

## **Diaconate is a lifelong journey**

*The following is an edited version of a column in the April 2008 issue of **In Stephen's Footsteps**, a newsletter published by the Office of the Diaconate.*

It's strange how some words and images can have a clear and certain meaning for one person and can mean something quite different to another. Are we speaking "apples and oranges" here? Not quite. It's more like one speaking of two red apples, two bright oranges and two luscious nectarines in a basket and another simply understands only that there are six pieces of fruit.

In my last review board before diaconal ordination many years ago, one of the interviewers asked how I felt about the diaconate and the upcoming ordination. I said I felt as if I were preparing to take on a backpack and set out on a journey; the pack fit well on my shoulders and felt comfortable.

The interrogator plowed right in and peppered me with questions about the statement. What do you it mean? Why do you say that? How do you feel about it? Are you saying it is a burden?

In response I could only explain that I think in images and the one I had chosen seemed to me to be appropriate. I was getting ready to set out on a life-long journey and I would have to be prepared for any eventuality and be suitably equipped. It seemed to me through my discernment and formation that the fit would be a good one.

This is a serious matter; it's not like donning a cap and gown to celebrate graduation and the end of an educational experience.

After all, we are not ordained to be ornaments, but for service to God and His people, in word, liturgy and charity. A principal reason for the deacon to be present at the altar is to bring the concerns of the poor, the distressed, the sick and the needy to the altar and to the Church at prayer.

As we respond daily to the call to serve, prayer must be at the center of our lives. Pope Benedict XVI reminded us during his recent pastoral visit to the United States that what matters most in our lives is our personal relationship with God, a relationship that "is expressed in prayer."

"God by His very nature speaks, hears and replies.... Far from turning in on ourselves or withdrawing from the ups and downs of life, by praying we turn towards God and through Him to each other, including the marginalized and those following ways other than God's path. As the saints teach us so vividly, prayer becomes hope in action." (Meeting With Youth and Seminarians, April 19, 2008)

Responding to Christ's call to diaconate is a journey that we undertake with the model of Christ the Servant always before us. In times of difficulty and in times of joy, may we always remember that the One who called us is always with us. "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." (Mt 11:29-30)

To the Ordinandi of 2008: May the Lord bless you, sustain you and give you His grace, so that with faith and humility you may always serve Him and His people according to His will.