

The deacon's wife: temperate and dedicated

For the married deacon, the call to the diaconate is a “shared” calling, as it is vital to both the couple’s marriage and to the success of the deacon’s ministry that the deacon’s wife be fully supportive of her husband’s vocation to the Church. Likewise, the deacon’s family can be greatly enriched by his ordination and service.

“Deacons, besides possessing the virtue of moderation (1 Tim 3:8), are to be outstanding for their faith (1 Tim 3:9) and well respected within the community (1 Tim 3:10). Women in the same role, although some interpreters take them to mean wives of deacons, must be dignified, temperate, dedicated, and not given to malicious talebearing (1 Tim 3:11). Deacons must have shown stability in marriage and have a good record with their families (1 Tim 3:12), for such experience prepares them well for the exercise of their ministry on behalf of the community (1 Tim 3:13).”

— Footnotes, New American Bible, <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1timothy/1timothy3.htm>

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Vocations Awareness Series No. 4

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC VOCATIONS - THE DIACONATE

All walks of life lead to the Lord...

They come from every corner of the Metropolitan Church. They are engineers, physicians, judges, businessmen, professors, contractors, and computer programmers. They are married. They are single. They have responded to the call of God and have an ardent desire to serve him and his people - the community of believers we call “Church.” They are DEACONS.

The Deacon: man of God, man of community

Deacons are part of a permanent order in the Church. This Major Order is not to be considered simply a “stepping-stone” to the priesthood. Deacons represent a great and a visible sign of the working of the Holy Spirit through a life of service in the Church. In the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh, the diaconate is largely a parish-based ministry, but always with the challenge to broaden its ministries. Deacons are critical to the life of the Church as they not only assist at liturgical services and in sacramental preparation but they also provide additional ministries such as visiting the sick, elderly, and bereaved, counseling, and acting as a community liaison. They also maintain the parish’s finances and property. The diaconate is an ecclesial ministry of service that can deepen a man’s own spiritual life and give him a more powerful sense of purpose and place in life.



ST. STEPHEN, DEACON AND PROTOMARTYR WAS MARTYRED IN JERUSALEM C. 35 AD. HE IS BOTH THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR (PROTOMARTYR) AND ONE OF THE FIRST DEACONS OF THE CHURCH.

The Diaconate - Q & A:

Q: Where do we first hear of deacons in the Church?

A: Deacons have actually been around longer than priests. According to the “Acts of the Apostles,” seven deacons were selected to help the church leaders (*Acts 6:1-7*). They were selected to serve primarily in the social ministries, particularly to attend to the poor and needy.

Q: Do deacons serve in the same role now as they did in the early Church?

A: In many ways, yes. However, the liturgical role of the deacon has become highly developed in the Eastern Churches. The Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Church is most expressive when bishops, priests, deacons, cantors, readers, choirs and ushers each serve their primary roles. So often today, we are accustomed to seeing only the priest celebrate the Divine Liturgy. But the role of a deacon allows priests to be properly presbyteral – that is, to lead the prayers of the Liturgy and lead the assembly in worship. Deacons serve liturgical functions such as chanting the litanies, performing the incensations, proclaiming the Gospel and administering the Eucharist, but they also have educational and social ministries as well.

Q: How does a man become a deacon?

A: As in all vocations, a man is called by God to become a deacon. He then goes through an internal and external discernment process. Internally, he considers whether he is suited to the life of service, and externally, others from his eparchy consider his suitability as well. If the man believes that he is called to the diaconate, and others who know him are in agreement, he then is admitted to a four-year program of formal study, both academic and spiritual. The Byzantine Catholic Seminary’s Deacon Formation Program, a graduate level course, consists of four two-week summer residential sessions; each is followed by a distance-learning component that takes place throughout the rest of the year.

Q: When and how is a man ordained to the diaconate?

A: Deacons are ordained during the Divine Liturgy after the Anaphora. The candidate is led into the church, called forth three times by the ordaining bishop. After making three prostrations, he is led around the altar three times, kissing the four corners while hymns to the martyrs are sung. He kneels on one knee at the right corner of the altar with his head on the altar, and the bishop places his *omophorion* (episcopal stole) on the candidate’s head. The first prayer of ordination is read and a litany chanted; a second prayer is read. The bishop raises the candidate and removes his sub-deacon

orarion (stole). The bishop then proclaims: “*Axios!*” (“He is worthy”) to show his approbation, and the people respond with a resounding “*Axios!*” The newly ordained deacon is then clothed with the deacon’s *orarion*. The bishop hands him the censer and the *ripidion* (liturgical fan), each time shouting “*Axios!*” and each time, the congregation shows their approval by responding “*Axios!*” The newly ordained deacon then takes his place next to the bishop, serving as the first deacon of the Liturgy. After receiving the Eucharist, the newly ordained deacon invites the congregation to come forth for the Eucharist; he also chants the Litany of Thanksgiving after Communion.

Q: What do we call the new deacon?

A: We may call him “Deacon” or “Father Deacon.”

Q: What is the proper attire for a deacon?

A: For liturgical services, he wears a cassock with a *sticharion* (a brocaded garment) and an *orarion* (stole). When serving in other ministries such as visiting hospitals or other health care facilities, teaching or officially representing the Church, the deacon normally wears a clerical collar.

Q: Where can we expect to see deacons, and what will they be doing?

A: The diaconal ministry is primarily a parish-based service. Since most deacons are married and have families and jobs, they will typically serve in their home parishes. They will be very involved in the liturgical and the educational life of the parish. In addition to their liturgical ministry, and depending upon the needs of the parish, deacons may: serve in teaching positions for both adults and children; assist with sacramental preparation for Christian Initiation and for marriage; visit those who are home-bound or in a health care facility; and take the Eucharist to the sick. Deacons also will be actively involved in wider church functions such as accompanying the Metropolitan or Bishop during parochial visits for liturgical services and in the annual Pilgrimage in Uniontown, Pa.

... for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of the church of God?

— 1 Timothy 3:5