

# DIACONATE INFORMATION KIT ARCHDIOCESE OF HOBART





# WHAT IS A DEACON?

A Deacon in the Catholic Church is an ordained minister. He is ordained “not to priesthood but to service.” In the Catholic Church the ordained ministry comprises three orders: bishops, priests and deacons. Deacons, like priests and bishops, are men who have undertaken a significant period of formation. Some deacons are ordained on the way to becoming priests (‘transitional’ deacons). Others are ordained in order to serve the Church as deacons (‘permanent’ deacons). In the latter case they must be over 35 years of age when ordained, and may be married.



Through ordination, an indelible and permanent sacramental character is conferred on the deacon through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Pope John Paul II once said of the deacon that his service is the Church’s service sacramentalised. He went on to say: “This is at the very heart of the diaconate – the deacon is to be a servant of the mysteries of Christ and – at the same time – be a servant to his brothers and sisters”.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, deacons are first and foremost living reminders of what it means to be Disciples of Christ and members of the church. And so, the diaconate is not about what a deacon can do, rather it is about who the deacon is. But whatever they do, deacons make visible Christ who serves and so, the primary function of the diaconate does not lie in any of its functions, whether pastoral, charitable or liturgical. The deacon is symbol par excellence of the Church’s ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Other ministries such as acolyte, lector, extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, catechist etc. respond to a particular need, in a particular place, at a particular time. Diaconate is not a lay ministry; it is a particular expression of the ordained ministry in the Church

The deacon is ordained as an assistant to the bishop and is called to minister in any area where the bishop would like him to serve. But whilst the deacon is at the service of the bishop, when appointed to a parish, he works in collaboration with the pastor, to assist him in the pastoral care of those entrusted to him.

The deacon participates in the three munera (ministries) of Christ who is priest, prophet and king, through ministry within the liturgy, ministry of the word (preaching and teaching) and ministry of servant leadership (especially to those who are in some way poor or on the fringes of the Church).

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1 Pope John Paul II, Address to Deacons and their Spouses – Detroit Michigan USA, 1987

2 James Monroe Barnett, “The Diaconate – A Full and Equal Order” (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International 1995), 137

# WHY DO WE NEED DEACONS?

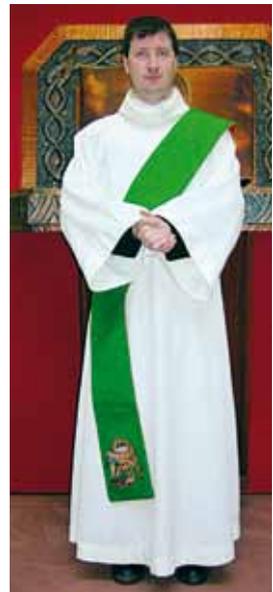
Since New Testament times, the Church has been served by ordained ministers of three types: bishops, priests and deacons. The Church's understanding of herself as the Mystical Body of Christ attests to her character as one body made of many parts. Lay people engaged in many roles in the Church and the world work in concert with ordained ministers of all three orders. The Church needs deacons in order to experience in full the gift of the ordained ministry given to her by the Holy Spirit, through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

At the time of the Reformation, many Protestants wished to abolish the diaconate, which had become a vestigial order of ministry. The Council of Trent resolved that the diaconate should not be abolished but should be restored as a permanent part of the Church's ordained ministry. This resolution was not put into effect until the Second Vatican Council. However, in the 40 years since, the diaconate has flourished in some parts of the Church, so that, for example, deacons today represent about a quarter of all ordained ministers in the Roman Catholic Church in the USA.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us that the pre-eminent expression of the Church is found in the Mass, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his priests, deacons and lay ministers and in which the holy People of God participate fully and actively.<sup>3</sup> If there are no deacons, something important is missing.

The restored diaconate is a gift to the Church given by the Holy Spirit working through the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. The diaconate was given by the Holy Spirit for the renewing of the Church. Deacons are part of God's plan for the renewal of His Church.

Permanent deacons in many parts of the Church are playing a significant part in the New Evangelisation, pastoral care of various groups (e.g. police, migrants, prisoners) and are playing key roles in animating and leading lay people to become active in spreading the Gospel and undertaking works of mercy in the Church and in the world. Deacons can make a very significant contribution to the life of Catholic parishes and schools. Married deacons bring to their ministry a special gift of faith lived in marriage, work and parenting along with the unique graces of the sacrament of Holy Orders.



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3 General Instruction of the Roman Missal 112 (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference May 2006) Strathfield NSW, St Paul's Publications 2007, 53

# WHAT DO DEACONS DO?

## The Ministry of Deacons

The ministry of deacons takes many forms, always within the threefold ministry of Christ, that of prophet, priest and king: to proclaim the Good News, to sanctify and to lead by serving.

- Ministry of the Word (*munus docendi*) of the deacon means he proclaims the Scriptures and instructs and exhorts the people
- Ministry of the Altar (*munus sanctificandi*) is expressed in prayer, assisting at the Eucharist, and in presiding over some other sacraments
- Ministry of Charity (*munus regendi*) is exercised in works of charity and administration.

All deacons undertake ministry in all three areas, though often in very different ways.

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 Scriptures 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)

Some deacons may be employed by the Church or its agencies on a full-time basis and be remunerated in the same way as lay people or other clergy would be for doing the same work. However, in Australia most deacons are not paid by the Church but support themselves by secular employment (full or part-time) or have retired from secular employment and are supported by their superannuation. The Church reimburses deacons for expenses incurred by them in the course of their work for the Church. Hence the extent of formal diaconal ministry varies quite widely with circumstances and may range from full-time to only a few hours per week. Of course a man ordained as a deacon is always a deacon, no matter what he is doing. In that sense there are no part-time deacons.

Some of the roles undertaken by deacons in the Australian Church are:

### Pastoral Work in Parishes

- preparing people for and conducting baptisms, weddings and funerals
- preaching and assisting with Masses and other liturgies such as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction and the Prayer of the Church
- initiating, motivating and assisting lay faith-sharing and charitable groups such as St Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary, prayer groups, scripture sharing groups, evangelisation groups
- visiting the homebound and the sick

- counseling the bereaved, the seriously ill, and those in stressed marriages
- faith development catechesis of adults or children in various contexts.

### **Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care Work**

- in police forces and the armed services
- in trade and industry missions
- in missions to seamen
- in schools, hospitals and nursing homes, prisons and ports.

### **Diocesan Roles (often requiring specific training and experience)**

- chancellor: managing financial resources of the diocese
- director of missions
- director (animator or trainer for) RCIA programs
- marriage tribunal official or canon lawyer
- secretary of Council of Priests and Consultors
- diocesan representative in ecumenical initiatives
- any other particular work the bishop wants done.

Irrespective of what main role the deacon undertakes, he will always have a connection to a particular parish where he will normally assist with Masses and sometimes preach.

### **Remuneration**

As mentioned above, permanent deacons in the Archdiocese of Hobart will not normally be paid for their work, which is voluntary. Expenses incurred will be reimbursed by parish or diocese depending on the placement of the deacon.

Deacons may on occasion be placed in full or part-time work within the Archdiocese or its agencies, in which case they would be paid a remuneration equivalent to that paid to lay-people doing the same sort of work, or a stipend and other benefits as paid to clergy or religious sisters and brothers in similar circumstances.

## **HOW DEACONS ARE SELECTED**

Deacons are men called by God to permanently live out a particular vocation as ordained ministers within the Church. They are selected by a process of discernment which takes place over several years. This discernment, guided by the Holy Spirit and nurtured by prayer, is two-sided. On the one side the enquirer and his wife (if he is married) and his family will be seeking to find out if becoming a deacon is God's plan for his life. On the other side, the Church will also be seeking to discern if he is genuinely being called to the diaconate. Ultimately this decision is made by the Archbishop who must be morally certain that the candidate has a genuine vocation and has the necessary spiritual and natural gifts and training to become a deacon. The process of discernment happens in three stages:- enquiry, aspirancy and candidacy.

## Enquiry

Initially, the interested man will enquire about the diaconate. This process is normally facilitated by discussion with his parish priest or others and attendance at diaconate enquiry meetings run by the Archdiocese from time to time. If, as he learns more about the diaconate, the enquirer wishes, he would make a formal request to be accepted into the deacon formation program. He would then provide various information about himself and his family and undergo a selection process involving interviews of himself and his wife (if he is married) by Archdiocesan staff and the Archbishop .

## Aspirancy

If the enquirer is accepted into the formation program, he is advised in writing that he is now a diaconal aspirant and that he will be expected to undertake a period of formation and training of about four years duration (see *Training and Formation Needed to Become A Deacon* below). Acceptance into the formation program does not imply that the aspirant will be ordained, because the discernment process is ongoing, on both sides.

## Candidacy

Should both the Archbishop and the aspirant be in agreement about the likelihood of a genuine vocation, the aspirant will eventually be admitted to candidacy for ordination as a deacon. Admission to candidacy takes the form of a rite, normally conducted by the Archbishop in the parish church. The candidate will then continue with his formation. Again, admission to candidacy does not imply certainty of ordination. During this time the candidate will be given the lay ministries of Acolyte and Lector normally six months apart, and start to practise some of the liturgical and other ministries he may be undertaking as a deacon.



If at the end of the formation period both the candidate, his wife (if he is married) and the Archbishop are sure of the genuineness of his vocation and his readiness, then the candidate is ordained by the Archbishop, either in the Cathedral or in his parish church.

On ordination the deacon makes a vow of obedience to his bishop and if unmarried also makes a vow of celibacy. A married candidate commits himself not to re-marry should his wife die before he does, in line with universal discipline of the Church.

## **CRITERIA FOR DISCERNMENT OF DIACONAL VOCATION**

The Archdiocese seeks prayerful and generous men of faith whose families are supportive of the diaconate and the Church. Aspirants will have to demonstrate adequate academic potential and a history of lay service in the Church.

In particular, an applicant for diaconal formation is expected to:

- be a prayerful, committed and generous Christian man of the Roman Catholic Rite, who considers himself called to serve the Church in the vocation of deacon.
- have a stable, regular and happy marriage (if married) and a wife and children who support him in pursuing the diaconate or (if not married) to be willing and able to commit himself to celibacy
- have a track record of service and leadership in the Church and in Christian outreach to the world, in either diocesan or parish ministries
- be living within the State of Tasmania and to have Australian permanent residency or citizenship
- be between the ages of 30 and 60
- have been sacramentally confirmed a Catholic for at least 5 years
- have completed year 12 of high school or equivalent and be capable of studying theology at tertiary level
- have stable financial situation and no criminal record
- be able to give serious time and resources to theological study and spiritual formation
- have a stable work history
- have a positive attitude to the Church and a grateful fidelity to all that the Church teaches
- have adequate physical and mental health
- be recommended by his parish priest or other equivalent church leader.

# TRAINING AND FORMATION NEEDED TO BECOME A DEACON

A candidate for diaconal ordination will normally have undertaken a four-year period of formation in four areas: theological, personal, spiritual and ministerial. This formation will be overseen by a director of formation appointed by the Archbishop.

## **Theological Formation**

It is expected that deacons will generally obtain a degree in theology from an approved institution. This will normally be done by distance education. In some cases where substantial progress has been made prior to ordination, the degree may be completed afterwards. The degree may be at undergraduate or post-graduate level. The actual course of study and level of achievement required will be determined in each case after due consideration of the particular circumstances of each applicant.

## **Formation Program**

In addition to the academic study of theology, the aspirant or candidate will participate in a formation program conducted by the Archdiocese. This program will foster personal growth, encourage a deeper spiritual life and seek to equip the candidate with skill in the areas of pastoral care, preaching, administering sacraments, and leading various forms of public worship. During this program the candidate will grow in his understanding of the life of the Archdiocese and become better equipped to take his place in it. A significant part of this formation will be a supervised pastoral placement.

The formation program will be run one day per month, normally on a weekend. In addition, aspirants and candidates and their wives will be expected to do a weekend retreat together once a year.

The wives of aspirants and candidates for the diaconate are encouraged to participate in at least some aspects of this formation program. Some sessions may also be arranged specifically for the wives and in some cases the children of aspirants and candidates.

## **Funding**

The Archdiocese will provide regular formation days for diaconal aspirants and candidates and their wives. However, the costs of academic formation, travel etc. will have to be borne by the aspirants and candidates themselves. Assistance may be provided by parishes or other agencies when needed and where circumstances allow.

# HOW TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE DIACONATE

- Talk to your parish priest or
- Contact the co-coordinator of diaconal formation for the Archdiocese, Deacon Nick MacFarlane at [nick.macfarlane@aohtas.org.au](mailto:nick.macfarlane@aohtas.org.au) or on mobile 0418 242 010
- Have a look at any of the following websites  
[www.catholicdeacon.org.au](http://www.catholicdeacon.org.au)  
[www.deaconsplace.org.au](http://www.deaconsplace.org.au)  
[www.clergy.org.au/about/deacons](http://www.clergy.org.au/about/deacons)  
[www.diaconate.org.uk](http://www.diaconate.org.uk)  
[idz.drs.de/english/index.html](http://idz.drs.de/english/index.html)
- Attend one of the diaconate information sessions run by the Archdiocese from time to time.

## PRAYER FOR DIACONAL VOCATIONS

Jesus said "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." (Matt 9:37-38)

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit;  
and there are varieties of service but the same Lord. (1Cor 12:4-5)

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph as it did among you (1 Thess 3:1)

Please pray for those who serve or aspire to serve Christ as deacons in our Church.

***Lord Jesus,***

***You gave yourself totally in the service of mankind, offering Yourself as the One who comes not to be served but to serve and who gives His life for many, that they might have life in abundance. Bless our Church in Tasmania with many deacons so that they may contribute to the renewal of her life and mission.***

***Amen.***



