

# Mission Intention

## MAY

2019 - 2020

### Country Focus: Lithuania

### Education for Community Life

## Pope Francis' May Prayer Intention

We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be a symbol of Christ's love for the entire Church.



Lithuania is a country with a long history of Christianity. More than 90 percent of the population is Christian, and 80 percent are Roman Catholic. Despite centuries of Catholic worship, there is one element of Church life that has been largely absent from Lithuanian Catholicism until very recently: permanent deacons.

The permanent diaconate was restored by Pope Paul VI in 1967, by the publication of the Second Vatican Council document "Diaconatus Ordinem." Still, it would be 50 years before Lithuania would ordain its first permanent deacons. It was not until 2017, when five men were ordained to the diaconate, that permanent deacons became a part of the life of the Church in Lithuania.

Since their ordination, Lithuania's deacons have performed baptisms, witnessed weddings, and preached

homilies. Three of the deacons even ministered at the beatification of Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis, the first Lithuanian beatified in his home country.

As Lithuania joins the rest of the world in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of permanent deacons and their call to service becomes increasingly important. Let us join Pope Francis this month in praying for all permanent deacons, that they may bear witness to Christ's love in these uncertain times.



### Promoting Knowledge of Faith

## God's Word for Mission

*"This is at the very heart of the diaconate...to be a servant of the mysteries of Christ, and, at one and the same time, to be a servant of your brothers and sisters. That these two dimensions are inseparably joined together in one reality shows the important nature of the ministry..."* (Saint John Paul II, Address to the Deacons of the United States, 1987).

*"...Deacons, upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service...[are servants] of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God'"* (Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, 1964).

## Saint Spotlight: Saint Stephen



As the early Church grew, the Apostles realized they needed help taking care of the needs of the faithful. They chose and specially ordained seven men to care for the needs of the poorest members of the Church. These seven men are considered the Church's first deacons (Acts 6:1-7).

One of these men, Saint Stephen, quickly became known for his great faith and ability to preach the Good News of the Gospel. Saint Stephen did "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). However, it wasn't long before Saint Stephen's preaching caught the attention of the authorities, who brought him before the Sanhedrin on charges of blasphemy.

When it was his turn to speak in court, his accusers noticed Saint Stephen's face "was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Saint Stephen spoke the truth fearlessly, reminding his accusers of Israel's history of persecuting God's prophets and chosen messengers, including the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He ended his speech by proclaiming that he saw the Son of Man "sitting at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).

Saint Stephen's words so angered his accusers they immediately dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Saint Stephen's last words were a prayer for the Lord to receive his spirit and a request for God to forgive his attackers (Acts 7:59-60).

As one of the Church's first deacons, Saint Stephen reminds us to be faithful in service to the Word and to the poor. He is the first martyr of the Church and the patron saint of deacons. We celebrate his feast day each year on December 26.

## Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



Deacon presiding at Rite of Baptism

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word “Diakonia,” meaning “service.” It is no wonder, then, that when a man is ordained a permanent deacon, he is ordained to a life of service. The Church teaches that deacons are servants of the Word, Sacrament, and Charity, responsible for proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, teaching, baptizing, witnessing marriages, conducting funerals, and giving of themselves to the hungry, sick and poor.

When deacons answer their call to help those in need, they also become living examples of the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, rooted in the Gospel of Matthew. When Jesus tells his followers at the Last Judgement, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40), he commands all

believers to care for the most poor and vulnerable among them. Deacons are called to live out this teaching in a special way. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops says that deacons are to be leaders in identifying and meeting the needs of others. They are also called to work to end the injustices and inequalities that cause these needs. By serving the hungry, sick and poor, the life of a deacon is a sign to the entire Church of its call to servanthood.

In this month’s video, we will hear Deacon Luis Royo of the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, describe what it means to be a permanent deacon. As you watch the video, listen to how Deacon Royo describes his call to be the hands of Christ. How does Deacon Royo’s understanding of his vocation demonstrate the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable?

## Deacon Luis Royo: Click Here >>

1. How is the permanent diaconate a call to be a servant?
2. Name two ways Deacon Royo said he could be a servant to others.
3. Does your parish have a permanent deacon, and, if so, how does he answer his call to be a servant?
4. What can you learn from the example set by your parish’s permanent deacon about living the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable?



2013 Permanent Deacon Ordination.  
Deacon Royo is second from left.

## Mission Petitions

- ✚ Let us pray for the continued growth of the permanent diaconate in Lithuania and all countries.
- ✚ Let us pray that God will guide all permanent deacons in their call to service.
- ✚ Let us pray for all men currently discerning a call to the permanent diaconate, that they will take heart in Jesus’ call to serve Him.
- ✚ Let us pray that those responsible for guiding the spiritual growth of men preparing to enter the permanent diaconate will rely on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

## Daily Offering

Dear God,

Send your spirit upon our deacons as they serve your Church. Give them eyes to see the needs of your people, a discerning mind to know the truth, and hearts like yours so they may love all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen