

DIACONATE

Deacons serve up faith, charity with holiday project

By Michael Gresham
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Answering a call to serve those in need, members of the Diocese of Dallas diaconate program are once again ready to wear their faith on their sleeves. Or, in this case, on their aprons.

Working in collaboration with Catholic Charities, deacons for the second consecutive year will serve Thanksgiving dinners to people in need in two seatings Nov. 19 at the Marillac Social Center in West Dallas.

"The first meal will be for senior citizens who are currently clients of Catholic Charities. The second seating will be for people and families from that area who are in need," said Deacon John O'Leary, director of the diaconate for the Diocese of Dallas, adding that those families for the second seating will be recruited from the Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Mary of Carmel parishes as well as the Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos-St. Theresa quasi parish. "We anticipate 175 to 200 people for each seating."

The idea for the Thanksgiving dinner was inspired by a conversation between Cardinal-designate Kevin J. Farrell, former bishop of Dallas, and Deacon O'Leary.



Texas Catholic File Photo

Deacon George Chou of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church in Plano helps with one of two Thanksgiving dinner services at the Marillac Social Center in West Dallas in November 2015.

"It started from a discussion I had with Bishop Farrell about having deacons become more involved in charitable work," Deacon O'Leary said. "Deacons are ordained to a three-fold calling: to assist with the liturgy; to proclaim the Gospel — not just in church but in how we also live our lives, and to be ministers of charity.

This is a step on our part to be more active as ministers of charity in the diocese."

Deacon O'Leary said he was "pleasantly surprised" by participation in last year's event and expects the same, if not more, turnout again this year.

"The deacons and their families

who participated last year were all touched and recognized the importance of us taking on more charitable activities. They truly were moved by it," he said. "I've been really pleased with the response we've seen, both last year and this year. It's exciting to see everyone come together."

Deacon Tim Vineyard of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Richardson called his participation in the 2015 event invigorating.

"When I became a deacon, I thought that this calling was wonderful because I see the diaconate as a kind of arm of charity of the church," Deacon Vineyard said. "It's a way for the church to reach out into the community and do it in the name of Jesus Christ."

The charitable work goes beyond just deacons, though.

"In many ways, the diaconate ministry truly is a family ministry," Deacon O'Leary said. "It can be a husband-and-wife ministry. While they are not obligated to do so, many wives, in this instance as they do in many instances, step in and help out."

Deacon O'Leary said that between deacons, their spouses and other family members more than 50 people volunteered to help serve the dinners last November. He also praised Cath-

olic Charities for its contributions and noted that students at St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic School in Plano for the second consecutive year will provide student-created Thanksgiving cards for those attending.

Among those volunteering in 2015 were Deacon Dominic Hoang, who serves at St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic Church, and his son.

"It was an opportunity for him to see what it is like to serve those in need," said Deacon Hoang, adding that he plans to bring his son again this year. "It is important for our children to see us in action so that they know that service is central to our faith."

Deacon Hoang said he hopes the Thanksgiving service project can lead to more service opportunities for the diaconate in the future.

"Preach what you believe and practice what you preach," he said. "The Gospel really comes alive when we actually do things that Christ has commissioned us to do."

Deacon Vineyard echoed those sentiments.

"I think that's the essence of being a deacon and that's what I love about that work," he said. "It's real and tangible. You are out there physically helping the people in need."