Fiftieth Anniversary of the Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1968 approval by Blessed Pope Paul VI for the bishops of the United States to renew the permanent diaconate as an active, permanent order of ministry.

Watch this Section – for articles and information about the diaconate and the 50th anniversary that can be shared with your parishes.

What You’ll Find if you Scroll Down:

- Brief: Origins and Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate
  - Resources from the 2018 National Diaconate Congress… the historic gathering of deacons in New Orleans in July to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the renewal of the diaconate in the United States. Deacon Joe Peters attended the congress and provided a timeline of the deaconate and links to presentations and videos.

- Recommended Reading
  - Link to Deus Caritas Est – includes a wonderful section on diakonia
  - Link to paper about deacon St. Lawrence – Death on a Grill?
  - Link to paper on a contemporary diaconal theology

- Videos
  - The Permanent Deacon in Three Minutes – a short video that can be used to help explain the diaconate

- Books to Consider
  - Deacons: Servants of Charity, Pope Francis – this study of the permanent diaconate discerns who deacons are in relation to the Church and the service that flows from their interior character
Origins and decline of the permanent diaconate

According to a 1998 Joint Declaration of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy, the service of deacons in the Church is documented from apostolic times. “A strong tradition, attested already by St. Irenaeus and influencing the liturgy of ordination, sees the origin of the diaconate in the institution of the ‘seven’ mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-6).” The Congregations go on to point out that St. Paul refers to them and to the bishops in his Letter to the Philippians (1:1), and he lists the qualities and virtues which they should possess so as to exercise their ministry worthily in his First Letter to Timothy (3:8-13). The order continued to flourish in the Western Church up to the fifth century. After this period, however, a slow decline ensued until it became simply an intermediate stage for candidates preparing for priestly ordination, i.e., only the transitional diaconate survived.

The path to restoration

It wasn’t until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) that the stage was set for the restoration of the permanent diaconate. There were three reasons for opening the door to restoration: (1) a desire to enrich the Church with the functions of the diaconate, which otherwise, could only be exercised with great difficulty; (2) the intention of strengthening with the grace of diaconal ordination those who already exercised many of the functions of the diaconate; and (3) a concern to provide some regions, where there was a shortage of clergy, with sacred ministers.

Blessed Pope Paul VI acted on the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council in 1967. A year later, the apostolic constitution Pontificalis Romani Recognitio approved a new rite of conferring sacred orders, which included the diaconate. Today, there are 14,588 active deacons in the United States.

2018 National Diaconate Congress

Diaconate Timeline (click image to enlarge)

Link to Congress Videos and Presentations
Recommended Reading

- I would like to encourage the deacons to read the Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, in particular, the section on *The Practice of Love By The Church As A” Community of Love.”* This is a wonderful reflection on the nature and purpose of the *diakonia* of the church.

  *(Recommended by Fr. Warren Savage)*

- In the Encyclical Letter, Pope Benedict XVI highlights the deacon St. Lawrence stating that “Lawrence has always remained present in the Church’s memory as a great exponent of ecclesial charity.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 23)

  Those interested in more information about St. Lawrence might enjoy the article:

  [St. Lawrence's Death on a Grill: Fact or Fiction? An Update on the Controversy](#)

- “*Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Diaconate,*” in *Worship* 79 (September 2005): 419-38. In this essay, Richard R. Gaillardetz, Ph.D., briefly considers three approaches to a theology of the diaconate often articulated in our present church setting. He then offers an outline of a constructive theology of the diaconate that meets four essential criteria: 1) do justice to the tradition of the Church regarding the historical ministry of the diaconate, 2) explain why the diaconate is properly an ordained ministry, 3) distinguish the ordained ministry of the deacon from that of the presbyter and bishop, and 4) distinguish the ministry of the deacon from the ministry of the lay ecclesial minister (without in anyway denigrating the importance of lay ecclesial ministry).


- [National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States – Fr. Warren Savage suggests that priests and deacons (re)read the Directory on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Permanent Diaconate.](#)
Videos

• The Permanent Deacon in Three Minutes – a short video that can be used to help explain the diaconate

Books

Word, Liturgy, Charity
The Diaconate in the U.S. Catholic Church, 1968–2018

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate - Contributions by Thu T. Do, LHC; Thomas P. Gaunt, SJ; Mary L. Gautier; Mark M. Gray; Michal J. Kramarek and Jonathon L. Wiggins

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent and stable order of ministry in the United States, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University undertook a contemporary study of the diaconate in the United States. Building on studies completed in 1981 and 1995 as well as annual research that CARA has conducted for the USCCB since 2005, CARA designed a comprehensive study of deacons, their wives, diaconate directors, and bishops to explore all aspects of this ministry. This book explores trends in the diaconate as well as current and emerging opportunities and challenges in the ministry. Deacons and their wives, diaconate directors, and bishops share insights about how those trends impact diaconal ministry today and into the future.

Book available at from Rowman and Littlefield (click here for website)

Hardcover: $100.00
Paperback: $29.99
eBook: $28.50
Pope Francis Deacons: Servants of Charity

Written through the eyes of a deacon, this study of the permanent diaconate discerns who deacons are in relation to the Church and the service that flows from their interior character—they are ordained ministers, preachers of the Word, and models of Christ. As deacons move along the path of charity, they herald the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world.

Deacons are called to minister to the community of believers, in service to Christ, their bishop, the poor, and the Body of Christ. This narrative takes the reader through Pope Francis’s vision for the permanent diaconate. This story reviews the renewal of the permanent diaconate and significant magisterial teachings on the office of the diaconate. It looks at Pope Francis’s words as bishop of Buenos Aires and his papal teachings, including his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium.*

This beautiful narrative draws the reader into the sacred ministry of the diaconate and will inspire deacons and all those drawn to the service of charity in the Church.

Order at USCCB Website: https://store.usccb.org/deacons-servants-of-charity-p/7-583.htm

*Pre-Order*
Price: $19.95
Availability: Shipping on or before 8/17
Product Code: 7-583