

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

CALLED TO BE A LEAVEN

Deacon Mark Kelly

Following rewarding careers in the Royal Australian Navy, in the power industry and twenty years of Catholic teaching and leadership, since 2006 I have been in full-time diaconal ministry.

Until recently Hilary and I lived in the parish house adjacent to St Ita's Parish church and primary school in Drouin, 100km from Melbourne in the Sale diocese. Expansion of St Ita's Primary has seen the parish gift the parish house and land to the school and purchase a new home for the deacon and his wife 1km away on the other side of town. We are humbled and blessed by the parish support.

By far the happiest and most fulfilling period of my life, I share myself between chaplaincy at the local Catholic secondary college and two parishes in partnership as well as wearing several hats for the diocese. In the parishes, apart from regular preaching and deaconing at Mass, I do my share of hatching, matching and dispatching in our parishes along with visiting and that myriad of other parish duties.

These years have given me insight into the diaconate's unique and liberating characteristics. Freedom from the total parish responsibilities of a parish priest enables me to focus, as well as my chaplaincy, on three youth groups, the ministers fraternal and particularly VCC Emergencies Ministry (of which I am area coordinator). Each year, RCIA is an active element of our parishes in which I have been much involved, along with the successful men Alive program which inspires two regular prayer groups in the parishes, a men's choir and communion breakfasts and has roused many men to closer involvement in the various ministries in the parishes.

At diocesan level, my roles include secretary of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and diocesan delegate on the Victorian Council of Churches as well as diocesan representation on Catholic Social Services Victoria, the umbrella body for Catholic community services in Victoria. And I'm secretary of the National Association of Deacons.

No daughters but Hilary and I are proud parents of four fine young men, three of whom are married, so we've acquired three lovely daughters by default. And we have five grandchildren who are a constant source of delight. Like so many Australian families, they are spread around the nation, which we address by spending time on the road, in the air and on Face Time. When youth group, preaching, weddings and baptisms allow, I'm a footy fan with reserved seats for Richmond Tigers games and also, in season, Melbourne Victory soccer games. Watch out for fourteen Kellys together at Bay 13 in the MCG! (Hilary is a member to keep me company).

As intended, Deacons are a rich and earthy presence in the parish and wider communities. A compliment to Bishops and Priests. We are uniquely placed to work in the world as it is, to proclaim the Kingdom by our presence immersed in the context of the modern world. It is sobering that around 23% of Australians identify as Catholic and 2.8% attend Mass. Wryly I often identify as "the minister for those who don't go to church." We don't choose the age into which we are born but we are called to be a leaven in that world. (*Bsh Geoffrey Robinson*) Leaven doesn't separate or exclude those who don't make the cut. Rather, as leaven we are a small but influential ingredient, kneaded and blended in their lives, raising us all to our better selves.

