

**Restoring The Permanent Diaconate:**

**Practical Questions to be Addressed  
in the  
Irish Context**

2003

## **1. Purpose of this Document:**

This document is intended as a companion to the National Directory and Norms. Its scope is to respond to practical questions regarding the ministry and life of deacons. The recommendations, once approved, will form the broad basis on which each bishop wishing to establish the permanent diaconate should proceed, in order to ensure the coherent development of the diaconate across the whole island of Ireland.

## **2. Pastoral Role:**

The ministry of the deacon is described as a triple ministry: a ministry of the word, of the altar, and of charity. It is a ministry which finds its fullest expression in the context of the deacon's contribution to building up the faith community. The responsibilities of a deacon (under the three previously mentioned headings) may include:

### *i. Altar*

- Assisting the priest at the celebration of the Eucharist
- Bringing the Eucharist to the sick at home and in hospitals
- The formation of altar servers and of acolytes
- Presiding at exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
- The celebration of baptism
- Celebrating marriages (with the appropriate delegation)
- Presiding at funerals

### *ii. Word*

- Proclaiming the gospel at the liturgy
- Preaching the homily
- Participating in sacramental preparation programmes
- The formation of readers
- Facilitating study of and prayer with the scriptures

### *iii. 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
- The promotion of justice and human rights

The deacon is called to be an icon of Christ the Servant. His service, like that of Jesus, is first and foremost the service of God, and this is expressed in the pastoral care of the people to whom he is sent. It would be a misunderstanding of the ministry of the deacon to limit his role to the work of charity. Equally it would undermine both the diaconate and the presbyterate if the deacon were to be reduced to the role of a substitute priest.

### **3. Catechesis:**

The first practical task in preparing to establish the permanent diaconate in Ireland will be the catechesis of the lay faithful and of the clergy. The following are the essential elements of such a catechesis:

- the origins of the diaconate in the Apostolic period
- the intention of the Second Vatican Council in restoring the permanent diaconate
- the link between this restoration and the renewal of other ministries
- the nature of ordained ministry and what it means to say that deacons are ordained
- the difference between deacons and priests
- the diaconate as a sacramental sign (or ikon) of Christ the servant
- the particular roles which will be carried out by deacons
- the fact that deacons are meant to complement and facilitate lay ministry and not to replace it

Closely related to this is the question as to who will actually pre-

pare and carry out this catechesis. An early decision on this matter is required.

#### **4. Diocesan Structures:**

##### ***i. Director for the Permanent Diaconate (DPD)***

Each diocese in which the permanent diaconate is established should appoint a director for the permanent diaconate, who will be directly responsible to the diocesan bishop. His responsibility is

- to have general oversight of the selection and formation of deacons in collaboration with the director of vocations and the director of diaconate formation
- to collaborate with the bishop and/or his personnel committee in relation to the appointment of deacons
- to exercise a particular pastoral care for the families of deacons

##### ***ii. The Director of Diaconate Formation (DDF)***

The DDF will take overall responsibility for co-ordinating the various elements of the formation programme (academic, pastoral, spiritual and human). It will be his responsibility, in consultation with the DPD, to make recommendations to the bishop regarding the progress of each candidate towards ordination. The roles of the DDF and of the DPD could be exercised by one person.

##### ***iii. Director of Vocations***

It will be the responsibility of the director of vocations to promote the vocation to the permanent diaconate.

#### **5. Selection:**

The selection of candidates for the permanent diaconate should be carried out with the same care as the selection of candidates for the presbyterate. The process outlined in the document *Enquiries and Applications for Admission into Formation for Diocesan Priesthood: A Model of Best Practice (2002)*, should be adapted to include the permanent diaconate.

The decision as to who will be accepted into formation rests ulti-

mately with the diocesan bishop. The initial process of discernment and accompaniment should be overseen either by the director of vocations or by the DPD in a manner to be agreed locally. Both should be involved in the more formal admissions process.

The period of pre-formation (the propaedeutic period) while not a formal academic programme, should be structured, and should be of at least one year's duration.

## **6. Formation:**

### ***i. Content of the Formation Programme***

The formation programme will take the form outlined in Appendix 1 of the *Directory and Norms for the Permanent Diaconate 2002* (and as subsequently amended). It should be noted that there are four required elements (intellectual, pastoral, human, and spiritual), which must be carefully integrated.

### ***ii. Approval of Academic Courses***

As indicated in the *Directory and Norms for the Permanent Diaconate, 2002*, the Episcopal Conference will establish a committee which will be entrusted with the task of evaluating and approving all proposed academic courses as suitable and adequate for the formation of permanent deacons. In theory such courses, once approved, might be offered independently by various institutes, or established at the behest of the local bishop or the bishops of a particular region.

### ***iii. Arrangements for Pastoral, Human and Spiritual Formation***

The practical element of pastoral formation will take place in the home diocese of the candidate, and will be arranged along the lines set down in the *Directory and Norms for the Permanent Diaconate, 2002*. The DDF in co-operation with the DPD will ensure that each candidate has a pastoral director to oversee his pastoral placement.

When candidates gather for formation days and weekends, the celebration of the Eucharist and/or the Liturgy of the Hours will be

an integral element of the programme. Some time will also be set aside for personal prayer. The DDF will ensure that each candidate for the permanent diaconate has recourse to a spiritual director.

Much of the human formation of candidates will happen in and through the inter-personal contact taking place between candidates and formators, and in the context of pastoral placements. It will be necessary to provide some workshops directed specifically to the needs of human formation. This will be the responsibility of the DDF.

*iv. The cost of formation*

It would seem appropriate that the diocese should bear the ordinary cost of formation to the permanent diaconate. This notwithstanding, candidates who are in a position to do so may contribute to the costs of their own formation.

**7. The Family of a Married Candidate:**

The primary responsibility of the married candidate for the permanent diaconate remains his responsibility to his wife and to their children (in particular those who are under the age of eighteen).

*i. Consent*

It will be the responsibility of the DPD, before any married candidate is accepted into formation, to establish that he has discussed his intentions with his wife and that she has freely given her consent in writing. It is desirable that the implications of their father becoming a deacon have also been discussed with the children in a manner which is appropriate to their age.

*ii. Participation in Formation*

The wives of married candidates should be invited to take part in the formation programme. The arrangements for the programme should be made in such a way that this is practically possible.

*iii. Pastoral Care*

The DPD should maintain pastoral contact with the families of candidates and this contact should be maintained after ordination.

Wives should be facilitated in meeting together and encouraged to take up whatever ministry may be possible for them, taking account of their other commitments. In particular, the DPD should offer support to a candidate or deacon and his family whenever family difficulties arise, which either result from the exercise of his ministry or which may impinge on his capacity to exercise his ministry.

#### **8. Ministries and Ordination:**

The DDF, in consultation with the DPD, will make recommendations as to the suitability of a candidate for ministries and for ordination.

As a general rule, the liturgical celebration of admission to candidacy will take place at the beginning of the time of formation (when the appropriate propaedeutic period has been completed) once the decision has been made to accept the man into formation.

The appropriate time for the reception of the ministries of Lector and Acolyte is at the end of the first and second years of formation respectively.

#### **9. Canonical Mission:**

Each deacon, following his ordination, will be given by the ordaining bishop an authentic certificate of the ordination received. His ordinary will give him a written canonical mission. This canonical mission will state clearly:

the parish or geographical area to which he has been appointed

the nature of the ministry he is expected to exercise

the person to whom he will be directly responsible

He shall be assigned to ministry of the word, of the altar and of charity, proper to his office, and should not replace lay people in carrying out tasks and ministries which are properly theirs. The terms and conditions under which this ministry will be exercised, will be the subject of a formal agreement between the bishop and the deacon.

## **10. Employment:**

As a general rule, deacons do not exercise a full-time ministry. They are entitled to work in their chosen career to support themselves and their families.

### *i. Secular employment*

While some candidates for the diaconate may take early retirement, others will continue to be active in their previous career or profession. While the ministry of the deacon is only exercised on a part-time basis, it is important to be clear that he *is* a deacon at all times and in all circumstances. This fact brings with it both unique pastoral opportunities and particular challenges for the deacon. In selecting a candidate for the diaconate, care must be taken to ensure that his full-time employment is both practically and morally consistent with the exercise of the ministry.

### *ii. Church employment*

The full-time employment of some deacons may be within the institution of the Church. It seems that there is scope for this to happen either:

- in a way which is more or less independent of their being called to diaconate,
- or - following ordination -
- on the basis of a specific canonical mission entrusted to them by the bishop, which involves taking on a particular full-time responsibility within the diocese

When the deacon is employed by the Church independently of his canonical mission, it is important that, although he is a deacon in the exercise of all his activities, some distinction be made between his employment and his ministry as a deacon.



## **11. Remuneration:**

### *i. A deacon in part-time ministry*

A deacon engaged in part-time ministry should be provided with expenses (either on foot of receipts or on the basis of an agreed amount) and may be allowed to keep such stole fees as he may receive in the exercise of his ministry, in accordance with diocesan policy.

### *ii. A deacon in full-time ministry*

A deacon who is assigned to a full-time ministry, or to a ministry which represents his principal employment, should be paid accordingly, always taking into account, if he is married, his responsibility for the support of his wife and children.

### *iii. A deacon who is also employed by the Church independently of his canonical mission*

A deacon who, independently of his canonical mission, is employed by the Church in some role (e.g., sacristan, accountant, secretary, etc.) should continue to be treated in the normal way as an employee. Independently, he should be reimbursed for expenses which he incurs in his ministry, and may be allowed to keep such stole fees as he may receive in the exercise of his ministry.

### *iv. Stole fees*

Depending on the local arrangements, stole fees may ordinarily be computed as part of the monthly income of the priest. The allocation of stole fees to deacons in respect of their sacramental ministry will in most cases be balanced by the reduction in the number of priests who have to be supported. Some structural alteration may have to be made in the arrangements currently in place in order to provide for this.

## **12. Integration with the Presbyterate:**

### *i. The Parish Team*

Deacons who are assigned to minister in a parish will exercise their ministry as part of the parish team and will be immediately respon-

sible to the parish priest or administrator. They should participate in meetings of the parish clergy, and of the parish team including lay ministers and lay administrators.

*ii. The Deanery*

Deacons should be welcomed and expected to participate in deanery conferences. A sacramental bond unites the deacons among themselves and with other clerics. A spirit of brotherly respect and collaboration, of communion and loyalty, should characterise the life of priests, permanent deacons and lay faithful in the deanery.

*iii. Diaconate Group*

As the diaconate becomes established in a diocese, a structure should be specifically established for the on-going formation and encouragement of deacons and their wives.

*iv. Diocesan Pastoral Council*

The College of Permanent Deacons in each diocese shall have a representative on the Diocesan Pastoral Council and nationally on the Episcopal Commission for Clergy/Vocations/Seminaries.

**13. Mobility:**

Deacons by virtue of their family life and secular employment will not be free to move from one part of a diocese to another in the way that priests are. Consideration should, however, be given to the fact that it may not be good - either for the deacon or for the parish - that a deacon should exercise his ministry indefinitely in one parish.

It is suggested that a deacon who, by virtue of his ordination, becomes incardinated into the diocese, should be appointed to minister in one of the parishes of the deanery in which he lives and should normally be available for re-deployment within that deanery.

A deacon who moves house within the diocese would normally, if he so requested, be re-assigned to the deanery in which his new home is situated.

A deacon who moves his home to another diocese

- should request permission of his ordinary, which should normally be given
- may request an assignment in, and eventually incardination into, the diocese in which his new home is situated. Apart from the normal process which applies for excardination and re-incardination, a request of this nature would only be granted if the bishop in the diocese to which the deacon had moved had already established the permanent diaconate, or was at the very least open to having a permanent deacon

**14. How are we to understand the promise of obedience made by a deacon to his ordinary?**

The promise of obedience, for a deacon as for a priest, relates primarily to the exercise of the ministry and to all that pertains directly to it. The rationale of the promise is quite different to that of the vow which is made by religious. The promise of obedience that the deacon makes does not have any bearing on his day-to-day family life, or on how he conducts his business, except in so far as these may be seen to impinge directly on his ministry.

**15. Holiness of Life:**

Permanent deacons are called to holiness because they are consecrated to God and are stewards of the mysteries of God in the service of his people. In order that they can pursue this perfection, they are faithfully and untiringly to fulfill the obligations of their pastoral ministry. They are to nourish their spiritual life at the two-fold table of sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. They are therefore earnestly invited to participate daily in the Eucharistic sacrifice.

At ordination they undertake to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours faithfully for the Church and for the world. Therefore, they shall recite the principal Hours of the Divine Office every day, namely Morning and Evening Prayer (cf. Can. 276, #1 and #2).

They shall make a spiritual retreat each year, to which wives are also invited.

**16. Publication of Material on Faith and Morals:**

Deacons may, in the exercise of their own profession, be involved in publishing material which does not impinge on the exercise of their ministry. If deacons wish to publish material on questions of faith and morals, they should do this in consultation with the DPD.

**17. Political Activity:**

Permanent deacons, according to the *Code of Canon Law*, are not forbidden to play an active part in political parties (Can. #288). Deacons who wish to offer themselves as candidates for public office require the prior approval of their ordinary.

**18. Financial obligations of the diocese (in law and in justice), as distinct from obligations in charity, towards deacons:**

Canon law distinguishes between deacons who exercise their ministry full-time, and those who have an income from secular employment. "Married deacons who dedicate themselves full-time to the ecclesiastical ministry deserve remuneration sufficient to provide for themselves and their families. Those, however, who receive a remuneration by reason of a secular profession which they exercise or have exercised, are to see to their own and to their families' needs from that income" (Can 281 #3).

A contract or similar agreement should be in place before formation begins, about support and remuneration afterwards as a deacon, whether celibate or married. Some consideration should also be given to what would happen if the circumstances of the deacon and his family were to change (e.g., through unemployment or financial difficulties). A solidarity fund could be established to which deacons themselves, the parish in which they minister and the diocese would contribute.

In any event, it would be appropriate that permanent deacons (and their wives) be included in a diocesan health insurance scheme.

### **19. Indemnity/Insurance:**

A diocese should indemnify itself against claims which would be made

- against the diocese, arising out of the actions of deacons
- against the diocese by a deacon who suffered injury, etc. in the course of the exercise of his ministry
- against the deacon himself, by third parties, arising out of advice he has given, services which he has provided or failed to provide etc.
- The same provision should be made as in the case of priests.

### **20. Annual Leave:**

The Permanent Deacon is allowed to be absent from pastoral duties on annual holidays, in accordance with the terms and conditions of his appointment (cf. # 9 above).

### **21. Clerical Dress:**

Canon law indicates that deacons do not wear a special ecclesiastical dress (cf. Can. # 288). It is appropriate, however, that they wear a badge or similar sign of identification.

#### *i. Liturgy*

For celebrations of the liturgy, the ordinary dress of the deacon will be an alb and stole. For a more solemn occasion a dalmatic (of the appropriate colour) is worn.

#### *ii. Outside the liturgy*

In keeping with the practice which obtains in most other countries, the normal dress of deacons engaged in non-liturgical ministry will be the same as would be worn by their lay counterparts in similar circumstances. The nature of the activity should dictate what is worn.

#### *iii. Special circumstances*

In those rare situations in which it is deemed to be pastorally necessary (e.g., in hospital or prison chaplaincy) deacons will wear specifically clerical dress.

**22. Form of address:**

There will be a standard form of address for deacons. The issue here is not to bestow “titles of honour” but on the contrary to ensure that there is no abuse in this regard. The appropriate form of address whether in writing or in verbal communication is “deacon.”

**23. Retirement:**

On reaching the age of 75, the Permanent Deacon shall tender his retirement to the Ordinary, who shall then communicate to him the cessation of his canonical mission. With the consent of his Bishop, however, he may continue his ministry, when requested by a priest in a parish to do so.

*This document was approved by the Irish Episcopal Conference in June 2003.*