



Permanent Diaconate

BACKGROUND

Statistics & History

There are 110 active and 19 retired Permanent Deacons in the Archdiocese of Toronto. On May 31, 2008, the Archdiocese will ordain nine new deacons for ministry in our Archdiocese.

Deacons are called to assist the bishop in spreading the Gospel message and caring for the needs of the poor and marginalized within our society. In the early church, the role of the deacon was to assist the bishop directly; today deacons more commonly assist the parish priest in his ministry, provide outreach in the community (hospitals, correctional facilities) and celebrate other liturgies that take place outside of Mass.

In 1967, a few years after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Roman Catholic Church reintroduced the permanent diaconate program. Permanent deacons are not staying to become priests – once ordained, they are a deacon for the rest of their lives.

Since 1972, St. Augustine's Seminary in Scarborough has provided a formation program for candidates for ordination to the Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Diaconate Formation Program

The Diaconate Formation Program is open to all men, aged 35+, of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto who meet the basic requirements. Candidates accepted into the program are required to participate in a formation program for a period of four years.

This four-year preparation period incorporates spiritual, academic and ministerial preparation that is vital for a person seeking a life of commitment to church service. Such preparation fosters a spirit of community among the candidates and their families. The candidates are guided in methods of prayer, contemplation and self-awareness.

In the second year of formation, candidates are elevated to the Ministry of Acolyte and in their third year, to the Ministry of Lector. In preparation for their charitable ministry, the men participate in a six-month Supervised Pastoral Experience. To better prepare for the ministry of preaching, the candidate during the fourth year is expected to prepare and present a homily at least once a month. By December of their fourth year, the candidates publicly express their intention through the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for Ordination to Diaconate.

At the end of the fourth year, upon fulfilment of all program requirements, recommendation of the Formation Committee and the Director of the Formation Program, and with the Archbishop's approval, the candidates are ordained to the Order of Deacon.

For more information on the Permanent Diaconate Program at St. Augustine's Seminary, please visit their website, www.staugustines.on.ca.

FAQ

What is a Permanent Deacon? Permanent Deacons assist parish priests in addition to providing spiritual support to the community, for which they're ordained. Following an extensive four year formation period which is highlighted by their ordination, deacons are assigned a parish for liturgical service as well as a specific ministry within the community (ie. Hospital Ministry, Prison Chaplaincy, etc.)

What is the difference between Permanent and Transitional Deacons? Transitional Deacons go on to become ordained priests in the Roman Catholic tradition whereas, permanent deacons remain a permanent deacon indefinitely.

Who can be a Permanent Deacon? Permanent deacons are married or single men over the age of 35. Those who desire to pursue the permanent diaconate must enjoy the health, time, academic ability and support of their family needed for the years of preparation. After ordination, they must make specific commitments of time and talent to the Church without compromising their family, marital or joy responsibilities.

Are Permanent Deacons married? Although some deacons are single, the vast majority are married and share their dedication to ministry with their wives. As part of their vows for ordination, married deacons may not remarry if their spouse passes on. Those not married before ordination are not able to marry and make promises to remain celibate. Deacons' wives are an important part of their formation process, with the couple going through much of the process together.

Are Deacons Paid? Is this their full-time job? Deacons are a critical component of spiritual support and service within the Archdiocese of Toronto. Permanent Deacons often hold secular full-time jobs in addition to their duties as deacons. Apart from their service at their assigned Catholic parish, they will spend countless hours of ministry in prisons, hospitals, seniors' homes and other areas where people cannot normally attend church.

Can a deacon celebrate Mass? Are they just a married priest? No. Only a priest or bishop may celebrate Mass. Their primary role is to assist the Bishop or the Presiding Priest at Mass. A Deacon reads the Gospel and preaches when required. Because they have a ministry to care for the poor and sick they may also prepare and read the Prayers of the Faithful at Masses which they are present. Deacons can baptize, witness marriages and preside at wake services and funerals as well in addition to assisting the priest at the Eucharist.

What do Deacons wear? When in liturgical dress (vestments), deacons wear an alb (long white tunic), stole (long, narrow strip of cloth, draped over the neck) and dalmatic (outer vestment). When working actively in their Ministry outside of Church, you may see a Deacon wearing a distinctive Roman Collar. When in street clothes, deacons do not prescribe to any distinctive dress.

What is an Acolyte? In the second year of formation, candidates for the Permanent Diaconate are instituted (appointed) to the Ministry of Acolyte. An acolyte is authorized to serve at the altar and assist the priest by preparing the altar and sacred vessels used in the liturgy of the Eucharist. He may also distribute Holy Communion.

What is a Lector? In their third year of formation, candidates for the Permanent Diaconate are elevated to the Ministry of Lector, this is the ministry of reading at Mass. The lector can read all the readings except the Gospel.

References

Pamphlet – Archdiocese of Toronto (2005). Deacons – Called to Serve the Archdiocese of Toronto. A Brief Description of Diaconal Ministry and Formation.
Catholic Source Book
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Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite