

The Permanent Diaconate



A Pastoral Letter
from
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Diocese of Killaloe

DIOCESE OF KILLALOE

THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

In St. Matthew's Gospel Jesus speaks of his mission, he is the One sent by the Father to serve: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (20:28). Service for Jesus is above all else to do the will of the Father who sent him into the world to communicate the positive hope of the Living God that "...all would have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This service is directed in a special way to those who are on the margins of our communities. At the last supper when Jesus washed his disciples feet he set out the blueprint for Christian action: the washing of the disciples feet was a clear example of how he wanted all disciples to follow him and act (John 13: 12-15).

Early Church

In the early Church the spirit of service continued in the ministry of deacons. From the earliest times the ministry of Deacon has been understood as a ministry of service in the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-6) we read that due to the growth of the Church the Apostles chose seven men to supervise the distribution of alms to those who were in need, in Jerusalem. In St. Paul's letter to Timothy he lists the qualities needed in those who exercise this ministry (1 Timothy 3:8-14).

Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate

For many centuries the deacon worked in close collaboration with the bishop: exercising a ministry of charity, assisting at the Eucharist and preaching the Gospel. Over time the ministry exercised by the deacon was absorbed into the work of the priest. For many centuries the order of deacon was regarded as a stage on the road to priesthood rather than a separate order in its own right. In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council in a review of church ministries proposed the restoration of the diaconate as a distinct ministry of service to be exercised in communion with the bishop, priests and community of believers.

As the Church moves into a new phase of her presence in our country a great range of ministries are developing and being acknowledged in Ireland:

Catechetical work, Baptismal preparation, Marriage preparation, Bereavement counselling etc. A wide range of liturgical activities involving ministers of the Word and Eucharist are now present in our faith communities. In the areas of our schools and education a wide range of involvement is present and appreciated.

The Diaconate in the Context of pastoral development and renewal in the Diocese of Killaloe

The promotion of lay involvement in the development and administration of parishes and the provision of training for the laity is central to the Killaloe Diocesan Plan 'Builders of Hope' launched in September 2013 at the Diocesan Faith Gathering. Over the past few months the diocese has been organising its strategy to implement the diocesan Plan and a call has been made to all the baptised to participate fully in the life of the Church.

The summer of 2008 saw the diocese broadening its focus from the traditional parish boundaries into the creation of pastoral areas known as clusters. This arrangement was instigated to further facilitate the effort to draw into the active life of the Church the many people who possess the gifts to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ in the spirit of 1 Corinthians "Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole" (12:27). The Pastoral Plan helps us to work now and to prepare for the future of our diocese by the involvement of all who are called by the Holy Spirit to build up the Christian community using the variety of gifts that are present in each community.

In a new and exciting development the diocese has now employed pastoral workers to assist with the implementation

of the diocesan plan. The years ahead will be challenging with the realities of future statistics for those involved in ministry already noted in the Diocesan Plan. My call is to all, to work together for the good of the Church and the mission given to us through our baptism.

With this Pastoral Letter I wish to invite men who believe that the Lord is calling them to the ministry of the permanent diaconate to present themselves to the Diocese and so begin a process of discernment. This is a new departure for the diocese and is an opportunity of engaging with a ministry that expands ministry as it is presently understood and practiced in the diocese. This opening heralds a welcome presence of candidates for ministry committed to family life, with all the knowledge and experience that family life brings.

The introduction of the ministry of the Permanent Diaconate will take account of lay involvement and pastoral development in the diocese. The role of the deacon does not replace or surpass the work of pastoral councils or pastoral workers. The main work of the deacon, as I see it from the outset, will be in facilitating the continued development of lay ministry in the diocese.

Deacons, if the Lord blesses the diocese with them, will be ordained to work alongside priests and lay ministers not to replace them.

WHAT DO PERMANENT DEACONS DO?

Among the areas of ministry which are particularly appropriate to deacons - under the three general headings of Charity, Word and Altar are the following:

Charity:

- Facilitating the development of lay ministry, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, visiting the bereaved, Youth ministry and the facilitation of peer ministry among young people.
- Promoting awareness of the social teaching of the Church, support for married life, the promotion of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.
- Promoting awareness of the social teaching of the Church.

Word

- Proclaiming the Gospel at the Liturgy; participating in programmes for sacramental preparation; the formation of Readers; facilitating study of and prayer with the scriptures.

Altar

- Assisting the priest at the celebration of the Eucharist; Training Ministers of the Eucharist; The celebration of the sacrament of baptism; celebrating marriages; presiding at funerals and burials.

Who is eligible to apply to become a deacon:

- Candidates who apply for admission for the permanent diaconate will be men married or single, and who are already involved in some aspect of lay ministry or leadership in the community.

- A married candidate must be thirty five years old before applying for acceptance. He will need the formal consent of his wife who also participates in the formation programme.
- An unmarried candidate makes a solemn promise of celibacy.

I place this new departure in our diocese under the care of Mary our Mother - quoting from the prayer at the end of Pope Francis' recent Letter "The Joy of the Gospel":

"Mary, Virgin and Mother, Star of the New Evangelisation, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor. That the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God's little ones pray for us."

How to Apply

The first point of contact is your parish priest. Then after consultation with Father Albert McDonnell, Chancellor and Director of the Permanent Diaconate programme in the Diocese of Killaloe, the application process will begin. A successful applicant will be invited to participate in a one Year Preparatory Programme prior to being accepted and committing to engaging in the full three year programme.

Fr Albert McDonnell's contact details are as follows:

Tel: 085 7811823

Email: a.mcdonnell@killaloe-diocese.ie



Diocese of Killaloe

www.killalodiocese.ie

The image of Francis of Assisi, Deacon on the cover is a contemporary portrait of the Saint from Subiaco, Italy.