

What Happens now that John's a Priest?

I was taken by surprise during John's ordination last week when a child looked at me, face downcast, and asked if this meant I wouldn't be the priest here any more. I reassured her that I'm not going anywhere, but her question reminded me that everyone has questions about John's role now that he's a priest.

John has been serving with us for a very specific reason. Every candidate for the priesthood is required to serve as an ordained transitional deacon for at least six months. In an ideal world, they are called as an associate in a parish that can pay them for their work. However, with his wife already serving as a priest in two parishes on a small island in Maine, John's opportunities for the transitional diaconate were pretty limited. This is why he volunteered his time with us: so that he could keep moving forward and be considered for ordination to the priesthood.

Now that John is a priest, he will be looking for what I jokingly like to call a paying gig at another church. But until he is able to find one, he will continue to be associated with our parish; hence his new title: "Priest Associate." This means that John will be with us whenever he can, even though we still have no budget to pay him. However, now that he is able to preside at the Eucharist, he will have many opportunities to serve as a supply priest in nearby parishes when their own clergy are away. This means we may see less of him than we're used to.

I should also explain what is happening liturgically on Sundays when both John and I are present. There are two common roles for clergy to take in the service: celebrant and deacon. The celebrant's title comes from the fact that they officiate at the altar during the celebration of the Eucharist. While the name is associated specifically with the Eucharist, the celebrant usually serves as the primary leader of the entire service, including the liturgy of the word. Deacons have very specific functions within the liturgy. They read the gospel, bid the confession, prepare the altar for communion, clean up the altar after communion, and dismiss the people. So that John can increase his experience as a celebrant, we will take turns serving in that role every other week. And while neither of us is a permanent deacon, whichever of us is not celebrating will fill the liturgical role of the deacon in the service.

John's presence among us has been a true gift, and I know that he has experienced our support as a real gift to him. I hope you'll join me in praying for him as he works to find a place where he can be compensated adequately for the gifts he brings. In the meantime, we continue to give thanks to God for his presence among us.