

Men serve their parish as permanent deacons

The men lined up, as rehearsed, to begin Mass. The first man in line looked directly at the crucifix and prayed for strength to always serve the parish and its community. The men walked towards the altar – ready to commit themselves to the Sacrament of Holy Orders as Permanent Deacons, a life-long ministry of service.

The title “deacon” originates from the Grecian term “diakonia,” meaning to serve. Diaconate is a ministry; it is a way of serving the Church. The call to the diaconate is both a call from God to serve, and a call from the community of faith, which is to be served. The ministry of the Word, Liturgy, and Charity are the ways in which a permanent deacon serves God.

The Diocese of Yakima ordained seven men on February 28, 2020 at the St. Joseph Parish in Kennewick. One of these men is Deacon German Farias, who, prior to the ordination, couldn't believe the day was quickly approaching.

Farias never thought he would be part of the Diaconal Formation Program, although he was active at St. Joseph Parish in Kennewick for 12 consecutive years. Pastors would talk to him about applying but it was never on his radar. It wasn't until he attended a retreat seven years ago, during a discussion of men serving their parish, that the realization and need hit him.

“I thought ‘I wish I could serve as a deacon,’” Farias said. “I had different pastors tell me to apply for the program, but I hadn't heard the call (from God) as I did on the retreat.”

Farias did his research on the program and thought of his family. His children no longer depended on him, as they were adults with their own families. He thought of his wife – who would need to consent to applying, as wives participate in the program as well.

Maricela Juarez Farias, wife of Deacon Farias, thought it was a miracle when they discussed his need to be part of the program.

“I saw that he wanted to become more, and serve the church,” Juarez Farias said. “Before we had this discussion, I saw him as a bit lost, and I prayed he'd find his vocation.”

She continued to state that she has learned along with him as she attended his classes, and they have both grown together as a couple and continue to do so after 30 years of marriage.

“This has been a blessing for us,” Juarez Farias said. “I will walk this journey with him.”

Farias enjoyed attending the classes during his formation, but soon realized that his family as well as other people from the community were treating him differently.

“People, I realized, look at me as a sort of role model,” Farias said. “And I'm trying to live up to it.”

The Diocese of Yakima now has more than 50 deacons in active ministry, serving communities throughout the Diocese. A total of 17 men have been ordained since December of 2019. Fr. Osmar Aguirre, Director of the Diaconal Formation Program, expects that Bishop Joseph Tyson will ordain 30 more men in addition to the 17 men who have already been ordained.

Fr. Aguirre emphasized one of the goals of the program – to have a deacon at every parish.

The deacon, Fr. Aguirre states, becomes a bridge between the community and the current priest. The deacons serve those in need: the homeless, the ill, refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the dying, etc. The deacon is to speak about these communities, articulate their needs, and to mobilize the community's response.

“Priests are always moving, and are never assigned to one parish, but the deacon is,” Fr. Aguirre said. “The deacon commits his life-time to a parish ... therefore the permanent deacon knows his community and its needs and is able to support and assist the priest.”

However, Fr. Aguirre states that not everyone who applies is able to enter formation. The applicants must meet certain qualifications such as, be active in their parish for at least five consecutive years, be endorsed by the parish pastor, and demonstrate leadership within parish and community, among many other qualifications.

The Diaconate Formation is a comprehensive ministry formation process involving human, pastoral, spiritual, and theological formation. The whole process consists of inquiry, aspirancy, candidacy, and post-ordination.

“If we go back to the apostles, we see that they didn't have enough time to help everyone in need,” Fr. Aguirre said. “To assist them, they chose well respected men in their community, so that the apostles could concentrate completely on preaching.”

On the morning of the permanent diaconate ordination, Farias was calm, excited, and nervous all at once.

“It's kind of like the feeling of getting married,” Farias said. “You're hyper aware of the seriousness of what you're about to do and the responsibility you're about to take on.”

At the parish, Farias was excited to see the other six men and was conscious of the journey they all had together, as well as the new journey they were about to embark upon.

Farias recalled that all the men were excited and talking about their families being present to witness the ordination. He couldn't help but think of his mother, who was in Mexico, and had been unable to attend the event.

“One of the men was on the verge of crying tears of joy,” Farias said. “I told him not to cry, and my friend turned to me, smiled, and said, ‘Let's see who cries first.’”

He continued to say that he is not someone who easily cries, and he found the comment his friend made strange. But he continued to dress, and once finished the men lined up to prepare to walk towards the altar at the beginning of mass.

Farias was the first person in line and as they approached the altar, he turned to his left to sit down, as was rehearsed and he smiled at his wife. It was then that he noticed his mother standing beside his wife.

“Everyone knew – the men, my wife, my family,” Farias said. “They were keeping it a surprise and I almost cried once I saw my mother ... it made the day complete for me.”

Farias then looked at the crucifix and thanked God for his mother witnessing and being part of the ordination with him, a day he had been looking forward to for seven years.

The support and donations to the Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA) make the Diaconal Formation Program possible. Thank you!

If you would like to apply or would like more information on the Diaconate Formation Program please click here: <https://bit.ly/2WUPu2d> or visit www.yakimadiocese.org and find the Deacon Ministry link under the Ministries tab.