



INSTITUTE FOR DIACONAL STUDIES ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Ministry of Charity and Justice

VII. The Church's Ministry of Charity and Justice The Deacon as Witness and Guide

37. The deacon's service in the Church's ministry of charity and justice is integral to his service in the Church's ministry of word and liturgy. "The three contexts of the diaconal ministry . . . represent a unity in service at the level of divine Revelation: the ministry of the word leads to ministry at the altar, which in turn prompts the transformation of life by the liturgy, resulting in charity."³⁹ "As a [participant] in the one ecclesiastical ministry, [the deacon] is a specific sacramental sign, in the Church, of Christ the Servant. His role is to 'express the needs and desires of the Christian communities' and to be 'a driving force for service, or *diakonia*,' which is an essential part of the mission of the Church."⁴⁰ The ancient tradition appears to indicate that because the deacon was the servant at the table of the poor, he had his distinctive liturgical roles at the Table of the Lord. Similarly, there is a reciprocal correspondence between his role as a herald of the Gospel and his role as an articulator of the needs of the Church in the General Intercessions. In his formal liturgical roles, the deacon brings the poor to the Church and the Church to the poor. Likewise, he articulates the Church's concern for justice by being a driving force in addressing the injustices among God's people. He thus symbolizes in his roles the grounding of the Church's life in the Eucharist and the mission of the Church in her loving service of the needy. In the deacon, in a unique way, is represented the integral relationship between the worship of God in the liturgy that recalls Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice sacramentally and the worship of God in everyday life where Jesus Christ is encountered in the needy. The deacon's service begins at the altar and returns there. The sacrificial love of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist nourishes him and motivates him to lay down his life on behalf of God's People. 38. The apostles' decision to appoint ministers to attend to the needs of the Greek-speaking widows of the early Church at Jerusalem⁴¹ has long been interpreted as a normative step in the evolution of ministry. It is seen as a practical response to Jesus' command during the Last Supper of mutual service among his followers. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus as head and shepherd of the community modeled the service that he desired to be the hallmark of their faithfulness. This gave the disciples a powerful sign of the love of God that was, in Jesus himself, incarnate and intended to be forever enfolded in the attitudes and behaviors of his followers.

42 The deacon, consecrated and conformed to the mission of Christ, Lord and Servant, has a particular concern for the vitality and genuineness of the exercise of *diakonia* in the life of the believing community. In a world hungry and thirsty for convincing signs of the compassion and liberating love of God, the deacon sacramentalizes the mission of the Church in his words and deeds, responding to the master's command of service and providing real-life examples of how to carry it out.

National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States

