

# **The Permanent Diaconate**

## **National Directory and Norms for Ireland**

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***VERITAS***

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## Introduction

1. All who are baptised are called to be active participants in the mission of the Church, bearing witness to Christ in word and in action. All ministries in the Church, whether lay or ordained, must be understood in terms of this mission and must be seen to flow from it.
2. The Second Vatican Council specifically recognises the fact that the lay faithful, through their Baptism and Confirmation, are commissioned to an active apostolate by the Lord Himself. 'Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation ever increasingly to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently let 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.'<sup>1</sup>
3. The Council also envisages the restoration of the diaconate as a 'permanent rank of the hierarchy,' and a 'distinct ministry of service' exercised 'in communion with the bishop and his group of priests.'<sup>2</sup> The decision of the Irish Episcopal Conference to petition the Holy See for permission to restore the permanent diaconate, although it comes more than thirty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, is rooted firmly in the vision of the Council.
4. In the course of the past thirty years large numbers of lay faithful have become actively involved in the apostolate in Ireland, not only in those ministries which were specifically renewed by Pope Paul VI in his apostolic letter *Ministeria quaedam*,<sup>3</sup> but in a wide range of other apostolic activities, including catechetics, baptismal preparation, bereavement counselling, marriage preparation and school management. The intention to restore the permanent

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1 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 33 (Hereinafter referred to as *LG*).

2 *Ibid.*, 29.

3 cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *Ministeria quaedam*, given Motu Proprio on 15 August 1972.

diaconate, while it refers to an ordained ministry, will be more correctly understood and more enriching for the life of the Church in Ireland if it is seen as being in partnership with this great diversity of charisms and services, as well as being in communion with the other orders of the hierarchy just as it was in the Christian communities of the Apostolic period.

5. Permanent deacons are not ‘substitute priests’, nor are they intended to take the place of religious, or of lay ministers. The integration of permanent deacons into the ministerial fabric of the Church will require that the inter-relatedness of ministry be clearly understood and properly managed. An indispensable first step in this process will be the carrying out of a balanced and comprehensive catechesis among priests and lay faithful concerning the permanent diaconate.
6. In 1998, the Holy See promulgated two documents which are intended ‘to clarify and regulate the diversity of approaches’ to the permanent diaconate since its restoration. One of these concerns the formation of deacons<sup>4</sup> and the other concerns the ministry and life of deacons.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the spirit of these documents, and with the requirements of Canon 236 of the *Code of Canon Law*, the Irish Episcopal Conference has prepared the following National Directory, which adapts the universal norms to the particular circumstances pertaining in Ireland.

## A. The Theology and Mission of the Diaconate

7. The service of deacons in the Church is documented from apostolic times, and has always been held in high esteem. The diaconate, like the sacred orders of the episcopate and the presbyterate, has very clear theological roots in the person and the ministry of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Congregation for Catholic Education. *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* (Hereinafter referred to as *Norms*).

5 Congregation for the Clergy. *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (Hereinafter referred to as *Directory*).

6 cf. *Norms*, 2.

8. Jesus reminds the disciples that, although he is Lord and Master (Jn 13:13), he is among them 'as one who serves' (Lk 22:27). His service is first and foremost to his Father, and to the truth. This is reflected in his ministry of preaching. His service is also directed particularly towards those who are oppressed or excluded. He incorporates in his own person the characteristics of the faithful servant of Yahweh, who 'acts with true justice', who serves 'the cause of right', and who does not 'break the crushed reed', nor 'quench the dimly burning wick' (cf. Is 42:1-7).
9. There is no dichotomy or conflict between Jesus' service of the truth and his compassion for the poor and the oppressed. As he explained to the Jews, it is the truth that liberates (cf. Jn 8:32). At the core of that truth is the love of God, revealed in the person of Jesus who, as St Paul tells us, 'being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (Phil 2:6-7).
10. Jesus insisted that service would be a distinguishing characteristic of his disciples (cf. Lk 22:16). Just as he instructed the twelve to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of him, so also he clearly explained to them that his washing of their feet was an example to them of how they should act (cf. Jn 13:12-15). It is not purely a coincidence that the priestly ministry of offering sacrifice and the diaconal ministry of washing feet both have an important resonance, and indeed their model and perfection in the Lord's Supper which itself is inseparably linked with the cross of Jesus.
11. The tradition of the Church understands the diaconate as a distinct ministry of service as having its origin in the selection by the Apostles of seven men whose responsibility was to supervise the equitable distribution of the charity of the faithful to those who were in need in the Church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6). The ministry of the deacon is referred to by St Paul who, in his letter to Timothy, lists the qualities which are to be sought in those who would exercise this ministry.<sup>7</sup> Many of the fathers of the Church, including

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7 Pope Paul VI, *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*, 1967, Introduction. AAS 59 (1967), pp. 697-704.



Irenaeus and Ignatius of Antioch, together with the early Councils of the Church refer to the deacons as ministers of the Church of God.<sup>8</sup>

12. The role of the deacon in the early centuries of the Church was directly associated with that of the bishop. Deacons preached the gospel, prepared the gifts to be offered at the altar and brought the Eucharist to the people. They continued to exercise in the community a ministry of charity which had its roots in the Eucharist.
13. ‘Up to the fifth century the Diaconate flourished in the western Church, but after this period, it experienced, for various reasons, a slow decline which ended in its surviving only as an intermediate stage for candidates preparing for priestly ordination.’<sup>9</sup>

## B. The Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate

14. The restoration of the permanent diaconate was decided upon in principle by the Council of Trent, but never actually happened. This decision was renewed by the Second Vatican Council with the

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8 cf. *Epistula ad Philadelphenses*, 4; *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos*, 12, 2; *Epistula ad Magnesios*, 6, 1; F. X. Funk (ed.), *Patres Apostolici*, Tubingae 1901; pp. 266–7; 286–7; 234–5; 244–5. Cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Syriac), capp. III, XI; A. Vööbus (ed.), *The Didascalia Apostolorum* (Syriac with English translation), CSCO, vol. I, n. 402 (t. 176), pp. 29–30; vol. II, n. 408 (t. 180), pp. 120–129; *Didascalia Apostolorum*, III, 13 (19), 1–7; F. X. Funk (ed.), *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, Paderborn 1906, I, pp. 212–216. Cf. canons 32 and 33 of the Council of Elvira (300/303): *PL* 84, 305; canons 16 (15), 18, 21 of the first Council of Arles. *CCL*, 148, pp. 12–13; canons 15, 16, and 18 of the Council of Nicea: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, bilingual edition of G. Alberigo, G.L. Dossetti, Cl. Leonardi, P. Prodi, cons. of H. Jedin, ed. Dehoniane, Bologna 1991, pp. 13–15. In the first period of Christianity, every local Church needed a number of deacons proportionate to her numbers so that they might be known and helped (cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, III, 12 (16): F. X. Funk, ed. cit., I, p. 208). In Rome Pope St Fabian (236–250) divided the City into seven zones (or ‘regiones’, later called ‘diaconiae’) in charge of each of which was placed a deacon (‘regionarius’) for the promotion of charity and assistance to the poor. Analogous diaconal structures were to be found in many cities of the east and west during the third and fourth centuries. Cf. Council of Trent, Session XXIII, *Decreta de Reformatione*, canon 17: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., p. 750.

9 cf. *Norms*, 2.

resolution that ‘it will be possible for the future to restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy’.<sup>10</sup> This restoration envisaged by the Council was subsequently given effect in various Apostolic Letters of Pope Paul VI, between 1967 and 1972, the essential norms of which have since been incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law*.<sup>11</sup>

15. Three reasons lie behind the decision to restore the permanent diaconate. They are:

15.1 ‘a desire to enrich the Church with the functions of the diaconate, which otherwise, in many regions, could only be exercised with great difficulty’;

15.2 ‘the intention of strengthening with the grace of diaconal ordination those who already exercise many of the functions of the diaconate’; and

15.3 ‘a concern to provide regions where there was a shortage of clergy, with sacred ministers.’<sup>12</sup>

16. The document goes on to state that ‘the restoration of the permanent Diaconate was in no manner intended to prejudice the meaning, role, or flourishing of the ministerial priesthood, which must always be fostered because of its indispensability’.<sup>13</sup>

## C. The Ministry of the Deacon in Diverse Pastoral Contexts

17. The diaconate, in so far as it is a grade of sacred orders, confers a character and communicates specific sacramental grace.<sup>14</sup> The deacon as an ordained minister participates in the ministry of

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<sup>10</sup> LG, 29.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Pope Paul VI, *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*, AAS 59 (1967), pp. 697–704 and *Ad Pascendum*, AAS 64, (1972) p. 540.

<sup>12</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy. Introduction to *Norms and Directory*, 2 (Hereinafter referred to as *Introduction*).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> cf. *Directory*, 7.

Christ. He is the sacramental sign in the Church of Christ the Servant.<sup>15</sup> The deacon, because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, signified by the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, exercises a service of the people of God, in the three fundamental areas of the action of the Church (word, Eucharist and charity). These different areas correspond to the three *munera* of ordained ministry, namely to teach, to sanctify and to lead. While the diaconate is essentially one and the same in every case, and the outlines of ministerial service inherent in the diaconate are very well defined, 'the concrete ways of carrying it out are diverse; these must be suggested in each case by the different pastoral situations of the single Churches.'<sup>16</sup>

18. Thus the deacon is called to proclaim the gospel and to preach the word, to instruct the people of God through the homily and through catechesis.<sup>17</sup>
19. In the liturgical and sacramental context, by virtue of his ordination, the deacon participates in the sanctifying action of God. He presides at some of the sacraments, e.g., Baptism, Marriage and at the Rite of Christian Burial. He presides at the Liturgy of the Hours; he blesses persons and things, and above all assists the bishop and the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist. At the celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon proclaims the Gospel and has the faculty to preach the homily. As an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, he distributes the Eucharist to the faithful during Mass, and administers Viaticum to the sick. It is in the Eucharistic Sacrament that the reality of the Church and its ordained ministry is most particularly expressed.<sup>18</sup>
20. In the third place, and in a pre-eminent manner, the deacon is called to be a witness of the charity of Christ, reproducing in his ministry the merciful action of the Lord, who came not to be served

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15 cf. *LG*, 29.

16 *Norms*, 9.

17 cf. *Directory*, 23–7.

18 cf. *Directory*, 28–36.

but to serve. An essential dimension of the vision of the Second Vatican Council was that the Church would engage in a new way with 'the modern world'. This vision is clearly expressed in the opening words of *Gaudium et spes*: 'The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.'<sup>19</sup> The deacon serves in the midst of the poor as a prolongation of his ministry at the Eucharistic table. In his love of preference for the poor and the sick the deacon exercises a leadership role in the community, which finds its expression in his particular care for those who suffer from infirmities and limitations whether physical or spiritual in nature.<sup>20</sup>

## **D. The Deacon as Collaborator with the Bishop and his Presbyterium**

21. According to a venerable formula of the early centuries, the deacon is ordained not to priesthood, but to ministry.<sup>21</sup> In consequence of this the deacon is called by the bishop, not to preside at the Eucharist, but to exercise the ministry that is entrusted to him. This ministry is linked into the local Church in such a way that the pastoral ministry of the deacon can be organised on a parochial, deanery or diocesan level. There are, however, certain areas of the life of the Church, such as liturgical service, collaboration in the pastoral activities of the priests, service of the poor and the marginalised, care for migrants and the pastoral care of the sick, in which the diaconal ministry finds a more specific expression. The different pastoral needs which present themselves will dictate the concrete form of the ministry according to the gifts of each deacon.
22. It falls to the bishop as pastor of the diocesan Church to determine the pastoral tasks of the deacons, and to supervise in a special way

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19 Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, 1. (Hereinafter referred to as GS.)

20 cf. *Directory*, 37–42.

21 *LG*, 29.

the pastoral cooperation between deacons and priests. The deacons must collaborate with the priests, and together they must collaborate with the bishop. Furthermore the joint ministry of deacons and lay people, who have been entrusted with a specific pastoral mission, can have a very beneficial effect for the new evangelisation which is a central task of the Church's mission. It is vital that, in each pastoral situation, the interaction between ordained ministers, including deacons and lay people, be carefully planned and carried out. The deacons will exercise their ministry in hierarchical communion with the bishop and with his priests.

23. From the disciplinary point of view, by virtue of his diaconal ordination, the deacon is incorporated into the local church. The incardination is not something purely accidental but is characterised as a permanent link of service to a portion of the people of God. It implies a belonging to the Church on a juridical, affective and spiritual level, and the application to ministerial service.<sup>22</sup>
24. It is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop, in consultation with the diocesan pastoral council, to determine whether it is appropriate to establish the permanent diaconate in his diocese, taking into account the needs of the concrete pastoral situation of the local Church.
25. In a diocese in which the permanent diaconate is restored, it is the responsibility of the bishop, from time to time, to prepare and revise diocesan norms, based on the National Directory and the experience that has been acquired.<sup>23</sup>
26. In all that relates to pastoral leadership, the exercise of divine worship, and the works of the apostolate, a deacon who is incardinated in an institute of consecrated life will exercise his ministry subject to the authority of the bishop, while remaining

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22 cf. *Directory*, 8.

23 cf. *Directory*, 16.

subject to his own superiors, and remaining faithful to the discipline of the community to which he belongs. In the event that a deacon is transferred to another community in a different diocese, the superior must present the deacon to the ordinary, with the purpose of obtaining from him the necessary faculties to exercise his ministry.<sup>24</sup>

## **E. The Discernment of Vocations to the Permanent Diaconate**

27. The vocation to the diaconate comes from the call of God, and from the response of the one who feels himself to be called, confirmed by the public choice of the Church, and sacramental ordination. Candidates for the permanent diaconate must be persons who are proven to have:

- a good general familiarity with the Gospel, and a reasonable understanding of the Church's mission
- a well founded spirituality and sacramental life
- a capacity to read and to listen, intelligently and critically
- an established capacity to engage and to work constructively with others
- a significant level of personal freedom, and the absence of any significant compulsions or addictions
- a love of the Church
- a proven readiness to serve others, even at some personal cost.<sup>25</sup>

28. The discernment of the authenticity of a person's vocation to the permanent diaconate is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop, who will consult with and listen to the community of origin of the said candidate. The fact that somebody aspires to the permanent diaconate does not in itself guarantee that he will be selected.

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24 cf. *Directory*, 4.

25 cf. *Directory*, 30-2.

29. The diocesan bishop in the exercise of his authority is the person responsible for admitting candidates to the permanent diaconate, for supervising the exercise of this ministry and for the termination of the exercise of the diaconal functions when this is required for specific concrete reasons.
30. It must be borne in mind that the diaconate is a vocation. Candidates for the permanent diaconate must already be actively involved in a Christian community, in which they have given evidence of their capacity for and commitment to pastoral ministry. In keeping with the norms of canon law, selection should be based exclusively on the qualities of the candidate and on the needs of the pastoral ministry in the diocese, and must never be seen as a reward.
31. Ordination to the permanent diaconate may be conferred on celibate men or on married men. The permanent deacon, who is celibate for the sake of the kingdom of God, will live his ministry with a generous heart. A married candidate for ordination as a permanent deacon should be in stable union, which is characterised by love for his wife and his children, which is a sign of his care for all. His wife and his children are called to accept and support him in his ministry as a permanent deacon.
32. The minimum age for admission to the permanent diaconate is twenty-five years for a celibate candidate, and thirty-five years for a married candidate. The maximum age is sixty years. In accordance with the requirements of canon law, younger candidates who are accepted into formation for the permanent diaconate will reside for at least three years in a special house of formation which will be designated and approved by the episcopal conference.<sup>26</sup>
33. When an applicant for the diaconate is a married man, he must have the consent of his wife, and have been already married for at least five years, in order to ensure that his candidacy poses no threat to the stability of his family. It would also be preferable that his adult

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<sup>26</sup> cf. *Norms*, 50.

children be consulted. The candidate's wife should be a woman of faith, whose human and Christian qualities complement those of her husband. In this way, far from there being any conflict between the candidate's marriage and his ministry, it will be clear that his ministry is facilitated and indeed enriched by his marriage.

34. A permanent deacon may be engaged in any career or employment which is consistent with his identity as a deacon, and which does not conflict with the exercise of his diaconal ministry. In principle a deacon should be in a position to sustain an adequate standard of living for himself and, in so far as it is applicable, for his family.
35. Care must be taken prior to the ordination of a candidate to ensure that there are no specific canonical impediments or irregularities. In keeping with traditional ecclesiastical discipline, except where a dispensation is granted, a deacon once ordained may not contract a marriage.
36. Deacons must not become directly involved in political activities. Only with the permission of their bishop may they become actively involved in trade union activities.

## **F. The Formation of Deacons**

37. The *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* envisages a formation programme of at least three years duration, prior to which the candidate will have completed a propaedeutic period. Among the basic criteria for such a programme, the *Basic Norms* indicate that such a programme must:
  - integrate in a harmonious manner the different areas of formation (human, spiritual, theological and pastoral)
  - be theologically well founded
  - have a specific pastoral finality
  - be adapted to local needs and pastoral programmes.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Norms*, 55.



### **i. Propaedeutic Period**

38. Prior to his formal selection for the three-year formation programme, and his liturgical admission as a candidate for diaconate, a man must complete a propaedeutic period, under the guidance of a director of formation who will make a recommendation to the bishop regarding the suitability of the candidate. The programme of the propaedeutic period, usually, should not be focused on an academic course, 'but rather meetings for prayer, instructions, moments of reflection and comparison directed towards ensuring the objective nature of the vocational discernment, according to a well structured plan'.<sup>28</sup> Even at this early stage it is preferable that the wives of married applicants should be involved, and that the willingness of each one to support her husband in his formation and future ministry should be established.
  
39. The director of formation appointed by the bishop will have the overall responsibility for accompanying the aspirants during this propaedeutic period, and will also maintain regular contact with the family of each candidate and with the parish clergy in his parish of origin. It will be the responsibility of the director of formation to make a recommendation to the diocesan bishop as to the suitability of the aspirant for admission among the candidates for the diaconate.
  
40. Each aspirant will be assigned a personal tutor, chosen by the director of formation from among the priests and deacons of proven experience, and appointed by the bishop (or the major religious superior in the case of candidates belonging to religious congregations). It will be the task of the tutor to accompany the candidate throughout the propaedeutic period, and to collaborate with the formation director in the programming of the different formation activities and in the preparation of the judgement to be presented to the bishop (or competent major superior), regarding the aspirant's suitability for admission into formation.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 41.

41. Each aspirant will have a spiritual director, approved by the bishop, to whom he will have regular recourse.
42. The pastoral accompaniment of the aspirant during the propaedeutic period will be the responsibility of the parish priest of the parish to which the aspirant has been assigned for the duration of this period.
43. The aspirants will together constitute a formation community, which will help them to develop the habits of working and praying together, and which will both support and challenge them during this time of discernment.
44. It is appropriate that the Rite of Admission to Candidacy be celebrated at the beginning of the period of formation. Given the significance of this rite, it should be celebrated publicly. It should also be preceded by some time of retreat.

**ii. The Objectives of the Formation Programme**

45. The formation programme for permanent deacons is significantly more intensive than the formation programme for lay ministers. It will have a duration of not less than three years, over and above the propaedeutic period. 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.<sup>29</sup>

**iii. The Content of the Formation Programme**

46. The formation programme must incorporate the four elements of human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation. While each of these elements is essential, not all will require the same amount of

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<sup>29</sup> The nature and implementation of the formation programme tends to vary depending on the context in which the deacon will exercise his ministry. In countries where a significant proportion of deacons is engaged in full-time ministry, the formation programme tends to be both longer and more intensive.

time or the same kind of structure. A more detailed overview of the proposed programme is given in Appendix 1.

#### **iv. The Implementation of the Formation Programme**

47. The model of formation which would be most suitable for Ireland would be a three-year cyclical programme, geared specifically to the diaconate. There are some arguments in favour of linking the formation of deacons into existing academic programmes, but there are also difficulties associated with this, not least of which would be the lack of a specific focus on ministerial formation. A programme which is specifically oriented towards the diaconate can be organised in such a way as to facilitate the participation of both candidates and their wives, and in such a way as to facilitate the development of a diaconal community.
48. The coordination of the formation programme and the supervision of the whole work of education in its various dimensions will be the responsibility of the director of formation. He will be a priest or deacon chosen for his lively faith, his pastoral experience, his wisdom and his solid theological and pedagogical competence. The director of formation will be nominated by the bishop (or the competent major superior). Where circumstances require it, the bishops of a region or a number of major superiors may choose to nominate one director of formation to coordinate a single formation programme to cater for all the candidates under their jurisdiction.
49. Each candidate will be assigned a tutor chosen by the director of formation from among the priests and deacons of proven experience, and appointed by the bishop (or the major religious superior in the case of candidates belonging to religious congregations). It will be the task of the tutor to accompany the candidate throughout his formation and to collaborate with the formation director in the programming of the different formation activities and in the preparation of the judgement of suitability to be presented to the bishop (or competent major superior).

50. Each candidate will have a spiritual director, approved by the bishop, to whom he will have regular recourse.
51. The academic dimension of the formation programme will be under the supervision of a course director, who will report to the director of formation.
52. The formation programme will be implemented simultaneously on a number of levels:

52.1 *Diocesan or Inter-diocesan level*

The academic formation of candidates for the permanent diaconate may be carried out through the use of suitable programmes in existing institutions. Where special schools for the theological formation of deacons are instituted, this will be done in such a way that 'the number of hours of lectures and seminars be not less than a thousand in the space of three years'.<sup>30</sup> In so far as there is an academic dimension to the pastoral, spiritual, or human formation, these will also be incorporated into this structure.

All formation courses intended to prepare candidates for the permanent diaconate should have the accreditation of a national training authority for the diaconate, answerable to the Irish Episcopal Conference. Consideration should also be given to having courses accredited for an award of the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College, Maynooth; St Mary's University College (a College of the Queen's University of Belfast) and/or HETAC.

52.2 *The Level of Parish Community*

Formation in the practical aspects of liturgy and pastoral ministry will take place in the parish to which the candidate is assigned for the three years of his formation. The parish should be carefully chosen with a view to the level of personal

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<sup>30</sup> *Norms*, 82.

support and pastoral guidance the candidate might expect to receive. The candidate need not necessarily be assigned to his parish of residence. For practical reasons he should be assigned to a parish which is not too distant from his home.

**v. Human Formation**

53. The nature of human formation is such that, for the most part, it will not be the subject of a formal written syllabus. It will take place in the context of the relationships facilitated by classroom contact, by parish ministry, by the diaconal community itself and within the candidate's own family. It will be the responsibility of the tutor to meet regularly with each candidate to explore his progress in these areas, as well as in the other areas of formation. He will also establish that the candidate has regular recourse to a competent spiritual director.

**vi. Evaluation**

54. The progress of each candidate will be evaluated, in each of the four areas of formation, with a view to establishing his readiness to progress to the various ministries and to ordination as a deacon.

55. Evaluation of the candidate from an academic point of view will take into account his performance in the classroom context, the satisfactory completion of regular assignments and the feedback from his tutor. The fundamental courses at least will conclude with an examination and at the end of the three years there will be a comprehensive examination. The purpose of this examination will be to ascertain if the candidate has in fact reached the objectives of the component courses undertaken. It will also evaluate his overall comprehension of 'the mystery of our religion' (1 Tim 3:16).

56. In the other areas of formation, evaluation will be the responsibility, in the first place, of the director of formation. Apart from his periodic meetings with the candidate, and his own observations of the candidate's progress, he will periodically seek the opinions of those most directly associated with the candidate during the period of formation (e.g. parish priest in the parish of placement, other key

members of the parish team, the candidate's tutor). The director of formation will be sensitive to any possible conflicts which may arise for the candidate between the responsibilities of the diaconate and the responsibilities of marriage. For this reason, an essential element of the role of the director of formation, from time to time, will be to meet the candidate and his wife together, preferably in a family environment, and to discuss openly with them how the formation process and the proposed future commitment impinge on their life as a couple (and – where applicable – as parents).

57. On the basis of the various reports he has received, and of his own judgement, the director of formation will report periodically on his progress to the candidate's bishop. He will ultimately make recommendations to the bishop regarding the candidate's progress towards ministries and towards diaconate itself.

#### **vii. Other Academic Programmes and Courses**

*Applicants who have completed third level studies in theology*

58. From time to time, and especially in the early stages of the restoration of the diaconate, candidates will be presented who have already completed a third level degree or diploma in theology. A case may be made for dispensing such candidates from some or all of the academic courses in the diaconal formation programme. It will be important, however, to:

- ascertain the extent to which the degree or diploma course already taken has covered, in a manner which is oriented to pastoral ministry, the academic material which is judged necessary for ordination to the diaconate
- take account of the fact that academic formation, while undoubtedly central to the formation process, is not in itself sufficient. The pastoral, spiritual and human formation cannot be ignored, and time is an element of that process of formation.

### **viii. Ongoing formation and further studies after Diaconal Formation**

59. Ongoing formation should be provided for all deacons and participation in such programmes should be a condition of their continuing involvement in diaconal ministry. This ongoing formation will include elements of the four categories of formation to which reference has already been made. Deacons will take part in an annual retreat and in such other spiritual activities as will help them to maintain and deepen their personal and ministerial spirituality. In particular, emphasis in ongoing formation will be placed on the study of the scriptures, and on familiarisation with the social teaching of the Church and its implications for the concrete circumstances of the diocese or region in which the deacons are exercising their ministry.
60. Among the candidates for diaconate, there will inevitably be some who have both the inclination and the capacity for further studies (e.g. to degree or post-graduate level) in theology and in related disciplines. It is recommended that, once they have completed the diaconal formation programme, and begun to minister as deacons, such further studies should be encouraged just as they would be where priests are concerned.

## **G. The Link between the Conferral of Ministries and Ordination as a Deacon**

61. In the course of the period of formation, and prior to diaconal ordination, the candidate will make a formal request of his bishop to receive the ministries of lector and acolyte. The director of formation will indicate to the candidate when it would be appropriate to make these requests. In this manner, the candidate will gradually become accustomed to the exercise of the ministries of the Word and of the Altar. The appropriate intervals between the conferring of one ministry and another should be observed.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> cf. *Norms*, 57–59.

62. Ordination to the diaconate will take place when the period of formation has been concluded.
63. In consultation with the director of formation, the candidate will present to the bishop a handwritten petition, in which he makes the request for ordination as a deacon, making clear that this request is with full freedom of choice, desire and will and without any compulsion of force or fear. The candidate's baptismal and confirmation certificates, together with evidence that he has received the ministries of lector and acolyte, and certification that he has satisfactorily completed the appropriate studies, must accompany the application. If he is married, the candidate should also enclose his certificate of canonical marriage with his application, together with the written consent of his wife, according to the prescribed form.<sup>32</sup>
64. The bishop, taking account of the recommendations of the director of formation and of the formation team, and of those others whom he sees fit to consult, will make the final decision regarding the suitability of the candidate. If the candidate is celibate, he will publicly make his commitment to life-long celibacy before his ordination. As a general rule, ordination to the diaconate will take place during the parish Sunday Eucharist.

## **H. The Entrusting of a Pastoral Mission**

65. The deacon, ordained for the service of the diocesan church, must faithfully carry out the tasks entrusted to him by his bishop. These tasks will be carried out according to the pastoral plan established by the bishop, taking account of the pastoral needs of the diocese, as well as the personal, family and professional circumstances of the deacon himself. The bishop will determine, by means of a canonical mission, the areas of ministry in which the deacon is to become involved. The bishop will designate a priest as the person ultimately responsible for the areas of activity in which the deacon

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<sup>32</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1050.



is engaged. It is vital, therefore, that the mission of each deacon should be specified in a concrete manner by the bishop, and that no deacon remains without a mission which has been specifically entrusted to him by the bishop.

66. While the deacon will be engaged in certain specific ministries, he remains a deacon at all times and in every situation including his professional life. For this reason he must always be careful to observe the obligations of justice and the teaching of the Church, and to maintain the fullest communion with his bishop. The service of the people of God must always be a priority in his life.
67. As a general rule, permanent deacons will provide for their own needs and for the needs of their families by the exercise of their profession. This norm will be applied in each case, taking into account:
  - a. the extent of the deacon's commitment to pastoral ministry
  - b. his state of life (married, celibate, widower)
  - c. his personal circumstances (e.g. unemployment).

Taking into account the rights and duties of deacons and of their families, the bishop may decide, where it is appropriate, the extent to which the deacon may be supported by the parish or other pastoral agency in which he is involved.

68. Since the vocation to the permanent diaconate is a distinct vocation, the stability of this order indicates that it is only in very rare cases and for particular reasons that a permanent deacon who is celibate or who has been widowed should subsequently be ordained to the priesthood. Where it appears that such circumstances exist, the decision rests with the diocesan bishop following due consultation with the appropriate congregations of the Roman Curia.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> cf. *Directory*, 5.

## Programme for the Formation of Candidates for the Permanent Diaconate

*The prescribed propaedeutic period shall have been completed before a man is accepted into this three-year formation programme, and before he is liturgically admitted among the candidates for the permanent diaconate.*

### *A. Doctrinal Formation*

#### **1. Scripture**

##### *a. Aims of the Course*

- i. To develop the habit of consistent reading of biblical texts and serious commentary.
- ii. To internalise the word of God as the basis for prayer and preaching.
- iii. To discover the informative and the performative dynamics of scripture and to explore the transformative dynamic of God's word.
- iv. To achieve wisdom through, and about, the word of God.

##### *b. Content of the Course*

###### *i. General Introduction to Scripture*

- The central role of sacred scripture in the life of the Church and the individual
- How to use the Bible, find the books, use the footnotes and cross references
- How to use dictionaries, commentaries, maps
- General introduction to inspiration, canonicity, interpretation and criticism
- Problems of fundamentalism, rationalism and quarrying for proof texts
- Outline of history and geography – the main epochs and their locations.

- ii. The Synoptic Gospels
- iii. Genre and Background of the Pentateuch, Historical Books, Prophets and Wisdom Books
- iv. Study of selected texts from the Pentateuch, Historical Books, Prophets and Wisdom Literature
- v. The Johannine Literature
- vi. The Pauline Corpus
- vii. Practical direction in the actualisation of scripture: its pastoral use, especially in preaching and leading people in prayer and reflection, e.g. in *lectio divina*.

## 2. Dogmatic Theology

### a. *Aims of the Course*

- i. To initiate students into the meaning of the Church's faith so that they will be able to 'proclaim, in a context like this, the changeless Gospel of Christ and make it credible to the legitimate demands of reason'.<sup>34</sup>
- ii. To enable students to sense and to grasp the total newness and divine freshness of Catholic faith by perceiving first the central core and content of the faith in the mystery of Christ. It is the light of this mystery that must bathe all the individual tracts of dogmatic theology.
- iii. To enable students to grasp how this mystery is the true meaning and purpose of person, society and history.<sup>35</sup>
- iv. To enable students to appreciate how Christian faith is always old and always new, like a spring of water.
- v. To enable students to grasp that all dogmas of the Church's teaching are contained within the one great Trinitarian and Christological dogma, 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8, 16).
- vi. To familiarise students with the great texts of the Church's faith, e.g., Tanner, Neuner and Dupuis, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the life and culture of the local church, so that in the future they will know where to find required knowledge.

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<sup>34</sup> *Pastores dabo vobis*, 51. The formation of candidates for the permanent diaconate should be analogous to that of candidates for the priesthood.

<sup>35</sup> cf. *GS*, 22–4.

b. *Content of the Course (should include the following tracts)*<sup>36</sup>

i. *Fundamental Dogmatic Theology:*

- Christ as the Mediator and Fullness of all Revelation
- The transmission of Divine Revelation via Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, and the interrelationship of these three<sup>37</sup>
- The Theology of Faith and of Creeds.

ii. *Particular Dogmatic Theology:*

- Christology
- Creation, Original Sin and Redemption
- Trinity
- The Holy Spirit
- Eschatology
- The Mystery of the Church as the Sacrament of Christ
- The Principles of Catholic Ecumenism
- Mariology
- The Sacraments in particular
- The Eucharist
- The Theology of Orders
- Grace.

### 3. Moral Theology

a. *Aims of the Course*

- i. To help candidates to mature in their understanding of the implications of faith in Jesus for Christian living in its many dimensions.

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<sup>36</sup> A few observations seem to be in order. The unifying theme of the first two tracts is that of Christ as the Mediator and the fullness of all revelation. This seems to be demanded by the logic of *Optatam totius* where the Mystery of Christ is proposed as the essential organising centre of the whole of theology and as the royal door to all the areas (cf. 16).

The same principle is carried through in the subsequent tracts with the conviction that theology can only perform its task by circular repetitions of that which is ever greater. Parcelling it out in individual isolated tracts is its certain death.

Similarly, care should be taken to ensure that the teaching of dogmatic theology and the teaching of liturgy are well integrated, and that no artificial gulf exists between the content of faith and the manner in which that faith is celebrated in the community of the Church.

<sup>37</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 10.

- ii. To help candidates to develop the theoretical skills which will enable them to exercise a prophetic ministry within the community of the diocese, and particularly in the service of those who are marginalised.
- iii. Moral theology 'should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world'.<sup>38</sup>

*b. Content of the Course*

*i. Fundamental Moral*

- Introduction to Moral Theology
- Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology: conversion; moral truth and law; conscience; freedom and obedience; vocation; virtue
- History of Moral Theology.

*ii. Particular Moral*

- Marriage and Family Ethics: the sacramentality of marriage: 'showing forth to the whole Church and society the communion of the family'<sup>39</sup>
- Bioethics: the meaning of persons; principles governing the right to life and bodily integrity; assisted human procreation; particular questions today; the principles governing their operation
- Justice: the virtue; kinds of justice; restitution; justice and mercy
- The Social Teaching of the Church: history and sources; principles; applications.

**4. Liturgy**

*a. Aims of the Course*

- i. To provide the candidate an opportunity to study the worship of the Church under its theological, historical and pastoral aspects.

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<sup>38</sup> *Optatam totius*, 16.  
<sup>39</sup> *Norms*, 68.

- ii. To provide training in liturgy to enable the candidate to be the minister of word (gospel, preaching, liturgy of the hours), the minister of sacrament (baptism, marriage), of funerals and at the Eucharist.

*b. Content of the Course*

- i. The principles of worship: ritual and symbol; theology of liturgy; elements and dynamics of worship; liturgical teaching of Vatican II.
- ii. The Eucharist: origins and development; shape and texts.
- iii. Word and sacrament: ministry of proclaiming and preaching; sacraments and rites of passage in the life of the Church.
- iv. Liturgy and time: liturgical year; liturgy of the hours.
- v. Liturgical leadership and practical skills.

**5. Ecclesiastical History**

*a. Aims of the Course*

- i. To develop a sense of the historical nature of the Church.
- ii. To appreciate the influence of historical, social and cultural factors on liturgy, philosophy, theological formulations and the institutional and charismatic developments in the Church and to appreciate the weaknesses inherent in an ahistorical understanding of the Church and her faith.
- iii. To give an insight into the main divisions and the ecumenical aspirations of Christians.

*b. Content of the Course*

- i. The early Church from New Testament times to Chalcedon: the emergence of the Church from a Jewish background into the Greco-Roman world, the persecutions and the Christological/Trinitarian debates leading to the early councils.
- ii. The Fathers: who they are, their providential role in formulating the faith, inculturating the faith, 'the originality of what they accomplished',<sup>40</sup> their great themes and lasting relevance.

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40 Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 41.

- iii. The East-West Schism (the issues) and the Medieval Reform (general outline).
- iv. The Reformation: the issues; the resulting traditions; Council of Trent.
- v. Vatican I and Vatican II: the Church coming to terms with the post-French Revolution world of the Enlightenment and the great missionary expansion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- vi. Appreciation of history as leading to the future and developing an openness to the new developments in the life of the Church in the world, seeing past, present and future under the guidance of the Lord of history.

## **6. Canon Law**

### *a. Aims of the Course*

- i. To help candidates to develop an appreciation of the Church in its prophetic, priestly and pastoral dimensions as a society of human beings established by Christ, and to understand their own position as ordained ministers in the Church.
- ii. To help the candidates to apply the theology of marriage to the celebration of the sacrament, and to deal with all the relevant administrative aspects.

### *b. Content of the Course*

- i. General introduction to the law of the Church.
- ii. Canon Law relating to the diaconate: the relationship of the deacon to his bishop; the law relating to incardination.
- iii. Canon Law as it applies to the celebration of the liturgy and the administration of the sacraments; with particular reference to baptism, eucharist, marriage, the pastoral care of the sick and the celebration of funerals; the implications of civil law for the celebration of marriage.

## **7. Spirituality**

### *a. Aims of the Course*

- i. To help candidates to explore the rich heritage of Christian spirituality, so that they can deepen their own relationship with God, and so that they can effectively accompany others in their journey of faith.

- ii. To ensure that the life-giving link between theology, spirituality, liturgy and action is adverted to and nourished.

b. *Content of the Course*

- i. Prayer, personal and liturgical.
- ii. Conversion; the virtues; growth in holiness.
- iii. The history of spirituality. A particular emphasis on traditions which emphasise themes such as charity, justice, service and simplicity of lifestyle, would be appropriate for candidates for the diaconate.

*Apart from formal lectures, the work of academic formation will involve the student's personal reading, meetings with his assigned tutor and periodic completion of assignments.*

### B. Pastoral Formation

1. The major part of the pastoral formation programme will take place in the parish, under the guidance and direction of a named priest. It will be tailored to the individual, and will take account of the instituted ministries received. Provision will be made for structured reflection on pastoral action and experience.
2. Among the areas to be included in the 'practical internship' are the following:
  - i. The care of the poor and the work of justice. Familiarity with and involvement in the work of the SVP and other agencies which give effect to the Church's social concern.
  - ii. The pastoral care of prisoners and their families.
  - iii. The pastoral care of the sick at home and in hospital.
  - iv. Participation in the communal prayer and the liturgical life of the community.
  - v. Participation in the building up of the community, through effective and appropriate involvement in small groups, committees, movements and voluntary bodies.



- vi. Proclamation of the word of God in the varied contexts of ministerial service: kerygma, catechesis, preparation for the sacraments.
  - vii. The pastoral care of the bereaved.
3. There will inevitably be some crossover between pastoral formation and human formation. One example of this is the way in which enhanced self-awareness and self-understanding will help the candidate to develop the skills necessary for pastoral counselling. Deacons should not be encouraged to think of themselves as counsellors. It is important, however, that candidates be assisted, both in theory and in practice, in developing the pastoral and personal skills which will enable them to listen respectfully and sensitively to people and to respond appropriately.

### *C. Spiritual Formation*

1. Spiritual formation is ‘the heart and unifying centre of every Christian formation’.<sup>41</sup> This dimension of the formation of deacons is not divorced from academic formation. Indeed certain aspects of spiritual formation will form a distinct element within the programme of doctrinal formation outlined above.
2. The spiritual formation of the future deacon will take account of his previous experience of spiritual life, and will seek to affirm and strengthen it, so as to impress on it the specific traits of diaconal spirituality. It will be integrated into study days and into all meetings of the future deacons. It will find its particular focus in monthly and annual retreats, in ongoing spiritual direction and in spiritual reading.
3. The deacon must be formed to become an icon of Christ the Servant. He will be helped, through prayer, spiritual direction and practical experience; ‘to acquire those attitudes which are

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<sup>41</sup> *Norms*, 71.

specifically diaconal, though not exclusively so, such as simplicity of heart, total giving of self and disinterest for self, humble and helpful love for the brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the suffering and the most needy, the choice of a lifestyle of sharing and poverty'.<sup>42</sup>

4. All ministry within the Church flows from the Eucharist. In a particular way the capacity to love of the future deacon finds its roots in the Eucharist, and his 'service of the poor is a logical consequence of service of the altar'.<sup>43</sup> Those who are being formed for the diaconate will, therefore, be encouraged to participate frequently, and daily if possible, in the celebration of the Eucharist and, within that context, to give adequate appreciation to the sacrament of Penance.
5. Since the deacon must preach the Word of God with faith, he will be helped to gain a deeper appreciation of the Word of God and 'to seek in it constant nourishment for his spiritual life', both through careful study and the daily exercise of *lectio divina*.<sup>44</sup>
6. Particular emphasis will be given to the responsibility of the deacon to pray in the name of the Church and for the Church. The meaning of the Liturgy of the Hours will be explored, and the future deacons will be initiated into this form of prayer. It will form an important element of all meetings of the future deacons.<sup>45</sup>
7. The vocation of the future deacon to service is incarnated in a particular way in his participation in the ministry of the Church. He will be helped to develop a spirituality of obedience and fraternal communion, in such a way that his future life and ministry is guaranteed to have an authentically ecclesial character.<sup>46</sup>

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42 *Norms*, 72.

43 *Norms*, 73.

44 cf. *Norms*, 74.

45 cf. *Norms*, 75.

46 cf. *Norms*, 76.

8. Even if the wives of married candidates are unable to participate in other aspects of the formation programme, they should be encouraged and facilitated in developing a growing awareness of their husbands' vocation and the implications of this for their own vocation and mission as wives. Similarly, the children of future deacons should be provided with appropriate opportunities to develop an understanding of the ministry of the deacon.<sup>47</sup>

#### *D. Human Formation*

1. The Holy Spirit can and often does act effectively in spite of human weakness. Pastoral ministry is, nonetheless, a ministry of person to person. The personal dimension of ministry can be significant in the outcome of pastoral activity, and also in the life of the minister himself.
2. During the course of the formation programme, candidates will be developing the theoretical and practical skills necessary for the exercise of the diaconate. They should also be maturing in faith. The purpose of the human formation element of the programme will be to ensure that each candidate also develops the personal skills to:
  - i. balance the needs of his own family with the requirements of ministry
  - ii. develop and maintain appropriate pastoral relationships
  - iii. communicate and work constructively and effectively with others
  - iv. observe appropriate boundaries
  - v. 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.

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<sup>47</sup> cf. *Norms*, 78.

3. Much of this human formation happens in and through the interpersonal 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.