

History of the Diaconate as a restored permanent order in the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio

In 1968, after the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States requested the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order in this country. Among the reasons for the request were that the many diaconal ministries already present would be enriched and strengthened by sacramental grace of Holy Orders; a new group of devout and competent men would be enlisted in the Church's ministry; charitable and liturgical services would be extended in both rural and urban communities; and the official and sacramental presence of the Church would be provided in communities where priests were not readily available.

Pope Paul VI responded favorably to the request in 1968, but it was not until 1972 that he issued the apostolic letter *Ad Pascendum*, establishing norms for the restoration around the world. Because the apostolic letter was not released until 1972, The Most Rev. Clarence Elwell, the eighth Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Columbus, decided not to move forward and implement the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order.

Upon the death of Bishop Elwell in February 1973, he was succeeded by The Most Rev. Edward J. Herrmann who initiated the program in the Diocese of Columbus by appointing Father Ralph Huntzinger as its first director. Father Huntzinger began to initiate the formation slowly and was later succeeded by Father Thomas Shonebarger in 1976 who began to develop this newly restored order through his assignment as Diocesan Director of Vocations. Under both Father Huntzinger and Father Shonebarger, any candidate interested in becoming a permanent deacon had to travel and study with the deacon-candidate in the Diocese of Toledo. This took place on one weekend a month at the Sacred Heart Seminary and Pastoral Center in Shelby, Ohio (approximately 120 miles northeast of Columbus). The formation program was a two-year process. The first two permanent deacons of the diocese, Deacon Roger Pry and Deacon Jack Rankin, were ordained in the spring and fall of 1975, respectively.

The training took place in Shelby, Ohio until 1982, when the program was transferred to The Pontifical College Josephinum under the direction of Father Joseph Hendricks. Father Hendricks established the present **Diaconate School of Theology for the Diocese of Columbus**. The "*Deacon School*" was later directed by Father John Cody along with his associate director, Deacon Joe Farry until 1990. At that time, with approximately fifty deacons ordained over a sixteen-year period, The Most Rev. James A. Griffin, who succeeded Bishop Herrmann, placed a moratorium on new entrants while the program was evaluated and re-structured.

In 1992, Bishop Griffin appointed Deacon Frank Iannarino as the Director of the Diaconate and established **The Office of the Diaconate** which maintains a central location for diocesan diaconal administration and study at The Catholic Center on the grounds of Saint Joseph Cathedral Square in downtown Columbus.

Under Deacon Iannarino and the newly established Diaconal Council, the formation process was studied; the course of study was rewritten; and the formation program was re-established in 1993. According to the present *Guidelines for Deacons in the Diocese of Columbus*, the formation

process is now based on a four-year cycle with each class being ordained before a new class of candidates begins formation.

The Diaconate School of Theology continues to exist today at The Josephinum where it maintains all formation and academic classes under the direction of the Bishop of Columbus, who serves as the Vice-Chancellor of the Josephinum. The formation process has a well-developed Inquiry, Aspirancy, Candidacy and Post-Ordination component reflecting the 1998 *Basic Norms for the Formation of the Permanent Deacons* (Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education) and *Directory for the Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacons* (Vatican Congregation for the Clergy).

In 2005, Bishop Griffin was succeeded by The Most Rev. Frederick F. Campbell, who was also newly elected as the Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on the Diaconate. It was then that Bishop Campbell, who helped author and sign the 2004 *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacon in the United States*, began to fully implement the much-needed directory throughout the Diocese of Columbus.

During Bishop Campbell's tenure as the Ordinary of Columbus and Vice-Chancellor for The Josephinum, he helped establish the center for diaconal studies throughout the United States. The Josephinum hosts various summer institutes on both the 1st edition of the National Directory and soon, the 2nd edition of the National Directory that was accepted and promulgated by the Holy See in 2021. The Josephinum also publishes the *National Diaconate Review* theological journal; and maintains **The Josephinum Distance Learning Program** to enhance online continuing education classes for ordained deacons and discernment classes for deacon inquirers throughout the world.

Bishop Campbell was succeeded in 2019 by The Most Rev. Robert J. Brennan, the 12th Bishop of Columbus. With the ordination of ten deacons in November 2020, the Diocese of Columbus presently has one hundred and twenty permanent deacons. A new class of candidates were chosen by Bishop Brennan before he left for his new assignment in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. These men hope of being ordained in 2024.

In April of 2022, The Most Rev. Earl Fernandes succeeded Bishop Brennan as the 13th Bishop of Columbus. Bishop Fernandes continues to embrace the number of deacons he has in our diocese and wants to be very active in the deacon's continuing formation and development as he embraces the Real Presence/Real Future diocesan initiative. Bishop Fernandes also wants to continue to fully implement with the help of the Diaconate Council the 2nd edition of the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacon in the United States* which was promulgated on June 9, 2022.

Although a few deacons are retired from active diaconal ministry, many deacons remain very active long after the 70-year-old retirement age. Most deacons minister full-time or part-time in parishes and schools. The majority are married and have jobs in many different professions but continue to minister in their parishes, hospitals, prisons and diocesan committees at other times. It is well known that throughout our diocese deacons assist the bishop and priests in proclaiming the Word, help administer the Sacraments, and assist in so many Charitable works; yet, they are most importantly the image and sacramental sign of the Servant Jesus to the church throughout the world who came to serve and not be served.