



Pastoral statement calling for a new class to begin the Deacon Formation Program

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Bishop of Pittsburgh

Recognizing our deacons as important partners with our bishops, priests, religious, and laity of the Church of Pittsburgh as we continue to journey together *On Mission for the Church Alive!*, I am pleased to announce the call for another class of men to begin the diocesan Deacon Formation Program.

In doing so, I highlight the fact that service, which is the defining characteristic of the diaconate, has always been at the heart of the Church's ministry.

At the Last Supper, in washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus said, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (Jn. 13:15). The apostles embraced this directive themselves and, likewise, called others to serve. In the earliest days of the Church, responding to the needs of the community, they designated certain men for service to the faithful (Acts 6:1-6). We now recognize these men as the first deacons, a name that comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning "servant" or "minister."

At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, during which the bishops of the world approved a revitalization of diaconal ministry, Pope Paul VI said, "The Church has...declared herself the servant of humanity." In subsequent years, the idea of the Church-as-servant has found concrete expression in the diaconate. As Pope St. John Paul II said, deacons are "configured to Christ in his servant role" and, therefore, are "meant to be living signs of the servanthood of his Church."

Since 1974, when the first permanent deacons were ordained for our diocese, deacons have diligently and faithfully served the Church of Pittsburgh in their various liturgical functions and by their countless works of service and charity. We have been richly and abundantly blessed by their ministry.

My hope in calling for another diaconate class is to foster the formation of men who are willing to develop their potential for servant leadership in the Church and to embrace the model of Jesus Christ's humble, loving care for others, especially those who are sick, elderly, imprisoned, hungry, poor, lonely, and forgotten.

I encourage prospective applicants to pray for guidance and to open their hearts to the Lord's will in discerning whether they have a genuine vocation to the diaconate. At the same time, I urge them to discuss their interest with their wife, if they are married, with other family members and close associates, and with their pastor, who must nominate an individual in order to initiate the application process.

The nomination and application process and the selection of men for the formation program will follow the norms set by the bishops of the United States and the universal Church.

In making this announcement, I reiterate that I intend to continue calling additional classes into the Deacon Formation Program every other year. Knowing this plan may help a man who feels called to this ministry decide when to respond to the call based on his job and family responsibilities or other obligations.

To those men who will discern this special vocation, to their families who will walk with them on the journey, and to those responsible for guiding them through the formation program, I offer my prayers, my support, and my gratitude.

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