

Shared and diverse mission

Deacon Anthony Gooley

“Their (deacon’s) authority, therefore, exercised in hierarchical communion with the bishop and his priests, and required by the same unity of consecration and mission, 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.” (Directory #37)

This section of the Directory has a focus on the pastoral ministry of the deacon. Notice that the authority, that is the authority to fulfil the office to which he is appointed, the deacon exercises in communion with the presbyters and bishop. He is not alone.

When the deacon is involved in pastoral ministry in the parish or diocese he participates in the same consecration for the work of the local church and mission which both presbyter and bishop have received. But each of them, presbyter, deacon and bishop participates in this mission in different ways. There is diversity in the communion of their common consecration and mission.



Those means which encourage constructive and patient collaboration between deacons and others involved in the pastoral ministry should be promoted with generosity and conviction. (#41)



Charity or pastoral ministry is not in this sense the unique ministry of the deacon. Bishops and presbyters are also ministers of charity. Throughout the Directory charity is defined broadly and sometimes inconsistently. One only has to read through the sections of the Directory from #37-42 to see how broad in scope is the term “charity” used in the document. We would be doing a disservice to the document to read it too narrowly as good works or caring for the poor and marginalised. And we would read it inconsistently if we said that “charity” was unique to the deacon, as paragraph 37 already tells us it is common to all the ordained.

Notice too that the object of the pastoral ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon is to foster or build up all the members of a particular church (diocese). By building up the laity in faith, recognising and encouraging the use of charisms with which the Spirit has endowed them the ordained fulfil their pastoral task.

The objective of pastoral ministry, according to #37, is to enable the laity to participate in that same spirit of communion or *koinonia* which characterises the Church in its life and mission. The life of the Church consists of the life of holiness, celebration of the Sacraments, prayer, discipleship and witness to the new life which we have founded together as one body in Christ, among other things.

The mission of the whole Church is the mission of Christ to the world. The Son was sent from the Father and we are sent by the Son in the Holy Spirit to continue that mission. This mission does have a social dimension, promotion of justice and peace and the works of charity but this does not exhaust the meaning of the mission.

Proclamation of the Kingdom of God is not identical with or restricted to the proclamation of peace and justice. Proclamation includes the announcement that God's Kingdom has already come and that there is open to us a new way of being. This being is characterised by our being an effective sign and means of the sacramental realisation of intimate communion between God and humanity and the unity of the whole of humanity in Christ. Mission is also proclaiming the New Creation. The deacon, alongside of the presbyter and bishop helps the whole church to be formed for this mission.

Diaconia should bring people to an experience of God's love and move him to conversion by opening his heart to the work of grace. (Directory #38) As we know, from Scripture, diakonia, is the ordinary word for ministry. Lumen Gentium, 24, described the work of the bishop as a diakonia. Thus all who are engaged in the ministry are ultimately about the work of conversion and grace.

It is for this reason that the directory advises that deacons (and all ministers) should always strive to avoid unnecessary forms of bureaucracy, lest they deprive their ministry of pastoral meaning and value. (#42) Whether the deacon has a role as chancellor of a diocese, an administrator in an ecclesial organisation like Centacare or chaplain to a school, his ministry is a pastoral service, meeting the diverse spiritual and material needs of people.

Those means which encourage constructive and patient collaboration between deacons and others involved in the pastoral ministry should be promoted with generosity and conviction. (#41) The deacon works in communion with others in pastoral ministry and efforts should be made to coordinate the common pastoral work of all, in a respectful manner. We are after all, not about our own mission, but the mission of Christ.