

## **Deacons: Pastoral and Liturgical Leadership in the Source Documents**

Two specific questions regarding deacons

- 1. Can a deacon be appointed Pastoral leadership of a parish (in the absence of a priest, that is, there is no priest to appoint)?**
- 2. Is it the role of the deacon to provide Leadership on Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP)?**

According to the source documents the answer to both is yes. Furthermore this answer also indicates that a deacon, if available:

- Should be appointed to a parish in this specific situation and not a lay person unless there is neither a priest nor deacon who could fulfill the role.
- Leads liturgy (not Mass) in the absence of a priest and a lay person(s) only takes this role if there is neither a priest nor deacon.

### **Key Documents (extracts)**

1. *Basic Norms For the Formation of Permanent Deacons (Norms)*, Congregations For Clergy and Catholic Education. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1998.
2. *Directory For the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (Directory)*. Congregations For Clergy and Catholic Education. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1998.
3. *Mysterio ecclesiae*, Inter-dicasteral Instruction, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1997.
4. *Directory for the Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. Congregation for Divine Worship, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1998.
5. *Code of Canon Law*, 1983
6. *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a priest: Directives for the Dioceses of Australia*. 2004 (ACBC Directives)
7. *ACBC Guidelines for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons. (Guidelines 2005)*, 2005

### **Norms (Congregations for Clergy and Education 1998)**

3. The effectiveness of the formation of permanent deacons depends to a great extent on the theological understanding of the diaconate that underlies it. In fact it offers the co-ordinates for establishing and guiding the formation process and, at the same time, lays down the end to be attained.

The almost total disappearance of the permanent diaconate from the Church of the West for more than a millennium has certainly made it more difficult to understand the profound reality of this ministry. However, it cannot be said for that reason that the theology of the diaconate has no authoritative points of reference, completely at the mercy of different theological opinions. There are points of reference, and they are very clear, even if they need to be developed and deepened.

### **Introduction to Norms and Directory**

The Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, as in the case of the Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, has, together with its hortative character, juridically binding force where its norms “recall disciplinary norms of the Code of Canon Law” or “determine with regard to the manner of applying universal laws of the Church, explicitate their doctrinal basis and inculcate or solicit their faithful observance”. In these specific cases, it is to be regarded as a formal, general, executory Decree (cf. canon 32).

The Sacrament of Orders “configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for his Church. By ordination he is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet and king”.

Through the Sacrament of Orders, the mission entrusted by Christ to his Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time. It is thus the sacrament of apostolic ministry. The sacramental act of ordination surpasses mere election, designation or delegation by the community, because it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit enabling the exercise of sacred power which can only come from Christ himself through his Church. “The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act of his own authority, but by virtue of Christ's authority; not as a member of the community but speaking to it in the name of Christ. No one can bestow grace on himself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorised and empowered by Christ”.

The sacrament of apostolic ministry comprises three degrees. Indeed “the divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests and deacons”

Together with priests and deacons as their helpers, the bishops have received pastoral charge of the community, and preside in God's stead over the flock of which they are shepherds in as much as they are teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship and ministers of pastoral government.

The sacramental nature of ecclesial ministry is such that it has “intrinsically linked...its character of service. Entirely dependant on Christ who gives mission and authority, ministers are truly “slaves of Christ” (cf. Rom. 1:11), in the image of him who freely took “the form of a slave” for us (cf. Phil. 2:7)”.

The sacred ministry also has a collegial form and a personal character by which “sacramental ministry in the Church...is at once a collegial and a personal service, exercised in the name of Christ”.

### **Directory:**

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

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.

32. It falls to the deacon to preside at Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest.

40. 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.

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

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, 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. "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. When deacons supply in places where there is a shortage of priests, they do so by ecclesial mandate". 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.

### **Mysterio ecclesiae (Inter-dicasteral instruction August 15, 1997)**

#### ***2. Unity and Diversity of Ministerial Functions***

The functions of the ordained minister, taken as a whole, constitute a single indivisible unity in virtue of their singular foundation in Christ. As with Christ, salvific activity is one and unique. It is signified and realized by the minister through the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful. This unity essentially defines the exercise of the sacred minister's functions which are always an exercise, in different ways, of the role of Christ as Head of the Church.

Therefore, since the exercise of the munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi by the sacred minister constitute the essence of pastoral ministry, the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other. Rather they must be viewed in terms of mutual correspondence and complementarity. Only in some of these functions, and to a limited degree, may the non-ordained faithful cooperate with their pastors should they be called to do so by lawful Authority and in accordance with the prescribed manner. "He (Jesus Christ) continually provides in his body, that is, in the Church, for gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we serve each other unto salvation...". "The exercise of such tasks does not make Pastors of the lay faithful, in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head in his Eternal Priesthood. The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the official deputation given by Pastors, as well as from its concrete exercise under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority".

This doctrine needs to be reaffirmed especially in the light of certain practices

## **Article 7**

### ***Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest***

§ 1. In some places in the absence of priests or deacons, non-ordained members of the faithful lead Sunday celebrations.

### **Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest**

29. As the primary assistants of priests, deacons are called in a special way to lead these Sunday assemblies. Since the deacon has been ordained for the nurture and increase of the people of God, it belongs to him to lead the prayers, to proclaim the gospel, to preach the homily, and to give communion.

30. In the absence of both a priest and a deacon, the pastor is to appoint laypersons, who are to be entrusted with the care of these celebrations, namely, with leading the prayers, with the ministry of the word, and with giving Holy Communion.

38. When a deacon presides at the celebration, he acts in accord with his ministry in regard to the greetings, the prayers, the gospel reading and homily, the giving of communion, and the dismissal and blessing. He wears the vestments proper to his ministry, that is, the alb with stole, and, as circumstances suggest, the dalmatic. He uses the presidential chair.

43. In order that the participants may retain the word of God, there should be an explanation of the readings or a period of silence for reflection on what has been heard. Since only a pastor or a deacon may give a homily, it is desirable that the pastor prepare a homily and give it to the leader of the assembly to read. But in this matter the decisions of the conference of bishops are to be followed.

### **Code of Canon Law 1983**

Can. 230 §3 When the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply certain of their duties, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside offer liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion, according to the prescripts of the law.

Can. 517 §2 If, because of a lack of priests, the diocesan bishop has decided that participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon, to another person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest who, provided with the powers and faculties of a pastor, is to direct the pastoral care.

### **ACBC Directives**

6. The provisions of the Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (1988) are to be observed in governing and directing liturgical ministry and worship when Sunday Eucharist is unable to be celebrated because of the lack of a priest or some other serious reason.

10. In Australia such celebrations are known as a:

- Sunday Celebration of the Word or
- Sunday Celebration of the Word and Communion or,
- Sunday Celebration of the Hours.

23. Flowing from the pastoral needs outlined, and, under the guidance and authority of the diocesan bishop, the Church entrusts the active participation in, and responsibility for conducting these celebrations to the lay faithful. In the absence of an ordained minister laywomen and laymen lead the prayer of the Sunday assembly by virtue of the dignity they possess through their baptism and confirmation. They must receive a mandate from the bishop. They may be commissioned in a simple liturgical rite in the parish for a specified duration, such as three years.

### **Guidelines 2005**

In their liturgical ministry, deacons proclaim the Gospel and direct the Church's prayer. As the primary assistants of bishops, deacons are called, as a consequence of ordination, in a special way to lead Sunday assemblies of the faithful in the absence of a priest (Motu proprio Ad Pascendum, Paul VI, 15 August 1972). Since deacons are ordained for the nurture and increase of the people of God, it belongs to them to lead the prayers, to proclaim the Gospel, to preach the homily, and to distribute Communion (Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, Congregation for Divine Worship, 2 June 1998).

16. In general, deacons, since they are clerics, are bound by the same obligations and enjoy the same rights as priests.

53. Against this backdrop, some possible ministry placements for deacons include:

(v) Parish Pastoral Leadership: Because of a shortage of priests, deacons can be appointed to a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish (can. 517 §2), although pastoral leadership within parishes is always exercised by some priest with the powers and faculties of a parish priest, who will direct the pastoral care.