

Reflections of the Wife of a Permanent Deacon

I see the Diaconate of my husband as a vocation given to him by God. It is the way the Holy Spirit has asked him to fulfil his basic calling to follow Christ. I believe we all need to be aware of the way we are called to follow Jesus and (my husband) Paul was open to promptings of the Holy Spirit and took the opportunities presented to him by the Vatican II and by the acceptance of the Diaconate by the Sydney Archdiocese.

The impact of this vocation has been felt by me and our children in two stages which are quite different in themselves as I will now try to outline.



The Study Period

This period has special implications for the candidate and his family. It means dedicating time to studies and assignments that would have been formally available to family. It is not just the husband who feels this burden. In our case it was especially heavy as Paul was required to do the full theology course through the *Catholic Institute of Sydney*. Many nights were lost to lectures and many weekends went to the completion of assignments.

The wife of a candidate needs to be aware that this will be the case even if the study course is lighter than ours was. Awareness of time lost is only one component...it is also a fact that the husband needs a quiet area at home for study, children have to respect that and be cooperative also. Sometimes the good old virtue of patience is hard pressed and the family have to sacrifice some outings etc.

But just "putting up with" inconvenience is hardly enough. In a good marriage the husband and wife will be sharing partners and so it only seems right that the wife would take an interest in the studies, read some of the articles and discuss them with her husband. The husband would do well to include his wife (and occasionally his children, according to their age) in his journey by sharing with them insights he may have that relate to them. I know that we did this and it was a great help to Paul and a renewal process for me.

After Ordination

What is the role of the wife of a deacon? To answer this question I find it really helpful to look at Mary's supportive role in the ministry of her Son Jesus. As a mother, Mary encouraged, guided and supported her son as he felt his way towards his ministry. Look how gentle yet firm she was when he started off (too early?) when he was "lost" in the temple. The same understanding guidance is evident at the marriage at Cana. She was there whenever he needed her. The other women in the Gospel did the same, they were never forceful and yet I get the impression that life would have been pretty difficult for Jesus and the Apostles without the care and love of these loyal, faith filled women.

But there is a fine line between supporting and sharing. We share Matrimony not the Diaconate. I have personal ministries e.g. Catechist, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion etc. But the Diaconate is my husband's calling and is his ministry. Vatican II says "Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their

married life" (*Lumen Gentium* (n.11) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* also says that "Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and their relatives, co-operators of grace and witnesses of the faith" (n.11). So I believe that the married permanent deacon is a husband first. He is seen by the community in which he lives and works as a married man and a father who exercises a particular ministry for God's people. If he is perceived to be neglecting his primary role (e.g. never spending any real time at home) he will be sending out a very negative signal to the community about the value of Christian marriage. Likewise if I, as his wife criticise the diaconate and am too demanding to the point that he needs to neglect his diaconate, then I am at fault.

My husband and I are one, as Christ and the church community are one. It is therefore very necessary for deacons and their partners to be well aware of the beauty and the implications of their marriage vows. Part of the training of deacons should then include a time when they are given opportunities to in-depth their understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage as well as the Sacrament of Orders.

From this perspective I find it helpful to look at the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Joseph had to let the grace of God flow out to all mankind through his family. It was not his choice to decide whether or not Mary should accept the call to be the mother of the Redeemer. It was his vocation to accept the role of husband of Mary and carer of Jesus.

Joseph, being a righteous man (Mt 1:19) did just that. As a wife of a permanent deacon I could really benefit by following Joseph's example. Joseph felt confused at times but he listened to God and did His will. By being a supportive partner, like Joseph, I allow salvation to reach others through the service provided by my husband. As Mary helped Jesus, and Joseph helped Mary, so can a wife help her husband fulfil his call to service.

In conclusion may I say that it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be the wife of Paul during these past eighteen years and we look forward to having many more deacons to share this ministry with us in the future.

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