signs of Christ the servant, the companions in-service of the bishop."

3. St. Polycarp: (c.70 - c.155 A.D.)

"The deacons should be blameless before his righteousness, as servants of God and Christ and not of men; not slanderers, or double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all matters, compassionate, careful, living according to the truth of the Lord, who became "a servant of all." (Letter of Polycarp 5:2)

4. An early second century document — The DIDACHE tells us:

"You must . . . elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried." (15:1)

5. Probably the best known deacon who became a saint, in addition to the holy martyr Stephen, was Saint Laurence:

His martyrdom in 258 A.D. illustrates that the deacons were expected to stand by their bishop through any trial. This is expressed in the Office for his feast: he says to his bishop, Pope Sixtus, who is being led away to martyrdom: "Where do you go without your son, Father? "Where, O holy Priest, are you going without your minister?"

From the apostolic age the diaconate has had a clearly outstanding position among all the ministries in the Church. The document of the Second Vatican Council, entitled, THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH, reminds us: "The deacon is at the disposal of the bishop in order that he may serve the whole people of God and take care of the sick and the poor; he is correctly and rightly called, 'one who shows love for orphans, for the devout and for the widowed, one who is fervent in Spirit, one who shows love for what is good.' Furthermore, he is entrusted with the mission of taking the Holy Eucharist to the sick confined to their homes, of conferring baptism and of attending to preaching the Word of God in accordance with the expressed will of the Bishop." (L.G. section 30)

As your Bishop, I am delighted to know that this new ministry is now ready to be initiated in our diocese. Two years of planning and toil have been spent in study and preparation for this new program. I am sure that the entire Church of Rochester joins me in expressing our heartfelt thanks to Bishop Hickey, as Executive Director, Father Sebastian Falcone, as Coordinator, and all the members of the Task Force who labored so generously and diligently to bring this program into existence. We are indeed in their debt. As we offer our congratulations to the Task Force for work completed, we pledge our prayerful support to Monsignor George Cocuzzi, the new Director of the Program. It is my fervent prayer that many worthy candidates will respond to the call to service as ordained ministers of our Church.

Vitality of the Church Today

Following is the address of Pope Paul VI, delivered in the course of the general audience on April 5.

The evangelist John narrates that during the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on the day known as Palm Sunday, in the midst of the great crowd extolling Jesus, there were some Greeks, who went up to the apostle Philip (the one from Bethsaida in Galilee), and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." An extraordinary episode in the Gospel, which represents for us the movement of public opinion surrounding the figure of the Savior, who wishes to be known and consulted also by strangers. A fine and interesting one, which is a prelude to the spread of the Gospel message.



We wish to see the Lord! For us this desire takes on a new formulation which addresses its aspiration not so much to the

historical person of Christ as to his Mystical Body, the Church, which is derived from him, lives off him, lives for him, and represents the historical and mystical-actuality of the Lord Jesus in time, present and accessible to us. And we wish to see in your presence at this momentary, but very significant meeting, the expression of an aspiration similar to the one now recalled by us with the Gospel quotation: we wish to see the Church, we wish to know the Church.

This survival of the Church in modern times is the most formidable pretext to arouse the strongest opposition to her, and often the fiercest persecutions. The materialistic mentality of the present civilization gives rise in popular conscience, and

even in men of high culture and modern intellect, to an aggressive question: The Church, why? Is it not an archaic institution, now meaningless? Is not the civil and profane world now self-sufficient? What is the use of the Church now? It does not work, as modern man works; what does it do, what does it produce? Everyone can realize the radical opposition to the Church presented by some as a society superimposed on the civil one, and which, even if tolerated to some extent, is considered superfluous, idle, useless, outdated! What historical pages, of modern life, of fierce politics, of progressive and revolutionary infatuation open before us! And what a tide of anti-clericalism, irreligiousness, blind but cunning fury against all surviving faith, and more than ever against that religious, institutionalized, independent faith which is called the Church!

Is the Church therefore a historical phenomenon of the past, which has left us relics of institutions, now outdated and absorbed in purely lay and modern forms? At this point there arise elementary but extremely vigorous and rigorous questions, to which the young seem to be especially sensitive, and seem to possess, through intuition or through initial experience, original solutions, even though traditional and tested by centuries of testimony not borne in vain. In short, an ancient, but revived twofold question is agitated in the depths of the conscience of youth today: What is the Church? What does she do?

We will not answer these questions at this moment, but we present them to your reflection. Perhaps visiting and contemplating the monuments that you visit as intelligent tourists, and even better as thoughtful Christians, you will understand the words of the Lord Jesus: "I tell you if these (his disciples) were silent, the very stones would cry out."