

# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

## Roderick Pirotta – the Church is underpowered without Deacons

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Roderick Pirotta is excited about his upcoming ordination to the permanent diaconate and is looking forward to the continuation of his call to ministry.

“To me, the diaconate is a way of life, not just the celebration on the ordination day and I’ve been living that way of life for as long as I’ve been married.”

Roderick, as well as Roque Dias, John Cinya and Thong Nguyen will be ordained to the diaconate on 22 February 2019 at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Parramatta.

Roderick and his wife Kathryn Fitzgibbon, who celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in November, first met whilst Roderick was the president of the Patrician’s Club, a social club for single Catholics that ran at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Parramatta in the 1980s and 1990s.

“It was the last day of my presidency in May 1993, and I saw Kathryn walk in and knew she was going to be my wife,” Roderick said.

“I initially didn’t feel that same way, I just saw this stalker from across the room. But we got on very well, and we thought let’s give it a go,” Kathryn laughed.

They were engaged six months later in November 1993, and then married a year later in November 1994 by Monsignor Ron McFarlane at St Andrew the Apostle Church in Marayong.

Before Roderick came to Australia in 1991, he studied at the Jesuit novitiate in his hometown of Naxxar, Malta and has always had a connection to the Jesuits.

“When I was a young child, I would walk with my father on Saturdays and we would stop to speak to the Jesuit brothers who would be working the land. During my teenage years, I still had the connection with the Jesuits by going on retreats and attending their activities.

“I entered the Jesuit novitiate on 1 February 1983, and I always wanted to be a brother, not a priest. I see the vocation of the brotherhood as similar to that of the vocation of the diaconate – brothers are there to serve and to be a support for the priest,” Roderick said.

Helping and serving people has always been in Roderick’s nature. He studied nursing in Ireland, worked as a nurse in England after leaving the Jesuits in 1989 and currently works part-time as a clinical nurse consultant in dementia and mental health for the elderly for the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District in Western Sydney.

“My work as a nurse, dealing with these clients who are living with mental health and dementia helps me to see the Eucharist in everyday life and to see Christ in an incarnate way.

“My adoration is going to the hospital and praying with these people. This is a reminder that the people I see is an example of Christ’s suffering today, I’ve just met with Jesus in these people.

“I sometimes drag my feet going to the hospital, but I come back with a spring in my step when I return.”

It wasn't until around the time his mother's death in 2012 that Roderick considered becoming a permanent deacon.

"I told my mother before she died 'I think I want to become a deacon, what do you think?' And she was alright with it, but she wasn't too sure about it because in Malta, we don't have permanent deacons.

"It was around the time of my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Kathryn had retired, and I was looking to retire and I asked myself what was I going to do as a retiree.

"When I visited Malta the previous year, I spoke with a very good friend of mine, who was also an ex-Jesuit, and he said, 'if there were deacons in Malta, I would be a deacon'.

"The seed of service was always there as part of my vocation to the brotherhood and it started germinating again. I wanted to go back to a life of service.

"I always wanted to do theological studies, so this was the time to do it.

Kathryn said she was supportive of Roderick joining the diaconate.

"I had no issues. Because I was not working, and I knew that the theological study would take up a fair amount of time, and after that, the weekends would be busy, it all worked out. If it had been ten or 15 years before that, it wouldn't have."

"Kathryn has supported me tremendously, and her support is incredible. Kathryn's support may not be front-and-centre, but she is always supporting me behind the scenes," Roderick said.

Once he is ordained, Roderick is not sure whether he will continue his active work at St Nicholas of Myra Parish, Penrith, where he has worked for the last two-and-a-half years but will take his passion for the ministry to where he will be appointed.

"I'm most looking forward to giving homilies and evangelisation. At the moment, I write my homilies down, but I much prefer to give them off-the-cuff. I love the Word of God.

"To me, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is a kind of evangelisation that I enjoy because we can sit down and have discussions with the catechumens and answer their questions.

"The diaconate is important to the life of the parish because it is the leaven of the apostolate for the laity. The deacon is the sacramentalisation – the tangible sign – of Christ as the Servant.

"The Church is underpowered without deacons.

"My advice to men wishing to become deacons is to listen to the Word of God, listen to what God desires from you."

**The Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate of Roderick Pirotta, Roque Dias, John Cinya and Thong Nguyen will take place on 22 February 2019 at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta.**

