

## CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY

### *DIRECTORIUM PRO MINISTERIO ET VITA DIACONORUM PERMANENTIUM*

#### **DIRECTORY FOR THE MINISTRY AND LIFE OF PERMANENT DEACONS**

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## 1

### THE JURIDICAL STATUS OF THE DEACON

#### *Sacred Minister*

1. The origin of the diaconate is the consecration and mission of Christ, in which the deacon is called to share.(34) Through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, he is constituted a sacred minister and a member of the hierarchy. This condition determines his theological and juridical status in the Church.

#### *Incardination*

2. At the time of admission to the diaconate, all candidates shall be required to express clearly in writing their intention to serve the Church(35) for the rest of their lives in a specific territorial or personal circumscription, in an institute of consecrated life or in a society of apostolic life which has the faculty to incardinate.(36) Written acceptance of a request for incardination is reserved to him who has authority to incardinate and determines the candidate's Ordinary.(37)

Incardination is a juridical bond. It has ecclesiological and spiritual significance in as much as it expresses the ministerial dedication of the deacon to the Church.

3. A deacon already incardinated into one ecclesiastical circumscription may be incardinated into another in accordance with the norm of law.(38) Written authorization must be obtained from both the bishop *a quo* and the bishop *ad quem* in the case of deacons who, for just reasons, wish to exercise their ministry in a diocese other than that into which they were incardinated. Bishops should encourage deacons of their own dioceses who wish to place themselves either permanently or for a specified time period at the service of other particular Churches with a shortage of clergy. They should also support in a particular way those who, after specific and careful preparation, seek to dedicate themselves to the *missio ad gentes*. The terms on which deacons afford such service should be duly regulated by contract and agreed upon by the bishops concerned.(39)

It is a duty incumbent on the bishop to care for the deacons of his diocese with particular solicitude.(40) This is to be discharged either personally or through a priest acting as his delegate. Special pastoral care should always be shown to those in particular difficulties because of personal circumstances.

4. The deacon incardinated into an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life shall exercise ministry under the jurisdiction of the bishop in all that pertains to the pastoral ministry, acts of public worship and the apostolate. He is, however, also subject to his own superiors' competence and to the discipline of his community.(41) When a deacon is transferred to a community in another diocese, the superior shall be obliged to present him to the local Ordinary and obtain permission for him to

exercise his ministry in accordance with the procedures agreed upon, between the bishop and the superior.

5. The specific vocation to the permanent Diaconate presupposes the stability of this Order. Hence ordination to the Priesthood of non-married or widowed deacons must always be a very rare exception, and only for special and grave reasons. The decision of admission to the Order of Presbyters rests with the diocesan bishop, unless impediments exist which are reserved to the Holy See.(42) Given the exceptional nature of such cases, the diocesan bishop should consult the Congregation for Catholic Education with regard to the intellectual and theological preparation of the candidate, and also the Congregation for the Clergy concerning the programme of priestly formation and the aptitude of the candidate to the priestly ministry.

6. By virtue of their ordination, deacons are united to each other by a sacramental fraternity. They are all dedicated to the same purpose — building up the Body of Christ — in union with the Supreme Pontiff(43) and subject to the authority of the bishop. Each deacon should have a sense of being joined with his fellow deacons in a bond of charity, prayer, obedience to their bishops, ministerial zeal and collaboration.

With the permission of the bishop and in his presence or that of his delegate, it would be opportune for deacons periodically to meet to discuss their ministry, exchange experiences, advance formation and encourage each other in fidelity. Such encounters might also be of interest to candidates to the permanent Diaconate. The local Ordinary should foster a "spirit of communion" among deacons ministering in his diocese and avoid any form of "corporatism" which was a factor in the decline and eventual extinction of the permanent Diaconate in earlier centuries.

7. The Diaconate brings with it a series of rights and duties as foreseen by canons 273-283 of the *Code of Canon Law* with regard to clerics in general and deacons in particular.

8. The rite of ordination includes a promise of obedience to the bishops: "Do you promise respect and obedience to me and to my successors?".(44) In making this promise to his bishop the deacon takes Christ, obedient par excellence (cf. *Phil 2: 5-11*), as his model. He shall conform his own obedience in listening (*Hb 10, 5ff; John 4:34*) and in radical availability (cf. *Lk 9:54ff and 10:1ff*) to the obedience of Christ. He shall therefore dedicate himself to working in complete conformity with the will of the Father and devote himself to the Church by means of complete availability.(45) In a spirit of prayer, with which he should be permeated, the deacon, following the example of the Lord who gave himself "unto death, death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*), should deepen every day his total gift of self. This vision of obedience also predisposes acceptance of a more concrete detailing of the obligation assumed by the deacon at ordination, in accordance with the provisions of law: "Unless excused by a lawful impediment, clerics are obliged to accept and faithfully fulfil the office committed to them by their Ordinary".(46) This obligation is based on participation in the bishop's ministry conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders and by canonical mission. The extent of obedience and availability is determined by the diaconal ministry itself and by all that is objectively, immediately and directly in relation to it.

The Deacon receives office by a decree of the bishop. In his decree of appointment, the bishop shall ascribe duties to the deacon which are congruent with his personal abilities, his celibate or married state, his formation, age, and with his spiritually valid aspirations. The territory in which his ministry is to be exercised or those to whom he is to minister should be clearly specified. The decree must also indicate whether the office conferred is to be discharged on a partial or full-time basis and the priest who has the "cura animarum" where the deacon's ministry is exercised, must

be named.

9. Clerics are obliged to live in the bond of fraternity and of prayer, collaborate with each other and with the bishop to recognise and foster the mission of the faithful in the Church and in the world<sup>(47)</sup> and live in a simple, sober manner which is open to fraternal giving and sharing.<sup>(48)</sup>

10. Unlike deacons to be ordained to the priesthood,<sup>(49)</sup> who are bound by the same norms as priests in the matter,<sup>(50)</sup> permanent deacons are not obliged to wear clerical garb. Deacons who are members of institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life shall adhere to the norms prescribed for them by the *Code of Canon Law*.<sup>(51)</sup>

11. In its canonical discipline, the Church recognises the right of deacons to form associations among themselves to promote their spiritual life, to carry out charitable and pious works and pursue other objectives which are consonant with their sacramental consecration and mission.<sup>(52)</sup> As with other clerics, deacons are not permitted to found, participate in or be members of any association or group, even of a civil nature, which is incompatible with the clerical state or which impedes the diligent execution of their ministerial duties. They shall also avoid all associations whose nature, objectives and methods are insidious to the full hierarchical communion of the Church. Likewise, associations which are injurious to the identity of the diaconate and to the discharge of its duties for the Church's service, as well as those groups or associations which plot against the Church, are to be avoided.<sup>(53)</sup>

Associations too which, under the guise of representation, organize deacons into a form of *trade(s) unions or pressure groups*, thus reducing the sacred ministry to a secular profession or trade, are completely irreconcilable with the clerical state. The same is true of any form of association which would prejudice the direct and immediate relationship between every deacon and his bishop.

All such associations are forbidden because they are injurious to the exercise of the sacred ministry, which, in this context, is considered as no more than a subordinate activity, and because they promote conflict with the bishops who are similarly regarded purely as employers.<sup>(54)</sup>

It should be recalled that no private association may be considered an ecclesial association unless it shall have obtained prior *recognitio* of its statutes by the competent ecclesiastical authority.<sup>(55)</sup> Such authority has the right and duty to be vigilant concerning associations and the fulfilment of their statutory ends.<sup>(56)</sup>

Deacons who come from ecclesial associations or movements may continue to enjoy the spiritual benefits of such communities and may continue to draw help and support from them in their service of a particular Church.

12. The professional activity of deacons assumes a significance which distinguishes it from that of the lay faithful.<sup>(57)</sup> Thus the secular work of permanent deacons is in some sense linked with their ministry. They should be mindful that the lay members of the faithful, in virtue of their own specific mission, are "particularly called to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth".<sup>(58)</sup>

Derogating from what is prescribed for other clerics,<sup>(59)</sup> the present discipline of the Church does not prohibit to permanent deacons professions which involve the exercise of civil authority or the administration of temporal goods or accountable secular offices. Particular law, however, may determine otherwise, should such derogation prove inopportune.

In those commercial and business activities(60) permitted under particular law, deacons should exhibit honesty and ethical rectitude. They should be careful to fulfil their obligations to civil law where it is not contrary to the natural law, to the Magisterium or to the canons of the Church and to her freedom.(61)

The aforementioned derogation is not applicable to permanent deacons who are incardinated into institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life.(62)

Permanent deacons must make prudent judgements and they should seek the advice of their bishops in more complex instances. Some professions, while of undoubted benefit to the community, can, when exercised by a permanent deacon, in certain circumstances, become incompatible with the pastoral responsibilities of his ministry. The competent authority, bearing in mind the requirements of ecclesial communion and of the fruitfulness of pastoral ministry, shall evaluate individual cases as they arise, including a change of profession after ordination to the permanent Diaconate.

Where there is conflict of conscience, deacons must act in conformity with the doctrine and discipline of the Church, even if this should require of them great sacrifices.

13. As sacred ministers, deacons are required to give complete priority to their ministry and to pastoral charity and "do their utmost to foster among people peace and harmony based on justice".(63) Active involvement in political parties or trades unions, in accordance with the dispositions of the Episcopal Conference,(64) may be permitted in particular circumstances "for the defence of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good".(65) Deacons are strictly prohibited from all involvement with political parties or trade(s) union movements which are founded on ideologies, policies or associations incompatible with Church doctrine.

14. Should a deacon wish to absent himself from his diocese for "a considerable period of time", he should normally obtain the permission of his Ordinary or Major Superior in accordance with the provisions of particular law.(66)

15. Deacons who are professionally employed are required to provide for their own upkeep from the ensuing emoluments.(67)

It is entirely legitimate that those who devote themselves fully to the service of God in the discharge of ecclesiastical office,(68) be equitably remunerated, since "the labourer is deserving of his wage"(Lk 10:7) and the Lord has disposed that those who proclaim the Gospel should live by the Gospel (cf. *1 Cor 9:14*). This does not however exclude the possibility that a cleric might wish to renounce this right, as the Apostle himself did (*1 Cor 9:12*), and otherwise make provision for himself.

It is not easy to draw up general norms concerning the upkeep of deacons which are binding in all circumstances, given the great diversity of situations in which deacons work, in various particular Churches and countries. In this matter, due attention must also be given to possible stipulations made in agreements between the Holy See or Episcopal Conferences and governments. In such circumstances, particular law should determine appropriately in the matter.

16. Since clerics dedicate themselves in an active and concrete way to the ecclesiastical ministry, they have a right to sustenance which includes "a remuneration that befits their condition"(69) and to social security.(70)

With regard to married deacons the *Code of Canon Law* provides that: "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 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".(71) In prescribing "adequate" remuneration, parameters of evaluation are also: personal condition, the nature of the office exercised, circumstances of time and place, material needs of the minister (including those of the families of married deacons), just recompense of those in his service — the same general criteria, in fact, which apply to all clerics.

In order to provide for the sustenance of clerics ministering in dioceses, every particular Church is obliged to constitute a special fund which "collects offerings and temporal goods for the support of the clergy".(72)

Social security for clerics is to be provided by another fund, unless other provision has been made.(73)

17. Celibate deacons who minister full-time in a diocese, have a right to be remunerated according to the general principle of law(74) should they have no other source of income.

18. Married deacons who minister full-time and who do not receive income from any other source are to be remunerated, in accordance with the aforementioned general principle, so that they may be able to provide for themselves and for their families.(75)

19. Married deacons who minister full-time or part-time and who receive income from a secular profession which they exercise or have exercised are obliged to provide for themselves and for their families from such income.(76)

20. It is for particular law to provide opportune norms in the complex matter of reimbursing expenses, including, for example, that those entities and parishes which benefit from the ministry of a deacon have an obligation to reimburse him those expenses incurred in the exercise of his ministry.

Particular law may also determine the obligations devolving on the diocese when a deacon, through no fault of his own, becomes unemployed. Likewise, it will be opportune to define the extent of diocesan liability with regard to the widows and orphans of deceased deacons. Where possible, deacons, before ordination, should subscribe to a mutual assurance (insurance) policy which affords cover for these eventualities.

21. Trusting to the perennial fidelity of God, the deacon is called to live his Order with generous dedication and ever renewed perseverance. Sacred ordination, once validly received, can never be rendered null. Nevertheless, loss of the clerical state may occur in conformity with the canonical norms.(77)

## 2

### THE DIACONAL MINISTRY

#### *Diaconal functions*

22. The Second Vatican Council synthesized the ministry of deacons in the threefold "diaconia of the liturgy, the word and of charity".(78) In this way diaconal participation through the ordained ministry in the one and triple *munus* of Christ is expressed. The deacon "is *teacher* in so far as he preaches and bears witness to the word of God; he *sanctifies* when he administers the Sacrament of Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and the sacramentals, he participates at the celebration of Holy Mass as a "minister of the Blood", and conserves and distributes the Blessed Eucharist; he is a

*guide* in as much as he animates the community or a section of ecclesial life.(79) Thus deacons assist and serve the bishops and priests who preside at every liturgy, are watchful of doctrine and guide the people of God.

The ministry of deacons, in the service of the community of the faithful, should "collaborate in building up the unity of Christians without prejudice and without inopportune initiatives".(80) It should cultivate those "human qualities which make a person acceptable to others, credible, vigilant about his language and his capacity to dialogue, so as to acquire a truly ecumenical attitude".(81)

### ***Diaconia of the word***

23. The bishop, during the rite of ordination, gives the book of the Gospels to the deacon saying: "Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become".(82) Like priests, deacons are commended to all by their conduct, their preaching of the mystery of Christ, by transmitting Christian doctrine and by devoting attention to the problems of our time. The principal function of the deacon, therefore, is to collaborate with the bishop and the priests in the exercise of a ministry(83) which is not of their own wisdom but of the word of God, calling all to conversion and holiness.(84) He prepares for such a ministry by careful study of Sacred Scripture, of Tradition, of the liturgy and of the life of the Church.(85) Moreover, in interpreting and applying the sacred deposit, the deacon is obliged to be directed by the Magisterium of those who are "witnesses of divine and Catholic truth", (86) the Roman Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him,(87) so as to teach and propose the mystery of Christ fully and faithfully.(88)

It is also necessary that he learn the art of communicating the faith effectively and integrally to contemporary man, in diverse cultural circumstances and stages of life.(89)

24. It is for the deacon to proclaim the Gospel and preach the word of God.(90) Deacons have the faculty to preach everywhere, in accordance with the conditions established by law.(91) This faculty is founded on the Sacrament of Ordination and should be exercised with at least the tacit consent of the rector of the churches concerned and with that humility proper to one who is servant and not master of the word of God. In this respect the warning of the Apostle is always relevant: "Since we have this ministry through the mercy shown to us, we are not discouraged. Rather we have renounced shameful, hidden things; not acting deceitfully or falsifying the word of God, but by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everybody's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4: 1-2).(92)

25. When the deacon presides at a liturgical celebration, in accordance with the relevant norms,(93) he shall give due importance to the homily, since it "proclaims the marvels worked by God in the mystery of Christ, present and effective in the liturgical celebrations".(94) Deacons should be trained carefully to prepare their homilies in prayer, in study of the sacred texts, in perfect harmony with the Magisterium and in keeping with the situation of those to whom they preach.

In order to assist the Christian faithful to grow in knowledge of their faith in Christ, to strengthen it by reception of the sacraments and to express it in their family, professional and social lives,(95) much attention must be given to catechesis of the faithful of all stages of Christian living. With growing secularization and the ever greater challenges posed for man and for the Gospel by contemporary society, the need for complete, faithful and lucid catechesis becomes all the more pressing.

26. Contemporary society requires a new evangelization which demands a greater and more generous effort on the part of ordained ministers. Deacons, "nourished by prayer and above all by love of the Eucharist", (96) in addition to their involvement in diocesan and parochial programmes of catechesis, of evangelization and of

preparation for the reception of the Sacraments, should strive to transmit the word in their professional lives, either explicitly or merely by their active presence in places where public opinion is formed and ethical norms are applied — such as the social services or organisations promoting the rights of the family or life. They should also be aware of the great possibilities for the ministry of the word in the area of religious and moral instruction in schools,(97) in Catholic and civil universities(98) and by adequate use of modern means of social communication.(99)

In addition to indispensable orthodoxy of doctrine, these *new fields demand* specialized training, but they are very effective means of bringing the Gospel to contemporary man and society. (100)

Finally, deacons are reminded that they are obliged to submit, before its publication, written material concerning faith or morals, (101) to the judgement of their Ordinaries. It is also necessary to obtain the permission of the Ordinary before writing in publications which habitually attack the Catholic religion or good morals. They are also bound to adhere to the norms established by the Episcopal Conference (102) when involved in radio or television broadcasts.

In every case, the deacon should hold before him the primary and indefeasible necessity of always presenting the truth without compromise.

27. The deacon will be aware that the Church is missionary (103) by her very nature, both because her origin is in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the eternal plan of the Father and because she has received an explicit mandate from the risen Lord to preach the Gospel to all creation and to baptize those who believe (cf. *Mk* 16, 15-16; *Mt* 28:19). Deacons are ministers of the Church and thus, although incardinated into a particular Church, they are not exempt from the missionary obligation of the universal Church. Hence they should always remain open to the *missio ad gentes* to the extent that their professional or — if married — family obligations permit. (104)

The deacon's ministry of service is linked with the missionary dimension of the Church: the missionary efforts of the deacon will embrace the ministry of the word, the liturgy, and works of charity which, in their turn, are carried into daily life. Mission includes witness to Christ in a secular profession or occupation.

### ***Diaconia of the liturgy***

28. The rite of ordination emphasizes another aspect of the diaconal ministry — ministry at the altar. (105)

Deacons receive the Sacrament of Orders, so as to serve as a vested minister in the sanctification of the Christian community, in hierarchical communion with the bishop and priests. They provide a sacramental assistance to the ministry of the bishop and, subordinately, to that of the priests which is intrinsic, fundamental and distinct.

Clearly, this diaconia at the altar, since founded on the Sacrament of Orders, differs in essence from any liturgical ministry entrusted to the lay faithful. The liturgical ministry of the deacon is also distinct from that of the ordained priestly ministry. (106)

Thus, in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the deacon does not celebrate the mystery: rather, he effectively represents on the one hand, the people of God and, specifically, helps them to unite their lives to the offering of Christ; while on the other, in the name of Christ himself, he helps the Church to participate in the fruits of that sacrifice.

Since "the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all her power flows", (107) this prerogative of diaconal ordination is also the font of sacramental grace which nourishes the entire ministry. Careful and profound theological and liturgical preparation must precede reception of that grace to enable the deacon to participate worthily in the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals.

29. While exercising his ministry, the deacon should maintain a lively awareness that "every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree". (108) The liturgy is the source of grace and sanctification. Its efficacy derives from Christ the Redeemer and does not depend on the holiness of the minister. This certainty should cause the deacon to grow in humility since he can never compromise the salvific work of Christ. At the same time it should inspire him to holiness of life so that he may be a worthy minister of the liturgy. Liturgical actions cannot be reduced to mere private or social actions which can be celebrated by anybody since they belong to the Body of the universal Church. (109) Deacons shall observe devoutly the liturgical norms proper to the sacred mysteries so as to bring the faithful to a conscious participation in the liturgy, to fortify their faith, give worship to God and sanctify the Church. (110)

30. According to the tradition of the Church and the provisions of law, (111) deacons "assist the bishop and priests in the celebration of the divine mysteries". (112) They should therefore work to promote liturgical celebrations which involve the whole assembly, fostering the interior participation of the faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the various ministries. (113)

They should be mindful of the importance of the aesthetical dimension which conveys to the whole person the beauty of what is being celebrated. Music and song, even in its simplest form, the preached word and the communion of the faithful who live the peace and forgiveness of Christ, form a precious heritage which the deacon should foster.

The deacon is to observe faithfully the rubrics of the liturgical books without adding, omitting or changing of his own volition (114) what they require. Manipulation of the liturgy is tantamount to depriving it of the riches of the mystery of Christ, whom it contains, and may well signify presumption toward what has been established by the Church's wisdom. Deacons, therefore, should confine themselves to those things, and only to those things, in which they are properly competent. (115) For the Sacred Liturgy they should vest worthily and with dignity, in accordance with the prescribed liturgical norms. (116) The dalmatic, in its appropriate liturgical colours, together with the alb, cincture and stole, "constitutes the liturgical dress proper to deacons". (117)

The ministry of deacons also includes preparation of the faithful for reception of the sacraments and their pastoral care after having received them.

31. The deacon, together with the bishop and priest, is the ordinary minister of Baptism. (118) The exercise of this power requires either the permission of the parish priest, since he enjoys the particular right of baptizing those entrusted to his pastoral care, (119) or the presence of necessity. (120) In preparing for the reception of this sacrament, the ministry of the deacon is especially important.

#### Holy Eucharist

32. At the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the deacon assists those who preside at the assembly and consecrate the Body and Blood of the Lord — that is the bishop and his priests (121) — according to the norms established by the *Institutio*

*Generalis* of the Roman Missal, (122) and thus manifests Christ, the Servant. He is close to the priest during the celebration of the Mass (123) and helps him, especially if the priest is blind, infirm or feeble. At the altar he serves the chalice and the book. He proposes the intentions of the bidding prayers to the faithful and invites them to exchange the sign of peace. In the absence of other ministers, he discharges, when necessary, their office too.

The deacon may not pronounce the words of the eucharistic prayer, nor those of the collects nor may he use the gestures which are proper to those who consecrate the Body and Blood of the Lord. (124)

***The deacon properly proclaims from the books of Sacred Scripture.*** (125)

As an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, (126) the deacon distributes the Body of Christ to the faithful during the celebration of the Mass and, outside of it, administers Viaticum (127) to the sick. He is equally an ordinary minister of exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament and of eucharistic benediction. (128) It falls to the deacon to preside at Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest. (129)

33. The pastoral care of families, for which the bishop is primarily responsible, may be entrusted to deacons. In supporting families in their difficulties and sufferings, (130) this responsibility will extend from moral and liturgical questions to difficulties of a social and personal nature, and can be exercised at diocesan or, subject to the authority of the parish priest, local level in promoting the catechesis of Christian marriage, the personal preparation of future spouses, the fruitful celebration of marriage and help offered to couples after marriage. (131)

Married deacons can be of much assistance in promoting the Gospel value of conjugal love, the virtues which protect it and the practice of parenthood which can truly be regarded as responsible, from a human and Christian point of view.

Where deacons have been duly delegated by the parish priest or the local Ordinary, they may assist at the celebration of marriages *extra Missam* and pronounce the nuptial blessing in the name of the Church. (132) They may also be given general delegation, in accordance with the prescribed conditions, (133) which may only be subdelegated, however, in the manner specified by the *Code of Canon Law*. (134)

34. It is defined doctrine, (135) that the administration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is reserved to bishops and priests since this sacrament involves the forgiveness of sins and the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist, but, the pastoral care of the sick may be entrusted to deacons. Active service to alleviate the suffering of the sick, catechesis in preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, preparing the faithful for death in the absence of a priest, and the administration of Viaticum according to the prescribed rites, are means by which deacons may bring the love of the Church to the suffering faithful. (136)

35. Deacons have an obligation, established by the Church, to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours with which the entire Mystical Body is united to the prayer Christ the Head offers to the Father. Mindful of this obligation, they shall celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours every day according to the approved liturgical books and in the manner determined by the respective Episcopal Conference. (137) Furthermore, they should strive to promote participation by the greater Christian community in this Liturgy, which is never private, but an action proper to the entire Church, (138) even when celebrated individually.

36. The deacon is the minister of sacramentals, that is of "sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments (and) signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature,

which are obtained through the Church's intercession". (139)

The deacon may therefore impart those blessings most closely linked to ecclesial and sacramental life which are expressly permitted to him by law. (140) It is for the deacon to conduct exequies celebrated outside of Holy Mass, as well as the rite of Christian burial. (141)

When a priest is present or available, however, such tasks must be given to him. (142)

### ***The Diaconia of Charity***

37. In virtue of the Sacrament of Orders, deacons, in communion with the bishop and the diocesan presbyterate, participate in the same pastoral functions, (143) but exercise them differently in serving and assisting the bishop and his priests. Since this participation is brought about by the sacrament, they serve God's people in the name of Christ. For this reason, they exercise it in humility and charity, and, according to the words of St Polycarp, they must always be "merciful, zealous and let them walk according to the truth of the Lord who became servant of all". (144) Their authority, therefore, exercised in hierarchical communion with the bishop and his priests, and required by the same unity of consecration and mission, (145) is a service of charity which seeks to help and foster all members of a particular Church, so that they may participate, in a spirit of communion and according to their proper charisms, in the life and mission of the Church.

38. In the ministry of charity, deacons should conform themselves in the likeness of Christ the Servant, whom they represent and, above all, they should be "dedicated to works of charity and to administration". (146) Thus, in the prayer of ordination, the bishop implores God the Father that they may be "full of all the virtues, sincere in charity, solicitous towards the weak and the poor, humble in their service... may they be the image of your Son who did not come to be served but to serve". (147) By word and example they should work so that all the faithful, in imitation of Christ, may place themselves at the constant service of their brothers and sisters.

Diocesan and parochial works of charity, which are among the primary duties of bishops and priests are entrusted by them, as attested by Tradition, to servants in the ecclesiastical ministry, that is, to deacons. (148) So too is the service of charity in Christian education; in training preachers, youth groups, and lay groups; in promoting life in all its phases and transforming the world according to the Christian order. (149) In all of these areas the ministry of deacons is particularly valuable, since today the spiritual and material needs of man, to which the Church is called to respond, are greatly diversified. They should, therefore, strive to serve all the faithful without discrimination, while devoting particular care to the suffering and the sinful. As ministers of Christ and of his Church, they must be able to transcend all ideologies and narrow party interests, lest they deprive the Church's mission of its strength which is the love of Christ. Diaconia should bring man to an experience of God's love and move him to conversion by opening his heart to the work of grace.

The charitable function of deacons "also involves appropriate service in the administration of goods and in the Church's charitable activities. In this regard, deacons "discharge the duties of charity and administration in the name of the hierarchy and also provide social services". (150) Hence, deacons may be appointed to the office of diocesan oekonomus (151) and likewise nominated to the diocesan finance council. (152)

### ***The canonical mission of permanent deacons***

39. The three contexts of the diaconal ministry, depending on circumstances, may

absorb, to varying degrees, a large proportion of every deacon's activity. Together, however, they represent a unity in service at the level of divine Revelation: the ministry of the word leads to ministry at the altar, which in turn prompts the transformation of life by the liturgy, resulting in charity. "If we consider the deep spiritual nature of this diaconia, then we shall better appreciate the inter-relationship between the three areas of ministry traditionally associated with the diaconate, that is, the ministry of the word, the ministry of the altar and the ministry of charity. Depending on the circumstances, one or other of these may take on special importance in the individual work of a deacon, but these three ministries are inseparably joined in God's plan for redemption". (153)

40. Throughout history the service of deacons has taken on various forms so as to satisfy the diverse needs of the Christian community and to enable that community to exercise its mission of charity. It is for the bishops alone, (154) since they rule and have charge of the particular Churches "as Vicars and legates of Christ", (155) to confer ecclesiastical office on each deacon according to the norm of law. In conferring such office, careful attention should be given to both the pastoral needs and the personal, family (in the case of married deacons), and professional situation of permanent deacons. In every case it is important, however, that deacons fully exercise their ministry, in preaching, in the liturgy and in charity to the extent that circumstances permit. They should not be relegated to marginal duties, be made merely to act as substitutes, nor discharge duties normally entrusted to non-ordained members of the faithful. Only in this way will the true identity of permanent deacons as ministers of Christ become apparent and the impression avoided that deacons are simply lay people particularly involved in the life of the Church.

For the good of the deacon and to prevent improvisation, ordination should be accompanied by a clear investiture of pastoral responsibility.

### **Parish**

41. While assuming different forms, the diaconal ministry, ordinarily finds proper scope for its exercise in the various sectors of diocesan and parochial pastoral action.

The bishop may give deacons the task of co-operating with a parish priest in the parish (156) entrusted to him or in the pastoral care of several parishes entrusted *in solidum* to one or more priests. (157)

Where permanent deacons participate in the pastoral care of parishes which do not, because of a shortage, have the immediate benefit of a parish priest, (158) they always have precedence over the non-ordained faithful. In such cases, it is necessary to specify that the moderator of the parish is a priest and that he is its proper pastor. To him alone has been entrusted the *cura animarum*, in which he is assisted by the deacon.

Deacons may also be called to guide dispersed Christian communities in the name of the bishop or the parish priest. (159) "This is a missionary function to be carried out in those territories, environments, social strata and groups where priests are lacking or cannot be easily found. In particular, in those areas where no priest is available to celebrate the Eucharist, the deacon brings together and guides the community in a celebration of the word with the distribution of Holy Communion which has been duly reserved. (160) When deacons supply in places where there is a shortage of priests, they do so by ecclesial mandate". (161) At such celebrations, prayers will always be offered for an increase of vocations to the priesthood whose indispensable nature shall be clearly emphasized. Where deacons are available, participation in the pastoral care of the faithful may not be entrusted to a lay person or to a community of lay persons. Similarly where deacons are available, it is they who preside at such Sunday celebrations.

The competence of deacons should always be clearly specified in writing when they are assigned office.

Those means which encourage constructive and patient collaboration between deacons and others involved in the pastoral ministry should be promoted with generosity and conviction. While it is a duty of deacons to respect the office of parish priest and to work in communion with all who share in his pastoral care, they also have the right to be accepted and fully recognised by all. Where the bishop has deemed it opportune to institute parish pastoral councils, deacons appointed to participate in the pastoral care of such parishes are members of these councils by right. (162) Above all else, a true charity should prevail which recognises in every ministry a gift of the Spirit destined to build up the Body of Christ.

42. Numerous opportunities for the fruitful exercise of the ministry of deacons arise at diocesan level. Indeed, when they possess the necessary requirements, deacons may act as members of diocesan bodies, in particular diocesan pastoral councils (163) and diocesan finance councils, and take part in diocesan synods. (164)

They may not, however, act as members of the council of priests, since this body exclusively represents the presbyterate. (165)

In the diocesan curia deacons in possession of the necessary requirements, may exercise the office of chancellor, (166) judge, (167) assessor, (168) auditor, (169) promotor iustitiae, defensor vinculi (170) and notary. (171)

Deacons may not, however, be constituted judicial vicars, adjunct judicial vicars or vicars forane, since these offices are reserved for priests. (172)

Other areas in which deacons may exercise their ministry include diocesan commissions, pastoral work in specific social contexts — especially the pastoral care of the family — or among particular groups with special pastoral needs, such as ethnic minorities.

In the exercise of the above offices, the deacon should recall that every action in the Church should be informed by charity and service to all. In judicial, administrative and organizational matters, deacons should always strive to avoid unnecessary forms of bureaucracy, lest they deprive their ministry of pastoral meaning and value. Those deacons who are called to exercise such offices should be placed so as to discharge duties which are proper to the diaconate, in order to preserve the integrity of the diaconal ministry.

### 3

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DEACON

### *Contemporary context*

43. The Church, gathered together by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit according to the providence of God the Father, lives and proclaims the Gospel in concrete historical circumstances. While present in the world, she is nonetheless a pilgrim (173) on the way to the fullness of the Kingdom. (174) "The world which she has in mind is the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelopes it: it is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures, the world, which in the Christian vision has been created and is sustained by its Maker, which has been freed from the slavery of sin by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its

fulfilment". (175)

The deacon, as a member and minister of the Church, should be mindful of this reality in his life and ministry. He should be conversant with contemporary cultures and with the aspirations and problems of his times. In this context, indeed, he is called to be a living sign of Christ the Servant and to assume the Church's responsibility of "reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, so that, in language intelligible to every generation, she may be able to answer the ever-recurring questions which men ask about this present life and of the life to come and how one is related to the other". (176)

### ***Vocation to holiness***

44. The universal call to holiness has its origin in the "baptism of faith" by which all are "truly made sons of God and sharers in the divine nature and thus are made holy". (177)

By the Sacrament of Holy Orders, deacons receive a "a new consecration to God" through which they are "anointed by the Holy Spirit and sent by Christ" (178) to serve God's people and "build up the Body of Christ" (*Eph 4:12*).

From this stems the *diaconal spirituality* with its source in what the Second Vatican Council calls "the sacramental grace of the diaconate". (179) In addition to helping the deacon to fulfil his functions this also affects his deepest being, imbuing it with a willingness to give his entire self over to the service of the Kingdom of God in the Church. As is indicated by the term "diaconate" itself, what characterizes the inner feelings and desire of those who receive the sacrament, is the *spirit of service*. Through the diaconate, what Jesus said of his mission is continually realized: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mt 20:28*). (180) Thus, through his ministry, the deacon lives the virtue of obedience: in faithfully carrying out those duties assigned to him, the deacon serves the episcopate and the presbyterate in the *munera* of Christ's mission and what he does is truly pastoral ministry, for the good of the faithful.

45. Hence, the deacon should accept with gratitude the invitation to follow Christ the Servant and devote himself to it throughout the diverse circumstances of life. The character received in ordination conforms to Christ to whom the deacon should adhere ever more closely.

Sanctification is a duty binding all the faithful. (181) For the deacon it has a further basis in the special consecration received. (182) It includes the practice of the Christian virtues and the various evangelical precepts and counsels according to one's own state of life. The deacon is called to live a holy life because he has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Orders and has been constituted by the same Spirit a minister of Christ's Church to serve and sanctify mankind. (183)

For deacons the call to holiness means "following Jesus by an attitude of humble service which finds expression not only in works of charity but also in imbuing and forming thoughts and actions". (184) When "their ministry is consistent with this spirit (deacons) clearly highlight that quality which best shows the face of Christ: service (185) which makes one not only 'servants of God' but also servants of God in our own brethren". (186)

### ***The Relations of Holy Order***

46. By a special sacramental gift, Holy Order confers on the deacon a particular participation in the consecration and mission of Him who became servant of the

Father for the redemption of mankind, and inserts him in a new and specific way in the mystery of Christ, of his Church and the salvation of all mankind. Hence the spiritual life of the deacon should deepen this threefold relationship by developing a community spirituality which bears witness to that communion essential to the nature of the Church.

47. The primary and most fundamental relationship must be with Christ, who assumed the condition of a slave for love of the Father and mankind. (187) In virtue of ordination the deacon is truly called to act in conformity with Christ the Servant.

The eternal Son of the Father "emptied himself assuming the form of a slave" (*Phil 2:7*) and lived this condition in obedience to the Father (*John 4:34*) and in humble service to the brethren (*John 13:4-15*). As servant of the Father in the work of salvation Christ constitutes the way, the truth and the life for every deacon in the Church.

All ministerial activity is meaningful when it leads to knowing, loving and following Christ in his *diaconia*. Thus deacons should strive to model their lives on Christ, who redeemed mankind by his obedience to the Father, an obedience "unto death, death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*).

48. Indissolubly associated with this fundamental relationship with Christ is the Church (188) which Christ loves, purifies, nourishes and cares for (cf. *Eph 5, 25:29*). The deacon cannot live his configuration to Christ faithfully without sharing His love for the Church "for which he cannot but have a deep attachment because of her mission and her divine institution". (189)

The Rite of Ordination illustrates the connection which comes about between the bishop and the deacon: the bishop alone imposes hands on the candidate and invokes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on him. Every deacon, therefore, finds the point of reference for his own ministry in hierarchical communion with the bishop. (190)

Diaconal ordination also underlines another ecclesial aspect: it communicates a ministerial sharing in Christ's *diaconia* with which God's people, governed by the Successor of Peter and those Bishops in communion with him, and in co-operation with the presbyterate, continues to serve the work of redemption. Deacons, therefore, are called to nourish themselves and their ministry with an ardent love for the Church, and a sincere desire for communion with the Holy Father, their own bishops and the priests of their dioceses.

49. It must not be forgotten that the object of Christ's *diaconia* is mankind. (191) Every human being carries the traces of sin but is called to communion with God. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that all who believe in Him might not die but have eternal life" (*John 3:16*). It was for this plan of love, that Christ became a slave and took human flesh. The Church continues to be the sign and instrument of that *diaconia* in history.

In virtue of the Sacrament of Orders deacons are at the service of their brothers and sisters needing of salvation. As mankind can see the fullness of the Father's love by which they are saved in the words and deeds of Christ the Servant, so too this same charity must be apparent in the life of the deacon. Growth in imitation of Christ's love for mankind — which surpasses all ideologies — is thus an essential component of the spiritual life of every deacon.

A "natural inclination of service to the sacred hierarchy and to the Christian community" (192) is required of those who seek admission to the diaconate. This should not be understood "in the sense of a simple spontaneity of natural disposition...it is rather an inclination of nature inspired by grace, with a spirit of

service that conforms human behaviour to Christ's. The sacrament of the diaconate develops this inclination: it makes the subject to share more closely in Christ's spirit of service and imbues the will with a special grace so that in all his actions he will be motivated by a *new inclination* to serve his brothers and sisters". (193)

### *Aids to the Spiritual Life*

50. The aforementioned points of reference emphasize the primacy of the spiritual life. The deacon, mindful that the diaconia of Christ surpasses all natural capacities, should continually commit himself in conscience and in freedom to His invitation: "Remain in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it remain in the vine, so also with you unless you remain in me" (*John 15:4*).

Following Christ in the diaconate is an attractive but difficult undertaking. While it brings satisfaction and rewards, it can also be open to the difficulties and trials experienced by the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to live this ministry to the full, deacons must know Christ intimately so that He may shoulder the burdens of their ministry. They must give priority to the spiritual life and live their diaconia with generosity. They should organize their ministry and their professional and, when married, family obligations, so as to grow in their commitment to the person and mission of Christ the Servant.

51. Progress in the spiritual life is achieved primarily by faithful and tireless exercise of the ministry in integrity of life. (194) Such ministry not only develops the spiritual life but promotes the theological virtues, a disposition to selflessness, service to the brethren and hierarchical communion. What has been said of priests, *mutatis mutandis*, also applies to deacons: "Through the sacred actions they perform every day....they are set on the right course to perfection of life. The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfilment of their ministry". (195)

52. The deacon should always be mindful of the exhortation made to him in the Rite of Ordination: "Receive the Gospel of Christ of which you are the herald; believe what you preach, teach what you believe and put into practice what you teach". (196) For a worthy and fruitful proclamation of the word of God, deacons should "immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study. For it must not happen that anybody becomes 'an empty preacher of the word of God to others, not being a hearer of the word in his own heart' (197) when he should be sharing the boundless riches of the divine word with the faithful committed to his care, especially in the sacred Liturgy". (198)

Moreover, deacons, under the guidance of those in the Church who are true teachers of divine and Catholic truth, (199) should strive to deepen their knowledge of the word, so as to hear its call and experience its saving power (cf. *Rom 1:16*). Their sanctification is based on their consecration and on their mission. This is true also with regard to the word and they should be conscious that they are its ministers. As members of the hierarchy, the actions and public pronouncements of deacons involve the Church. Consequently, it is essential for pastoral charity that deacons should ensure the authenticity of their own teaching. Likewise, in the spirit of the profession of faith and the oath of fidelity, (200) taken prior to ordination, they should preserve their own clear and effective communion with the Holy Father, the episcopal order and with their own bishops, not only with regard to the articles of the Creed, but also with regard to the teaching of ordinary Magisterium and the Church's discipline. Indeed, "such is the force and power of the word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigour, and the children of God for their strength, food for the soul, and for a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life". (201) The closer deacons come to the word of God, therefore, the greater will be their desire to communicate it to their brothers and sisters. God speaks to man in Sacred Scripture: (202) by his preaching, the sacred minister fosters this salvific encounter. Then, lest the faithful be deprived of the word of God through the ignorance or indolence of its

ministers, deacons should devote themselves to preach the word tirelessly and yet be mindful that the exercise of the ministry of the word is not confined to preaching alone.

53. Likewise, when the deacon baptizes or distributes the Body and Blood of Christ or serves at the celebration of the other sacraments and sacramentals, he confirms his identity in the Church: he is a minister of the Body of Christ, both mystical and ecclesial. Let him remember that, when lived with faith and reverence, these actions of the Church contribute much to growth in the spiritual life and to the increase of the Christian community. (203)

54. With regard to the spiritual life, deacons should devote particular importance to the sacraments of grace whose purpose "is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God". (204)

Above all, they should participate with particular faith at the daily celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice, (205) possibly exercising their own proper liturgical *munus*, and adore the Lord, present in the Sacrament, (206) because in the Blessed Eucharist, source and summit of all evangelization, "the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained". (207) In the Blessed Eucharist they truly encounter Christ who, for love of man, became an expiatory victim, the food of life eternal and friend of all who suffer.

Conscious of his own weakness and trusting the mercy of God the deacon should regularly approach the Sacrament of Penance, (208) in which sinful man encounters Christ the Redeemer, receives forgiveness of sin and is impelled towards the fullness of charity.

55. In performing the works of charity entrusted to them by their bishops, deacons should always be guided by the love of Christ for all men instead of personal interests and ideologies which are injurious to the universality of salvation or deny the transcendent vocation of man. They should be ever conscious that the diaconia of charity necessarily leads to a growth of communion within the particular Churches since charity is the very soul of ecclesial communion. Deacons are thus obliged to foster fraternity and co-operation with the priests of their dioceses and sincere communion with their bishops.

### ***Prayer life***

56. The deacon shall always remain faithful to the Lord's command: "But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man" (*Lk 21:36* cf. *Phil 4:6-7*).

Prayer, which is a personal dialogue with God, confers the strength needed to follow Christ and serve the brethren. In the light of this certainty, deacons should form themselves according to the various types of prayer: the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, as prescribed by the various Episcopal Conferences, (209) should inform their whole prayer life since deacons, as ministers, intercede for the entire Church. Such prayer is carried over into the *lectio divina*, arduous mental prayer and the spiritual retreat prescribed by particular law. (210)

The habit of penance should also be taken to heart together with other means of sanctification which foster personal encounter with God. (211)

57. Participation in the mystery of Christ the Servant necessarily directs the deacon's heart to the Church and her most holy Mother. Christ indeed cannot be separated from the Church which is his Body. True union with Christ the Head cannot but foster true love for His body which is the Church. This love will commit the deacon

to work diligently to build up the Church by faithful discharge of his ministerial duties, through fraternity and hierarchical communion with his own bishop and with the presbyterate. The deacon should be concerned for the entire Church: the universal Church, the principle and perpetually visible foundation of whose unity is the Roman Pontiff, the Successor of St Peter, (212) as well as the particular Church which "adhering to its pastor and united by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist.... in which the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is present. (213)

Love for Christ and for His Church is profoundly linked to love of the Blessed Virgin Mary, handmaid of the Lord. With her unique title of Mother, she was the selfless helper of her divine Son's diaconia (cf. *John* 19:25-27). Love of the Mother of God, based on faith and expressed in daily recitation of the Rosary, imitation of her virtues and trust in her, are indeed signs of authentic filial devotion. (214)

With deep veneration and affection Mary looks on every deacon. Indeed, "the creature who more than any other who has lived the full truth of vocation is Mary the Virgin Mother, and she did so in intimate communion with Christ: no one has responded with a love greater than hers to the immense love of God". (215) This love of the Virgin Mary, handmaid of the Lord, which is born and rooted in the word, will cause deacons to imitate her life. In this way a Marian dimension is introduced into the Church which is very close to the vocation of the deacon. (216)

58. Regular spiritual direction is truly of the greatest assistance to deacons. Experience clearly shows how much can be gained in sincere and humble dialogue with a wise spiritual director, not only in the resolution of doubts and problems which inevitably arise throughout life, but also in employing the necessary discernment to arrive at better self-knowledge and to grow in faithful fellowship of Christ.

### *Spirituality of deacons and states of life*

59. In contrast with the requirement for the priesthood, not only celibate men, in the first place and widowers, may be admitted to the permanent Diaconate but also men who live in the Sacrament of Matrimony. (217)

60. With gratitude, the Church recognises the gift of celibacy which God gives to some of her members and, in different ways, both in the East and West, she has linked it to the ordained ministry with which it is always particularly consonant. (218) The Church is conscious that this gift, accepted and lived for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. *Mt* 19:12), directs the whole person of the deacon towards Christ who devoted Himself in chastity to the service of the Father so as to bring man to the fullness of the Kingdom. Loving God and serving the brethren by this complete choice, so far from impeding the personal development of deacons, fosters man's true perfection which is found in charity. In celibate life, indeed, love becomes a sign of total and undivided consecration to Christ and of greater freedom to serve God and man. (219) The choice of celibacy is not an expression of contempt for marriage nor of flight from reality but a special way of serving man and the world.

Contemporary man, very often submerged in the ephemeral, is particularly sensitive to those who are a living witness of the eternal. Hence, deacons should be especially careful to give witness to their brothers and sisters by their fidelity to the celibate life the better to move them to seek those values consonant with man's transcendent vocation. "Celibacy 'for the sake of the Kingdom' is not only an eschatological sign. It also has a great social significance in contemporary life for service to the People of God". (220)

In order to conserve this special gift of God throughout life for the benefit of the entire Church, deacons should not depend excessively on their own resources, but

should be faithful to the spiritual life and the duties of their ministry in a spirit of prudence and vigilance, remembering that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41).

They should be particularly careful in their relationships with others lest familiarity create difficulties for continence or give rise to scandal. (221)

They must finally be aware that in contemporary society, it is necessary to exercise careful discernment when using the means of social communications.

61. The Sacrament of Matrimony sanctifies conjugal love and constitutes it a sign of the love with which Christ gives himself to the Church (cf. Eph. 5:25). It is a gift from God and should be a source of nourishment for the spiritual life of those deacons who are married. Since family life and professional responsibilities must necessarily reduce the amount of time which married deacons can dedicate to the ministry, it will be necessary to integrate these various elements in a unitary fashion, especially by means of shared prayer. In marriage, love becomes an interpersonal giving of self, a mutual fidelity, a source of new life, a support in times of joy and sorrow: in short, love becomes service. When lived in faith, this *family service* is for the rest of the faithful an example of the love of Christ. The married deacon must use it as a stimulus of his diaconia in the Church.

Married deacons should feel especially obliged to give clear witness to the sanctity of marriage and the family. The more they grow in mutual love, the greater their dedication to their children and the more significant their example for the Christian community. "The nurturing and deepening of mutual, sacrificial love between husband and wife constitutes perhaps the most significant involvement of a deacon's wife in her husband's public ministry in the Church". (222) This love grows thanks to chastity which flourishes, even in the exercise of paternal responsibilities, by respect for spouses and the practice of a certain continence. This virtue fosters a mutual self-giving which soon becomes evident in ministry. It eschews possessive behaviour, undue pursuit of professional success and the incapacity to programme time. Instead, it promotes authentic interpersonal relationships, OIC, and the capacity to see everything in its proper perspective.

Special care should be taken to ensure that the families of deacons be made aware of the demands of the diaconal ministry. The spouses of married deacons, who must give their consent to their husband's decision to seek ordination to the diaconate, (223) should be assisted to play their role with joy and discretion. They should esteem all that concerns the Church, especially the duties assigned to their husbands. For this reason it is opportune that they should be kept duly informed of their husbands' activities in order to arrive at an harmonious balance between family, professional and ecclesial responsibilities. In the children of married deacons, where such is possible, an appreciation of their father's ministry can also be fostered. They in turn should be involved in the apostolate and give coherent witness in their lives.

In conclusion, the families of married deacons, as with all Christian families, are called to participate actively and responsibly in the Church's mission in the contemporary world. "In particular the deacon and his wife must be a living example of *fidelity and indissolubility in Christian marriage* before a world which is in dire need of such signs. By facing in a *spirit of faith* the challenges of married life and the demands of daily living, they strengthen the family life not only of the Church community but of the whole of society. They also show how the obligations of family life, work and ministry can be harmonized *in the service* of the Church's mission. Deacons and their wives and children can be a great encouragement to others who are working to promote family life". (224)

62. It is necessary to reflect on the situation of the deacon following the death of his wife. This is a particular moment in life which calls for faith and Christian hope. The

loss of a spouse should not destroy dedication to the rearing of children nor lead to hopelessness. While this period of life is difficult, it is also an opportunity for interior purification and an impetus for growth in charity and service to one's children and to all the members of the Church. It is a call to grow in hope since faithful discharge of the ministry is a way of reaching Christ and those in the Father's glory who are dear to us.

It must be recognised, however, that the loss of a spouse gives rise to a new situation in a family which profoundly influences personal relationships and in many instances can give rise to economic difficulties. With great charity, therefore, widowed deacons should be helped to discern and accept their new personal circumstances and to persevere in providing for their children and the new needs of their families.

In particular, the widowed deacon should be supported in living perfect and perpetual continence. (225) He should be helped to understand the profound ecclesial reasons which preclude his remarriage (cf. *1 Tim* 3:12), in accordance with the constant discipline of the Church in the East and West. (226) This can be achieved through an intensification of one's dedication to others for the love of God in the ministry. In such cases the fraternal assistance of other ministers, of the faithful and of the bishop can be most comforting to widowed deacons.

With regard to the widows of deacons, care should be taken, where possible, by the clergy and the faithful to ensure that they are never neglected and that their needs are provided for.

#### 4

### CONTINUING FORMATION OF DEACONS

#### *Characteristics*

63. The continuing formation of deacons is a human necessity which must be seen in continuity with the divine call to serve the Church in the ministry and with the initial formation given to deacons, to the extent that these are considered two initial moments in a single, living, process of Christian and diaconal life. (227) Indeed, "those who are ordained to the diaconate are obliged to ongoing doctrinal formation which perfects and completes what they received prior to ordination", (228) so that, by a periodic renewal of the "I am" pronounced by deacons at their ordination, the vocation "to" the diaconate continues and finds expression as vocation "in" the diaconate. On the part of both the Church which provides ongoing formation and of deacons who are its recipients, such formation should be regarded as a mutual obligation and duty arising from the nature of the vocational commitment which has been assumed.

The continuing need to provide and receive adequate, integral formation is an indispensable obligation for both bishops and deacons.

Ecclesiastical norms regarding ongoing formation (229) have constantly emphasised the obligatory nature of such formation for the apostolic life and stressed the need for it to be global, interdisciplinary, profound, scientific and propedeutic. Application of these norms is all the more necessary in those instances where initial formation did not adhere to the ordinary model.

Continuing formation should be informed with the characteristics of fidelity to Christ, to the Church and to "continuing conversion" which is a fruit of sacramental grace articulated in the pastoral charity proper to every moment of ordained ministry. This formation is similar to the fundamental choice, which must be

reaffirmed and renewed throughout the permanent diaconate by a long series of coherent responses which are based on and animated by the initial acceptance of the ministry. (230)

### ***Motivation***

64. Inspired by the prayer of ordination, ongoing formation is based on the need of every deacon to love Christ in such manner as to imitate him ("may they be images of your Son"). It seeks to confirm him in uncompromising fidelity to a personal vocation to ministry ("may they fulfil faithfully the works of the ministry") and proposes a radical, sincere following of Christ the Servant ("may the example of their lives be a constant reminder of the Gospel... may they be sincere...solicitous...and vigilant").

The basis and motivation of this formation, therefore, "is the dynamism of the order itself", (231) while its nourishment is the Holy Eucharist, compendium of the entire Christian ministry and endless source of every spiritual energy. St Paul's exhortation to Timothy can also be applied, in a certain sense, to deacons: "I remind you to fan into a flame the gift of God that you have" (2 *Tim* 1:6; cf. 1 *Tim* 4:14-16). The theological demands of their call to a singular ministry of ecclesial service requires of them a growing love for the Church, shown forth by their faithful carrying out of their proper functions and responsibilities. Chosen by God to be holy, serving the Church and all mankind, the deacon should continually grow in awareness of his own ministerial character in a manner that is balanced, responsible, solicitous and always joyful.

### ***Subjects***

65. From the perspective of the deacon, primary protagonist and primary subject of the obligation, ongoing formation is first and foremost a process of continual conversion. It embraces every aspect of his person as deacon, that is to say, consecrated by the Sacrament of Order and placed at the service of the Church, and seeks to develop all of his potential. This enables him to live to the full the ministerial gifts that he has received in diverse circumstances of time and place and in the tasks assigned to him by the bishop. (232) The solicitude of the Church for the permanent formation of deacons would, however, be ineffective without their co-operation and commitment. Thus formation cannot be reduced merely to participating at courses or study days or other such activities: it calls for every deacon to be aware of the need for ongoing formation and to cultivate it with interest and in a spirit of healthy initiative. Books approved by ecclesiastical authority should be chosen as material for reading; periodicals known for their fidelity to the Magisterium should be followed; time should be set aside for daily meditation. Constant self-formation which helps him to serve the Church ever better is an important part of the service asked of every deacon.

### ***Formators***

66. From the perspective of the bishops (233) (and their fellow workers in the presbyterate), who bear responsibility for formation, ongoing formation consists in helping the deacon to overcome any dualism that might exist between spirituality and ministry and, more fundamentally, any dichotomy between their civil profession and diaconal spirituality and "respond generously to the commitment demanded by the dignity and the responsibility which God conferred upon them through the sacrament of Orders; in guarding, defending, and developing their specific identity and vocation; and in sanctifying themselves and others through the exercise of their ministry". (234)

Both dimensions are complementary and reciprocal since they are founded, with the

help of supernatural gifts, in the interior unity of the person.

The assistance which formators are called to offer deacons will be successful in as much as it responds to the personal needs of each deacon, since every deacon lives his ministry in the Church as a unique person placed in particular circumstances.

Personalized assistance to deacons also assures them of that love with which mother Church is close to them as they strive to live faithfully the sacramental grace of their calling. It is thus of supreme importance that each deacon be able to choose a spiritual director, approved by the bishop, with whom he can have regular and frequent contact.

The entire diocesan community is also, in some sense, involved in the formation of deacons. (235) This is particularly true of the parish priest or other priests charged with formation who should personally support them with fraternal solicitude.

### *Specificity*

67. Personal concern and commitment in ongoing formation are unequivocal signs of a coherent response to divine vocation, of sincere love for the Church and of authentic pastoral zeal for the Christian faithful and all men. What has been said of priests can also be applied to deacons: "ongoing formation is a necessary means of reaching the object of one's vocation which is service of God and one's people". (236)

It must be seen in continuity with initial formation since it pursues the same ends as initial formation and seeks to integrate, conserve and deepen what was begun in initial formation.

The essential availability of the deacon to others is a practical expression of sacramental configuration to Christ the Servant, received through ordination and indelibly impressed upon the soul. It is a permanent reminder to the deacon in his life and ministry. Hence permanent formation cannot be reduced merely to complementary education or to a form of training in better *techniques*. Ongoing formation cannot be confined simply to updating, but should seek to facilitate a practical configuration of the deacon's entire life to Christ who loves all and serves all.

### *Dimensions*

68. Ongoing formation must include and harmonize all dimensions of the life and ministry of the deacon. Thus, as with the permanent formation of priests, it should be complete, systematic and personalized in its diverse aspects whether human, spiritual, intellectual or pastoral. (237)

69. As in the past, attention to the various aspects of the human formation of deacons is an important task for Pastors. The deacon, aware that he is chosen as a man among men to be at the service of the salvation of all, should be open to being helped in developing his human qualities as valuable instruments for ministry. He should strive to perfect all those aspects of his personality which might render his ministry more effective.

To fulfil successfully his vocation to holiness and his particular ecclesial mission, he should, above all, fix his gaze on Him who is true God and true man and practice the natural and supernatural virtues which conform him more closely to the image of Christ and make him worthy of the respect of the faithful. (238) In their ministry and daily life particularly, deacons should foster in themselves kind-heartedness, patience, affability, strength of character, zeal for justice, fidelity to promises given,

a spirit of sacrifice and consistency with tasks freely undertaken. The practice of these virtues will assist in arriving at a balanced personality, maturity and discernment.

Conscious of the example of integrity in his social activity, the deacon should reflect on his ability to dialogue, on correctness in human relationships and on cultural discernment. He should also give careful consideration to the value of friendship and to his treatment of others. (239)

70. Ongoing spiritual formation is closely connected with diaconal spirituality, which it must nourish and develop, and with the ministry, which is sustained by "a truly personal encounter with Jesus, a relationship with the Father and a profound experience of the Spirit". (240) Hence, deacons should be encouraged by the Pastors of the Church to cultivate their spiritual lives in a responsible manner, for it is from this life that springs up that love which sustains their ministry and makes it fruitful, and prevents its reduction to mere "functionalism" or bureaucracy.

In particular, the spiritual formation of deacons should inculcate those attitudes related to the triple diaconia of word, liturgy and charity.

Assiduous meditation on Sacred Scripture will achieve familiarity and worshipful dialogue with the living God and thus an assimilation of the revealed word.

A profound knowledge of Tradition and of the liturgical books will help the deacon to discover continually the riches of the divine mysteries and thus become their worthy minister. A solicitude for fraternal charity will impel him to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and provide living signs of the Church's love.

All of this requires careful planning and organization of time and resources. Improvisation should be avoided. In addition to spiritual direction, deacons should try to pursue study courses on the great themes of the theological tradition of Christian spirituality, intensive sessions in spirituality and pilgrimages to places of spiritual interest.

While on retreat, which should be at least every other year, (241) deacons should work out a spiritual programme which they should periodically share with their spiritual directors. This programme should include a period of daily eucharistic adoration and provide for exercises of Marian devotion, liturgical prayer, personal meditation and the habitual ascetical practices.

The centre of this spiritual itinerary must be the Holy Eucharist since it is the touchstone of the deacon's life and activity, the indispensable means of perseverance, the criterion of authentic renewal and of a balanced synthesis of life. In this way, the spiritual formation of the deacon will reveal the Holy Eucharist as Passover, in its annual articulation in Holy Week, in its weekly articulation on Sunday and in its constant articulation at daily Mass.

71. The insertion of deacons into the mystery of the Church, in virtue of Baptism and their reception of the first grade of the Sacrament of Orders, requires that ongoing formation strengthen in them the consciousness and willingness to live in intelligent, active and mature communion with their bishops and the priests of their dioceses, and with the Supreme Pontiff who is the visible foundation of the entire Church's unity.

When formed in this way, they can become in their ministry effective promoters of communion. In situations of conflict they, in particular, should make every effort to restore peace for the good of the Church.

72. The doctrine of the faith should be deepened by suitable initiatives such as study days, renewal courses and the frequentation of academic institutions. For the same reason, it would be particularly useful to promote careful, in-depth and systematic study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

It is necessary that deacons have an accurate knowledge of the Sacraments of Holy Orders, the Holy Eucharist, Baptism and Matrimony. They must develop a knowledge of those aspects of philosophy, ecclesiology, dogmatic Theology, Sacred Scripture, and Canon Law which most assist them in their ministry.

Such courses, while aimed at theological renewal, should also lead to prayer, ecclesial communion and greater pastoral efforts in response to the urgent need for new evangelization.

Under sure guidance, the documents of the Magisterium should be studied in common, and in relation to the needs of the pastoral ministry, especially those documents in which the Church responds to the more pressing moral and doctrinal questions. Thus, with a sense of communion, deacons will be enabled to achieve and express due obedience to the Pastor of the universal Church and to diocesan bishops, as well as to promote fidelity to the doctrine and discipline of the Church.

In addition, it is of the greatest use and relevance to study, appropriate and diffuse the social doctrine of the Church. A good knowledge of that teaching will permit many deacons to mediate it in their different professions, at work and in their families. The diocesan bishop may also invite those who are capable to specialize in a theological discipline and obtain the necessary academic qualifications at those pontifical academies or institutes recognized by the Apostolic See which guarantee doctrinally correct formation.

Deacons should pursue systematic study not only to perfect their theological knowledge but also to revitalize constantly their ministry in view of the changing needs of the ecclesial community.

73. Together with study of the sacred sciences, appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that deacons acquire a pastoral methodology (242) for an effective ministry. Permanent pastoral formation consists, in the first place, in constantly encouraging the deacon to perfect the effectiveness of his ministry of making the love and service of Christ present in the Church and in society without distinction, especially to the poor and to those most in need. Indeed it is from the pastoral love of Christ that the ministry of deacons draws its model and inspiration. This same love urges the deacon, in collaboration with his bishop and the priests of his diocese, to promote the mission of the laity in the world. He will thus be a stimulus "to become ever better acquainted with the real situation of the men and women to whom he is sent, to discern the call of the Spirit in the historical circumstances in which he finds himself, and to seek the most suitable methods and the most useful forms for carrying out his ministry today", (243) in loyal and convinced communion with the Supreme Pontiff and with his own bishop.

The effectiveness of the apostolate sometimes calls also for group work requiring a knowledge and respect of the diversity and complementarity of the gifts and respective functions of priests, deacons and the lay faithful, within the organic nature of ecclesial communion.

### ***Organization and means***

74. The diversity of circumstances in the particular Churches makes it difficult to give an exhaustive account of how best to organize the suitable ongoing formation of permanent deacons. Yet it is necessary that all such formation be accomplished by

means which accord with theological and pastoral clarity.

A few general criteria, easily applicable to diverse concrete circumstances, may be mentioned in this respect.

75. The primary locus of ongoing formation for deacons is the ministry itself. The deacon matures in its exercise and by focusing his own call to holiness on the fulfilment of his social and ecclesial duties, in particular, of his ministerial functions and responsibilities. The formation of deacons should, therefore, concentrate in a special way on awareness of their ministerial character.

76. Permanent formation must follow a well planned programme drawn up and approved by competent authority. It must be unitary, divided into progressive stages, and at the same time, in perfect harmony with the Magisterium of the Church. It is better that the programme should insist on a basic minimum to be followed by all deacons and which should be distinct from later specialization courses.

Programmes such as this should take into consideration two distinct but closely related levels of formation: the diocesan level, in reference to the bishop or his delegate, and the community level in which the deacon exercises his own ministry, in reference to the parish priest or some other priest.

77. The first appointment of a deacon to a parish or a pastoral area is a very sensitive moment. Introducing the deacon to those in charge of the community (the parish priest, priests), and the community to the deacon, helps them not only to come to know each other but contributes to a collaboration based on mutual respect and dialogue, in a spirit of faith and fraternal charity. The community into which a deacon comes can have a highly important formative effect, especially when he realizes the importance of respect for well proven traditions and knows how to listen, discern, serve and love as Jesus Christ did.

Deacons in their initial pastoral assignments should be carefully supervised by an exemplary priest especially appointed to this task by the bishop.

78. Periodic meetings should be arranged for deacons which treat of liturgical and spiritual matters, of continuous theological renewal and study, either at diocesan or supra-diocesan level.

Under the bishop's authority and without multiplying existent structures, periodic meeting should be arranged between priests, deacons, religious and laity involved in pastoral work both to avoid compartmentalization or the development of isolated groups and to guarantee co-ordinated unity for different pastoral activities.

The bishop should show particular solicitude for deacons since they are his collaborators. When possible he should attend their meetings and always ensure the presence of his representative.

79. With the approval of the diocesan bishop, a realistic programme of ongoing formation should be drawn up in accordance with the present dispositions, taking due account of factors such as the age and circumstances of deacons, together with the demands made on them by their pastoral ministry.

To accomplish this task, the bishop might constitute a group of suitable formators or seek the assistance of neighbouring dioceses.

80. It is desirable that the bishop set up a diocesan *organization for the co-ordination of deacons*, to plan, co-ordinate and supervise the diaconal ministry from the discernment of vocation, (244) to the exercise of ministry and formation —

including ongoing formation. This organization should be composed of the Bishop as its president, or a priest delegated by him for this task, and a proportionate number of deacons. This organization should not be remiss in maintaining the necessary links with the other diocesan organizations.

The Bishops should regulate the life and activity of this organization by the issuance of appropriate norms.

81. In addition to the usual permanent formation offered to deacons, special courses and initiatives should be arranged for those deacons who are married. These courses should involve, where opportune, their wives and families. However, they must always be careful to maintain the essential distinction of roles and the clear independence of the ministry.

82. Deacons should always be appreciative of all those initiatives for the ongoing formation of the clergy promoted by Conferences of bishops or various dioceses — spiritual retreats, conferences, study days, conventions, theological and pastoral courses. They should avail themselves of such initiatives especially when they concern their own ministry of evangelization, worship and loving service.

*The Sovereign Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, has approved this present Directory and ordered its publication.*

Rome, at the Office of the Congregations, 22 February 1998, Feast of the Chair of Peter.

**Darío Card. Castrillón Hoyos**  
*Prefect*

**+ Csaba Ternyák**  
Titular Archbishop of Eminenziana  
*Secretary*

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