

Board placing deacons in parishes, agencies

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For the first time in three years, the diocesan Deacon Personnel Board is offering the services of permanent deacons to parishes and other organizations.

In a memo sent out last month to pastoral teams throughout the diocese, the board noted that "several men ... will definitely be free for a new assignment this Spring," and that possibly "others will be looking for new avenues of service as their life circumstances change."

So far, 14 parishes and social agencies have responded with requests for deacons, remarked Deacon Steve Graff, diocesan director of the diaconate. The deacon personnel board was slated to consider any such requests at its April 17 meeting.

The board, established in 1982, monitors

and reviews deacons in their post-ordination work. It serves as a clearinghouse for assignment recommendations to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Graff said, noting that the bishop must give final approval to any deacon assignment.

Deacon Graff said the March memo included a job description for pastoral teams to consider. The job description was compiled from a survey of permanent deacons taken in October, 1989. Divided into the traditional categories of "Service, Word and Sacrament," each category first lists the function most commonly performed by deacons, followed by functions deacons perform less frequently within the category.

In the "Service" category, parish social ministry headed the list of duties performed by deacons. Deacons often work with social ministry committees; parish

evangelization; outreach work and census taking; food pantries; peer ministries; and counseling.

Under the category of "Word," proclaiming the Gospel was the No. 1 function of deacons in parishes and other religious communities, with preaching and catechetical work running second and third.

Serving at the Eucharist was deacons' most commonly performed function under the "Liturgy" category, followed by presiding at communities' formal worship services, baptisms, marriages and funeral rites.

Deacon Graff said the job description was included in the mailing so that pastoral teams could form a clear idea of where to place a deacon in their community. In this way, for example, parishes might consider hiring a pastoral associate or a religious education coordinator rather than a deacon to fill positions that would such require such personnel. However, as the memo explained, "some deacons have expressed a desire to commit themselves to full-time ministry," which would enable them to take up such a position as pastoral associate.

Deacons generally spend 8-10 hours a week in ministry and receive no salary, but are compensated for expenses, continuing education and retreat costs.

Deacon Graff also said that social-service agencies are interested in placing some of the available deacons in positions. For example, he said, a deacon might be assigned to work with developmentally disabled persons through one area agency. Such work would be in keeping with the original mission of the diaconate, dating

back to the early church when deacons were assigned to work with disenfranchised members of society, Deacon Graff commented. He added that the memo also included a vision statement outlining the diaconate's call to minister to the "the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the alienated."

At the parish level, the disenfranchised might encompass individuals who have become alienated from the church, Deacon Graff continued, noting that permanent deacons can serve as sounding boards for those who would be reluctant to openly voice their feelings about the church before another hierarchal official.

"You go and meet with a couple who've been alienated from the church," he said, illustrating his point. "They can take out their anger on you." He noted that the deacon is seen as an "official" of the church, yet, because of his secular work and lifestyle, is also seen as accessible to those with whom he shares such experiences.

"(Deacons) are used to working in big Christian circles, and in circles in which this word (Christian) never comes up," he concluded.

SSJ motherhouse to be site for discernment workshop

ROCHESTER — The Great Lakes Leadership Group will offer a session of "Pathways," a workshop on life/work discernment and planning from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, May 17 at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave.

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