Growing Pains
Fifth Sunday Of Easter 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

“Today’s selection from Acts tells the story of how the Apostles ordained the first ministers to serve the needs of the growing community of Jesus’ followers. Like any successful institution, success is accompanied by growth, and growth is often accompanied with greater diversity. Growth and diversity are positive outcomes, but they place increasing demands on the institution.

Due to the growing numbers and the greater diversity of this sect of Judaism, was in need of reorganizing and the restructuring of ministry. No longer could the Apostles attend to the corporal needs of the community while at the same time meet the spiritual needs of their followers. Thus the diaconate was born to better serve the growing needs of this fledgling community, especially the more vulnerable members, like the widows. As in all the ministries in the Church, deacons are called to serve, not to be served. The Greek word διακονία, ας, ἡ (diakonia) literally means servant.

The persons picked to serve, as deacons were men who spoke the Greek language of the women who were being neglected. It should be noted that the division between the two groups went deeper than language, but also culture, and it posed a challenge to unity. The men chosen to address the needs of the estranged Hellenists, and thus bring greater unity, were chosen because they were reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom. True today is the need for wise leaders, whose reputation gains the respect of the people they serve. True also is the role of the deacon today, to serve the needs of the excluded; the poor, the sick, the alien, and the imprisoned. This is what deacons are ordained to do, but equally important is their role to lead other members of the community in service to these least ones in our midst.
Be aware that when the poor, the sick, and the alien are welcomed; it may become a point of contention or even division in the community. This is why leadership by respected members of the community is so very important. True leadership is key, leadership that comes from faithfully following the leadership given us in the Spirit. This is why choosing Spirit-filled and faithful leaders is so very important. Do you know such a person in the community? Are you, or someone you know, this person? If the spirit is prompting you then have the courage to act. The health and growth of the Christian community depends on you. The healing of division and the inclusion of everyone is paramount to building the Kingdom of God in the here and now. God’s kingdom is not for a select few, but for all God’s children, regardless of how challenging this may be at times.

There are those, who consider themselves Christian, who will reject this kind of leadership. Do not be surprised; they rejected Jesus in the same way. “Jesus, a living stone, rejected by human beings, but chosen, precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourself be built into a spiritual house and a royal priesthood… a holy nation, a people of his own.” (cf 1 Peter 2)