

LESSON 37: HOLY ORDERS (DEACONS)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 11
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 11
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 12

Revision from previous lesson:

We have started learning about the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We have learned that the people received into the Holy Orders are men who are called to be a part of the ministerial priesthood in order to serve the people of God. In this lesson, we consider the role of the deacon in the Church.

Current lesson:

1. We see the role of the deacon in the New Testament:

1 Timothy 4:6, 13, 16: “If you will give these instructions to the brothers, you will be a good minister (*diakonos*) of Christ Jesus...”

1 Timothy 3:8-9: “Similarly, deacons (*diakonos*) must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.”

2. *Lumen Gentium, 29:* “At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed ‘not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service.’ For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God. It is the duty of the deacon, according as it shall have been assigned to him by competent authority, to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services. Dedicated to duties of charity and of administration, let deacons be mindful of the admonition of Blessed Polycarp: ‘Be merciful, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all.’”
3. A deacon serves as the eyes and ears of the bishop. He is a minister of the Word (teaching, preaching), Charity (caring for the poor and marginalised), and Altar (assisting the bishop and priests at Masses, leading public prayers, proclaiming the Gospel at Mass).
4. Deacons can be transitional (on their way to priesthood) or permanent. Married men can be ordained as permanent deacons; they continue living the married life upon ordination but if their wives die during their lifetime, they are required to live celibate lives like all

other clergy. Single men ordained as deacons are required to make a promise of celibacy at their ordination.

5. A deacon is usually addressed verbally as “deacon”, whereas more formal salutations apply in writing depending on local custom (“Reverend Deacon”, “Reverend Mr”, or sometimes just “Deacon”).
6. A deacon is an ordinary minister of Baptism and Communion. He can also conduct weddings and burials provided that no Eucharistic consecration is necessary.
7. A deacon can also bless people, articles, and places except where the Rite of Blessing specifically states otherwise.
8. Most permanent deacons have their own secular profession, while an increasing number is working full-time for their bishops. Those who have their own professions are not salaried by the Church.
9. Canon Law obliges clerics to be dressed in clerical attire at all times (Canon 284). It is both a right and an obligation. (The local custom in Malaysia has developed such that being dressed in clerical attire is not made compulsory.)
10. Permanent deacons are usually allowed to be dressed in clerical attire where it is useful for their ministry. It is a right but not an obligation. But this is also subject to the stipulation of their bishop.
11. At liturgical celebrations, a deacon is dressed in an alb, a stole and a dalmatic. He may use a cope at liturgical celebrations that do not involve the Mass.
12. Acts 6 tells us about the selection of the first seven deacons of the Church during the days of the Apostles. They became rather legendary figures because of their righteousness.
 - A) **St Stephen.** The Acts of the Apostles shares quite a bit about the deacon named Stephen (Chapters 6 and 7). He went beyond his duty of serving the needy. He also preached and performed great wonders and signs. St Stephen was ultimately stoned to death for his faith and ministry. He is known as the first martyr of the (New Testament) Church, hence his popular title “protomartyr”.
 - B) **St Philip the Deacon/Evangelist.** He is sometimes called a deacon and sometimes an evangelist. While Cornelius is considered by most to be the first Gentile convert to Christianity, some suggest that the Ethiopian Treasurer baptised by St Philip may really have been the first (Acts 8:26-40).
 - C) **St Prochorus.** Scripture tells very little about St Prochorus, outside of the fact that he was filled with the Spirit and respected by many early Christian-Jews. Some claim that he was one of the 70 appointed by Christ (Luke 10:1-20) and later became the bishop of Nicomedia.

- D) **St Nicanor.** There are traditions that believe that Nicanor suffered with St Stephen when Stephen was stoned to death. St Nicanor may also have been one of the 70 mentioned in Luke 10.
- E) **St Timon.** Many believe that St Timon had the gifts of healing the sick and banishing evil forces, and was martyred in Greece.
- F) **St Parmenas.** Besides helping out with the needy Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem and being known as a good man, some claim that Parmenas preached in Asia Minor (Turkey) and was martyred in Philippi (Greece).
- G) **St Nicholas of Antioch.** Acts 6:5 offers a little bit of extra information on Nicholas. He was from Antioch. We also know that he was a convert to Judaism. Little information has been written about St Nicholas of Antioch outside of what is offered in Scripture.



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