

▲ Deacon Santiago Rosado-Rodriguez, M.D., director of Permanent Deacon Formation.

SERVICE IN ACTION: The Call of Permanent Deacons

BY JESSICA LARSON, MPM

The Permanent Diaconate is a ministry rooted in service and faith, forming men to bring Christ’s love to their communities. In the Diocese of St. Augustine, deacons balance their sacred duties with family life and careers, serving as a bridge between the Church and the world.

The following deacons lead the diocese’s Permanent Deacon Formation and Personnel programs and exemplify the balance of serving the church and community daily.

Deacon Santiago Rosado-Rodriguez, M.D., serves at San Sebastian Parish in St. Augustine. A retired gastroenterologist, he continues his healing ministry by volunteering his medical expertise in clinics, on missions, within jails

and at home as a grandfather.

Deacon David Yazdiya, assigned to St. Matthew Parish in Jacksonville, leads with dedication as the principal of Bishop John J. Snyder High School, shaping the faith and future of young minds.

Deacon Stephen Arnold, serving at St. Paul Parish in Jacksonville, fulfills a vital role as chaplain at Ascension St. Vincent’s

Riverside Hospital, offering spiritual care to patients and families during their most vulnerable moments.

These three men, deeply committed to their diaconal ministry, embody the essence of service, integrating their professional lives with their sacred calling to bring Christ’s presence to the world.

A Ministry of Service

The Permanent Diaconate is a unique ministry within the church’s hierarchy, distinct from the priesthood. Deacons are ordained to serve rather than to lead sacramental ministry. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1569) states that deacons are ordained “not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry.”

Unlike priests, most deacons are married men who balance their ministry with family life and secular careers. This dual role gives them a unique perspective, enabling them to bring the Gospel into workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. Deacon Yazdiya, director of Deacon Personnel, underscores this distinction: “We are not mini priests. Our calling is different. While we serve at the altar, our primary focus is being out in the community, living a life of service.”

A Rich Historical Foundation

The diaconate dates back to the early Church, as described in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1-6) when deacons were chosen to serve the community. While the role became transitional for those preparing for the priesthood in the Western Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council restored the diaconate as a permanent ministry, emphasizing its importance in addressing communities’ pastoral and social needs.

The Diocese of St. Augustine launched its Permanent Deacon Formation in 2004 under the leadership of Bishop Victor Galeone, with the first ordinations in 2006. Since then, the program has become a comprehensive formation process preparing men for lifelong ministry.

Formation: A Journey of Discernment

Formation for the diaconate is rigorous. Candidates undergo nine months of discernment and five years of academic,

spiritual and pastoral training. Deacon Rosado-Rodriguez, director of Deacon Formation, guides candidates through their discernment and education. Deacon Arnold leads spiritual formation, which helps the men focus on developing a deep relationship with Christ. “Knowing that the Lord is walking with them is crucial,” he says.

Family involvement is key. Wives must give formal consent for their husbands to enter the program and are encouraged to share in their ministry. “A deacon’s life must strengthen his family,” emphasizes Deacon Yazdiya.

The current group of deacon candidates includes 83 men, 20 of whom are Spanish-speaking. This diversity reflects the diaconate’s growth under Bishop Erik Pohlmeier, who removed age limits for candidates and encouraged pastors to identify potential deacons.

A Ministry of Impact


Deacons serve diverse roles, from preaching and teaching to ministering in prisons, hospitals and schools. Their work brings the Gospel into everyday life, offering a tangible expression of the Church’s commitment to service.

The minimum age for ordination as a married man is 35, though most candidates begin formation in their 50s. Previously, men in their 60s did not enter formation because of an age limit to start the process. However, the bishop removed the upper age limit and actively encouraged pastors to identify potential candidates, which has increased interest. “Bishop Pohlmeier has opened the door wide,” notes Deacon Rosado-Rodriguez.

Preparing for the Call

For men discerning the diaconate, preparation begins long before the official formation process. Engaging in parish ministries, deepening prayer life and seeking spiritual direction are essential first steps. “The diaconate is a ministry of service, not status,” advises Deacon Rosado-Rodriguez.

The next group of deacon candidates begins in 2029, offering ample time for discernment. “Go for a walk with a deacon,” suggests Deacon Arnold. “It’s a great way to get to know the ministry.”

The Permanent Diaconate continues to thrive in the diocese, inspiring servant leaders to live out Christ’s mission of love and service. 



FRAN RUCHALSKI

▲ Deacon Stephen Arnold leads spiritual formation for the Deacon Formation Program.



LEARN MORE

For more information, visit dosaf1.com/ministries/permanent-diaconate or contact Deacon Santiago Rosado-Rodriguez by emailing srosado@dosaf1.com.



NEXT STEPS FOR THE 2029 CANDIDATES

Though the next group of deacon candidates doesn’t begin until 2029, men feeling the call can take steps now by:

Deepening Your Faith – Engage in parish ministries and strengthen your prayer life.

Discerning Your Call – Talk to your pastor and a deacon to reflect on your gifts. Reflect on whether the diaconate aligns with God’s plan for you.

Fostering Family Support – Discuss the commitment with your spouse and family. Their encouragement is essential.

Growing as a Student – Prepare for theological study and academic demands by considering participating in the Ministry Formation Program (MFP) and developing good study habits.



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▲ Deacon David Yazdiya, shown here proclaiming the Gospel, is the director of Deacon Personnel.