

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PERMANENT DIACONATE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

1. These *Guidelines* should be read in the light of the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy, 22 February 1998.

### **DIACONATE IN THE CHURCH**

2. The diaconate fulfils a key role in the ministry of the Church and is an essential part of its structure. The ministry of deacons is one of liturgy, word and charity. In this they are ordained to assist the bishop and his body of priests. However they are also to be at the service of all, embodying Christ who came to serve and not to be served.
3. The order of deacons is a distinct and permanent grade in the Church's hierarchy. Through ordination deacons enter into the threefold ministry of worship and service, ministering in communion with the bishop and his presbyterium. The pre-eminent expression of the Church is that Sunday Eucharist celebrated by the bishop, surrounded by his presbyters, deacons and lay ministers, and in which the faithful present participate fully and actively (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, §112).
4. The Second Vatican Council, when decreeing that the diaconate be restored as a proper and permanent rank of the clergy in the Latin Church, stated that it pertained to the office of deacon to administer baptism, to be the custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services (*Lumen gentium*, 29).
5. A local Church without deacons is not only missing an important ministry of Christ-like service, but lacks something integral to its very nature.

### **THE DEACON IN THE LITURGY**

6. Since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Rite has given greater attention to the role of deacons in worship. The *Third Edition of the General Instruction* (2002) reflects this by acknowledging the deacon more frequently in the various lists of ministers. Deacons have their own proper functions at Mass: proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, announcing the intercessions, assisting the priest at the altar, distributing Communion, and in particular under the species of wine, and giving directions (*GIRM* §94, 171). When it comes to making choices and preparing the liturgy, they fall under the same criteria outlined for the priest

- (§352). The *Instruction* contains a separate section which describes how Mass is to be celebrated when a deacon is present (§171-186).
7. Deacons, as members of the rank of the ordained, are seated alongside the presiding celebrant in the sanctuary (§310). It is in the sanctuary that they exercise their ministry (§295). They are assigned the stole and dalmatic as vestments proper to the order (§338). The question of whether deacons should exercise their ministry within a celebration does not belong to the presiding celebrant: *When a deacon is present at the Eucharistic celebration, while wearing sacred vestments, he should exercise his ministry* (§171). When more than one deacon is present they may distribute among themselves the various parts that belong to their ministry (§109, 179).
  8. In their liturgical ministry, deacons proclaim the Gospel and direct the Church's prayer. As the primary assistants of bishops, deacons are called, as a consequence of ordination, in a special way to lead Sunday assemblies of the faithful in the absence of a priest (*Motu proprio Ad Pascendum*, Paul VI, 15 August 1972). Since deacons are ordained for the nurture and increase of the people of God, it belongs to them to lead the prayers, to proclaim the Gospel, to preach the homily, and to distribute Communion (*Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 2 June 1998).
  9. Their duties also include: to preside over public prayer, to baptise, to assist at marriages and bless them, to give Viaticum to the dying, and to lead funeral rites.
  10. Deacons are required to celebrate daily at least a part of the Liturgy of the Hours, as set out by the Conference of Bishops. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has determined this to consist of Morning and Evening Prayer (*ACBC* 1970, 1985). Deacons are obliged to pray for the universal Church. Where appropriate, they should lead these prayers with the community to whom they have been assigned to minister.

## **THE DEACON IN CANON LAW**

### **Office of Deacon**

11. Canon law determines that an ecclesiastical office is any post constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical law to be exercised for a spiritual purpose (can. 145).
12. Through the sacrament of orders, a man is marked with an indelible character and thus constituted a sacred minister, so that according to the grade of deacon or priest or bishop he will fulfil, in the person of Christ, the sacred functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing in the Church (can. 1008). However, these sacred functions are normally exercised within an office to which the ordained has been assigned. Just as a bishop normally exercises his sacred functions in an

office assigned to him (e.g. bishop of a diocese or auxiliary bishop), and a priest does likewise (e.g. parish priest or chaplain), a deacon normally exercises his sacred functions in an office or offices to which he is appointed. Such offices are many and varied, whether on the level of parish (e.g. assistant to a parish priest or being entrusted with a share in the pastoral care of a parish lacking a resident priest) or the level of diocese (e.g. as chancellor, tribunal judge or head of a diocesan agency) or serving the wider Church (e.g. military chaplain, or episcopal conference assignment).

### **Place within the Clergy**

13. Entrance into the clerical state and incardination into a diocese are brought about by ordination to the diaconate (can. 266). Because deacons are clerics, not laymen, the canon law specifying rights and obligations of clerics applies equally to priests and deacons.
14. Permanent deacons may accept a job transfer or promotion in their secular employment to places outside their diocese of incardination. The procedures for excardination and incardination are the same as those for priests, as are the procedures for those who receive permission to work in another diocese for a specified time. A deacon moving from one diocese to another, even for a short time, would ordinarily be admitted by the bishop to diaconal ministry in the new diocese (cann. 267-272). While a deacon can be admitted by the local parish priest to minister after the manner of a visiting or supply priest, any appointment to stable ministry within a diocese will always be made by the diocesan bishop (can. 157).

### **Faculties**

15. A faculty is a favour or authorisation extended to a cleric permitting him to exercise certain powers in addition to those received by ordination. A bishop may grant a deacon some faculties which authorise him to perform actions in the Church in addition to those conceded to him by diaconal ordination. These faculties are granted at the discretion of the bishop in accordance with the needs of the diocese. Faculties frequently granted to deacons include: to assist at marriages (cann. 1108, 1111), and to grant certain permissions and dispensations in connection with ecclesiastical laws. A bishop can withdraw the faculties he grants. However, the withdrawal of faculties leaves intact the sacramental powers the deacon received from God at his ordination. The only one of these powers that the bishop is authorised to restrict is the power to preach (can. 764).

### **Rights and Obligations**

16. In general, deacons, since they are clerics, are bound by the same obligations and enjoy the same rights as priests. By exception, permanent deacons are able to be chosen from married men, are not obliged to wear clerical dress, and are

exempted from the prohibitions to clerics to assume public office, undertake the management of goods of the laity, practise commerce or trade, or have active roles in political parties and trade unions (can. 288).

17. Clerical obligations include an active seeking of holiness (with the obligation of the Liturgy of the Hours), continuing studies, making an annual retreat, fulfilling assigned offices, and respecting the Pope and the bishop.

### **PREPARING THE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY FOR THE DIACONATE**

18. When, after due consultation, a bishop decides to introduce the Permanent Diaconate into a diocese, it is strongly recommended that time and resources be devoted to preparing the diocesan community. Some explanation of the diaconate itself, and the reasons for its introduction into the diocese, should be given to the faithful, for example through diocesan and parish newsletters, through other specially prepared material or through information sessions. Education in the nature and purpose of the diaconate should be considered as part of the ongoing pastoral formation of the diocese.
19. Special effort should be made to familiarise the priests of the diocese about the role of deacons in the Church and the various ministries that deacons are likely to fulfil in the particular diocese.

### **CANDIDACY AND FORMATION FOR DIACONATE**

20. This section of the *Guidelines* should be read in the light of the *Basic Norms for the Formation of the Permanent Diaconate*, promulgated by the Congregation for Catholic Education, 22 February 1998.

#### **Initial Steps**

21. It is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to discern a vocation to the diaconate.
22. To be a suitable candidate for ordination to the diaconate, a person must be a Catholic man of sound moral character and mature faith who has shown a sense of vocation to service.
23. He must demonstrate prayerfulness and an openness to further spiritual formation.
24. He should be at least thirty years of age (cf. can. 1031 §2) and should be involved already in parish or other apostolic life. He should not normally be older than the commonly accepted retirement age.
25. He should have the ability to complete undergraduate studies and be able to make time for formation without detriment to his family and work commitments.

26. He must have adequate physical and mental health.
27. If married, he must have the active support of his wife (and family). If not married, or if widowed in the future, he must be willing to accept a lifelong commitment to celibacy.
28. He must have the support of his parish priest or other equivalent church leaders.
29. A bishop or his delegate will interview an applicant and obtain appropriate documents, certificates and references. An applicant's wife should also be interviewed.
30. The applicant will be provided with written information about the formation process including the time involved, the role of deacons within the diocese, and expectations during formation and after ordination as a deacon.

### **Formation**

31. An applicant for ordained ministry will receive formation in four areas: theological, personal, spiritual and ministerial. The bishop will appoint an experienced, competent director of formation to oversee this program.
32. It may be appropriate for several bishops in neighbouring dioceses to establish a single formation program, with one director, for applicants in their dioceses.
33. An applicant should obtain a degree in theology from an approved institution, either by residential study or distance education.
34. In addition, an applicant will participate in a formation program organised or supported within his diocese. This will normally consist of part of one weekend every month and will normally take four years. The program will address issues of personal growth, encourage a deeper spiritual life including spiritual direction, and seek to equip an applicant with the ministerial skills needed in the diaconate, in the areas of pastoral care, preaching and leading various forms of public worship. The program should assist a candidate to understand the life of the diocese, and to take his place in it. A significant component of the program will be a supervised pastoral placement.
35. An applicant's wife will be encouraged to participate in at least some aspects of this formation program. Some additional sessions should be conducted specifically for the wives (and family members) of applicants.
36. At an appropriate time during the formation program, and with the consent his wife and those who have overseen the formation program, an applicant would formally petition the bishop to be accepted as a candidate for ordination to the

diaconate. It would be expected that, at definite stages throughout a formation program, an applicant would be formally instituted by the bishop in the ministries of lector and acolyte. A candidate would make a five-day retreat before ordination.

### **Funding**

37. The costs and funding of a formation program may vary from diocese to diocese. Such arrangements should be explained and agreed upon before applicants are accepted into the program.

### **Ongoing Formation of Deacons**

38. Along with other members of the clergy, a deacon accepts a life-long commitment to ongoing formation in the theological, personal, spiritual and ministerial aspects of his life. As far as possible, he will attend conferences, seminars and retreats conducted for the deacons of his diocese (can. 279). He will be encouraged to participate in pastoral discussions with priests and laity. He will be encouraged to participate in programs and associations designed specifically for the support of deacons. It will often be fruitful for appropriate programs to be offered to deacons' wives (and families).

## **THE PLACEMENT OF DEACONS** **AND POSSIBLE MODELS FOR DIACONAL MINISTRY**

39. The appointment of a deacon to an office will be made by his ordinary in writing (can. 51) and will define the terms, scope and hours of ministry of this office. Where appropriate, the letter of appointment will also specify the cleric to whom the deacon is primarily accountable.
40. Canon 281 envisions three patterns of diaconal ministry:
  - deacons who dedicate themselves “fully” to ecclesiastical ministry
  - deacons who work primarily in a secular trade or profession
  - deacons who are retired from a secular trade or profession.
41. These patterns of sacramental ministry may be implemented in a number of ways:

### **The Deacon in Full-Time Ecclesial Ministry**

42. Some deacons are appointed to full-time ministry positions within Church agencies or parishes by their bishops. These appointments include, for example, general parish ministry, military chaplains, hospital pastoral care coordinators, and canon lawyers.

43. Deacons appointed to positions where they are to dedicate themselves fully to ministry are to be equitably remunerated and provided with superannuation in accordance with civil and canon law.

### **The Deacon in Part-Time Ecclesial Ministry**

44. Deacons who dedicate themselves to significant stable part-time ministry will be treated in a similar manner to full-time ecclesial ministers on a pro rata basis. They will enjoy equivalent benefits and responsibilities to a lay person employed in a similar capacity.

### **The Deacon as Sacrament in Secular Society**

45. In some cases, deacons will minister primarily “in the world” and would normally have a limited ministerial involvement within the structures of the Church. The main thrust of these deacons’ ministry is to be a sacramental expression of Christ outside the sanctuary, outside the church building and the ecclesial structures. Through their service of those in the “world” these deacons are a sacramental expression of the diaconal nature of the Church. These deacons will help identify those in need in society, and bring word of them to the Eucharistic community, especially in the liturgy (including the Prayers of the Faithful and the deacon’s preaching). They also serve as a prophetic reminder to all the baptised of their own responsibility to care for others.
46. Since these deacons would generally minister within the context of their work place and the social network in which they find themselves, they would have very limited time available to dedicate to traditional clerical ministry. These deacons’ involvement in parishes or agencies of the local Church should not exceed six hours per week. Any greater participation in Church-based ministry could place serious pressures upon the deacon’s health, employment and marriage.
47. Particular law will provide clear norms for providing a ministry allowance and for reimbursing expenses, so that those parishes and agencies who benefit from the deacon’s ministry fulfil their obligation to reimburse him for expenses incurred in the exercise of that ministry.

### **The Deacon who has Retired from a Trade or Profession**

48. Some men who have retired from secular employment before the commonly accepted retirement age in Australia desire to dedicate themselves on either a full-time or part-time basis to pastoral ministry.
49. This situation requires careful discernment. The diaconate is a call to serve God's people and not a recognition of a reward for faithful service. It is to be seen as a vocation not a kind of “retirement hobby”.

50. It is envisaged that older deacons in early retirement with superannuation annuities from their employment would provide for themselves and their families from that income.

### **Possible Ministry Placements**

51. A deacon's ministry has a focus on being brother to those people who live at the "edge" in either a spiritual, social or economic sense.
52. To strengthen the diaconal character of the diocesan Church, care is to be taken to include, as much as possible, a diaconal presence within diocesan structures, as well as parish communities.
53. Against this backdrop, some possible ministry placements for deacons include:
- (i) **Deacons as Pastoral Workers:** Increasingly, dioceses, agencies, parishes, hospitals, and prisons are advertising positions for pastoral workers (e.g. pastoral associates, RCIA coordinators, liturgy coordinators, sacramental program coordinators, social workers, youth workers, teachers, journalists, managers, strategic planners, finance officers). Many deacons have qualifications and considerable secular experience in these areas, as well as theological and pastoral training that make them ideal candidates for these positions
  - (ii) **Chaplaincies:** particularly prison, hospital, police, military, school and workplace - places where the deacon is likely to meet people who are marginalised from Church or society in one way or another
  - (iii) **Church agencies:** particularly those with an evangelistic (youth/young adult ministry) or welfare (*Centacare, Caritas*) orientation, or those that form the laity for mission (*Catholic Mission*)
  - (iv) **Parish Ministries:** These may include those parish ministries that generally have a large component of reaching out to the unchurched, such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. For example, a deacon might be the "marriage minister" who is involved with everything from marriage preparation through to presiding at the liturgical celebration
  - (v) **Parish Pastoral Leadership:** Because of a shortage of priests, deacons can be appointed to a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish (can. 517 §2), although pastoral leadership within parishes is always exercised by some priest with the powers and faculties of a parish priest, who will direct the pastoral care

- (vi) **Diocesan Ministries:** A deacon with substantial experience in other ministries could assist in central administration, such as diocesan chancellor, bishop's secretary or in the diocesan Tribunal
  - (vii) **Diocesan pastoral works in specific social contexts:** These could include the pastoral care of families, of ethnic minorities, or of disabled, sick or elderly people.
54. With the permission of his bishop, a deacon is free to apply for such positions and to be considered equally with other applicants (other clergy, religious and lay people).

### **CONCLUDING NOTE**

55. These Guidelines were approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at their meeting of November 2005, and will be reviewed after a period of five years.
56. For more information about the Permanent Diaconate in the Catholic Church in Australia, visit [www.ausdeacon.org](http://www.ausdeacon.org)