

# A Look at Holy Orders

by Fr. Mark Pavlik  
June 20, 2010

Our look at the seven sacraments continues this week with Holy Orders. The seven sacraments are divided into three categories: sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), sacraments of healing (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick) and sacraments of service (Holy Orders and Marriage). These two sacraments are called sacraments of service because they are directed toward the salvation of others. While the other five sacraments are for the benefit of the recipient, marriage and ordination are primarily for the betterment of others.

The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the “common priesthood of the faithful.” *For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:4-8) Based on this common priesthood and ordered to its service, there is another participation in the mission of Christ: the ministry conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, where the task is to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community.

There is only one Sacrament of Holy Orders, but there are three levels. The first is that of episcopate or bishop. He stands in a direct, unbroken line from the Apostles, a condition known as “apostolic succession.” Bishops are given a particular diocese to shepherd and teach and his primary responsibility is for the faithful of his diocese.

The second level of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the priesthood. No bishop can minister to all the faithful in his diocese, so priests act, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as “co-workers of the bishops.” At their ordination, priests promise celibacy, a responsibility to prayer and obedience to the local bishop. The primary duties of the priesthood are the preaching of the Gospel and performing the sacraments.

The third level of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the diaconate. Deacons assist priests and bishops in the areas of ministry. There are two kinds of deacons: permanent deacons, who are ordained to act as deacons for the rest of their lives and transitional deacons, who are ordained deacons in anticipation of their priestly ordination.

While the particulars of these levels differ by the particular ministry, they share a common call of spreading the Gospel and building up the Church. As we close this year for priests, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for all the kind words and gestures of appreciation given to Fr. Sauber, Fr. Savundra and me in these past twelve months. It is indeed a blessing to serve St. Olaf and all those who come through our doors. May your kindnesses be returned to you many times over.