



Pastoral Statement Announcing the Call for Applicants to the Deacon Formation Program

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Through the *Envisioning Ministry Project*, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has sought to meet the pastoral demands of our diocesan Church in vibrant and dynamic ways. We have come to recognize as never before how well our diocese has been served by the faithful and competent ministry of our priests, religious, and laity. Our deacons have also performed a special and vital task by assisting priests in their sacramental responsibilities and motivating and coordinating the laity in the works of service and charity.

Because of the importance of the diaconate, I am pleased to call for applicants to join the formation program for a new class of deacons to be ordained in 2013. The application process and the eventual selection of candidates will follow the directives established by the governing documents of the Church. All those interested or who would like more information on the application process should speak to their pastor.

What is a deacon? From the one priesthood of Christ, all of the baptized participate in the mission to preach the Good News. The Church teaches us there are two participations in this one priesthood. The non-ordained constitute the common priesthood of Christ, building up the Kingdom of God by transforming society with Gospel values. The ministerial priesthood—bishops, priests, and deacons—orders the charisms and gifts of the faithful to bring about unity in the Body of Christ.

The ministry of deacons is clearly documented in Sacred Scripture, from the institution of the diaconate in the Acts of the Apostles to the letters of Saint Paul. Until the fifth century, the diaconate flourished in the western Church, but it then experienced a slow decline, until it was seen only as an intermediate stage for candidates preparing for the priesthood. The Council of Trent urged the restoration of the diaconate, but it was not until the Second Vatican Council that the Church would restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy.

Several years ago, the Holy See gave three reasons for the Church's restoration of the diaconate: (i) to enrich the Church with the functions of the diaconate; (ii) to strengthen with the grace of diaconal ordination those who already exercise the functions of service; and (iii) to provide sacred ministers when there is a shortage of priests. The restoration of the diaconate was in no way intended to prejudice or replace priesthood, but rather be of service to it.

Today, the Church in the United States is blessed in so many ways from diaconal ministry. The Church in Pittsburgh has benefited from the ordination of two classes of deacons, and another class is preparing for ordination in 2011. We rejoice that so many men are already participating in the deacon formation program as aspirants to diaconal ministry. All have demonstrated the value and indispensable role of diaconal ministry in the life of the Church.

As the Church of Pittsburgh continues to move forward, I offer my gratitude to the men who will consider this special vocation and to their families who offer support. May the Lord bless them in their initial discernment and all those who will give them support and direction at this most important time in their life.

June 9, 2007
Memorial of Saint Ephrem
A Deacon of the Church