

Division of Personnel Permanent Diaconate 1983-84

The Greeks called it "Diakonia," meaning "service," and that's what the 50 permanent deacons in our diocese are doing, in places ranging from prisons and hospitals to local parishes.

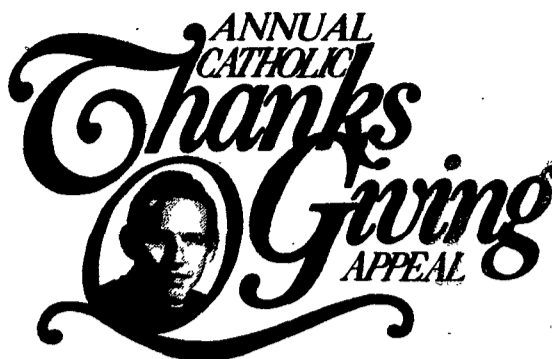
Deacons work in ministries which reach out to young adults, families, troubled youths, alcoholics, the poor, the unemployed... in dozens of areas of our community.

For instance, Deacon Greg Doyle, whose home parish is St. Rita's in Webster, has initiated a self-help program for alcoholics based at St. Augustine's in the city.

The effort, called the Matt Talbot Foundation, includes several group sessions



Deacon Zawacki, who also had a part in the area's sesquicentennial observance, speaks with Joan Young of Old St. Mary's Church, also observing its 150th anniversary this year.



in which people, together with family members, focus on their problems.

"The spiritual aspects are what we highlight," says Deacon Doyle, who was ordained in 1983, "and today we have more than 150 people attending our weekly sessions. So we must be providing needed food for spiritual growth.

Deacon Stan Zawacki, ordained in 1982, works in the jails and prisons.

"I couldn't possibly do much good by myself, so what I try to do is to mobilize groups of lay people to work inside the prisons," Deacon Zawacki says. "Initially I go in with the group, help them get started, then step aside. Today there are groups of lay people working in Auburn, Nevada and Groveland prisons."

Besides the social justice aspects, ordained deacons also have duties in the Word, Sacrament and Liturgy.

"I love to preach the Word," says Deacon Ray Defendorf from Corning.

"Preaching is the highlight of our diaconal duties," agrees Deacon Al Wilson.

Deacon Wilson, who works at the newly formed Transfiguration Parish in Plattsburgh,



Deacon Doyle discusses program with Ellen Henson, a staff member of the Matt Talbot Foundation.

says, "I'm preaching several times a week, not only on weekends, but also during the week... before I go off to my job at Taylor. It is truly a rewarding experience. In fact, I get more out of preparing the homilies.

"Being involved in the creation of a new parish, I'm also involved in everything from baptism preparation to the RCIA program and human development."

There are 18 men in diaconal formation at the present time, attending courses at St. Bernard's Institute, and doing a variety of field education projects. Another eight will begin studies in the fall.

According to Msgr. George Cocuzzi, program director, "The diaconate is the public ministry which mediates the Church to the world, and which strengthens the Church through prayer and service."

The early deacons waited on tables and cared for the sick and orphaned and the elderly. Today's deacons are doing much of the same — and just as well.



Father Bruce Ritter

HE WAS, ONCE, SOMEBODY'S CHILD

Surgeons in battlefield aid stations separated the wounded into three categories: the slightly wounded that could safely wait for medical attention; those so severely injured that medical help was useless; and the others, less seriously wounded who might live if helped immediately. They called it triage.

He was, once, somebody's child. Now he's merchandise, a commodity. Anybody who buys him is crazy. A malevolent little boy lost at 16, now a profoundly sad and very scared 19-year-old street wolf who has absolutely no reason to believe he will make it back, but has to think that or go crazy.

I met Peter five years ago when he was 14 — a street kid even then — and hadn't seen him for over a year when he walked into my office yesterday. He was wearing skin-and-muscle tight jeans and a body shirt unbuttoned to the waist. We exchanged greetings — mine delighted, surprised; his, muted and detached.

I hoped he was doing well. Peter gave a sad wry smile. OK, he said. Not bad, he said. I think of killing myself a lot, he said. Do you need a place to stay, I said. No, he said. I stay at the Baths. It's cheap. I kinda help out around there. It's a bad scene, I said. It's a living, he said. And then I think he remembered about dying because he started slightly, sat for just an instant of frozen immobility, then shrugged, and again gave me a faint sad smile.

Come back to Covenant House, Pete, I said. No more programs, Bruce. I'm too old. I'm a male hustler, Bruce. I'm not gay. I'm bisexual... He stopped and his face twisted. He couldn't continue. Come on back, Pete, to our school. We'll get you a job. That lifestyle is going to kill you, Pete. It's rotten that you have to do that. He didn't hear me. I grabbed his hand, his arm. We've got this really great place, Pete — really good people. He looked at me in great pain. I'm a go-go boy, Bruce, in this bar on Eighth Avenue. I dance there. If the johns like me they stick a five dollar bill in my jock strap.

Come back, Pete. We'll find you a place. It's not too late, Pete. This Monday, Bill, downstairs will get you a job. He's an expert at it. It's OK, Pete. I'm really glad you're back, Bruce, he said. I'm a stripper in a male burlesque joint; four performances a night for a hundred bucks. I dropped out of school in the seventh grade. I worked a couple of girls for a while, Bruce. He couldn't stop. He had to tell me the whole sad sick story. It was almost as though he was afraid to leave out any details — like when you go to confession.

I'm really glad you're back, Pete. So are Gretchen and Steve and Dave. You've got to change your lifestyle, Pete.

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

You're into a lot of things that make you feel pretty sick about yourself, Bruce. I don't have any clothes. All my stuff was ripped off. I had a stereo... Pete, you're not going to get out of that mess you're in without help.

There's a warrant out for my arrest, Bruce. I pawned a gold bracelet for a friend. It turned out to be stolen. We can work that out, Pete. We've got a place for you and a job and school. We've missed you a lot, Pete. Finally there was no more to tell: the small dirty puddle that was his young life spilled out between us.

"He was afraid to leave out any details — like when you go to confession."

He relaxed and took a deep breath. I think I'll go downstairs and talk to Bill about that job. Is it OK if I come back and talk to you again on Monday? He looked down at his low slung jeans with some amusement. I can't go for an interview in these.

Pete can make six hundred dollars a week — tax free — on the street. It's going to be awfully tough for him to work 40 hours a week for \$3.35 an hour. It's going to be even harder for him to go back to school and learn how to read and write. He's a good kid. He came in to see me for a lot of reasons he didn't really understand very well. He's not a religious kid and he doesn't know anything about going to confession but he needed and wanted absolution bad. Like most of us he was about as sorry as he could be.

"I think maybe the only way he feels he can reassert some control over his life is to end it."

A lot of people drift into, slide and choose into a lifestyle that ultimately kills them. It's almost certainly too late for Pete. The Peters of this world are refuse in our social sewers, to be inexorably flushed down and out, drowned in a sea of garbage: human pollution to be coped with and buried and dumped. Most honest, caring people think so. One such, good friend, sighed and murmured the word triage. Let them go, Bruce. Think of the others, the ones you know you can help, the ones that still have a chance. He's already almost dead, Bruce.

Peter is already almost dead, and I think maybe the one way he feels he can reassert some control over his life is to end it. Pete is most definitely one of the Lord's lost sheep. He is not the cuddly innocent lamb that just happened to wander away from the fold. In biblical categories I think it's fair to say that Pete is a sinner — the kind over whom heaven rejoices if they turn away from the evil pervading their lives and turn back to God. Pete can't do that without God's help, nor can we.

Pete doesn't really want to end his life but he's not certain he can begin it again either. Only the Lord can provide the massive life support systems he needs to make it — and to carry through with the metaphor — places like Covenant House must exist as the intensive care units for these dying children. We need you to help us, to go on helping us. We're always in need and we are occasionally subject to the kind of questioning doubts that make the solution of triage very attractive. But I refuse to triage my kids, to screen out the ones who won't make it. I cannot exercise that kind of clinical detachment when a kid is involved. My staff and I refuse to turn any kid away.

Thanks much for your help and prayers.

I agree every child should have a chance. Enclosed is my contribution of \$ _____ please print:

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LIFE ON THE STREET IS A DEAD END