

***A Portrait of the Permanent Diaconate:  
A Study for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
2011-2012***

**Executive Summary**

This report presents findings from a national survey of the Office of the Permanent Diaconate in arch/dioceses and arch/eparchies in the United States that was commissioned by the Secretary of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The survey was distributed in January, 2012. The present survey is the sixth survey of Offices of the Permanent Diaconate that CARA has conducted for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.<sup>1</sup>

The original questionnaire was designed in collaboration with the Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for the Diaconate.

To obtain the names and contact information for the directors of these offices, CARA contacted the National Association of Deacon Directors for a list of current directors of the Office of Deacon in U.S. dioceses and eparchies. CARA also contacted the directors of all diaconate formation programs in its Catholic Ministry Formation database to request their cooperation in completing the survey. As in previous years, diocesan directors had the option of completing the survey either online or on paper.

CARA completed data collection in May 2012, after extensive follow-up by mail, e-mail, telephone, and fax. At the completion of data collection, CARA had 2011-2012 information from 130 of the 192 arch/dioceses and arch/eparchies whose bishops and eparches belong to the USCCB, for a 68 percent overall completion rate.<sup>2</sup> The response rate is higher among arch/dioceses (72 percent, or 128 of 177 possible responses) than among arch/eparchies (13 percent, or two of 15 possible responses).

***Number of Deacons***

- Responding arch/dioceses with the largest number of permanent deacons include Los Angeles (434), Galveston-Houston (402), Toledo (303), Hartford (289), and San Antonio (281). Adjusting for Catholic population size, Latin rite dioceses with the lowest ratio of Catholics per permanent deacon include: Fairbanks (466 Catholics to every deacon), Amarillo (641), Lexington (915), Peoria (931), and Rapid City (942).
- The 128 Latin rite arch/dioceses that responded to the questionnaire report a total of 12,476 permanent deacons. The two arch/eparchies that responded report a total 36 permanent deacons. Extrapolating to include arch/dioceses and arch/eparchies that did not respond to the survey, it can be estimated that there are as many as 17,241 permanent deacons in the United States today.
- Latin rite arch/dioceses report having 10,056 deacons active in ministry. The two arch/eparchies report 31 active deacons. Extrapolating to include dioceses and eparchies that did not respond to the survey, it can be estimated that there are 14,833 deacons active in ministry in the United States today, or about 80 percent of all permanent deacons.

***Demographic Characteristics of Active Deacons***

- Ninety-one percent of active deacons are currently married. Four percent are widowers, and 3 percent have never been married.

- Ninety-five percent of active deacons are at least 50 years old. A quarter are in their 50s, slightly more than four-tenths are in their 60s, and slightly more than one-quarter are 70 or older.
- Seventy-six percent of active deacons are non-Hispanic whites. Sixteen percent are Hispanic or Latino. Four percent are African American and 3 percent are Asian.
- Six in ten active deacons have at least a college degree. One in ten has a graduate degree in a field related to religion or ministry.

### *Compensation and Formation*

- Among deacons who are financially compensated for full-time ministry, 30 percent are serving in an “other parish ministerial position.” Fifteen percent are in a parish non-ministerial position and just over a fifth are in a diocesan position. Ten percent are in full-time hospital and 8 percent are compensated for full-time prison ministry. Just under one in ten deacons is entrusted with full-time pastoral care of a parish (Canon 517.2), and one in twenty is employed by a social services agency.
- Among deacons who are financially compensated for part-time ministry, 33 percent are involved in an “other parish ministerial position” and 13 percent are in a parish non-ministerial position, while 9 percent are entrusted with the pastoral care of a parish (Canon 517.2). Thirteen percent are in part-time diocesan positions and just over 10 percent are in part-time hospital or prison ministries. Only 3 percent are in social service positions part-time.
- Eighty-three percent of responding arch/dioceses require post-ordination formation of deacons. These arch/dioceses require a median of 20 hours of post-ordination formation annually.
- Ninety-five percent of arch/dioceses require an annual retreat of deacons. Eighty-six percent provide other annual gatherings for deacons.
- Ninety-four percent of responding arch/dioceses have a Director of the Diaconate (or a person with a similar title). In about a third of these arch/dioceses, the position is fulltime.
- More than three-quarters of arch/dioceses have a plan for the placement and ministry of deacons.
- Nearly nine in ten responding arch/dioceses have a minimum age for deacons. Almost half have a mandatory age for deacon retirement.

<sup>1</sup> The survey was originally commissioned by the USCCB Secretariat for the Diaconate, which became the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. It has been conducted annually since 2005-2006, with the exception of 2010-2011.

<sup>2</sup> The Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A. has no clergy personnel except those on assignment from other dioceses and eparchies, so it is excluded from this report and analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Another two eparchies, Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg and St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago, have no permanent deacons in the United States and are also excluded from this report and analysis.

The complete survey results may be found at:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/diaconate/upload/Diaconate-Post-Ordination-Report-2011-2012-FINAL.pdf>

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### ***Ausdeacon* Editor's comments**

**Demographics:** It would be interesting to examine the demographic profile of Australian deacons. We have a small number of indigenous men who are deacons. What varieties of cultural mix may also be found? Since 2005 ACBC guidelines a bachelor degree in theology or equivalent is required for deacons. What are the qualifications of deacons and the quality of formation programs within each diocese? What are the age characteristics of deacons in Australia?

**Financial support or remuneration:** It would be interesting to ask why those who are in full time ecclesiastical ministry are not remunerated. Can it be that all of these have sufficient income from other sources that they have been able to forgo their right to remuneration from the diocese in which they minister?

The Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, which is a general executory decree (CIC can§ 32) when it interprets the universal law or urges its observance, is abundantly clear that all clerics (deacons, presbyters, bishops) dedicated fully to ecclesiastical ministry have a right to financial support and social security from their diocese.

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

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” and to social security.

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”. 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”.

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

17. Celibate deacons who minister full-time in a diocese, have a right to be remunerated according to the general principle of law 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.

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.

It would be interesting to see if a similar survey of presbyters reveals as high a percentage of them who are able to minister as full time prison or hospital chaplains and support themselves from other sources of income than that provided by the diocese. Can we conclude that there is a selection bias in formation programs where candidates for the diaconate are mostly selected from men with independent wealth sufficient to support themselves and their families even while full engaged in ecclesiastical ministry? Does this selection bias cut out potential candidates whom the Spirit calls but who are not financially able to support themselves?

Hopefully the number of deacons ministering without remuneration does not mean we have deacons ‘volunteering free’ ministry and simply not being supported financially as required by canon law. This would be an injustice that we would not expect our priests, bishops or deacons to experience. So there are many questions to investigate at a deeper level with the remuneration question.<sup>1</sup>

Post-ordination formation: It is good to note that ongoing formation is a high priority for diocese. It would be interesting to discover what supports the dioceses offer to assist deacons to meet the requirements. Are courses provided? Is funding provided for deacons to attend courses and retreats? Is time made available for deacons to attend courses and retreats as part of their normal ministry arrangements? Can wives gain some support for attending these? Similarly what provisions are made for married priests in the Latin Church and Eastern Churches?

The full report is worth reading. Of course everything that happens in the USA is not always transferrable to our Australian context but insights can be gained. It would be interesting to start some kind annual survey like this in Australia to track the development of the diaconate. Perhaps plans are already in place for such a survey.

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<sup>1</sup> An article on deacons and remuneration may be found on the Canon Law page of this website.