

DEACON DAVID PALMER

I'm Dave Palmer, a chartered accountant. I have been married for 44 years. I have one daughter and four granddaughters, and I was ordained a deacon in 2007. A cradle Catholic, I was away from the Church for many years, but I came back when I was taking my daughter to Catholic School. It seemed hypocritical not to take her to Mass. In 1996, I went on an Alpha course and God changed my life. Suddenly Christ and his Church took on a new meaning for me.

I have always been a workaholic and I immediately got involved in evangelisation. As a finance trainer, I was used to public speaking, but it soon became obvious that God wanted me to use my natural gifts of administration in the service of the Church - people kept asking me to sort out management, charity law and tax issues. I went on a seminar about the permanent diaconate and almost every word seemed to resonate with me. My favourite hymn is *The Servant King* - Jesus - who came to serve, not to be served. Deacons are the servants in the Church. If you read Acts 6, you can see that they were appointed because people complained the apostles (the priests) were neglecting them and the apostles were worried that they had no time to pray.

That is the situation today. There is lots of work to be done and priests are trained to be priests, not managers in finance, human resources, marketing or administration. Over the years, I have served as a trustee for ten different Church charities and have just completed six years as a trustee at Birmingham Diocese, where I was also diocesan treasurer - almost a full-time managerial role.

Being ordained a deacon did not change what I am, but it focussed me on supporting the Church using my gifts and gave me the additional sacramental grace to cope with what needed to be done. It didn't stop me evangelising; no more than the need to feed Greek widows stopped Stephen preaching, or Philip running up and down motorways converting Ethiopian eunuchs; but it did enable me to work more effectively within the Church, because I could speak with authority.

The world of secular work has much to offer the Church by way of management systems and practices; the Church has much to offer secular society regarding ethics, honesty, compassion and prayer. A deacon can exist in both worlds - sacred and secular; just as Christ did. In many ways the diaconate mirrors the combination of Christ's humanity and his divinity. His parables show a knowledge of woodworking, shepherding, farming, family life, even sewing and housework (although he may have got those from his mother). Whatever you do in life, the Church needs your skills. God made you and gave you your individual gifts. Pray, and ask God to guide you how best to use them. Remember the best plan for your life is God's plan.

May the peace and grace of God be with you and those you love. May he give you the gift of discernment to listen to his voice so he may guide you in the right path.