

June 7, 2009

All are welcome to Holy Angels Cathedral this Saturday, June 6th, for the 10:30 a.m. Ordination Mass during which I will ordain nine deacons. Eight men are married with families and will serve in the Church as deacons for the rest of their lives. The ninth man, Ted Mauch, is a seminarian. He will be ordained a deacon with the expectation of Ordination to the Priesthood next year.

The eight married men began preparations for Ordination to the Diaconate in 2003 as members of the Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Program. After successfully completing an intense four-year program of theological studies together with spiritual and pastoral formation in 2007, they continued two additional years of preparation for ordained ministry.

Before imposing hands upon these nine men and invoking the Holy Spirit upon them, I will ask the question: “Are you resolved to discharge the office of deacon with humility and love in order to assist the bishop and the priests and to serve the people of Christ?”

Every baptized person shares a common responsibility to build the Body of Christ, the Church, in their parishes and to build the Father’s kingdom of truth, peace, justice, and love in their families and workplaces.

Deacons assist the bishop and the priests in coordinating the various ministries of all of the baptized. In the words of St. Paul, their role in the Church is “to equip the saints (that is, the whole community of believers) for the work of ministry, the building of the Body of Christ.”

Our diocese is blessed with the dedicated ministry of deacons. All deacons are assigned to assist in parishes. Most deacons also carry an

additional assigned responsibility for a diocesan ministry in our prisons, jails, youth homes, or health care institutions.

With these nine newly ordained deacons, we will be blessed with 48 active deacons and an additional 11 deacons who have requested Senior status yet minister as their health permits. For all the married deacons, the Church insists that their priority be family first, then their job, and thirdly their assigned ministry.

Deacons are not ordained to take the place of priests. Deacons are ordained for a very specific service of Word, Altar, and charity and justice.

As Minister of the Word, the deacon proclaims the Gospel, sometimes preaches, and often leads faith formation classes and sacramental preparation discussions. He further witnesses to the implications of the Gospel in word and by example in his family, neighborhood, and place of work.

As Minister of the Altar, the deacon assists at the Eucharist, presides over public prayer, baptizes, assists at and blesses marriages, gives Viaticum to the dying, and leads the rites of burial.

Above all, the deacon is ordained to lead the community in works of charity and justice. When Pope Paul VI restored the diaconate as a vital force in the Church after the Second Vatican Council, he explained this key dimension of their ministry: "The deacon should be a driving force for the Church's service toward the local Christian communities and is a sign or sacrament of the Lord Christ Himself who, 'came not to be served, but to serve.' By their ordination, deacons are configured to Christ in His servant role."

Deacons remind all of us through their own example that just as Jesus lay down His life for His friends, so must we give ourselves in service to one another, especially to those in need. Deacons do not replace the laity anymore than they replace the priest. Rather, deacons facilitate the ministry of the people of God to

those who are most in need of our service: the sick, lonely, homebound, elderly, emotionally disturbed, those suffering from broken marriages, the grieving, those who are incarcerated, and others whose lives are devoid of hope and meaning.

Deacons remind us of the words of Jesus when He gave us the criteria for the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31f): “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.”

Deacons keep before us that the social mission of the Church is not optional, but essential. This ministry of loving service is not new, but as old as the Scriptures. No one committee or group in the parish can do this outreach for the rest of the parish. It is a ministry that must be at the center of our Catholic life. Our very participation at Holy Mass sends us forth to bring Christ’s compassionate love to widows, orphans, prisoners, the sick, and those in any need.

I am most grateful for the vitality which our deacons bring to so many ministries in our parishes and institutions, and I look forward to ordaining nine additional deacons for service in our diocese this Saturday.