

Archbishop's message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am happy to announce today that, in line with the discipline of the Universal Church, the ministry of the Permanent Diaconate will be introduced in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Church tradition views as the first deacons the seven men chosen by the twelve apostles to assist them in their work of proclaiming the Good News in the rapidly growing church of Jerusalem (Acts 6: 1-6).

St Stephen, the first martyr, St Laurence and St Francis of Assisi are some of the deacons in successive ages of the Church.

Over time, the diaconate became the final step in the training of priests.

The Eastern Churches retained the traditional structure of the Sacrament of Order. That is, as well as bishops and priests, they continued to ordain permanent deacons.

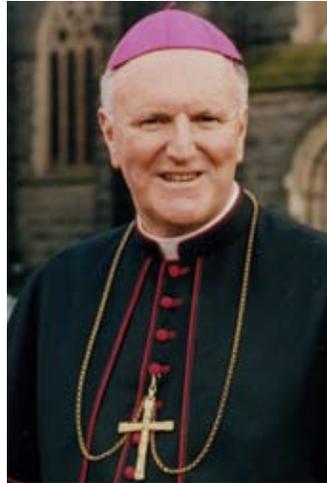
In 1972, Pope Paul VI restored the diaconate, open to married and unmarried men, as a permanent rank within the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

In doing so, the Church renewed its mission of preaching, worship and service to the community.

Please join me in praying that the diaconate will bring rich blessings to our local church.

15th April 2007

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ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE



Where does a deacon work?

A deacon could be asked to work in one or more of a wide range of situations – in a parish, in a church agency, in social service ministries.

The deacon is ordained by the Archbishop and the Archbishop selects the situation in which the deacon will work.

What is the role of a deacon?

The bishop is the first evangeliser in his diocese. Deacons serve the bishop in his duty to bring the Good News to believers and unbelievers.

Deacons are called to bring the presence of Jesus to all that they meet.

They are well-placed to bring to the Church's leaders an awareness of the needs of the poor and of people distant from the Church.

Nationally, deacons minister in parishes, the military, prisons, ports, hospitals and diocesan agencies.

The deacon works in harmony with the priests and lay leaders of the parish. The deacon supports and complements the active service of the lay faithful.

The deacon may preach at Mass, preside at public prayer, administer the Sacrament of Baptism, assist at marriages and funerals.



What attributes are looked for in an applicant for the Diaconate?

- Positive attitude towards the church and its future
- Commitment to gospel values
- Capable of giving serious attention and time to theological study, spiritual formation and ministry
- Stable work history
- Has shown leadership qualities in parish/diocesan ministry for a reasonable time
- Is recognised within his parish community as a person of service
- If married, is in a stable and happy relationship and enjoys the support of his wife and children in pursuing the diaconate
- In good health and broadly between 30 and 60 years of age

Interested?

If you wish to know more about the diaconate in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, speak with your Parish Priest or call the Office of the Vicar General on 03 9926 5677.

What training is required?

Deacons undertake a similar formation process to students for the priesthood, which generally includes a degree in theology, and studies in canon law, pastoral care and liturgy.

Just as important throughout this time are the spiritual formation of the candidate, who is accompanied by a spiritual director, as well as intensive pastoral and human formation.

At an appropriate time during the formation, and with the consent of his wife (if married) and those who have overseen the formation program, an applicant would formally petition the Archbishop to be accepted as a candidate for ordination to the diaconate.

The formation process takes four years.

What remuneration?

The National Guidelines for the Permanent Diaconate in Australia envisage that some deacons would be in a full-time ministry and would receive a stipend with the usual provisions for superannuation.

If in a part-time ministry, a deacon would enjoy similar benefits as a lay person engaged in similar pastoral work.

The guidelines indicate that older deacons in early retirement would provide for themselves and their families from their superannuation.

In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, a deacon could be employed by a church agency, though the majority would be part-time ministers funded from their superannuation.

Do you want to know more?

You will find further information, reading and answers to questions at www.catholicdeacon.org.au (Melbourne website), www.ausdeacons.org (Official website for Australia), www.deaconsplace.info

The Church's teaching

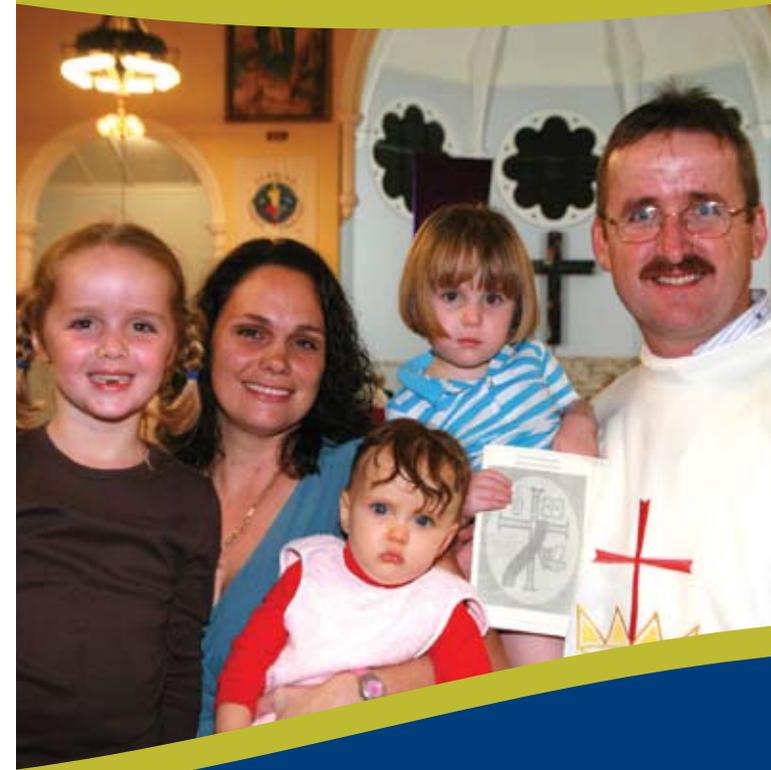
There is an account in Acts 6:1-6 of the choice of seven men, one of whom was Stephen, the first martyr. Pope Benedict said last January in a general audience that "Tradition sees in this group (of seven) the origins of the future ministry of deacons."

Noting that St Stephen was a witness to the Good News, the Pope underlined the intrinsic unity of the seven's mission of evangelisation and their charitable activity.

More often, we read that the deacon is dedicated to charitable service (recently in Pope Benedict's Encyclical Letter *The Love of God*, para. 21).

During the period of the early Church, deacons were not assistants to the priests. Rather, they participated in the bishop's ministry of evangelisation and service.

Catholic teaching since the Second Vatican Council has insisted on a balanced diaconal ministry of preaching, ministry in the liturgy, and charity.



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

This brochure produced with information sourced from:

1. John N. Collins *Are All Christians Ministers?* Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1992.
2. Documentation on Permanent Diaconate kindly provided by the Diocese of Broken Bay.
3. Website: <http://www.ausdeacons.org/>
4. William T. Ditevig *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons* New York: Paulist Press, 2004.
5. Permanent Diaconate Working Group in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.
6. Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons (Sacred Congregations for Catholic Education and for the Clergy)
7. Guidelines for the Permanent Diaconate in the Catholic Church in Australia (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference).

Front cover: Peter Devenish-Mearns with (from left) daughter Georgina, 5; his wife Jo; and daughters Emily, seven months, and Charlotte, 2.

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A Restored Diaconate

INFORMATION ON THE
ORDER OF PERMANENT DEACONS
IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH