

A Review of Some Diaconal Publications
by Deacon Michael Jackson
Diocese of Qu'Appelle, Anglican Church of Canada

July 2016

It is gratifying to see the number of contemporary publications on the diaconate, notably in recent years by Roman Catholic authors in the United States. The principal publishers, the Paulist Press in New York, Liturgical Press in Collegeville, Minnesota, and Abbey Press in Indiana, are to be commended for their sustained interest in the diaconate. Obviously and understandably, their books and booklets are written for a Roman Catholic readership, but they often include an ecumenical perspective and in almost all cases provide valuable information and insights for Anglican/Episcopal and Orthodox deacons too.

Abbey Press Publications, St. Meinrad, Indiana

This is the publishing arm of St. Meinrad's Archabbey, a Benedictine monastery in southern Indiana. It has a seminary and school of theology and offers a formation program for permanent deacons. For thirty years, Abbey Press has published the bimonthly *Deacon Digest*. Two compact booklets on the diaconate were recently published by the Press:

Deacon William T. Ditewig, *To Be and to Serve: The Ministerial Identity of the Deacon*
(St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press Publications, 2015)

Bill Ditewig, of the Diocese of Monterey, California, is a prolific and influential author on the diaconate and a member of the editorial board of *Deacon Digest*. This concise study focuses on the identity of the deacon – who deacons *are* rather than what they *do*. Deacon Ditewig starts with baptism as key to the identity of a servant people and moves from this to ordination, which “conveys a sense of servant-leadership for the rest of the community.” The ministerial identity of the deacon is summed up as “disciples who are now also apostles with a mission.”

Less pertinent for Anglicans is the chapter on “Deacons and Their States of Life,” which deals with married as compared to celibate deacons in the Roman Catholic Church. However, the final chapter, on relationships, is of interest to all. Based on the diaconal “three-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament and Charity/Justice,” the author shows how the deacon ministers through relationships with family, the bishop, the diocese, other deacons, priests, laity, and secular society. “We live our ministerial identity at all times,” says Deacon Ditewig, concluding that “our identity is characterized by this constant outreach to the Other.”

Silas S. Henderson, ed., *Serving with Joy: Lessons from Pope Francis for Catholic Deacons Today*
(St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press Publications, 2015))

Edited by the managing editor of *Deacon Digest*, this is a compilation of brief essays by one priest and four deacons. The starting point is the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis,

Evangelii Gaudium, “The Joy of the Gospel,” and the implications for deacons of its twin themes of joy and mercy.

Ironically, as Deacon James Keating points out in his essay, “Accompanying the Laity in Evangelization,” when Francis was Cardinal Bergoglio he did not at first like deacons, because he saw them as clericalized laity! Dr. Keating counters that “a deacon is *a cleric who lives a lay life*,” embedded in secular employment and culture so that “he can describe an alternative way of living.” The essay by Deacon Greg Kandra, “Pope Francis: The New Evangelist,” sums up the papal – and diaconal – view of mission: “The gospel isn’t just proclaimed from a pulpit; it is lived in the world.”

Deacon Steve Swope, in “Servant of the Church of Mercy: The Permanent Deacon,” calls on deacons to inculcate their ministry with joy, dignity and compassion towards those in need, inspiring others to do the same. In “Breaking Down the Categories: The Power of Mercy,” Paulist Father Frank DiSiano emphasizes that Pope Francis encourages us to cross over dividing lines and enter into dialogue with others. The last essay, by Deacon William Ditewig, discusses “Pope Francis as Servant Leader: Servant of the Servants of God.” Leadership means having the courage to face challenges, seeking the common good, promoting justice and entering into dialogue. Says Dr. Ditewig, “Pope Francis exemplifies a diaconal style of leadership.” The final word, however, should go to Deacon Keating: “In the end, I think it is safe to say that Pope Francis likes deacons.”

Both of these little booklets are valuable for deacons and prospective deacons, Roman Catholic or not. And they are literally the right size for a pocket – or a purse!