



# Deacon News

Diocese of Davenport

Winter 2015

“One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.” *Mathew 4:4b*

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Deacon David Montgomery, Director of the Diaconate

Good News—Msgr. Hyland informed me on November 3rd of last year that at the meeting of the Priestly Life & Ministry Committee, the decision was made to invite all deacons to attend the annual Priest Convocation. The committee felt that many of the topics presented would also benefit deacons. Attendance at the Convocation is not mandatory; deacons may attend if they wish.

This invitation is very significant. While deacons have been invited on occasion to the Priest Convocation, this invitation is annual and ongoing. Please express your gratitude to Msgr. Hyland for taking this initiative to the committee.

## Deacon Alfred Mitchell Returning

Spring Retreat—April 18-19, 2015

Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center

Hiawatha, IA

It has been twelve years since Deacon Alfred joined our diaconate community at Prairiewoods. The deacons, wives, and those of us in formation remember the excellent retreat he led, full of storytelling and time to relax, pray and to reflect.

This retreat is open to all deacon and wives and to deacon candidates and wives.

To register go to [www.davenportdiocese.org/dcn/](http://www.davenportdiocese.org/dcn/) for information



**50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE  
DIACONATE**  
JULY 2018 - NEW ORLEANS

## Important Dates

### **Priest Convocation**

March 23 - 24, 2015  
The Lodge  
Bettendorf

### **Spring Retreat**

Apr 18 - 19, 2015  
Prairiewoods  
Hiawatha, IA

### **Deacon & Priest Ordinations**

June 6, 2015  
Sacred Heart Cathedral

### **June Clergy Institute**

June 8-10, 2015

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## **Deacon Alfred Mitchell Returning -Spring Retreat 2015—Apr 18-19**



Deacon Alfred: My early years in South Carolina with my grandmother introduced me to storytelling. I spent many hours listening to her stories. Many of the stories she told were about family members and residents of the small town in which we lived. Some were humorous and usually contained a moral or a lesson of some kind I tend to tell the same kind of stories.

I believe strongly in the power of stories. They have a way of putting people at ease. Stories help us to answer three very important questions: *Who am I? Where do I come from? Where Am I Going?*

I retired from the Federal Civil Service in 1989. Two and a half years prior to retirement I was ordained as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church in May 1987. I served 2 and a half years as an unpaid volunteer assistant deacon director for the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. In October, 1990 I was appointed to the position of Director of Deacon Personnel. I served in that capacity from October 1990 through the end of December, 2005.

As a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church I use stories in my ministry of preaching, teaching and reaching out to others. I have been telling stories all my life, though I didn't become professionally involved in storytelling until after my ordination to the Diaconate. I saw storytelling techniques as a way of bringing my homilies alive and making them more meaningful to the congregation.

- ◇ Ordained to the Diaconate for the Archdiocese of Atlanta in May, 1987.
- ◇ Additional Ministry Assignments: Prison Ministry, Volunteer Chaplain at Hartsfield-Jackson-International Airport, Administrator of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church
- ◇ Director of Deacon Personnel-Archdiocese of Atlanta 1990 -2005.
- ◇ Founding Member of the National Association of African American Catholic Deacons-1991.
- ◇ National Association of Deacon Directors (NADD) Convention Co-chair-1997.
- ◇ President-National Diaconate Institute of Continuing Education (NDICE)-1997-1998.
- ◇ Recipient of NADD's Bart O'Leary Award-1999 (NADD's second highest award).
- ◇ President-NADD-2003-2004.
- ◇ Recipient of NADD's William Philbin Award-2005 (NADD's highest award).
- ◇ NADD Recognition Award-2005

## Preaching: What Sort of Language Do You Use?

Deacon Frank Agnoli, Director of Liturgy

To what kind of language do you prefer to listen? How do you use language in your own preaching? Here's a quiz for you to take (Schlafer, David J. *Your Way with God's Word: Discovering Your Distinctive Preaching Voice*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995). How do you react to the following ways of using language? Rank each on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = "go to sleep" and 5 = "pay close attention":

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. prove a point?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. create a visual scene / evoke sensory awareness?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. produce a music-like effect?
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. describe a tense situation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. explain a position?
- \_\_\_\_\_ f. connect one image with another?
- \_\_\_\_\_ g. bring everyone up-to-date on what happened?
- \_\_\_\_\_ h. set matters in context?
- \_\_\_\_\_ i. evoke or express an emotion?
- \_\_\_\_\_ j. celebrate a special event?
- \_\_\_\_\_ k. remove an objection?
- \_\_\_\_\_ l. define an important idea?
- \_\_\_\_\_ m. tell a joke (not a riddle)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ n. explain how a certain situation came to be?
- \_\_\_\_\_ o. take the listener on a journey?

OK, now total the following together:

- (1) a + e + h + k + l = \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) b + c + f + i + j = \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) d + g + m + n + o = \_\_\_\_\_

If your highest score was in set (1), you tend towards using language in the "essay" mode; if (2) is your highest score, you are more "poetic" in your use of language; a high score in (3) is associated with "storytelling."

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In the essay mode, words used primarily to summarize, analyze, and criticize concepts; language is reflective, abstractive. The preacher wants to teach (an appeal to truth). In the poetic mode, words used for their sensuous or evocative potential; they are used to foster an encounter and delight or inspire the listener (an appeal to beauty). In the storyteller mode, words used to convey action, interaction, drama; in other words, a narrative. Language (both words and the person of the preacher) is used to persuade (an appeal to goodness).

What's the take home here? First, realize that just as you have your preference – so does everyone in the assembly. If we are always preaching *only* in the way we are most comfortable, we will – over time – lose a certain part of our community. Not only can we vary the way we use language between homilies, but even in the same homily, language can be used in different ways. As Pope Francis has taught us, “[i]n the homily, truth goes hand in hand with beauty and goodness” (*Evangelii gaudium* #142). In other words, don't be one-sided.

Second, recent church documents – from the US Bishops, the Pope, and now the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments from the Vatican – have all commented on how we use language in preaching. They make it clear that while homilies teach, they are not lectures – so, especially those of us who prefer the essay mode, need to be careful. Homilies need to be doctrinally sound; but they are neither extended readings from nor commentary on the *Catechism*, nor are they Bible study sessions. There is also a warning here for those who prefer the storyteller mode. Those of us who gravitate in this direction have to guard against turning the homily into a form of entertainment, or making it about ourselves instead of Christ.

Pope Francis in particular has stressed that the language used in preaching needs to be concrete, grounded in images from day-to-day reality, in order to foster an encounter with Christ. So, those of us who are more poetic in their orientation are reminded that the use of images in preaching is not just window dressing, an end in itself. Since homilies deals with questions of God, who is beyond human language, the language we use will need to be strongly metaphorical – but it cannot be abstract, divorced from normal life. Such “imaginal” preaching will be the topic of our next column.

In the meantime, here's a list of texts that deal with the issue of language, in general as well as specifically in the context of preaching:

Boyle, Elizabeth Michael. *Preaching the Poetry of the Gospels: A Lyric Companion to the Lectionary*.

Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

Geary, James. *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*.

New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

Lord, Jennifer L. *Finding Language and Imagery: Words for Holy Speech*. Elements of Preaching Series.

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.

McClure, John S. *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.

McKenzie, Alyce M. *Novel Preaching: Tips from Top Writers on Crafting Creative Sermons*. Louisville, KY:

Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Ramshaw, Gail. *Reviving Sacred Speech: The Meaning of Liturgical Language*. Akron, OH: OSL

Publications, 2000.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *When God is Silent*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998.

Willobee, Sondra B. *The Write Stuff: Crafting Sermons that Capture and Convince*. Louisville, KY:

Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Witherup, Ronald D. *A Liturgist's Guide to Inclusive Language*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.