

I Have Given You An Example



Permanent Diaconate in Scotland

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What is a Permanent Deacon?

Origins and History

The Acts of the Apostles describes how, in the first century, the Church was faced with the challenge of responding to the needs of those who were at risk of being marginalised, either through culture or through material poverty. Keeping in mind the example of Jesus, the Apostles selected and ordained a number of men specifically for this service.

For a number of centuries, deacons ministered in close co-operation with the bishops of the Church, assisting at the Eucharist, preaching the Gospel, and exercising a ministry of charity.

Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Orders, is probably one of the best known deacons, though many tend to assume that he was a priest. Gradually, in the Western Church, the functions of deacons were absorbed into the ministry of the priest, and the diaconate became a transitional order, for those on the way to priesthood. The diaconate continued to exist as a permanent ministry in the Eastern Churches, including those in full communion with Rome.

Renewal:

The Second Vatican Council envisaged a renewal of ministry, both lay and ordained, in the Church. The Council's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, explains that the lay faithful, by virtue of their Baptism, are commissioned to an active apostolate and insists that "every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church."

The Second Vatican Council also proposed the restoration of the diaconate as a "distinct ministry of service" to be exercised "in communion with the bishop and his group of priests". Many of the functions which deacons perform can also be carried out by members of the lay faithful. The restoration of the diaconate is not intended in any sense to change that situation. The idea is that some of those who already exercise these functions would be "strengthened with the grace of diaconal ordination" and in that way would be designated to be a visible public sign of the Christ the Servant in the community of the Church.

What do Permanent Deacons Do?

The first responsibility of the deacon is to be an effective visible sign of Christ who came to serve rather than to be served. Although the ministry of the deacon may be exercised on a part-time basis, he remains at all times a deacon and he is called, in his life-style, to reflect this.

The ministry of the deacon is an expression of his being, as the documents say, *an icon of Christ the servant*. The areas of ministry which may be entrusted to deacons fall under three general headings, *Altar*, *Word* and *Charity*. They 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
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

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 apostolate
- 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 administration of Church property

A permanent deacon is not a “lone-ranger.” He receives his mission from his bishop, and will be assigned to work as a member of a team, normally under the leadership of a parish priest. He is called to minister in close co-operation with priests and with members of the lay faithful who are entrusted with various ministries.

Collaborative ministry is already a reality in very many parishes, especially with the development of Parish Pastoral Councils, family-mass groups, baptism teams, bereavement support groups etc. Deacons are not intended to replace lay ministers. On the contrary, in many places, they play a key role in the development and co-ordination of lay ministry. Neither are deacons intended to be “substitute priests,” making up for a shortage of priestly vocations.

Who Is Eligible to Become a Deacon?

It is the bishop who, in the name of the Church, calls a man to ordination as deacon. Any decision to call a man to the order of deacon must follow from a mature discernment. In other words, it is a decision rooted in faith. The bishop needs to satisfy himself that a man, who has already been called by God in the Sacrament of Baptism, is now called by God to ordained ministry.

Candidates for the permanent diaconate may be married or unmarried.

Married Candidates:

The Church is concerned that there should be no potential for conflict between the responsibilities of ordained ministry and the need of a couple in the early years of their married life to devote their time and energy to maturing in their relationship and to caring for young children. For that reason, a married man must have reached the age of thirty-five before he can be ordained to the permanent diaconate. He must also have the formal consent of his wife.

Unmarried Candidates:

Unmarried candidates must have reached the age of twenty five before they can be ordained as permanent deacons. In keeping with the tradition of the Church, those who are ordained as single men make a solemn promise of celibacy.

What Personal Qualities are Required?

A prospective candidate for the permanent diaconate must:

- have a genuine sense of vocation to this calling.
- be a baptized and confirmed man who is active in the practice of his Catholic faith.
- be actively involved in the parish or charitable work and come highly recommended by his parish priest and parishioners.
- [if married...] have been married at least five years and live in a stable and valid marriage, enjoying the full support of his wife and be willing to remain celibate if his wife precedes him in death
- [if single...] enjoy a stable, settled life, a history of healthy relationships, and be able and willing to accept celibacy, understanding the implications of this charism.

- possess the human, spiritual and intellectual capacity to participate fully in the formation programme.
- possess natural gifts for ministry, demonstrate maturity and balance, enjoy good physical and mental health with no condition which would impede ministry and have no history of any significant compulsions or addictions
- be free of all force or pressure in making his application.
- be able to sustain an adequate standard of living for himself and, in so far as it is applicable, for his family.
- be able to give the time required for study and service without detriment to his family.
- be willing to be subject to the vetting procedures as required by the Scottish Bishops' Conference.
- not belong to any organisation or engage in any work or professional activity that is, according to the norms of the Church and the prudent judgement of his bishop, inconsistent with the diaconal ministry
- be free of all irregularities and impediments to Orders

How do I know if I am Suited to the Permanent Diaconate?

Before he is formally accepted as a candidate for the permanent diaconate an *aspirant* is invited to participate in what is known as the propaedeutic period. During this period, which lasts approximately one year, he engages in a process of discernment which is intended to help him to arrive at a better understanding of himself and of ministry in the Church, so as to be able to make an initial decision which is fully free and unconditioned by personal interests or external pressures of any sort.

The focus of the propaedeutic period will be on the vocation of the candidate and, in the event that he is married, its implications for his family. Those who are accepted into the propaedeutic period begin a year-long programme that focuses on spiritual and human formation, and on what it means to be a deacon.

The Programme

Normally the process will last for a year during which there will be five weekend meetings. The applicant must attend all five weekends. If he is married his wife will be invited to weekends three, four and five. During each weekend a different theme will be explored and developed as follows:

Weekend One: Focus on the Call to Ministry

(ministry in general, and the Diaconate in particular).

This weekend is facilitated by the Diocesan Directors of the Permanent Diaconate programme. The Weekend includes an individual interview with each candidate conducted by his own Diocesan Director. The Sunday programme

may also include a visit by a bishop, or with the applicant's own ordinary should his bishop decide to arrange such a meeting.

This weekend is followed up by a meeting between the Diocesan Director, the applicant and, where applicable, his wife.

Weekend Two: Prayer and Spiritual Direction.

The aim of the weekend is to reflect on spiritual formation.

This weekend provides an opportunity to explain Spiritual Direction and present the list of approved Spiritual Directors. Provisional arrangements are made for the applicants to meet the Spiritual Director. The weekend is followed up by the applicant's first monthly visit to his Spiritual Director.

Spiritual Direction is conducted in accordance with the tradition and law of the Church. The Director of Formation will confirm that Spiritual Direction is taking place on a regular basis. Bishops will ensure that those who are included on the list of approved Spiritual Directors have the necessary preparation to carry out this ministry.

Weekend Three: Ministry, Celibacy and Marriage.

Married applicants attend this weekend with their wives.

For married applicants the weekend is an opportunity to look at the implications of Ministry as a Permanent Deacon in relation to the candidate's marriage and family life. For married applicants this weekend is facilitated by Scottish Marriage Care and is followed up by couples making three visits to a Marriage Care Counsellor to continue exploring the themes touched on during the weekend. Time will also be taken during this weekend to reflect on the Church's discipline of celibacy.

The Director will confirm that the three follow-up sessions had been attended.

Celibate applicants should attend this weekend but instead of follow-up sessions with marriage care counsellors the commitment of celibacy should be explored in spiritual direction which includes widowed deacons.

Weekend Four: Personal Awareness and Development.

Married applicants attend this weekend with their wives. This weekend is intended to help the participants look at their personal strengths and areas for continued formation. Experts in the area of human formation will facilitate this weekend. This weekend will be followed up with a meeting between the Diocesan Director and the applicant.

Weekend Five: Interview. Married applicants attend this weekend with their wives. Arrangements for this weekend are the responsibility of the applicant's own diocese. Having been furnished with a report on the applicant from those responsible for the propaedeutic year, the bishop will convene an interview board, on which he himself may sit. The wives of married applicants should also be formally consulted by the bishop or his delegate. The bishop will inform the

applicant if he has been accepted to embark upon the ordination course for the Permanent Diaconate.

Follow-up. The applicant's parish priest will be informed of the bishop's decision so that together with the Diocesan Vocations' Director he is able to offer appropriate support to both successful and unsuccessful applicants. The Diocesan Vocations' Director will ensure that successful applicants are given all the necessary information about what lies ahead.

What Kind of Training is Provided?

Training for ordained ministry is usually referred to as formation, because it is more than just training for a job; it is about preparing for a way of life. Following the propaedeutic period, candidates who are accepted into the formation programme will begin a four year period of preparation for ordained ministry, which includes academic study, spiritual, human and pastoral formation.

The overall purpose of the formation programme is to help each candidate to reach a mature understanding of his faith, and to develop the personal and pastoral skills which will enable him to share this faith with others through the exercise of a ministry of charity which also has a significant liturgical dimension.

Academic Formation

The academic dimension of the formation programme is provided by:

The Maryvale Institute's
BA In Applied Theology in Diaconal Ministry
by Part-Time Distance-Learning

This course aims to provide, over four years, the appropriate formation in preparation for ordination to the permanent diaconate. It presents Catholic doctrine in a comprehensive way, together with diaconal practice in all areas of the ministry. It is specifically designed for men who have been accepted by their bishop to go forward for diaconal ministry and who can show evidence of a capacity to study at degree level.

Each year consists of the following elements:

- 3 residential weekends
- 6 coursebook modules
- 6 written assignments
- development of a portfolio of resources
- formation in the areas of ministry in which a deacon is involved
- assessed participation in liturgical and other aspects of diaconal ministry
- tutorials and continuous assessment of assignments and activities

- homiletic, catechetical and liturgical planning and practice with each module
- end of year exams

The course is designed to take 15 hours of study a week for 10 months of the year over a four-year period. Maryvale provides continuous support throughout the duration of the entire course.

There are regular tutorials, guidance through assessment of written work, local practical support from trained mentors and a telephone helpline with the course director.

The Institute also co-operates with the local Diocesan Director of Formation for the Permanent Diaconate so that additional support may be provided for personal and spiritual formation.

No previous qualifications are required but evidence of ability to undertake the course successfully will be sought.

Pastoral Formation

Among the elements included in the pastoral formation programme will be

- The care of the poor and the work of justice
- The pastoral care of prisoners and their families
- The pastoral care of the sick at home and in hospital
- Participation in the communal prayer and the liturgical life of the community
- Participation in the building up of the community, through effective and appropriate involvement in small groups, committees, movements and voluntary bodies
- Proclamation of the word of God in various pastoral contexts
- The pastoral care of the bereaved.

Spiritual Formation

The spiritual formation of the future deacon will be integrated with his academic formation. It will take into account his previous experience of spiritual life, and will seek to affirm and strengthen it. He will be helped, through prayer, spiritual direction and practical experience to deepen his relationship with Christ, and to develop a spirituality which enables him to offer himself, as Christ did, in the service of his brothers and sisters, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Human Formation

The human formation element of the programme will include some scheduled workshops, but much of it will take place in the context of working together with other candidates, in pastoral placement, and in reflecting on these experiences with his formation director.

The aim of this human formation is to help the candidate to develop the personal skills which will enable him to

- balance the needs of his own family with the requirements of ministry,
- develop and maintain appropriate pastoral relationships,

- communicate and work constructively and effectively with others,
- observe appropriate boundaries, and
- develop the kind of personal discipline which will enable him to establish ministerial priorities, and to care appropriately for his own well-being in body, mind and spirit.

How Would Diaconate Impinge on my Employment?

The diaconate is an active ministry, not an honorary position. Being a deacon involves a serious level of commitment, both at the stage of preparation and after ordination.

As a general rule, deacons exercise a voluntary, part-time ministry, and the amount of time given to this ministry will depend to some extent on the individual and family circumstances of the deacon concerned. Some deacons, if they have taken early retirement or reduced their work commitments, may be able to offer a greater time commitment.

Deacons who exercise a part-time ministry are entitled to work in their chosen career to support themselves and their families. It is important, however, that their employment is both practically and morally consistent with the exercise of ordained ministry.

It may occasionally happen that, alongside his voluntary service, the full-time employment of a deacon is within some agency or service of the Church. Although he is, at all times, a deacon, a distinction needs to be made between his employment and his voluntary ministry, not least because he may be answerable to different people in respect of each.

From the point of view of remuneration, canon law distinguishes between deacons who are asked to 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”

Those who exercise a voluntary part-time ministry would normally receive expenses related to the exercise of their ministry, according to an agreed system. Once a deacon has been ordained he will be insured against personal injury sustained in the course of his ministry, and against claims made by third parties, arising out of advice he has given, services which he has provided or failed to provide etc.

How Do I Make an Application?

Each Diocese has its own process for inviting men to consider offering themselves for the Permanent Diaconate. How this is done is the responsibility of the bishop who will develop the process with the Vocations’ Director.

Enquiry

Anyone wishing to enquire about the Permanent Diaconate should apply in writing to the Vocations' Director, giving contact details, some information about marital status, home parish, present involvement in the local Church and some indication as to why he is drawn to the Permanent Diaconate. The Directorate of Diaconate Vocations will contact the enquirer's parish priest directly.

The Pre-acceptance Discernment Process

This covers a period of time which allows the applicant and his family to explore more fully the implications of the call to the Permanent Diaconate. In the case of a married man his wife and family will also be involved at this stage. It is also a time when the Director of the Diaconate Programme establishes a working relationship with the applicant. The process is one of discernment to discover if an applicant should be admitted into the Permanent Diaconate Propaedeutic Period (formal discernment process).

Application Form

The process begins with the completion of the nationally approved application form. In the case of married applicants an important aspect of the application is to explore the attitude of the applicant's wife (and family).

The application form contains a statement under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Exceptions) Amendment) Order 1986. Applicants are also required to give their consent for the appropriate Police and/or Social Services, and Health checks.

In addition to the completed Application Form the applicant must provide a recently issued copy of his Certificate of Baptism and Confirmation, where applicable, a Marriage Certificate, and a written medical statement from his G.P. stating he is in good health. The application form also invites the nomination of two people to provide character references and a reference from the applicant's Parish Priest.

Prospective applicants for the Permanent Diaconate may find it helpful to read: *Norms for The Permanent Diaconate in Scotland* which has been published by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland's Commission for the Permanent Diaconate and which is available on the web site:

<http://www.scotsdeacons.org.uk/Downloads.html>