



Catholic Courier

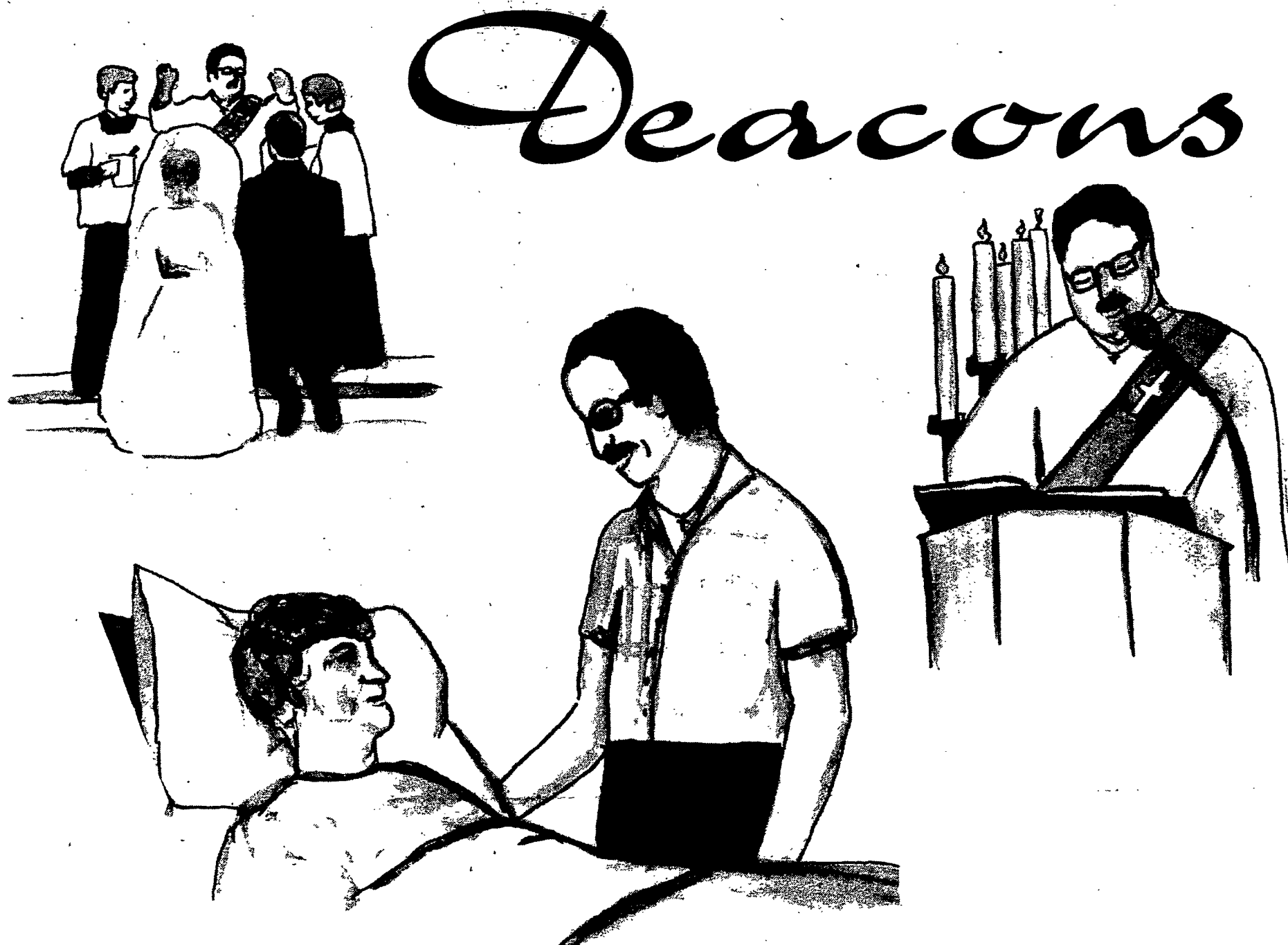
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Ministries range far and wide, yet call to service is a constant

Upon leaving Sunday Mass at Hamlin's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, well-meaning churchgoers often say "Have a good day, Father" to Deacon John Holmes.

"I don't know what to say to them," he remarked with a chuckle.

Clothed in albs and stoles at Mass, deacons indeed resemble priests. By giving homilies, they sound like priests. By performing various kinds of ministry in their parish and community, they act like priests.

Yet a permanent deacon's role is more limited than a priest's and his full-time work is usually not church-related. The same person who can be mistaken for a priest on Sunday can also don a suit and tie on Monday morning and go off to his full-time job. And return home at night to a wife and family.

Because of these circumstances, the general public often struggles to identify a permanent deacon — not only in appearance, but also in the ministry he performs.

"The majority of the people see the deacon at Mass, but they do not see him in his one-on-one (deacon's) ministry, day in and day out," remarked Deacon Samuel Taub, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for the Perma-

nent Diaconate, in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C.

Confusion may also stem from the fact that deacon ministry is a rather recent re-development in the Roman Catholic Church: After an absence for several centuries, the permanent diaconate was restored by the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s. The movement is even more recent in the Diocese of Rochester, where the first class of permanent deacons was not ordained until 1982. (Permanent deacons are individuals who are not planning to become ordained priests; transitional deacons are those studying for the priesthood.)

Further complicating the issue of a permanent deacon's identity, Deacon Holmes pointed out, is the way in which deacons' roles have been affected by recent changes in the Catholic Church. He pointed to the deacons' increasing importance in parish life, as opposed to their more traditional role of performing ministry in the community, as the number of priests and women religious continues to decline.

"The deacon is called to a service ministry; we have tried to put service in the forefront. But by default, it's just happened that deacons are be-

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