



# Frequently Asked Questions About Deacons

## Who is a deacon?

A deacon is an ordained minister of the Catholic Church, called by God to serve his people.

## What does a deacon do?

A call to be a deacon is a call to service. A deacon gives service in three main areas: *Liturgy, Word, and Charity*. Some examples of each might include:

**Liturgy:** Assisting at Mass, Celebrate Baptisms, Witness Marriages outside of Mass, Celebrate Funerals outside of mass, Benediction, and various other prayer services, etc.

**Word:** Proclaim the Gospel at Mass, preach the homily, religious education, sacramental preparation, etc.

**Charity:** Visiting the sick and homebound, Hospice, Jail and Prison Ministry, helping at homeless shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens, Habitat for Humanity, and other ministries in the community.

## Is a deacon “assigned” a certain area?

A deacon is assigned by the Archbishop and usually serves the parish or cluster in which he lives.

## Are there different kinds of deacons?

Yes. A transitional deacon is a single man who is studying to become a priest. He is ordained a deacon and usually is ordained to the priesthood within a year.

A permanent deacon can be a single or a married man who usually has a secular job and serves in various ministries without compensation. There are some deacons who are employed at the parish or diocesan levels. Since he will not continue on to the priesthood, he is called a permanent deacon.

## How does one become a deacon?

In the Archdiocese of Dubuque, after successfully completing an extensive application and interviewing process, a deacon candidate (and his wife, if married) attend 4 ½ years of classes sponsored by the Archdiocese. These masters' level classes cover a wide variety of topics and are taught primarily by college professors, priests, and deacons. Following the completion of this formation process, the Archbishop may call him to orders. If he answers yes to that call, he is ordained a permanent deacon.

## Why is the wife expected to attend the classes with her husband?

So they may learn and grow in their faith together. She will also have a much deeper understanding of the diaconate and the commitment her husband makes as a deacon. In many cases she will be actively involved with her husband in his ministry and this preparation will help her as well.

## What does a deacon wear?

For liturgical celebrations the deacon typically wears an alb and a stole. The deacon's stole matches the liturgical colors for the occasion or season and is worn diagonally across the chest, whereas a priest wears his stole around the neck with both ends hanging in front of his chest. It is appropriate for a deacon to wear a dalmatic over his alb and stole. The dalmatic is a tunic with sleeves and would be the same liturgical color for the occasion.



# What Does A Deacon Do During Mass?

## Why does a deacon assist at mass?

Diaconal service within the liturgy is the climax and celebration of diaconal service outside it. The deacon serves in the liturgy because the deacon serves in the church. The deacon's liturgical ministry is wedded to his social ministry.

## What duties does the deacon have during the Mass, and why is he assigned those duties?

*He carries the book of the Gospels in the entrance procession* – Because the deacon proclaims the Gospel.

*Penitential Rite* – If the third form is used, the bishop or priest invites the assembly to “recall their sins and to repent of them in silence.” After a brief silence, the deacon may speak the three invocations addressed to Christ. The bishop's or priest's absolution is ended by the people's “Amen.”

*He proclaims the Gospel* – The deacon's role is to proclaim God's Word in the Gospel. A priest or Bishop may proclaim the Gospel if no deacon is present.

*He delivers the homily on occasion* – As part of his ministry of the Word, the deacon brings the good news to the people through his homily.

*He reads the General Intercessions* – Because of his ministry in the community, the deacon sees the needs of the people. As a representative of the parish family, the deacon leads the assembly in these prayers.

*He receives the gifts* – As a representative of the community he serves, the deacon receives the gifts from the assembly.

*He prepares the gifts and the altar* – After receiving the gifts, the deacon prepares them at the altar for the celebrant.

*He invites the congregation to share a sign of peace* – It is the deacon's role to invite the sign of peace among the assembly.

*He distributes the Cup* – The Cup recalls Christ's ultimate sacrifice in his passion and death. As a reminder of the commitment he has made to serve others, the deacon is the minister of the Cup. As an Ordinary Minister of Communion, he may also distribute the Body of Christ.

*He purifies the vessels* – A deacon may purify the vessels after Communion.

*He dismisses the congregation* – The deacon is a symbol of Service. He brings his ministry of service to the liturgy and will return to it following the liturgy. Therefore, the deacon dismisses the people so they may follow his example of service.

## What if Father gets sick and no other priest is available to celebrate mass?

The deacon is the first person contacted to lead a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (sometimes called a SCAP service). A trained lay person may also lead this service in the absence of a deacon.

## The Demands of Phones and Computers

A comedian recently quipped that today's information technologies have effectively rendered a number of things obsolete, most notably phone-books and human courtesy. That's also true for human rest.

Today's information technologies (the internet, email, software programs like Facebook, mobile phones, iPhones, pocket computers, and the like) have made us the most informed, efficient, and communicative people ever. We now have the capability, all day, every day, of accessing world events, world news, whole libraries of information, and detailed accounts of what our families and friends are doing at any moment. That's the positive side of the equation.

Less wonderful is what this is doing to our lives, how it is changing our expectations, and robbing us of the simple capacity to stop, shut off the machines, and rest. As we get wrapped up more and more in mobile phones, texting, email, Facebook, and the internet in general, we are beginning to live with the expectation that we must be attentive all the time to everything that's happening in the world and within the lives of our families and friends. The spoken and unspoken expectation is that we be available always—and so too others. We used to send each other notes and letters and expect a reply within days, weeks, or months. Now the expectation for a reply is minutes or hours, and we feel impatient with others when this expectation is not met and guilty inside of ourselves when we can't meet it.

When I was young both our churches and our culture still took the concept of Sabbath (for Christians, especially the idea of not working on Sunday) more seriously. A popular question was always: what are you allowed to do on a Sunday and what are you not allowed to do? Mostly this focused on different kinds of physical labor: may you work in your garden on a Sunday? May you harvest your apples tree on a Sunday? Today, I worry less about gardening or picking apples on a Sunday. The more important issue is: can we step off the treadmill of phones and computers on Sundays and be genuinely available to celebrate Sabbath?

Sabbath, as Wayne Muller tells us,\* is time off the wheel, time when we take our hand from the plough and let God and the earth care of things, while we drink, if only for a few moments, for the fountain of rest and delight. Today that plough looks a lot like a mobile phone or a computer.

Centuries ago, the mystic poet, Rumi, wrote: I have lived too long where I can be reached!\*\*\*

Haven't we all!

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