

Three deacons ordained for Diocese of Bethlehem



On September 29, at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, Bishop Paul Marshall ordained (l-r) Marion Meiss (St. Peter's, Hazleton), Dolores Evans (North Parish, Schuylkill County), and Sarah Bosler (St. Gabriel's, Douglassville). Canon Jane Teter preached.



Canon Jane Teter

Early one morning the volunteers gathered at the Thrift Shop. They were busy sorting through the donated clothing, hanging it on hangers, and stacking it on tables. They plugged in the coffee pot and the crockpot filled with homemade soup. They were ready to open for the day.

Among the volunteers was a deacon who had rolled up her sleeves and was working along with the other volunteers. The shop was in a poor section of town and its mission was to help those in need. Throughout the day, people wandered in – some were looking for bargains on the clothes racks, others were hungry and knew they could come to this safe place for a cup of soup and some coffee, still others came in to get out of the cold, or just to find someone to talk to.

During the afternoon the deacon visited some of the neighborhood folks. She took some food to a woman whose husband was in prison, she helped a young mother with two small children whose husband had left her, to find the help she needed, and spent some time with a young man who was struggling with drugs.

The deacon will go back to her parish and share with the people her experience of the pain and

brokenness of God's creation. Perhaps some of the people will be willing to volunteer time in the thrift shop, some may donate clothes, some may make soup to be frozen to meet emergencies, all can pray for those in any need or trouble.

In another time and place the twelve apostles called together the whole community of disciples to select from among themselves seven men of good standing, full of the spirit and of wisdom to the

Continued on next page

ministry of service. They chose Stephen and six others. They stood before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

In still another time and place the Bishop prays, “Father, through Jesus Christ you Son, give your Holy Spirit to Sarah, Marion, Dolores; fill her with grace and power, and make her a deacon in our church.”

These vignettes have described the vocation of a deacon, the power of a deacon, the ordination of a deacon.

The deacon is to be a servant, following the servanthood of Christ. Jesus’ self-understanding is one of servant who is so dedicated to caring for others that he is willing to suffer and die for their sakes. To all who would follow Christ, this self-understanding would also be true. We could say the vocation of the Church, as the people of God, is that of servant. It bears witness to sacrificial servanthood as the “way” of redemption for a sinful and broken world. The Church, as the Body of Christ, performs as Christ’s diakonia – Christ’s service.

A story is told by Henri Nouwen – it is an old legend in the Talmud that suggests where to begin searching for a way to be of service in the world, entitled “Where to Find the Messiah?”

Rabbi Yohua ben Levi asked Elijah the prophet, “When will Messiah come?”

Elijah replied, “Go and ask him yourself”

“Where is he?”

“Sitting at the gates of the city.”

“How shall I know him?”

“He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds them one at a time and binds it up again, saying to himself, ‘Perhaps I shall be needed: if so I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment.’”

This story raises many questions, such as: How does the prophet know when the Messiah will come or where he might be found? Why would the Messiah be found outside the gates of the city? Why sitting among the poor? Why covered with wounds? Why changing bandages, others’ and his own, one at a time?

The coming Messiah, according to the prophets, is a suffering servant and a wounded healer (Isaiah 53). His place is among the poor. He tends to his own wounds as well as the wounds of others, in anticipation of the moment when he will be needed. So it is with all ministers and servants of God. We are called to be wounded healers who look after our own wounds and at the same time prepare to heal the wounds of others.

The deacon’s distinctive role, ordained by the Church and empowered by the Spirit, is that of service to the Church and to the world – particularly the disenfranchised: the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely. The deacon is the bridge between the Church and the world, and also between the world and the Church.

Today’s collect says, “Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals” To ordain means to prepare, to set aside for a special ministry. Each of Christ’s followers has been ordained for a special ministry. But to ordain means more than to be set aside – it means to equip with the qualities of mind and heart and character, which are necessary for that ministry.

God has called each of you – Sally, Marion and Dolores – to the ministry of a deacon. The servanthood aspects of this ministry to the Church are symbolized by the liturgical duties a deacon may perform: setting the Communion Table and administration of the elements are servant-related tasks. The deacon’s reading of the Gospel, in the midst of the people, proclaims this ministry visibly. When the deacon invites the people to confess their sins and leads the Prayers of the People, she serves the community by bringing their needs and concerns to the Church. Finally, when the deacon dismisses the people to, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” it is a reminder of the church’s charge to serve humankind in the name of Christ.

Liturgical duties, however, are only part of a deacon’s total ministry. The greater part of diaconal ministry is carried on with the community.

The form your diaconal ministry takes will be different from anyone else’s, because you each bring to it your unique gifts and talents.

Continued on next page

You are to be a model, an example of Christ's servanthood to all people – to be a constant reminder to each of us that we are all called to be servants of Christ. Every time I attend the ordination of a deacon, I am caught up and once again reminded that, though a priest, I am a deacon – a servant. And my life is to be lived helping others and bringing them to Christ.

There are those who would like to see direct ordination to the priesthood for those who are so called. I would oppose that (I know some in this room would disagree!!) because I have not met a priest for whom the diaconate has been harmful; indeed, I know some priests for whom their time as a deacon has been especially beneficial.

Today, Christ shares his servanthood with you. And you are ready to share your life in this ministry of service.

Your preparation has been long and hard. You have studied and worked and grown. And now God and his Church have found you worthy as you offer yourself again.

Dean Martha Horne, in her final commencement

address at Virginia seminary in May said, "You are needed now (in other places). So many of God's people have no voice and little, if any, hope: They are victims of poverty, famine, war, oppression, and disease and their name is legion. We need you to speak out on their behalf, to dismantle the structures of injustice in this world, to speak truth to power, and yes, to call us to account for our participation in the injustice and evils in our society."

She continued, "Are you adequately prepared for the challenges that lie ahead? Well, no, of course not. One of the curious, often confusing, but always consistent things about God is that God insists on calling people who aren't quite ready to go."

Each of you will use your unique gifts to do the ministry to which God has called you.

Isaiah says: "You shall go out in joy, be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth in singing. And all the trees will clap their hands. (Is. 55:12)

Go out in joy, be led forth in peace ...

May God bless you as you begin your new ministry. Amen.

