

Dear Parishioners,

As you may know, Rick Roder has been in formation to become a deacon for six years. He and Wendy have been preparing to serve in this new role for a long time. It is with joy that I announce that Rick has been called to ordination as a deacon by Bishop R. Walker Nickless. Rick and five other men will be ordained Saturday, May 1, 10:30 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Epiphany in Sioux City. He will be assigned to St. Mary's and Oyens St. Catherine and will assist me at Mass in his new role for the first time on May 2 at 10 o'clock Mass. I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you more about the diaconate and Rick's role as he begins this ministry among us.

**What is a deacon?** A deacon is a member of the Catholic clergy, which consists of bishops, priests, and deacons. The deacon is ordained not to the priesthood, but to service. The diaconate is a three-fold ministry: **Charity**, in which he is of service to the community. **Word**, in which he serves by proclaiming the Gospel and preaching. **Liturgy**, in which he can assist at Mass, serve as ordinary minister of the Eucharist, preside at baptisms, witness marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, and lead the community in prayer, funeral services and Liturgy of the Hours. The deacon finds his identity not in what he does, but in who he is. While particular ministries of deacons can vary widely, the important thing is that wherever a deacon finds himself, he seeks to serve. This parallels baptism; what we do is not as fundamental as who we are – members of God's family.

**What is the background of this ministry?** The ministry of deacon goes back to the Apostles, who ordained deacons to help serve God's people by taking over service-oriented ministries so the Apostles could concentrate on Sacramental ministry. Among the first deacons was Stephen, who became the Church's first martyr. The diaconate as a distinct ministry declined in the fourth century when bishops began sending priests out from the cities into the countryside. Deacons were the "right hand men" of the bishop, so remained in the cities and more and more the diaconate became restricted to the "transitional" (vs. permanent) deacon, a step to the priesthood. The restoration of the distinct ministry of the "permanent" deacon was recommended by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and the first modern deacons were ordained in the 1970s. St. Mary's first deacon was Allan "Bud" Weiler, who was ordained in 1986 and died in 2004.

**Are deacons supposed to help "fill in" for priests since our number of priests is declining?** No; the ministry of the deacon is meant to assist and enhance the ministry of the priesthood, not to replace it in times of need. Deacons are not permitted to preside at Mass, hear Confessions or Anoint the Sick. However you may see Rick helping me out in other ways, such as funeral vigils, cemetery interments, baptisms, wedding rehearsals, etc.

**What changes will there be at Mass with a deacon assisting?** The deacon leads certain prayers and invites the congregation to certain actions; he invokes the "Lord Have Mercy..." leads the Prayers of the Faithful, calls for the sign of peace, and dismisses the congregation after the final blessing. He reads the Gospel and can preach. He can receive the gifts of the faithful. He helps prepare and purify the sacred vessels used for Holy Communion, for which he is an "Ordinary" (as opposed to "Extraordinary" ministers who help as necessary). He will typically be lead minister of the Sacred Blood (meaning he normally administers the Blood of Christ rather than the Body of Christ during Communion).

**How will my ministry change if I am a lector or extraordinary minister of the Holy Eucharist?** Only one practical change for each. **Lectors:** When Rick is assisting at Mass as a deacon, he is representative of the People of God and thus is directed by the Roman Missal to lead the Prayer of the Faithful (the "Petitions"). Thus, lectors will proclaim only the two readings (and Responsorial Psalm if necessary) and Rick will lead the petitions. **EMHCs:** When Rick is vested for a Sunday Mass, we will simply need one less extraordinary minister of the cup (or on a weekday we will not need an EMHC when Rick is assisting). Since Rick's assistance on the altar will not always be scheduled (meaning there may be two EMHCs scheduled to administer the cup) I would ask that only cup minister come up front when Rick is vested. I need to stress that as a deacon Rick will be an Ordinary minister of the Eucharist, thus he **must** help distribute Holy Communion. If an extra EMHC comes up the extra person will have to return to his or her pew.

**Will there be changes in our parish structure?** Not essentially. Rick and Wendy have a young family and in this first year his ministerial assignment will be to continue with the things he has done for the parish in the past (except for being a lector) while integrating the liturgical aspect of his ministry, which is of course something new for all of us. A deacon continues to work in his “regular job” and to be a husband and father. (If you don’t know, Rick works for a company called ArbiterSports doing various editing tasks). I don’t want to put too many demands on Rick and Wendy’s time at the expense of their family. So we will integrate his ministry as a deacon slowly but surely. I would like to add that deacons are normally not paid by the parish unless of course they are part- or full-time employees.

**Why can deacons be married when priests cannot?** Celibacy is an important gift to the Church, but is not an inherent or essential aspect of ordination. The norm in the Roman Catholic Church is that priests are not married, unlike the Eastern rites of Catholicism, where many priests are married. However, it is important to remember that deacons are NOT priests. This being said, Wendy has had to support and formally agree to Rick’s ordination, and Rick will agree not to marry again after ordination, should anything ever happen to Wendy. These are important decisions for them and I want you to know that they made these decisions as servants of Christ and of this parish. I would add that ordination does not fundamentally change any aspect of Rick and Wendy’s marriage.

**How do the Mass vestments of deacons differ from those of priests, and do deacons wear a Roman collar like a priest?** Both wear an alb, a white garment that represents baptism (also worn by altar servers). From there, the vestments differ slightly. The stole is a long, narrow, ribbon-like cloth. For the priest it is worn around his neck, hanging in front. You will see that Rick’s deacon stole hangs over his left shoulder and is connected at the right hip. The outer garment of a priest is called a chasuble. If a deacon wears an outer garment, it is called a dalmatic, which is basically a chasuble with sleeves. Outside of Mass, when carrying out his ministry, a deacon will occasionally wear a black shirt with Roman collar (often called “clerics”). Remember that deacons are clergy, which is what the collar symbolizes. The way you can tell the difference between a priest and deacon is that deacons in our diocese are required have some sort of pin or embroidered symbol of the diaconate on their “clerics” so you can distinguish them from priests. Most often this symbol consists of a cross with deacon’s stole (diagonal) laid over it.

**How should one address a deacon? Is it always necessary that we call Rick “Deacon Rick”?** While it is good and proper to call him “Deacon Rick,” Rick has asked me to tell you that it is equally OK if you continue to refer to him only by his first name. So, it is up to you; either way is fine.

**Can deacons bless people and things?** A blessing calls God to be present to someone in a special way or to set aside some thing for a sacred purpose. By virtue of ordination, yes, a deacon can bless. They can bless most religious artifacts, just as priests do. They can and do bless people, especially in connection with various sacramental rites and liturgical services. I would encourage all our parishioners to understand the graces that are available to you through Rick’s ordination and to take advantage of his ability to bless you and pray for and with you.

**Can anyone attend the ordination, or is it by invitation only?** Anyone can attend; the diocese anticipates that there will be a number of faithful from each parish who would like to be present. Thus, if you would like to go, you are welcome at the ordination and the luncheon reception afterward.

In closing, we welcome any questions you may have. I would ask that you pray for Rick and Wendy and their family they prepare to serve God in a new and beautiful way. It is truly a privilege and a grace for our Catholic faith community to have Rick and Wendy help lead us to the Spirit of the Living God. May we always respect their calling and honor their efforts as a sign of Christ dwelling with us.

God bless,  
Father Bill