

A Deacon!?

May, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a pleasure to announce to all of you that St. Mary's will be blessed with the ministry of a deacon among us. Her name is Susan Cushinotto and she was ordained on Saturday, May 16, 2009 at Trinity Cathedral by Bishop Sylvestre Romero. Susan is a member of Holy Trinity Church in Ocean City and our Bishop prefers that a deacon's ministry take place outside of their home church. So, Susan has searched for a place to exercise her ministry and sought out St. Mary's as one of those possibilities. Following meetings with me and our Vestry, I and our Vestry are pleased to welcome Deacon Sue to our church community. This gives me the opportunity to share with you some reflections on the ministry of the deacon and why I believe her presence among us will indeed be a gift.

I discovered what I consider one of the best descriptions of a deacon on the website of The Episcopal Diocese of New York -- <http://www.diocesenyny.org/pages/307-deacons-in-the-diocese>. I have chosen to reprint it here for your benefit.

“During the service of ordination of a deacon, the Bishop addresses the ordinand or ordinands regarding the special ministry of deacons. The Bishop says:

"My brother/sister, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

‘As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.’ (The Book of Common Prayer, page 543.)

A deacon is called to a special ministry of servanthood directly under his or her bishop. But what does that mean? And what does a deacon do?

All Christians are called to ministry, and often those ministries involve serving others. The Catechism echoes the Bishop's words at ordination and affirms that a deacon's special ministry of servanthood is ‘to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need....’ (BCP, page 856.)

In representing Christ and his Church in and to the world, a deacon is called to servant ministry in a particular way. Given the Bishop's words at ordination, it almost goes without saying that the deacon serves directly in one or more ministries with the hungry, the homeless, the sick, prisoners, the oppressed and victims of all kinds. Indeed, a deacon models such service to other Christians.

But the special ministry of deacons goes beyond the work of service in these essential ministries to the work of leadership to which the deacon also is called. The deacon is 'to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.' In other words, in the name of the Church, and under the authority of the Bishop, the deacon is charged with the responsibility of leading others in the Church and in the world to a deeper understanding which leads to action. The deacon interprets the needs that keep God's world from being all God created it to be and God's people from being fully the people we are meant to be. The deacon reminds us of the power of the hope that is in us. The deacon is called to help and lead others to discern and practice their own ministries of service responding to those needs in the Church and in the world.

Thus, diaconal ministry is primarily one of outreach. The ministry of deacons may involve important aspects of pastoral care, teaching or other ministries, but it does so as the deacon fulfills the primary ministry of serving the community and leading the community in service.

Another aspect of the deacon's ministry is to interpret to the Church 'the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world' through his or her role in the liturgy. The same deacon whose active ministry of service proclaims good news - through an after school program for homeless children, by advocating against the death penalty or offering nourishment through the work of a community food pantry - also literally proclaims the Good News as she or he reads the Gospel during the Eucharist. The deacon calls on all the people to remember and pray for the needs of their neighbors at home and around the world. He or she then participates in the ministration of the sacrament.

Because of the deacon's service in the world and leadership in service, the people come to recognize the connection between the deacon's roles in the world and in the liturgy of the Church. The community sees the deacon's servant ministry as joining the world to the Church and the Church to the world. From the relation between the deacon's active outreach into the community and her or his symbolic actions in the liturgy, the people observe 'that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.'
(BCP, page 543.)

The deacon's ministry reaches out into the world and reaches back again into the community of the Church to draw out other Christians to become involved in servant ministry. Those members of the laity who become the new leaders will make it possible for existing ministries to continue. The deacon then will be able to identify and develop new opportunities for involving others in service.

Thus, there are three aspects to the ministry of the deacon: service to the wider

community, leadership of the laity in service and leadership in liturgy - all to the one end of making known the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who most need to be touched by the savior's redeeming love.”

I hope this article helps you to understand why Deacon Sue's ministry among us is such a gift. If you would like to read more, see the website of Matthew's Church in Fairbanks, Alaska, for a more popularized rendition:

http://www.stmatthewschurch.org/what_s_a_deacon.

Sue works for the Board of Social Services in Cape May County as a Human Services Specialist. Her work in the community provides her with many opportunities to show Christ's love and to raise up the needs and concerns of the poor and the weak. As she begins her ministry here, she will be focused on the issue of affordable housing and serving as a liaison to *The Coalition on Affordable Housing in Cape May County* and *South Jersey Hope*. They are both advocacy groups that can serve as vehicles through which Christ's Church can make its voice heard on a variety of pressing moral concerns for the poor and needy. Any costs involved in her ministry (and they are few as deacons work primarily as volunteer servants!) will be covered in her first year by *The Mustard Seed of Cape May County*, St. Mary's outreach arm that currently runs our Thrift Shop and *Heavenly Scavengers*.

Most of you will be seeing Deacon Sue on Sundays as she carries out the liturgical roles of a Deacon. Know that her roles in liturgy are only an expression in worship of what she is doing in the community, serving the world in Christ's name. When you see her, be reminded of the call we all have to bring Christ's love into every aspect of our lives. That's why her presence among us is such a gift, because she will be a visible sign calling all of us, challenging all of us, to serve the world in Christ's name!

Deacon Sue's first Sunday with us will be Sunday, June 7th. Welcome her to our church and help her feel at home. She will be getting around to our various groups and committees to get to know people and share with all of you her passion for ministry. Her husband, Richard, may be around from time to time. We welcome him, also, to St. Mary's and thank him for supporting Sue in her call to serve.

Join me, then, in rejoicing and giving thanks to God for yet another blessing to our church. Let us grow together in our love for the Lord as we continue to serve Christ in this little corner of Cape May County, doing the work God has called us to do.

Sincerely,

John+

Your Pastor

