

Preached June 12, 2010 at Ordination to Diaconate of Joan Testin – S. H. Hartman

41 years ago this month, at St. Paul's church in Brunswick ME on a VERY hot day

I stood where Joan stands now – about to receive orders – holy orders – orders from God and from the church.

Things have changed in the church since then:

- The Prayer book no longer speaks of deacons as holding an “inferior” office as the 1928 Prayer book did when I was ordained.
- Ministry is no longer seen as a profession done by male professionals for and to the people in the pews – now we have learned that ministry is the work and calling of all Christians.
- And of course, women are now included in all ordained ministries.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about the diaconate this morning – a ministry which is not inferior, but foundational to the life of the church.

I am glad that I have been a deacon all these years.

I am glad Joan will be made a deacon today.

I am glad that the church still, by tradition, insists that priests (and bishops too) are ordained as deacons FIRST.

Why? Because the ministry of a deacon is the most important of all ordained ministries.

The deacon represents, symbolizes, focuses and articulates the ministry and vocation we all share as Christians.

All ordained individuals are given special responsibilities in the community of faith, by calling, community, prayer and sacraments.

All are called to be ordered to represent and lead the community of faith.

BUT, all ordained individuals – FIRST OF ALL – are called to embody and represent, to prod and promote, to be a catalyst for and a symbol for the ministry that all Christians share.

Whatever else ordained leaders eventually might be called and ordered to do, the first and foundational ordained ministry is diaconal—the ministry of bringing the gifts and grace of the Good News of love and our care to the world and to the church.

A deacon calls to the attention of the church our opportunities and obligations to care for creation, society and all those in need.

The deacon brings the promise of the gospel – hope, faith, love – out into the wild and dark and lonely places of the world.

“You are not alone – God loves you – no matter how bad it gets, no matter how fearful and hurtful and dangerous the world may be, don’t be afraid. God is with you, God loves you.” This is the diaconal message – and the message of us all.

Think of a deacon as someone standing at the threshold of the church, drawing hurting people and urgent concerns into the prayer and caring of the body of Christ, and then sending people filled with the good news of Christ across the threshold into the dark places and to the wounded people, carrying with them the saving power of the incarnate and risen Christ.

Author Roslind Brown describes deacons as:

- people who reveal and shed light on the servant ministry that is already in our lives as Christians.
- windows through which we see the meaning of our baptisms.

Deacons enable the church to be itself, to carry out the ministry of Christ we are given.

Deacons are prophets when they confront injustice; they are pastors to those in need. They proclaim that all people – ALL people – are children of God.

They listen and seek to answer the question: Where is God in this?

And, they speak for those who have no voice.

But you might be wondering “Why all this talk about deacons?” Isn’t Joan going to be ordained as soon as permitted to the priesthood, when she will be able to get on with her “real” ministry? (Maybe she will even be a bishop some day!)

Well, maybe you have guessed already the answer to that question –

We HAVE to talk about diaconal ministry today, we have to celebrate Joan’s call not only to priesthood but also to diaconal orders – because this ministry is ours too. Today we celebrate our call to ministry, to service in Christ and we celebrate the joyous fact that Joan has been called to be a deacon. As a deacon, Joan will focus, embody, incarnate (with all her talents, imagination, gifts –and even flaws) the ministry of service and love and proclamation of the Good News that all of us Christians share.

Today, June 12, the church commemorates Enmegahbowh, a native American priest of 19th century Minnesota, a Christian and a native American. Enmegahbowd lived at a threshold – between his native American culture and heritage and the new community of faith in Christ he had discovered. We might learn from him for our ministry today – We too live on the threshold between the community of praise, faith hope and worship of God and of our society, culture, nation and all creation – all of which is often filled with pain, violence and sorrow. Our calling is to live like Enmegahbowh, stretched, bridging, even sometimes torn, but always witnessing to God’s incarnation and our reconciliation with God in Christ . And we do this with fiery zeal and gentle humility

We have all received holy orders – Joan, Bud, me, you, each and every one of us here – because we are all Christians. We are baptized.

SO --

Proclaim the Gospel.

Don't let the church forget the world

And don't let the world forget the good news, the hope and love of the gospel.

God is incarnate still, in each and every one of us – in our words, actions, service to each other, and to the whole creation.

These are our orders – the orders of Christian people.

JOAN –

REMEMBER to

Pray – especially in the dark and wild places

Love – especially those you don't like and would rather forget about – they too are the beloved children of God.

Use your imagination, gifts and good ideas (and I know that you have them!) all for the glory of God

Listen to others – they too, all of them, have value and are loved by God

Remember that when you are ordained priest, most of what you will do will still be the ministry of a deacon.

Be a deacon – always – for Christ's sake, for the church's sake, for our sake.

And, along with all of us, lay and ordained, strive always, depending on God's grace and with fiery zeal and gentle humility, to carry out by word and action and your very being, the ministry of the incarnate and risen Lord.