



Permanent Diaconate Information Sheet

1. What is a Deacon?

A deacon receives the sacrament of Holy Orders, which is exercised in three degrees: the *episcopacy* (bishops) and the *presbyterate* (priests), which are intended to be served and helped by the *diaconate* (deacons). The title “deacon” comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, which means *servant*. “By imprinting an indelible spiritual mark, diaconal ordination irrevocably configures the recipient to Christ, Lord and Servant of all, and communicates a specific sacramental grace that strengthens him for his mission of public ministry in the Church.”¹

2. What’s the Difference between Permanent and Transitional Deacons?

What we refer to as a “transitional deacon” is a man in the latter stages of preparation for ordination to the priesthood. A permanent deacon, on the other hand, is quite different because he will stay a deacon and live out his vocation as such. It’s worth noting, however, that there is only one diaconate – even transitional deacons do not cease to be deacons once they are ordained to the priesthood; just like a bishop does not cease being a priest once he becomes bishop – the sacramental effects are cumulative, not exclusive.

3. What Does a Deacon Do?

Deacons are official teachers and preachers of the Gospel, and they may preside at baptisms, marriages, funerals, and other forms of community prayers. They also share in the pastoral responsibilities of outreach, such as visiting the sick, the homebound, those imprisoned and in need. They cannot celebrate Mass, hear confessions, or anoint the sick. “By its very nature, the ministry of permanent deacons will help all of us – priests, consecrated women and men, and lay faithful – to live our baptismal call of building up the Body of Christ.”²

4. Is the Diaconate a True Vocation?

Yes! Being a deacon is a unique vocation. The deacon is a particular “icon” of Christ as *servant*; so while you may see deacons participating in the Mass and other liturgical ceremonies, you may often *not* see the main thrust of the deacon’s ministry, which is to be a sacramental sign of Christ outside of the Church building.³

5. Can Married Men Become Deacons?

Yes. Most permanent deacons are married. In these cases, the Church requires that the wife freely consent to the ordination of her husband. If the demands of ordained ministry would be too disruptive for his family, the bishop will not call a man to ordination.

¹ Archbishop J. M. Miller, C.S.B. (2011). *Pastoral Letter on the Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate Program*.

² Ibid.

³ Ditewig, W.T. (2004). *101 Questions & Answers on Deacons*. Paulist Press: New York, p. 12.



6. Did you know?

Did you know that St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), one of the most famous saints in Christian history, was a deacon? He was well known for his homilies, his outreach to the poor and outcast, and for his devotion to “Lady Poverty.” His feast day is on October 4th.