

# The Diaconal Ministry within the Church

by Bishop Peter Elder Hickman

**The Diaconate** is one of the earliest ordained ministries within the Church. The earliest ministerial order within the Church was that of the Apostles which was established by Jesus himself. Not long after the Church came into being, the Apostles appointed seven men to provide service to the early Christian community. These first seven were later called deacons and after them the Diaconal ministry continued in the Church alongside the continuing ministry of **the Apostles** through their successors, **the bishops**. Later, the bishops delegated their authority to celebrate the Eucharist to another order of ministry called the **Presbyterate** (the priests). So, there can be recognized three distinct orders of ministry: the **Episcopal** (the bishops); the **Presbyteral** (the priests); and the **Diaconal** (the deacons). It is well attested that women, along with men, also served as deacons (deaconesses) in the early centuries of the Church.

Bishops served as the "senior pastors" of the Church with the primary responsibility to teach and to "oversee" the other ministries of the Church. The presbyters were deputized to serve a local faith community in the absence of a bishop primarily in presiding at the Eucharistic celebrations as well as providing pastoral care in providing the sacramental ministries of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. The deacons served in various capacities in assisting the bishops and in supporting the various ministries of the order of the laity. Deacons may also baptize and officiate (witness and bless) marriages.

Although the diaconal ministry was a common feature of Church life in the early centuries, over time, in more recent centuries the diaconal ministry began to disappear. It has only been since the Vatican II Council (1963-1965) that the diaconate has been fully restored.

There are basically two kinds of deacons: 1) **the transitional deacon** and 2) **the permanent deacon**. A transitional deacon is a person who has been formed to become a priest and that formation process requires such persons to serve for a temporary period of time as an ordained deacon before moving on to be ordained a priest; the permanent deacon is one who has been called and ordained to serve as a deacon for life.

Presently, there are vastly more priests than permanent deacons. However, this was not always the case. It was normal that there would be several deacons for every priest within a given faith community. Therefore, it is my hope that we would have an increase of both men and women ordained and functioning in a vibrant diaconal ministry among us at Saint Matthew Church. That is why I am putting out a call to the members of our parish to prayerfully consider and discern the possibility of actively serving the community as deacons.

In September, we are beginning **the Diaconal Formation Program of the Saint Cyprian School of Theology** here at Saint Matthew Church. There will be an **orientation and introduction** to this formation program on **Saturday, 10 September**, at 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at **Saint Junia House** in Anaheim. I have appointed **Mother Esther Diane Smith** to be our **Director of Vocations for the Saint Cyprian School of Theology**. The program is designed to last between two to four years. Each student will proceed at their own rate of speed that should take no less than two years and no more than four years to complete. The cost of the entire program is \$2000 to be paid over the course of the time one is in formation. (scholarships may be applied for)

If you are interested in exploring the possibility of becoming a deacon of our church then I ask you to contact me at **bishoppeterelderhickman@gmail.com** or by telephone at **714 401 7650**.