

# Deepening the Call: Reflections on the Diaconate

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## Embracing the Peripheries: A Deacon's Perspective on Pope Francis' Call and the Personalism of John Paul II

In his pontificate, Pope Francis consistently brings to the forefront a compelling vision of the Church's mission, one that is deeply rooted in the concept of reaching out to the “peripheries.” This vision, while seemingly straightforward, is layered with profound theological and pastoral implications that resonate deeply with my vocation as a deacon.

### Understanding the Peripheries as Envisioned by Pope Francis

Pope Francis' understanding of the peripheries extends beyond mere geographical boundaries. It encapsulates the existential margins of our society — places where the poor, the forgotten, the marginalized, and the suffering reside. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope expresses a preference for a Church “which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets” (No. 49). This poignant imagery challenges us to venture beyond our comfort zones, urging the Church to be a beacon of hope and solace in the darkest corners of human experience.

### The Deacon's Service: A Salvific Act of Love

Our ministry as deacons is fundamentally a concrete expression of salvific love through sacred ecclesial service. It's a love that seeks the good of the other for the sake of the other, drawing those we serve into deeper intimate communion with Christ. This love, which is a participation in divine love, is not passive; it actively reaches out, echoing the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. Diaconal ministry, therefore, is not just a duty but a profound act of love that participates in the redemptive work of the Church in a unique way – in a diaconal way – by revealing Christ the Servant to those in desperate need of His saving love.

### From the Remote to the Proximate: A Personalist Approach

Saint John Paul II's personalism provides a valuable lens through which to view our approach to the peripheries. Personalism, at its core, emphasizes the intrinsic dignity and value of every person. In the context of our discussion, it invites us to see the peripheries not just as remote, abstract concepts but as realities that are often closer than we realize.

The distinction between the remote and proximate peripheries is crucial. While the remote peripheries might represent those marginalized in distant lands or different socio-economic contexts, the proximate peripheries refer to the marginalized within our own

communities — perhaps even within our own circles. These are individuals who may be physically close yet remain on the fringes of our attention and care.

### **Bridging the Gap: From Theory to Practice**

In my ministry, I have learned that the peripheries are not always far away. Sometimes, they are in the neglected friend, the estranged family member, the lonely elderly in our parish, or the youth struggling with faith. Embracing John Paul II's personalist philosophy, I recognize that each encounter with these individuals is an opportunity to affirm their inherent dignity, to show them they are seen, heard, and valued.

### **A Call to Holistic Evangelization**

Pope Francis' call to go to the peripheries and John Paul II's personalism together provide a comprehensive framework for our mission as deacons. They remind us that our call to serve is not just about reaching out to distant lands; it's also about being attentive to the marginalized in our midst. It's about recognizing Christ in every face, including those who are closest to us, and responding to them with a love that seeks their good for their own sake. In doing so, we not only fulfill our call to evangelize as deacons but also participate in the salvific mission of the Church, bringing the light of Christ to every corner of our world, near and far.

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