

The Permanent Diaconate

The diaconate is one of the most ancient orders in the Catholic Church instituted by the apostles soon after Jesus had ascended and after Pentecost.

The establishment is recorded in chapter 6 of the Acts of the Apostles and details the selection of seven men of good repute on whom they placed hands and sent them to take on the domestic and pastoral needs of the communities in Jerusalem. They were called to look after the needs of the widows and orphans of the communities who were somewhat neglected as the apostles went out preaching and evangelising the word of God to the people.

The diaconate seemed to flourish in the early church and the order became a powerful one with some deacons holding quite important positions within the church. It seemed to lose its importance in the expanding church in or about the eleventh or twelfth century but was revived by the First Vatican Council in 1876. It was further revived during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s where the order of the permanent diaconate was established. So after that there became two strands of the ministry, one was the transitional diaconate, men who went to become priests and the other to be permanent deacons, mostly married men who took on the pastoral mission of the church.

The permanent deacons are usually found within parishes and who are appointed by their bishops to work as a complementary ministry with the parish priests. Deacons are usually proclaimers of the Word and are ordained with the faculties to celebrate baptisms, weddings and the life of the deceased at funerals. At ordination the deacon is handed a book of the gospels and the ordaining bishop says: "Take this book of the gospels whose herald you now are, believe what you read and teach what you believe and live what you teach."

Most deacons study at university taking out a bachelor of theology degree which usually equips them to be able to research and understand the messages of sacred scripture and to prepare and preach homilies which give to the people a contemporary understanding of how the scriptures relate to the events of the times.

Deacons can be found in hospitals as pastoral carers carrying Eucharist for the people in need; they can also be found in Aged care facilities and in home visitation and indeed anywhere there are people in need of pastoral care.

Deacon Paul Rummery