

DIOCESE OF ROCKFORD

QUICK FACTS ABOUT PERMANENT DEACONS

Who is a Deacon?

A deacon is an ordained minister of the Catholic Church. There are three groups, or "orders," of ordained ministers in the Church: bishops, presbyters (priests) and deacons. Deacons are ordained as a sacramental sign to the Church and to the world of Christ, who came "to serve and not to be served." The entire Church is called by Christ to serve, and the deacon, in virtue of his sacramental ordination and through his various ministries, is to be a servant in a servant-Church.

How many Permanent Deacons are there in the Rockford Diocese?

The Rockford Diocese currently has 151 deacons including both those who are active or retired. The ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 27 this year will be the 22nd Ordination for Permanent Deacons in the Diocese. The first class of 15 men was ordained by Bishop Arthur J. O'Neill in 1975.

What are the requirements to become a permanent deacon?

Men must be between the age of 35 and 55 and must complete two years of ministry formation and five years of diaconate formation. These programs are conducted by the Diocese of Rockford. For more specific requirements and how to get started, men should first contact their parish pastor or contact the Office of the Permanent Diaconate.

What are these "various ministries" of the Deacon?

All ordained clergy in the Church are called to be ministers of the Word, Sacrament, and Charity, but bishops, presbyters and deacons exercise these functions in various ways. As ministers of the Word, deacons proclaim the Gospel, preach, and teach in the name of the Church. As ministers of Sacrament, deacons baptize, lead the faithful in prayer, witness marriages, and conduct wake and funeral services. As ministers of Charity, deacons are leaders in identifying the needs of others, then marshaling the Church's resources to try and meet those needs. Deacons are also dedicated to work toward eliminating the injustices or inequities that cause such needs. No matter what specific functions a deacon performs, they all flow from his sacramental identity. In other words, it is not only WHAT a deacon does, but WHO a deacon is, that is important.

May married men be ordained deacons?

Yes. The Second Vatican Council decreed that the diaconate, when it was restored as a permanent order in the hierarchy, could be opened to "mature married men," later clarified to mean men over the age of 35. This is in keeping with the ancient tradition of the Church, in which some married men were ordained into ministry. Also in keeping with ancient practice is the expectation that while a married man may be ordained, an ordained man, if his wife should die, would not marry again.

Is a Deacon ordained for the Parish or the Diocese?

Whenever a person is ordained, he is to serve the diocesan Church. Deacons are no different in this regard: they are assigned by the bishop to ministries for which the bishop perceives a great need, and for which the deacon may have special gifts or talents. Most often, this will be within a parish setting, just as most priests serve in a parish. Once assigned to a parish, the deacon and any other clergy assigned to the parish, minister under the immediate supervision of the pastor. However, this assignment may be changed at the request of the deacon or the initiative of the bishop.

How do I find out more about becoming a Deacon?

Contact the Office for the Permanent Diaconate for the Diocese of Rockford at 815-399-4300 ext. 375 or visit their website at <http://www.deaconrockford.org>.

(Source: The Diocese of Rockford and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)