

DEACONS

ON EMBRACING VOCATION, SERVICE, AND LOVE



DEACON RONALD CHOO
Cohort 1, Ordained 1981

I've been a permanent deacon for 42 years now. Though I'm not currently active, it remains a lifelong commitment. Being a deacon is a vocation and a calling from God, and a lifelong commitment of love and service.

Becoming a deacon wasn't a decision I could make alone. My wife, Catherine, and I spent a lot of time talking and praying, and we sought guidance from a trusted friend and priest. We came to the realization that it was God's call, not ours.

I know there are permanent deacons in our Church who aren't married, but having the support of my wife and family has been important for me. From the start of our formation, the message was clear: family and church, in that order, with God at the root of it all. Catherine has been my pillar, offering help, advice, and unwavering support. She even played a role in crafting some of my homilies – some were as much hers as mine.

She'd often remind me that I was the deacon, not her, and that I shouldn't forget about my family. It's easy for us deacons to get so engrossed in doing God's work that we overlook our family responsibilities. Catherine kept me grounded.

Early in my diaconate I was involved in detention ministry. I would visit inmates at OCCC or Halawa, or the Women's Community Correctional Center. I was never concerned about why they were in prison; I only knew they needed to hear God's message. And I could do that.

On one occasion my family and I were at the Honolulu Zoo when a man with his family came up and said to me, "Hey, Brother. I want you to meet my wife and kids." I didn't recognize him. Pulling me aside, he told me, "When I was in prison you came and talked with me. Things are working out okay now. Thanks." That was a moment I cherished.

Forty-two years -- that's almost half my lifetime. I want to quote what I said on my retirement from active ministry: "If there is a reward to be given us as permanent deacons it is the love, support, encouragement, and prayers we receive from those whom we serve."



DEACON BILLY WHITFIELD
Cohort 6, Ordained 2007

Some advice for a lifelong commitment to the diaconate? First, open your heart to the process. Open your heart with words allowing God to know your desire, and for Him to open the door.

Next step has three parts: pray, pray, and pray some more, without ceasing.

The most critical step, if you are married, is for your spouse's awareness and willingness to go on this journey with you. Your desire becomes one with her own, and you will need her in more ways than one! And tell the children; you need their blessing. Most importantly, listen to what your spouse has observed. She is your most loving critical advisor.

Pray over your decision, be firm in your commitment, find the humor in life, and be flexible. Now pray again!

Prayer is indispensable. Jesus the word made flesh is always in my thoughts and actions. My first prayer is to reflect Jesus to others and know that I have failed at times, and He gently corrects me, teaching me how to be more loving to all.

A deacon doesn't know everything upon ordination. God will give us the necessary knowledge we lack by continued study, observation and mistakes.

The priests and associate priests I have served with provided guidance, wisdom, caring, and love. I have grown in purpose, continued commitment, and a willing desire to always serve in any capacity requested. I'm closer to the Holy Trinity, especially Jesus, who has softened my heart with the love of the Father and Son. When I meet Jesus in relationships, words of scripture and in His body and blood, I'm never the same.

A final thought: Study the word "servant," and make it real in your actions, thoughts, and words expressed. We are all called to serve in one way or another, but the deacon is Servant with every breath he takes.



DEACON JEFF CALAMAYAN
Cohort 9, Ordained 2021

The best advice I got in formation was in a reply to one of my assignments: "The Church is happy for you to explore and accept this vocation, but the Church does not want you to neglect your first vocation: your marriage."

In everything I do, I always lean to my wife, Jenn. I entrust her to take care of my heart. Her words of affirmation are something I cherish because they give me strength to continue ministry. She reminds me if I do too much. She reminds me to rest. She reminds me to be human and not robotic – to feel and not just do work.

Please remember your wife. She's being asked a lot. She's being asked to share you with the whole People of God.

Prayer is essential... I wasn't aware of what prayer truly is. Yes, it's kneeling silently, and the vocalization of words, and going to Mass. But embracing family and hanging out with friends are also prayerful moments.

Every time I proclaim the Gospel, it still makes me nervous. Double that if I'm also giving the homily. It's an awesome responsibility to proclaim the Word of God. I put it on myself to remember that people deserve to hear it clearly, to the best of my ability.

I reflect on Jesus and his 12 disciples frequently. He had disciples that spoke before thinking, disciples that were bent on revenge, disciples that frequently misunderstood, disciples that murmured and complained... And you know what? Jesus still chose them; Jesus still allowed them into his circle. He corrected them and guided them for sure, but it was a process, not an instant event.

If you're thinking about a commitment, just allow the curiosity to happen. Get to know a deacon, get to know their story, ponder the invitation, and just chance 'em. Go to a discernment night, go to an inquiry weekend. After all that, reassess how you feel about serving God in that capacity, and take it to prayer.

QUANTIFYING THE DIACONATE

HAWAII BY LOCATION

Incardinated: 83
From other Dioceses: 9
Serving elsewhere: 8

BY AGE

Average age: 70
Median age: 72
Under the age of 60: 13
60-69 years old: 25
Over 69: 48

NATIONALLY

BY AGE

Age 70+: 36%
Age 60-69: 41%
Age 50-59: 19%
Age 40-49: 4%
Age 39 or younger: <1%

BY MARITAL STATUS

Married: 93%
Single, never married: 2%

BY CULTURE

Asian/Pacific Islander: 3%
Hispanic/Latino: 18%
African-American/Black: 3%
Caucasian/White: 76%
Native American or Other: 1%



Oahu Deacon Ordinations, January 2024



Saint Peter consecrating the Seven Deacons. Fresco by Fra Angelico

WHAT’S A DEACON, ANYHOW?

By Dcn. Michael Weaver

In his Foreword to Deacon James Keating’s book *The Heart Of The Diaconate*, the Most Reverend José Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, writes the following:

“A Deacon is called to minister in persona Christi Servi – in the person of Christ the Servant. Ordination configures him to Jesus in his most humble form – as the Son of God who emptied himself to come among us in the form of a servant; as the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve.”

Deacon Bill Ditewig, in his latest work *Courageous Humility*, refers to deacons as “icons of The Church’s humility” and “ministers of kenosis” -- the “self-emptying” of one’s personal will to become entirely receptive to the will of God.

The Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight, Bishop of Jefferson City, MO, calls deacons “social intermediaries among the people of God” (*Understanding The Diaconate*.)

So exactly what is a deacon?

Is he a servant? A minister? An icon? An intermediary?

The answer is, of course, that a deacon is all of the above... and more.

Deacons are members of the clergy along with priests and bishops. Like all degrees of Holy Orders, the diaconate finds its origin in Scripture. In Acts 6:1-7, we read that as Christianity began to spread, the apostles realized they would need help as some new followers’ needs were neglected. So, as directed, the community “selected seven reputable men, filled with Spirit and wisdom,” and “presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.” These men were then sent out to serve the Christian communities.

Through the centuries, both the concept and role of

“deacon” grew and shifted in purpose, its utilization and emphasis changing over time in an elaborate and somewhat convoluted evolution. Every priest, including those who eventually become bishops, is ordained a deacon while still in his formation period, since it is the first degree of Holy Orders. The deacon later transitions into a priest with his priestly ordination. For an extended period of Church history, there was an overarching focus on the “transitional diaconate,” and these soon-to-be priests served as deacons as needed. Then, with the Second Vatican Council, the Church decided to renew the “permanent diaconate” ministry, and ordain men who intended to remain in the servant role.

But that still does not give us a clear picture of what a deacon is.

To my way of thinking, the best way to understand the role of a deacon would be to see him as “the minister of the threshold.” (The idea is not mine. I first saw the term in Deacon Tim O’Donnell’s wonderful book *The Deacon: Icon Of Christ The Servant, Minister Of The Threshold*. The deacon stands solidly with one foot in the world and one foot in the church, anchored in his ministries of Liturgy, Word, and Service.)

At the liturgy, the deacon assists the bishop and priests at the altar. He proclaims the Gospel and preaches on the message of The Word, bringing his theological understanding and personal life experiences together for the congregation. The deacon may also baptize, witness and bless marriages, preside at the Liturgy of the Hours, and preside at funeral liturgies, among many other duties.

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TIMELINE:

An abridged history of the diaconate

Deacons are first mentioned in Acts 6:1-7. Playing a crucial role in the early church, deacons thrive for the next few centuries.

36 AD

St. Stephen, one of the original Seven Deacons, becomes first martyr.



800s AD

The deacons’ role begins to diminish. By 800 AD, it is reduced to a transitional step towards priesthood.

BUT IT'S JUST FOR OLD GUYS, RIGHT?

MISPERCEPTIONS OF THE DIACONATE

The Diaconate is an old guy's club.

With the average age of Hawaii's deacons being 70, it might seem that way! But deacons must be at least 35 at the time of Ordination, which means 29- and 30-year-olds are encouraged to apply!

Diacons are mini-priests.

Not at all! While both priests and deacons are clerics of the church, the call to be a deacon has its own distinct dignity and character, with expressed responsibilities, and a focus on a life as an Icon of Christ the Servant.

Diacons are glorified altar servers.

A deacon's ministry goes beyond liturgy protocols, and often includes organizing, teaching, counseling, and other duties. Unique to clerics, Holy Orders impart an indelible, and lasting character and grace, configuring the deacon to Christ.

Diacons earn a lot of money.

Actually, deacons don't receive any salary at all, unless they are employed by the parish or diocesan office. A deacon's service to the Church is performed without expectation of earthly reward.

Being a deacon is just part-time.

Actually, being a deacon is more than a full-time job. A deacon is always a deacon... at church, at work, at home, at the grocery, during every activity. No matter where he is or what he is doing, he continues to be a presence of Christ and his Church.

Becoming a deacon is really easy.

Not exactly. It's a five-year process, and you'll do an extraordinary amount of studying, writing, community work, praying, and soul-searching during those five years. It isn't easy... but it's infinitely rewarding.

Becoming a deacon is really hard, and there are no rewards at all.

Formation is indeed an intense program. But you'll have the support, encouragement, prayers, and love of everybody in the Diaconate; you'll feel like you have a new family! You'll be enrolled in the Religious Studies program at Chaminade University in Honolulu, and you'll earn a certificate, the minimum qualification for the Diaconate. If you wish to continue your studies, you can earn a BA or even an MA through the program. You'll have the deep satisfaction of serving your community and your God in a meaningful and impactful way.

Only married men can become permanent deacons.

Those deacons who are fortunate enough to be married count on their spouses as helpmeets -- beloved companions and helpers. They are essential to the diaconate journey. Single men may also enter formation, but they must commit to remaining chaste throughout formation, and at Ordination, they must vow to remain unmarried and celibate.



Diacon wives pose with Hyun Underwood (center) and Co-Director of Deacon Formation Kathy Coughlin (right).

Becoming a deacon is really expensive.

Actually? It's FREE. The program covers everything from the college-level courses taught by Chaminade, weekend accommodations at St. Stephen's Diocesan Center, and all meals.

I need to live on O'ahu to become a deacon.

Not true! Aspirants from the Neighbor Islands are warmly welcomed. The Diaconate program covers transportation expenses to and from O'ahu for aspirants and their wives as well.

Feel free to contact the Deacon Formation office if you have questions about the Diaconate: (808) 203-6777

NAVIGATING THE PATH OF FORMATION

Formation of a deacon is a process that promotes the development of the whole person. As explained by Keith Cabiles, co-associate director of the Office of Permanent Deacon Formation, the program for deacons consists of three separate but integral paths: aspirant, candidate, and post-ordination.

"During Formation, the paths merge organically and lead them on a profound journey of transformation," Dcn. Keith says. "The program focuses on four dimensions, or specific areas in formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—considered essential for development of the deacon as a whole person."

Here, three men at various stages of Formation, joined by their wives, talk candidly about their experiences, and the importance of the four dimensions in their work. First, Dcn. John and Kathy Coughlin, Formation Directors since 2008, share their wisdom and distinct perspectives.

Dcn. John Coughlin, Director of the Office of Permanent Deacon Formation, Cohort 6, ordained 2007:

Time management is crucial. Stamina is a factor,

particularly for working Neighbor Islanders. It can be exhausting to leave a full work week, get to the airport, experience a weekend of activities, fly home, go back to work, and get threaded discussions posted on time.

A THOUSAND-MILE JOURNEY STARTS WITH A SINGLE STEP.

The next challenge is the spiritual one. There will come the time when internal reflection causes the candidate to face the less lovely aspects of his character – a "look in the mirror moment," when it would be easier and more comfortable to look away. But there's no growth in looking away.

Nothing will occur without prayer. It is the essential part of successful growth and formation.

Aspirants can expect changes like growth in prayer life, personal humility, theological knowledge base, and appreciation and acceptance of human differences.

My advice: Take it one weekend at a time. For those

who enter certain of their calling, there will come a time when doubts intrude; for the uncertain, there will come a time of surety. It is a bit of a rollercoaster ride. Allow it to happen as God wills.

Kathleen Coughlin, wife of John Coughlin and Co-Director of the Office of Permanent Deacon Formation:

Being the wife of a deacon is not for the clinging vine or dependent personality type. I recommend that you develop and cultivate your own interests and talents so you will not come to resent your husband's time spent away from the home.

Enjoy the Formation process for your own enrichment and you will grow with your husband, understand the demands of his ministry, and become the guardian of your marriage!

Dcn. Marlowe Sabatier, Cohort 10, ordained January 2024:

A thousand-mile journey starts with a single step. Opening our hearts to the call and being willing to be

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1967

The Second Vatican Council reestablishes the diaconate "as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy."

1971

First permanent deacons are ordained in the United States.

1981

Bishop John Scanlan ordains eight men to the order of Permanent Deacon, the first in Hawai'i.



2018

The diaconate celebrates the 50th anniversary of its restoration in the modern world.

2024

Eight men are ordained in January 2024 in Cohort 10, Hawai'i's newest group of deacons.

WHAT'S A DEACON?

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Living in the world, deacons are sent by the Church to be the presence of Christ to those in need. Some deacons have full-time jobs, witnessing to their faith in the marketplace. Others are retired. Some serve their parishes directly in a variety of roles, including marriage preparation and OCIA instruction. Some are involved in prison and hospice ministries and care for the unhoused. Most (about 90% nationally) are married. Others are widowed or single men.

But to truly understand the character of the diaconate, I think it is necessary to look not at what the deacon does, but rather who he is. The deacon is a reminder to all the people of God, of what Christ is calling all of us to be: men and women for others. In his calling to evangelize and to catechize, in taking God out into the world, and in bringing his experiences of work and family to the door of The Church, the deacon proclaims and lives out The Good News of The Kingdom for all to see.

In a recent talk to a group of deacons, our Holy Father Pope Francis spoke of “the generosity of the deacon who spends himself without seeking the front lines, who smells of the Gospel and tells of the greatness of God's humility.”

We who are called to this wonderful and beautiful ministry of the diaconate are reminded every minute of every day of the challenges this role presents to us, and the many gifts The Lord bestows on us. We are truly blessed!

NAVIGATING THE PATH

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formed, is the first step. Applying these two at a constant pace allows us to reach that thousand-mile marker. Take the first step and cooperate with God's grace! God will do the rest.

The response to a call to the Diaconate comes from a place of open heart to the possibility of becoming an ordained minister of Christ's Church, and a willingness to serve. Openness of heart leads to answering “yes” to the call, while willingness leads to answering “yes” to being formed.

The openness to be formed to the person God wants us to be, and the willingness to work on how we interact with other people based on who we become, are at the core of formation. Formation is a grace from God that transforms us as a person in God's image and likeness.

The changes we experience and the knowledge we gain during Formation make us personally well-rounded, intellectually ready, and more compassionate. Even if the candidate doesn't make it to ordination, the grace of God has already transformed him into a better version of himself.

Maggie Sabatier, wife of Marlowe Sabatier:

Formation helped my husband and me to be closer, and has strengthened our relationship as a married couple. Attending the formation needs sacrifice, dedication, commitment, and time management, since I have a full-time job. The women in the core team support us in many ways, mentoring and inspiring me to continue the journey. The significant presence and support of all the wives is helpful, and we have built friendships. Our kids are also involved and serving in the church. Our family involvement helps us to realize that God is the center of whatever that we are doing.

Cliff Villareal, Cohort 11 Candidate, ordination projected for January 2027:

As you embark on this formation journey alongside other diverse and unique Catholic men, you naturally form friendships and bonds that evolve into a supportive “brotherhood.” This network can become an invaluable source of support, offering both a listening ear and meaningful guidance.

The formation process has significantly enriched my relationships, particularly with my wife. Together, we have focused on living our faith more intentionally, which has strengthened our bond. As I undergo personal change through this formation, my wife, who accompanies me during formation weekends, is experiencing her own transformation as she deepens her understanding of our faith and about each other.

Furthermore, the formation has had a profound impact on my family, fostering a more Christ-centered household. I am grateful for the opportunity to actively participate in my children's spiritual development.

As for my relationship with God, it has undergone immense growth, although there is always room for further progress. I firmly believe God is with us every step of the way. Through prayer and discernment, I have experienced God's guidance in shaping me to become more aligned with the person he is calling me to be -- to reflect the image of Christ.

Irene Villareal, wife of Cliff Villareal:

I knew that Cliff had been having the call for several years, and as his wife, I knew I needed to support him in his journey to follow God's call. I prepared through a lot of prayer and reflection. I realized that he had many gifts that needed to be shared with others, so I knew that I would join him in this journey.

Having known several deacons and their wives, my fears lay in my own self-doubts. I naturally had fears of being adequate and “enough.” Several of them have told me to just be myself, and to support Cliff in the best way I can.

“The imagery of the refiner's fire and the crucible from the Old Testament is a very powerful and appropriate metaphor for the kind of transformation that occurs in Formation,” concludes Den. Keith. “The essence of who you are will remain, but the process aims to refine and shape you to better embrace the character and virtues of one who will commit his life to serving God's church.”

LET THE SPIRIT
GUIDE YOU.
DISCERN THE
VOCATION OF

DEACON





The Permanent Deacon
Formation Program

is directed at preparing men spiritually, intellectually, and pastorally for ordination and to assist the Church in its mission of salvation of souls. Men who are called will be formed and sent to teach, to guard and to bear witness to, and to serve Holy Mother Church through the example of their lives and their ministries of Word, service and charity.

Inquiry Weekends

Applicants for the next cohort will be accepted only after attendance at one of the mandatory Inquiry Weekends, along with your wives, if married.

• April 12 - 14

• May 3 - 5

• June 14 - 16

For more info or questions:
deaconformation2@rcchawaii.org
Or call us at:
(808) 203-6777

CATHOLICHAWAII.ORG/FORMATION