

## Permanent Deacons in the Catholic Church

### What is a Deacon?

- The first order of Holy Orders
- Associated with the bishop
- Three-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament and Charity
- Word – proclamation of the Gospel, preaching and the Christmas and Easter Proclamations, catechesis
- Sacrament – Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion, can baptise, conduct funerals and witness marriages
- Charity – historically associated with service to the poor; the social doctrine of the Church

### Types of Deacons

- Transitional – intermediate step to the priesthood
- Permanent – a permanent state; open to married men

### The Early Church of the Apostles

- An order created to help the Apostles with “service”.
- Title derives from the Greek diakonos (διάκονος) a servant
- The appointment of the seven in Acts 6
- A Church of bishops (apostles) and deacons - Philippians

### The Early Church after the Apostles

- The Didache – late first/early second century describes early Christian structure of bishops and deacons
- Antioch is where we first see current structures emerge of a single bishop surrounded by a group of presbyters and deacons
- Augustine of Antioch – “I exhort you to do all things in the harmony of God. The bishop having primacy after the model of God and the priests after the model of the council of Apostles, and the deacons (who are so dear to me) having entrusted to them the ministry of Jesus Christ” 100 AD

### The Church at Rome

- The early Roman Church had a maximum of seven deacons to echo the seven in Acts 6
- St Lawrence 3<sup>rd</sup> century famously defies the Emperor – the treasure of the Church is the poor. He swiftly follows Pope Sixtus to martyrdom

### The Church in the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation

- Around the time of the Council of Trent, the diaconate lost its status as a distinct order and became a transitional step to the priesthood
- Minor orders – porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte and subdeacon
- Major orders – deacon, priest and bishop

## Vatican II

- Revived interest in the permanent diaconate dates back at least to the time of World War II.
- In 1957 Pope Pius XII spoke favourable of a restored permanent diaconate, although concluding that "the time is not yet ripe"
- The Council recommended "With the consent of the Roman Pontiff, this diaconate can, in the future, be conferred upon men of more mature age, even upon those living in the married state. It may also be conferred upon suitable young men, for whom the law of celibacy must remain intact." Lumen Gentium §29
- Minor orders abolished and replaced with Lector and Acolyte
- Pope Paul VI in his 1967 Motu Proprio, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* allowed the formation of permanent deacons if the local bishop saw a need in their diocese.
- First deacon in Southwark ordained in 1975 and now has about 90 deacons, but situations vary widely between dioceses.
- 50% of deacons are in North America, 30% in Europe and rest elsewhere

## Formation

- The selection process for deacons varies among dioceses but will include a series of interviews and psychological assessment
- There is a propædeutic year before formal studies for preparation and further discernment
- Three years of studies resulting in a foundation degree.