

# Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



## “Not to be served, but to serve” (Mt 20:28)

Following upon the restoration of the permanent diaconate for the Church Universal implemented by Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1967, it was in April 1968 that the permission of the Holy See was requested and granted to the Bishops of the United States to allow married and celibate men to be ordained for the Church as permanent deacons in this country. Here in the Diocese of Toledo, from those first two permanent deacons ordained in September 1973 to the 20 permanent deacons ordained in September 2017, our local Church has been generously served by those called like Jesus “not to be served, but to serve,” and to exercise the ministry of the Word, of the Altar and of Charity.

To mark this 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate, the 2018 National Diaconate Congress was held recently in New Orleans, with its theme “Christ the Servant: Yesterday, Today and Forever.”

Among the almost 3,000 participants, the Diocese of Toledo was well represented with a contingent led by our Vicar for Clergy, Monsignor Marvin Borger, with our Delegate for Deacons, Deacon Hal Welch, and comprised of many permanent deacons and their wives.

Our permanent deacons are a daily reminder to us that “*diakonia*,” or servanthood, is a constitutive characteristic of the Church. A number of speakers at the Congress referenced Pope St. John Paul II’s address to Deacons in 1987 in Detroit: “This is at the very heart of the diaconate to which you have been called: to be a servant of the mysteries of Christ and, at one and the same time, to be a servant of your brothers and sisters.”

The deacon’s ministries of the word, of the altar and of charity are inseparably linked in

the service of God’s redemptive plan. “This is so because the word of God inevitably leads us to the worship of God at the altar; in turn, this worship leads us to a new way of living which expresses itself in charity.”

The majority of permanent deacons, in essence, exercise a “double vocation” in and for the Church, as married spouse and ordained minister; and just as the one must not compete with but complement the other, so too does their ordination complement those ordained to minister as priests and bishops. Together they are called to “Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps 100).

How grateful I am that the deacons who serve throughout our Diocese, whether in parishes or specialized ministry, fulfill, among other tasks, assisting the bishop and priests in the celebration of the divine mysteries, above all the Holy Eucharist, in the distribution of Holy Communion, in assisting and blessing marriages, in the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching, in presiding over funerals, and in dedicating themselves to the various ministries of charity.

When one sees the permanent deacon, one is to see not someone looking for recognition or to be noticed, but one who looks for opportunities to serve humbly and who eschews recognition. When one sees the permanent deacon, one is to see not someone consumed by his own agenda and convinced his own opinions, but someone imbued with the Word of God and with a genuine love and respect for the Church. When one sees the permanent deacon, one is to see Jesus the Servant.

While most of our permanent deacons serve locally, others serve beyond the boundaries of the diocese, and in fact, two of our own serve

the National Association of Diaconate Directors: Deacon Tom Dubois as the Executive Director and Deacon Jim Caruso, as the newly elected Secretary Treasurer.

As we await the guidance of a soon to be released Second Edition of the “National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States,” pray with me for our permanent deacons, encourage them, support them and express your gratitude for their ministry. Remember in your prayers also those currently in formation for the permanent diaconate, and be sure to entrust all of them, their wives and their families to the Lord. We are grateful for the sacrifices they make and for the good example they offer us, modelling what it means to be a servant for Christ.

Pope Francis writes: “The Church finds in the permanent diaconate the expression and, at the same time, the impulse to become itself a visible sign of the *diakonia* of Christ the Servant in the history of mankind.”

The Diocese of Toledo has been, and please God will continue to be, enriched by the generous men who offer themselves to carry out a truly diaconal ministry in the Church, whether in her liturgical and pastoral life, or whether in her social and charitable works, for the sake of their brothers and sisters. We look to our permanent deacons to be “icons” of Jesus Christ the Servant, living signs of the servanthood of His Church.

+ *Daniel E. Thomas*

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