

Report to NAD - Brisbane Conference - June 2011

Deacon Paul Simmons
National Coordinator – Permanent Diaconate

I am a Deacon of the Broken Bay Diocese, and was appointed as National Coordinator for the Permanent Diaconate, by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in 2007, for a term of three years, and was subsequently reappointed for a further three years in June 2010.

This is a part-time position and is accountable, through the Director of Clergy Life and Ministry to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry, and in turn is accountable to the Bishops Conference, for the coordination and promotion of the permanent diaconate in Australia.

This includes implementing policies decided by the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry to support the formation and ongoing education of deacons in Australia, and to raise the profile of the permanent diaconate by communicating a national vision, yet at the same time, focusing on the individual needs of each diocese, particularly in relation to the formation of aspirants and candidates for the diaconate.

As National Co-ordinator, I am also an Ex officio member of the Australian Council for Clergy Life & Ministry. I attend and participate in the bi-annual conferences of the Council as well as attending the Diocesan Directors for Clergy Life & Ministry annual conferences. I am also an ex officio member of the Executive of the National Association of Deacons.

Since my report to the members of the National Association of Deacons at our 2009 Conference in Broken Bay, the situation of the Permanent Diaconate in Australia, at this time, is that there are one hundred and nine diocesan permanent deacons. There are in addition, one Benedictine permanent deacon, at New Norcia WA, and four Eastern Rite permanent deacons. Twelve of our brother deacons have now been returned to the Father.

I have had numerous meetings with Bishops and Diaconal Communities in various Archdioceses/Dioceses regarding the promotion of the Diaconate and the formation of aspirants/candidates as well as the ongoing formation of permanent deacons.

In September 2009, I worked with the Archdiocese of Sydney to assist them with the reimplementation of the Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese.

In December 2009, I had my first visit to Hobart. I met with Archbishop Doyle and Deacon Nick MacFarlane to assist with the promotion of the permanent diaconate, and the implementation of a formation programme for the Archdiocese. I had the pleasure attending a formation session and met Paul Crowe and Michael Hangan, who are both in formation for the Archdiocese. Paul will be ordained by Archbishop Doyle on 4th September 2011 at the Church of the Apostles Launceston.

I also met with Bishop Michael Malone regarding the revision of the Guidelines for the Permanent Diaconate. (This is the subject of a separate report).

In February of 2010 my wife Susan and I had the pleasure of hosting Deacon Larry Tranel, from the Madison Diocese in Wisconsin, USA, for five days. It was a wonderful experience discussing the many different aspects of ministry and life of deacons in both our countries.

Also in March 2010, in conjunction with Fr Frank Devoy, Director for Clergy Life and Ministry, I worked on setting up a Deacons' webpage on the Clergy Life and Ministry website www.clergy.org.au/deacons

In February and March 2010 the Broken Bay Dioceses conducted an acculturation programme for international priests. As many priests who come to our dioceses in Australia, have little or no appreciation, or understanding, of the vocation and ministry of permanent deacons, I was invited to give a presentation to these men on the theology, ministry and life of permanent deacons in Australia.

In May 2010 I entered into discussions with the Diocese of Ballarat, regarding the implementation of the permanent diaconate within that diocese, There have been ongoing discussions since then, but no decision to implement the permanent diaconate has been made to date.

Also in May 2010, I met with Bishop Michael Malone, the then Chair of the Bishops' Commission for Church Ministry, who undertook a review of my performance as the National Coordinator, over the previous three years.

Between July and November 2010 I visited the Dioceses of Bathurst, Darwin and the Archdiocese of Hobart. In Bathurst, Susan & I, along with Mick & Cora O'Donnell, (ACT/NSW member of the Exec) held meetings and made presentations to the formation team and a number of enquirers, regarding the permanent diaconate. I will be returning to Bathurst in September to meet with the Bishop and his Council of Priests. I will also meet with the Formation Team and a number of Aspirants.

I spent a week in Hobart with Nick Macfarlane, and held meetings with Nick, Fr Mark Freeman VG and Archbishop Doyle. I visited a number of parishes from Launceston to South Hobart, to speak on the diaconate. I also assisted in the preparation of a draft diaconal policy and a draft formation programme for the Archdiocese. I wish to publicly record my thanks Nick and his wife Giovanna, for their generous and wonderful hospitality during my time in Hobart.

My stay in the Diocese of Darwin was particularly memorable; I visited Deacon Boniface Perdjert, and members of the community at Wadeye. Boniface is the longest serving deacon in the country, who had recently celebrated the 36th anniversary of his ordination just prior to my visit to Wadeye.

I also spent four days on the Tiwi Islands where I thoroughly enjoyed meeting Deacons John Bosco Tipiloura, John Baptist Kelantumama, Theodore Tipiloura and Peter Brogan.

I was most appreciative of the support and hospitality shown to me during my time in the Diocese of Darwin by the priests who welcomed me to live in their presbyteries. I was also very appreciative of the support given me by Deacon Tony and Marjorie Cunningham.

I was invited to return to the Diocese of Darwin, to lead a retreat for the deacons and hopefully, be involved in some ongoing formation to help them in their ministry. At the moment, the retreat is planned for later this year.

In February 2011, I met with Fr Michael McEntee and aspirants for the permanent diaconate in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Also, Deacon Jim Curtain and I met with the Executive of the National Council of Priests, in Geelong.

In March 2011, thanks to Mick & Cora O'Donnell, I was invited into the Archdiocese of Canberra/Goulburn where I met with Archbishop Mark Coleridge and a number of deacons, aspirants and their wives, over a BBQ lunch which was generously provided by the diaconal community, at the Archbishop's house. We discussed many things pertaining to the diaconal community and the Archbishop articulated well, his vision of the diaconate for the Archdiocese.