



DIOCESE WELCOMES FOUR NEW PERMANENT DEACONS

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — The Diocese of San Diego welcomed four new deacons on June 1.

Lyle Blackmon, Kevin Helfers, Marco Huizar and Andrés Sánchez were ordained to the permanent diaconate by Bishop Robert W. McElroy during a diocesan liturgy at Our Mother of Confidence Parish.

In his homily, Bishop McElroy noted that the four men had been prepared for their new ministry, not only by their five years in the diaconal formation program, but also through their vocations as husbands and fathers. Even after ordination, he said, their marriages and family lives would continue to be their “first service to God and the Church.”

But, with ordination, they would also be empowered to preach, assist at Mass, baptize, and preside at weddings and funerals, among other duties.

“Your parish communities and the whole of our Local Church have chosen you and found you to be worthy of the calling for which they present you to me today,” the bishop told them, after recounting the unique paths that had led each of them to the diaconate.

In closing, he expressed this hope for those he would ordain moments later: “May you root your new ministry firmly in ... a stance of openness to the glories of God which lie all around us, and may the Lord who has begun His work in you, bring it wonderfully to fulfillment.”

The following are profiles of the diocese’s new deacons.

Deacon Lyle Blackmon - Camp Pendleton Catholic Chapels, Oceanside

It was unlike anything Lyle Blackmon had ever experienced.

One Sunday at Mass, he couldn't help but notice that the deacon had become visibly emotional while performing his sacred duties.

The sight touched him and triggered the memory of a prayer he had made a year earlier, when he invited God to come into his heart. In that moment he renewed that prayer, and God's answer was palpable.

"I felt an overwhelming sensation come over me," said Deacon Blackmon, 55. "I have never felt this before, but it was one of total peace and love."

After Mass, he immediately went to speak with his parish's pastor and deacon, telling them of his interest in entering the diaconate. Within a few months, he was being interviewed for admission into the formation program.

"Serving the Church as a deacon is very humbling," said Deacon Blackmon, who retired after 20 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and has worked for more than eight years as an adjunct professor at MiraCosta College in Oceanside.

In his diaconal ministry, he said, he looks forward to ministering to military families, as well as serving at the altar for Mass and working with North County's homeless.

Deacon Blackmon and his wife, Emily, have been married for 34 years. Members of the Catholic community at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton for 32 years, they have two adult children.

Deacon Kevin Helfers - St. Louise de Marillac Parish, El Cajon

Kevin Helfers admits that he received various "suggestions and nudges" from God over the years, but did a good job resisting them.

A turning point came during a Cursillo weekend when he was, in his words, "convicted by the Holy Spirit ... for not being open to God's will."

Through prayer, he came to believe that God wanted him to be at least open to the idea of serving the Church as a deacon. He kept himself open to the possibility, and that proved to be a blessing for him.

"As I walk this journey with Him, I see how He has been at work, forming me all along," said Deacon Helfers, 50, president/CEO of Helfers Electric Company, Inc.

He grew up attending a Baptist church in Chula Vista, but became Catholic in 1997 at Holy Trinity Parish in El Cajon. Active in the Cursillo movement for 24 years, he has been a member of St. Louise de Marillac Parish for six years.

"It is an honor to serve the Church, he said. "I am humbled to be chosen and eager to be used by God to bear fruit through His people."

Deacon Helfers and his wife, Yvette, have been married for 26 years. They have six living children, ranging from age 24 to 7, and five children who have passed away.

Deacon Marco Antonio Huizar -- St. Didacus Parish, San Diego

Marco Antonio Huizar's active involvement with the Church really started with the Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement and the evangelization ministry Católicos de Conversión.

"My life of service for others began to grow," he said, reflecting on how these ministries changed him.

But despite his desire to serve, when his pastor invited him to consider becoming a deacon, he had to decline. He was an undocumented immigrant, and his immigration issues were a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

"If this is God calling us, He will provide," the 47-year-old said, recalling the attitude that he and his wife adopted.

As he continued his involvement with various ministries, he saw that his path toward the diaconate was being smoothed out. His immigration case settled, he was ultimately able to enter the program.

As a deacon, he is uniquely empowered to reach out to the many people suffering in the community.

"There are a lot of them in our parish, but there are even more outside that don't go to church," he said, "and we have to go to them."

He said his "mission" is "to let people know that ... God loves you because you are His beautiful child."

Deacon Huizar has been a landscaper with a small family business for 15 years. He and his wife, María Del Refugio Ruiz, have three adult children and have been members of St. Didacus Parish for about nine years.

Deacon Andrés Sánchez - St. Mary Parish, Escondido

His twin sons were preparing for their First Holy Communion, and Andrés Sánchez was an active member of St. Mary Parish.

He sought out opportunities for spiritual growth, including retreats, and it was at one of those retreats that he first felt called to the diaconate.

"The call to be a deacon surprised me a lot because I didn't know what it meant to be a deacon," he admitted. "That's why I was looking for an excuse to deny the call, but I couldn't find any excuse."

Between hearing the call and applying for the diocese's diaconal formation program, he spent a year learning more about the role and responsibilities of deacons.

"For me, serving the Church as a deacon means that I have the opportunity to express my faith and live what I believe by serving others," said Deacon Sánchez, 55, who has worked for 18 years as a testing supervisor for a communications company.

"The role of a deacon is to help the local pastor by visiting the sick, teaching the faith, counseling couples and individuals, working on parish committees and councils, and giving advice to the pastor," he said. "Every aspect is important, but I am most looking forward to teaching the faith."

Deacon Sánchez and his wife, Ivón, have been married for 20 years and have 18-year-old twin sons. They have been members of St. Mary Parish for 10 years.

The Southern Cross