

Consultation of the Permanent Diaconate
Proposed Text for DVD
(Parts 1 – IV)

Part 1 (Archbishop James Weisgerber)

One of the great gifts of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent ministry and the opening of this ministry to married men. The Archdioceses of St. Boniface and Winnipeg were pioneers in launching and promoting the permanent diaconate. The service of deacons has been a great blessing for our communities. Forty years on appears to be a good time to take stock and to plan for the future. Archbishop Legatt and I would like to engage the whole Church in a reflection on the presence and ministry of the deacon within our parishes and our dioceses.

Our reflection begins with the person and work of Jesus. In Christ, God entered our history as Prophet, Priest and Servant-King. He taught by word and deed, he offered his life in sacrifice and he showed his care for all, especially those who were most excluded. Through Jesus' gift of the Spirit, He created the Church in and through which He continues his mission. Thus Jesus' mission becomes the mission of the whole Church, all the baptized. In baptism each of us was anointed with sacred chrism as priest, prophet and king, incorporated into the Body of Christ and called to mission. To the whole Church is committed the whole mission of Christ.

The Lord has given, to his people, ministers and leaders who enable and support them in this mission. The deacon is ordained to assist the parish and the diocese and ultimately each Christian in the service of charity, justice, reconciliation and peace. The deacon is to be a sign and an instrument of the Church's call to be a people who care for each other and who care for the poor. The deacon is a gift to the community to lead it, by word and example, to become a people who show their love through service and care, especially of those who are most needy.

The deacon's call is to be deeply involved in caring for the needy and serving the poor. This experience enables him to understand God's Word in a fresh way and it is out of this experience that he is privileged to preach when the community gathers. His example and reflection calls everyone to a deeper understanding of their own call to serve. The deacon is the one commissioned to lead the community's prayers of petition because he is the one most intensely involved with those in need. He assists the priest during the Eucharist and

distributes communion as a sign that our oneness with the Christ must lead the community and each individual member into a deeper caring for those especially loved by the Lord.

Part II (Archbishop Albert LeGatt)

The ministry of the permanent diaconate as an order of ministry and the service of each deacon in particular is a gift from God to help the Church as a whole fulfill this mission of Christ. In dioceses and in parishes the presence and service of a deacon should lead and help all the faithful, all the baptized to show forth God's compassion for those in particular need of His love.

How each permanent deacon lives out his call may vary in many ways, but what holds for each one of them is that through their service, the all-merciful and life-giving love of Christ shines out more fully in all and through all of the Church's life and activities. The Church is called to be attentive to the poor and the suffering and within that call, God chooses to invite particular individuals to the permanent diaconate.

The call of God to an individual always comes through the Church in a particular situation, listening to and responding to God's call to see to the concrete needs of the poor and suffering in its midst now, in the society and world that surrounds it now. From within that response the Church calls men to the ministry of the permanent diaconate. The deacon is called to a concrete ministry in response to the needs of the poor and the Church at that particular moment in his history.

An individual's call to the diaconate is therefore to be discerned and guided according to two things; on the one hand, the spiritual journey of that individual, the work of God in his life and heart, and on the other hand the call of the Church.

Part III (Archbishop James Weisgerber)

To ask what the deacon is called to do is to ask what the Church, the gathered community, is called to do. The deacon is to lead this discernment. Whom and how is this particular community, be it parish or diocese, called to serve, to love following the example of Jesus? The deacon must help the community look around and see who is needy, who is suffering. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that outsiders were amazed at how the Christian community loved each other. This is where we can begin: who in our community is in need? One can

think quickly of the sick, the grieving, the disabled and the aged. One could also see the challenges created by our culture for those preparing for marriage and for those who faithfully make their relationship a sign of Christ's love for the Church. Many are struggling with parenting and increasing numbers belong to the 'sandwich generation' who simultaneously care for children and aging parents. Unemployment and poverty define the lives of many. How does the community know who needs help and how do we help? This is the responsibility committed to the deacon.

Realities which are uniquely Manitoban cry out for our attention. Relationship and reconciliation between native and non-native communities comes easily to the top of the list. No Christian or Christian community can ignore this call. Manitoba prides itself in welcoming each year more immigrants and refugees than any other part of the country. These groups face enormous challenges when they come to live with us. How can we help? Manitoba has a very large number of people incarcerated, the greater majority of them being Aboriginal. What does this say about our society and what can we do about the situation? There are many in our midst who suffer from mental illness or who are homeless. Care for the environment and concerns about trafficking of people make us realize that advocacy with various levels of government must also be a concern for the parish and diocese. There are so many needs, so much that needs our attention and our hearts.

Obviously, no individual or community can respond to all needs, but all of us can and must do something. To serve the needy isn't a burden; it is an opportunity to encounter Christ who told us: "Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do for me."

The deacon leads the parish by helping it discern and make choices and then by organizing the response. He helps the community become who it is: the Body of Christ, anointed for service.

Part IV (Archbishop Albert LeGatt)

We have spoken of God's gift of the diaconate to the Church and to particular individuals. We have spoken of how God calls both the Church as a whole and certain individuals to ministry for the sake of showing forth Christ's compassionate love, His desire for consolation, for justice for all. We have spoken of how this ministry might be lived out in varying ways and how it might invite, lead and form all the baptised to grow in their witness of charity and justice.

We are indeed proposing a consultation in both our Archdioceses on the permanent diaconate at this time of our Church's history and in this place of southern Manitoba, in both its rural and urban reality. The questions are several:

- In what ways is God calling us, dioceses and parishes, to be diaconal in nature? Where is God calling us to be the loving, serving, consoling, freeing, healing hands and heart of Christ today?
- Why is the ministry of the permanent deacon needed in our Church here today? What should they be? What should they do?
- Whom do we call to this ministry of permanent diaconate? What are the signs of the Spirit, the gifts and abilities, the inner work of God in a person that we seek out and call for the sake of the richness of the permanent diaconate?
- How do we make this call? How do we promote it? How do we respond to a person who believes he has a call to be a permanent deacon? How do we guide a journey of discernment and formation, if it is indeed God's call?
- How do we assure ongoing formation and growth in their particular spirituality and ministry for the deacons once they have been ordained?

There are many questions. But answered well, they can lead both archdioceses to a greater richness of service, of faithfulness to God's love. That is why we are asking for consultation from the permanent deacons already in ministry, from priests, from parishes, in fact from all the faithful. Thank you for your cooperation and valuable input.