

**From the Australian Bishops' Guidelines  
on the Permanent Diaconate**

“... The diaconate fulfils a key role in the ministry of the Church and is an essential part of its structure. The ministry of deacons is one of liturgy, word and charity. In this they are ordained to assist the bishop and his body of priests. However, they are also to be at the service of all, embodying Christ who came to serve and not to be served.

“The order of deacons is a distinct and permanent grade in the Church's hierarchy. Through ordination deacons enter into the threefold ministry of worship and service, ministering in communion with the bishop and his presbyterium. The pre-eminent expression of the Church is that Sunday Eucharist celebrated by the bishop, surrounded by his presbyters, deacons and lay ministers, and in which the faithful present participate fully and actively. (GIRM, 112)

“The Second Vatican Council, when decreeing that the diaconate be restored as a proper and permanent rank of the clergy in the Latin Church, stated that it pertained to the office of deacon to administer baptism, to be the custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services (Lumen gentium, 29).

“A local Church without deacons is not only missing an important ministry of Christ-like service, but lacks something integral to its very nature. ....”

(from “Guidelines for the Permanent Diaconate in the Catholic Church in Australia”, 2-5; to be read in the light of the Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, promulgated by the Congregation for Clergy, 22 February, 1998)

**Pope Benedict's *Deus caritas est*  
on the Permanent Diaconate & Charity**

**The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with “prayer” (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the “ministry of the word”, felt over-burdened by “serving tables”, so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons ...**

**They were to be men  
“full of the Spirit and of wisdom”  
(cf. Acts 6:1-6). In other words,  
the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete,  
yet at the same time it was a spiritual service;  
theirs was a truly spiritual office  
which carried out  
an essential responsibility of the Church,  
namely a well-ordered love of neighbour.  
With the formation of this group of seven,  
“diaconia” – the ministry of charity  
exercised in a communitarian, orderly way –  
became part of the  
fundamental structure of the Church.” (no. 21)**

**... love for widows and orphans,  
prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind,  
is as essential to [the Church]  
as the ministry of the sacraments  
and preaching of the Gospel.  
The Church cannot neglect  
the service of charity  
any more than she can neglect  
the Sacraments and the Word. (no. 22)**

(emphases added)

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**INFORMATION  
BULLETIN**

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Dear Brothers in Ministry

We all know what it means to be torn apart in every direction. After responding daily to our most pressing parish issues—administrivia as well, where do we find time for those precious moments of care for the poor and needy, with a depth of compassion and charity? And yet, the Church is clear: in *Pastores dabō vobis* (22-23, *et alia*), pastoral charity is the very essence of priestly ministry; in *Christus Dominus* (30:2; 13), bishops are reminded that “they should devote themselves with a paternal love to the poor and the sick ....”

Pope Benedict tells us in *Deus caritas est* (20-25) that when the Apostles were torn in every direction, the **diaconate** was established as “part of the fundamental structure of the Church”, as “a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church.” It's not that deacons replace priests in pastoral charity; deacons are ordained to assist the bishop, *inter alia*, in his essential work of charity.

In January this year, deacons from across Australia met in Adelaide to celebrate their ministry and life. Those who led discussions—priests too, reminded all of us of their unique place in the Church, asking us to give prayerful thought to a more complete understanding of the Sacrament of Orders. Our deacons' understanding of their place in the wider Australian Church was drawn together in Adelaide—some of their thoughts are included inside.

With personal best wishes

**Frank Devoy**  
Executive Officer

## Why have this Conference?

- To review Models of Formation
- To reflect on Models of Diaconate
- In short, 'to be reading off the same page'!

In addition we wish:

- To gauge the growth of this vocation across the nation
- Establish a national database

... to consolidate the diaconate

### This project

is an initiative of the Australian Council for Clergy Life & Ministry authorized and promoted by the Bishops' Commission for Church Ministry.

### Accommodation Costs

will be borne by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference through the Office for Clergy Life and Ministry.

**Travel Costs** will be the responsibility of participating Dioceses.

## Who should attend?

All Directors of  
Diaconate Formation  
or their equivalent

Where there is **no** Director  
of Formation  
Dioceses are invited  
to send their  
Director of Clergy Life and  
Ministry.

## Where?

Mackillop Place,  
North Sydney

## Aim of the Conference:

To look at the development of the Permanent Diaconate across Australia drawing on the National Guidelines as a basis.

In particular, to:

1. Identify Basic Standards
2. Review Models of Formation
  - Human
  - Spiritual
  - Academic
  - Pastoral
  - Liturgical
3. Enhance Communication Strategies:  
(Diocesan, Parish, and Diaconal Communities)
4. Activate Ongoing Formation  
(Clergy Life and Ministry)
5. Focus on Complimentarity with other Ministries