

Address to the National Conference of Deacon Directors and Delegates
‘The Bishop and his Deacons, a theological and personal reflection’
‘The Sacramental Character of the Diaconate – from identity to function’

Hinsley Hall, Tuesday 7th November 2017

In 1987, during the final year of my studies for a Pontifical License in Dogmatic Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome I had the privilege of having a conversation with the Right Reverend Francis Thomas, the then Bishop of Northampton.

The subject of our discussion were the events taking place in the Church of England and the ordination of women to the diaconate the Church of England. The subject was particularly pertinent to me not just because I had been a convert from Anglicanism but because I was at that point writing the thesis for my License on the subject of the diaconate.

As long ago as 1861, the Church of England had revived the office of deaconess but until the 1980s the law’s governing the Church of England’s ministry had permitted only men to be admitted to holy orders. The possible admission of women to each of the traditional orders of deacon, priest and bishop was explored in a Church of England Assembly report of 1966 and in 1975 the General Synod subsequently resolved that “there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood”. However, it decided at that stage not to proceed with the necessary legislation to progress with the ordination of women. In a letter dated 30th November 1975 to Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Paul VI called on the Anglican Communion not to take the unilateral decision to ordain women, a plea which was disregarded.

Subsequently, separate pieces of legislation were introduced into the General Synod to enable women to become deacons and priests in the Church of England. The Synod gave Final Approval to a Measure to enable women to become deacons in 1985, and in 1992 to a Measure opening the priesthood to women. The first women were ordained as deacons in the Church of England in 1987.

I remember asking Bishop Thomas as to why the Church of England was forging ahead with this development as it posed such a threat to ecumenical dialogue; a dialogue which, until that point, had achieved a degree success and a genuine hope of reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion along the path of unity which Christ wills for his Church.

The answer was of course, that in reality the Church of England did not share the theological and sacramental understanding of the Sacrament of Orders held by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. This was the wording of one newspaper report regarding the theological debate that had taken place in the Church of England leading up to the decision: “The Church of England's policy-making body voted today to allow the ordination of women as deacons, the lowest rank of the Anglican clergy. But it stopped short of allowing them to become priests ...A deacon is in the third rank of holy orders, behind priests and bishops”¹.

From a Catholic theological point of view and the Catholic sacramental understanding of holy orders, the debate in the Church of England demonstrated just how differently the two Churches understood the nature of the three-fold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon. If the Catholic Church were ever to consider the ordination of women, the first question to be asked is not whether women can be ordained to the diaconate on the basis that it is not the priesthood but whether the Church has the authority to admit women to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. As you know, Pope St John Paul II, authoritatively answered this question on 22nd May 1994 when he promulgated the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.

My purpose in raising this at the beginning of my talk to you is not to address the subject of deaconesses or the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate but to highlight some of the misconceptions that are held regarding the nature of the diaconate and its unity within the Sacrament of Holy Orders in Catholic theology and ecclesiology. When I wrote my thesis some thirty years ago, the principal magisterial teaching document on the diaconate was in the form of Blessed Pope Paul VI's *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, which was the principal and most authoritative elaboration on the diaconate following the call of the Second Vatican Council for the order's permanent restoration in the Church.

¹ The New York Times, 3rd July 1985

Since writing my thesis though, there has been a great deal of theological reflection and teaching on the diaconate. One of the most significant and seminal developments was the address of Pope St John Paul II to the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy on 30th November 1995. The Congregation was at that moment embarking on the preparation of a *ratio fundamentalis* on formation and a directory on the ministry and life of permanent deacons. The final documents, as I am sure you know, were promulgated in February 1998.

At that time Pope St John Paul II presented an invitation which, I believe, we still have not fully accepted. This is what he said: “The vocation of the permanent deacon is a great gift of God to the Church and for this reason is an important enrichment for the Church’s mission... What is specific to the life and ministry of deacons could be summarized in a single word: fidelity - fidelity to the Catholic tradition, especially as witnessed to by the *lex orandi*, fidelity to the magisterium, fidelity to the task of re-evangelization which the Holy Spirit has brought about in the Church.” He spoke of this commitment as “an invitation carefully to promote throughout the Church a sincere respect for the theological, liturgical and canonical identity proper to the sacrament conferred on deacons, as well as for the demands required by the ministerial functions which, in virtue of receiving holy orders, are assigned to them in the particular churches.”

That statement for me was so significant. For the key issue of my thesis ten years earlier had been that in any consideration of the diaconate we need first to understand ‘who the deacon is for the Church’ before we talk of ‘what the deacon does for the Church’. Let us listen again to Pope St John Paul II’s invitation: “to promote throughout the Church a sincere respect for the theological, liturgical and canonical identity proper to the sacrament conferred on deacons”. Note that this comes before promoting the “ministerial functions” which are “assigned to them in the particular churches”. In other words, it is not the functions that defines the diaconate but the nature of the diaconate that defines the functions.

I emphasise this because when considering the subject of ‘The Bishop and his Deacons, a theological and personal reflection’, I think it is essential to be clear about the sacramental character which ordination to the diaconate confers and how it is this sacramental character which helps us to contemplate and understand the deacons relationship to the bishop and the specific role of the deacon in the life of the Church.

The restoration by the Second Vatican Council of the diaconate as a permanent order of ministry in the Church was rooted in an appreciation of the ministerial structures of the early Church, and it restored to the Church its fullness as the sign of salvation. The exclusively functional interpretation of the restoration of the permanent diaconate was firmly rejected by Blessed Pope Paul VI. The theological reason for the restoration of the permanent diaconate according to Paul VI was that 'the special nature of this order will be shown more clearly'. "It is not" he said, "to be considered as simply a step on the way to priesthood; rather it is endowed with its own indelible character and special grace in such a way that those who are called to the diaconate are empowered for a permanent service to 'the mysteries of Christ and the Church'"².

The special nature of the diaconal order does not lie in its functions but the fact that it confers on the one who is ordained to that order a sacred 'office' within the Church. In the New Testament the whole Christian community is called to fidelity to the apostolic teaching and tradition but it is those who hold 'office' and who exercise ministry in the name of, and for, the whole community who have a special responsibility for that apostolic teaching and tradition. Fidelity to the apostolic kerygma and the Church's mission, and the objective status of those who preserve and transmit it – the office holders in the Church (deacons, presbyters and bishops) – is the way in which the primitive Church preserved its continuity and identity as the Body of Christ. This is why 'apostolic succession' was linked so closely with the conferment of office through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and consequently with those who held office in the Church.

The one stable function which is common to both office holders in the Church and all the baptised is 'mission'. However, the duty of preserving and ensuring that that mission and all it entails is carried out, is entrusted to the office holders; to bishops, presbyters and deacons. It is this understanding of mission which is used in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, to describe the relationship between 'office' and 'function'. It is only in the context of the total mission of Christ that the specific functions of the ministry can be understood, and not vice versa.

² Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem

This is what *Lumen Gentium* paragraph 18 says: “In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body”, and consequently in paragraph 20 it goes on to state: “That divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world, since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society... In that way, then, with priests and deacons as helpers, the bishops received the charge of the community, presiding in God's stead over the flock of which they are the shepherds in that they are teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship and holders of office in government”.

What is clear from this teaching is that the unity of the Sacrament of Orders and the complementarity of the degrees of Order are in the service of all the faithful and in the mission of the Church. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

“‘The divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests, and deacons.’ Catholic doctrine, expressed in the liturgy, the Magisterium, and the constant practice of the Church, recognizes that there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate. The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. For this reason the term sacerdos in current usage denotes bishops and priests but not deacons. Yet Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of priestly participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called ‘ordination’, that is, by the sacrament of Holy Orders”³

And, to emphasise the importance of the diaconate for the integrity of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the authentic expression of ministry in the Church, the Catechism goes on to quote from the Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians: “Let everyone revere the deacons as Jesus Christ, the bishop as the image of the Father, and the presbyters as the senate of God and the assembly of the apostles. For without them one cannot speak of the Church”. This passage of the

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1554

Catechism emphasises that the diaconate, the presbyterate and the episcopate are sacramental 'degrees' of Order. They are not three distinct sacraments though, not three sacraments of Holy Order, but conjointly form the one Sacrament of Holy Orders in which each order shares in different degrees.

In the Catholic Church's most recent elaboration and teaching on the three fold ministry in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the deacon should not therefore be understood as the first rung on a ladder progressing up through the presbyterate to the episcopate – as described in that newspaper report I quoted from. The understanding of the relationship of the offices within the threefold pattern of ministry for the Catholic Church today, and especially the understanding of the place of the diaconate within the community of the Church, is not to regard the three offices (as some of the Scholastic theologians of the past seem to have done) as steps in a ministerial 'promotion' towards the fullness of the sacrament. Rather, the offices of deacon, presbyter and bishop should be understood, as *Lumen Gentium* 28 suggests, as ministries which share in various degrees in the fullness of the one sacrament of Orders.

It might be suggested that the fathers of the Second Vatican Council themselves endorsed the 'promotion' view by the use of the word 'degree' but the word is used, however, with reference to the concept of 'sharing' in the ministry of the bishop. The use of the term 'degree' can be found in many of the Church's teaching documents regarding ministry but it finds expression most explicitly in recent years in the joint declaration of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy in association with the documents on the Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons and the Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons. These documents declare that: "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'."

Both the 'promotion' and the 'degree of sharing' views are hierarchical, but it is in the direction from which they come or proceed that is the key difference to a richer understanding of the ministry and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In one, Christ is the true 'hierarchy' who shares his own office of High Priest with the baptised and the ordained in various ways and degrees for the building up and preservation of

his Church; this is an 'efficient' view, one that sees each office as having its own special ministry within the Church. The other is a 'deficient' view, one that sees a deacon as someone who is 'deficient of' or lacks the power of a presbyter, and likewise a presbyter is seen as someone who lacks all the power or the jurisdiction that a bishop possesses.

Recognising these different views is important for our understanding of the specific nature of the diaconate as an order and office in the Church. Through a greater biblical and patristic awareness in the Church's theology of ministry, a new appraisal of the role of the bishop in the Church and of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in general has come about. This has certainly been the case since the Second Vatican Council, where the office of bishop is given full theological treatment: its nature as embodying the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the reception of a sacramental 'character' at episcopal consecration is affirmed.

With the Second Vatican Council, and the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* on the nature of the Church and its mission, there came a greater appreciation of the nature of the 'hierarchy' within the Church. Hierarchy is presented not so much in terms of ascendancy on a scale but in terms of 'communion'. This communion respects the authentic and charismatic role of each manifestation of ministry service in the Church: "Although by Christ's will some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, there remains, nevertheless, a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ"⁴.

For this reason then, the threefold pattern of ministry within the sacrament of Orders should be seen as a 'communion' between bishop, presbyter and deacon; a communion which itself is at the service of the communion and unity of the Universal Church. Moreover, it is the bishop, who possesses the fullness of Holy Orders, who exercises a unique ministry in the formation of communion within their diocese: "The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists". It is in the bishop's ministry of priesthood and service that

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, §32

the presbyters and deacons share, in distinct and complementary ways. The diaconate therefore shares too in the bishop's ministry of building communion within the diocesan: "By virtue of their ordination, deacons are united to each other by a sacramental fraternity. They are all dedicated to the same purpose — building up the Body of Christ — in union with the Supreme Pontiff and subject to the authority of the bishop"⁵.

With this understanding of the integrity of the threefold ministry for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the degrees of participation by bishop, presbyter and deacon, and the significance of their hierarchical communion for the unity and communion of the Universal Church, I would now like to return to the subject of the sacramental character which ordination to the diaconate confers and how it is this sacramental character which helps us to contemplate and understand the specific role of the deacon in the life of the Church.

As I stated earlier, too often when we speak about the diaconate and its importance in the Church, the first question one is asked often is "What can a deacon do?" The immediate obsession seems to be with the deacon's function - what can he do for the church community - rather than who he is for the church community. Understanding the sacramental character conferred by the diaconate reveals to us the ontology of the deacon – who the deacon is for the church community; only then can we properly see and appreciate the role or 'functions' of the deacon in the three-fold sacramental ministry of the Church.

It is the sacramental character of the diaconate, and not its functions, which help us understand, "...the theological, liturgical and canonical identity proper to the sacrament conferred on deacons", an understanding which Pope St John Paul II invited us to promote throughout the Church.

In the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII on the Sacrament of Order, *Sacramentum Ordinis*, he wrote: "By virtue of our supreme apostolic authority we declare with sure knowledge and as far as it may be necessary, we determine and ordain: that the matter of the Holy Orders of the diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate is the laying on of hands alone, and the sole form is the words

⁵ Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, §6

determining the application of the matter, words by which the effects of the sacrament - that is, the power of Order and the grace of the Holy Spirit - are unequivocally signified, and which for this reason are accepted and used by the Church”.

I have quoted this because here the offices of deacon, presbyter and bishop are clearly linked to the “...effects of the sacrament - that is, the power of Order and the grace of the Holy Spirit”. And so we might ask, what is the ‘the power of Order and the grace of the Holy Spirit’ in the diaconate?

The consecratory prayer in the Rite of Ordination of a deacon states that the ‘office of a deacon’ is to minister at God’s ‘holy altar and to assist in the daily ministry’; the homily in the rite expounds this, echoing *Lumen Gentium* §29, which states that deacons “strengthened by sacramental grace... are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity”.

In exercising this office, the deacon does not do so as a ‘functionary’; for these functions can be exercised by any of the baptised without the need for the power or grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. When these aspects of ministry are celebrated by an ordained deacon, he is empowered, like the presbyter and bishop, to surrender himself to Christ, who is the original minister and Head of the Church, so that it is Christ sacramentally in the person of his minister who is carrying out those sacred functions with the authority and power of the Spirit. By virtue of his sacramental ordination, a deacon acts in the person of Christ and represents him in those functions and duties which the deacon is called to exercise.

This is made very clear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It states that 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... 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”.

Through his sacramental ordination, the deacon is endowed, as Blessed Pope Paul VI stated in *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, with an “indelible character and special grace” which empowers him “...for a permanent service to ‘the mysteries of Christ and the Church’”. This sacramental character establishes in the ordained deacon an existential reality which consists in a new relationship or configuration to Christ in a particular way and a new relationship to the Church. Service or ‘*diakonia*’ characterises the whole office of ministry in the Church and all its degrees in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In the deacon though, the sacramental character conferred is the personal presence of Christ the Head as Servant ministering in his Church and as a living sign of the Church as servant in the world.

This is the specific theological identity of the deacon. In the Congregation for Catholic Education’s *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, this sacramental character empowers the deacon to ‘express the needs and desires of the Christian communities’ and to be ‘a driving force for service, or *diakonia*’, which is an essential part of the mission of the Church”. It is only after the specific theological identity of the diaconate and its specific sacramental character is enunciated that the document then goes on to talk about the functions which derive from that identity and character.

This is what it specifies with regard to diaconal functions: “The ministry of the deacon is characterised by the exercise of the three munera proper to the ordained ministry, according to the specific perspective of *diakonia*. In reference to the *munus docendi*, the deacon is called to proclaim the Scriptures and instruct and exhort the people. The *munus sanctificandi* of the deacon is expressed in prayer, in the solemn administration of baptism, in the custody and distribution of the Eucharist, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in presiding at the rites of funeral and burial and in the administration of sacramentals. Finally, the *munus regendi* (pastoral governance) is exercised in dedication to works of charity and assisting in the pastoral oversight of communities or sectors of church life, especially with regard to the Church’s charitable activities. This is the ministry most characteristic of the deacon”.

As a bishop, the passage in the *Basic Norms* which follows this description of the diaconal *munera* is very significant for me; particularly when considering the assignments and the appointments for deacons within my diocese: “As can be seen from original diaconal practice and from conciliar indications, the outlines of the ministerial service inherent in the diaconate are very well defined. However, even if this inherent ministerial service is one and the same in every case, nevertheless the concrete ways of carrying it out are diverse; these must be suggested, in each case, by the different pastoral situations of the single Churches”.

Similarly, in the catechesis on the diaconate given by Pope St John Paul II in 1995 to the members of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy, he addressed the full range of diaconal functions and he stressed that included among them is that of “promoting and sustaining the apostolic activities of the laity” since he is “present and more involved than the priest in secular environments and structures”. Indeed, he went on to say that: “The exercise of the diaconal ministry — like that of other ministries in the Church — requires per se of all deacons, celibate or married, a spiritual attitude of total dedication. Although in certain cases it is necessary to make the ministry of the diaconate compatible with other obligations, to think of oneself and to act in practice as a ‘part-time deacon’ would make no sense. The deacon is not a part-time employee or ecclesiastical official, but a minister of the Church. His is not a profession, but a mission!”

Since becoming a bishop three years ago, I have tried to take this to heart in the work and roles I have assigned to the deacons within my diocese. Notwithstanding the fact that many of our deacons are married men with families and hold full time secular profession, a deacon is, like a priest and a bishop, is a deacon twenty four-seven. This means that even when a deacon is working in his secular job or profession, he is able to extend the personal presence of Christ the Servant and the Church’s ministry into environments and in ways that other ordained ministers cannot. As Pope St John Paul II observed, this was one of the major reasons the Second Vatican Council renewed the diaconate as a permanent ministry in the Church in the first place.

Now, I hope that you will note, that throughout my talk I have avoided using the term ‘permanent diaconate’. The terms transitional deacon and permanent deacon

may be useful to distinguish between a man who is in the process of being formed for the priesthood and a man ordained to exercise ministry permanently within the diaconal order; however, it is not at all helpful in terms of the invitation of Pope St John Paul II to understand “the theological, liturgical and canonical identity proper to the sacrament conferred on deacons”.

At a diaconal ordination recently, in the homily I addressed a young man who would eventually be ordained a priest. I informed him that I was ordaining him as a permanent deacon! I noted a momentary look of nervousness which came over him and the bewilderment on the faces of the clergy and faithful present. ‘No, I have not made a mistake’ I said to him and the congregation! I went on to explain that it was important that everyone who had come for the celebration, and particularly the young man who was about to be ordained, knew that his ordination as a deacon that day was not something transitional. It was and is permanent. I as a bishop and all the priests gathered there were and are still deacons, because the character and grace given in the diaconate, the first degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is something permanent and not transitional.

Deacons are icons or images of Christ the Servant who came ‘not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45). The configuration to Christ the Servant through diaconal ordination is permanent. Priests are servants. Bishops are servants. That is why the Church requires us to be ordained as a deacon first. We do not leave one Order behind when we assume a different one. The sacramental effects of the three degrees of Holy Orders are cumulative, not exclusive. The person who is ordained a deacon but is also in formation for ordination to the presbyterate will be an icon of Christ the Servant not for six months or a year only but for the rest of their lives. No one is Ordained to the presbyterate or to the episcopate without first being configured to Christ with the indelible character of the diaconate.

This is why when a man is ordained to the presbyterate, the diaconal dimension of his ministry must also be a visible and authentic aspect of his priesthood.

In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI said this in an address to the parish priests and the clergy of the Diocese of Rome: *“Every priest also continues to be a deacon and must always be aware of this dimension, for the Lord Himself became our minister, our*

deacon. Recall the act of the washing of the feet, where it is explicitly shown that...the Lord acts as a deacon and wants those who follow Him to be deacons and carry out this ministry for humanity, washing the feet of those entrusted to our care. This dimension seems to me to be of paramount importance ...Priests remain deacons and deacons clarify this diaconal dimension of our ministry in the Church and in the world."

Similarly, during the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, every day the Book of the Gospels was solemnly enthroned on an altar in the midst of the assembled bishops. Noting this, on one day Blessed Pope Paul VI told the masters of ceremonies that he himself would like to be the one who enthroned the Book of the Gospels. They said: 'No, this is a task for deacons and not for the Pope, the Supreme Pontiff, or the Bishops'. Blessed Pope Paul noted in his diary: "*But I am also a deacon, I am still a deacon, and I too would like to exercise my diaconal ministry by enthroning the Word of God*". So Ordination as a deacon is important for the whole life of a presbyter and a bishop; not just for the months which lead up to Ordination to the Presbyterate.

The first deacons in the Acts of the Apostles were ordained to serve at table, to feed the poor widows. They were appointed that they might manifest the Church's compassionate love, charity, *caritas*, in the form of *diakonia*, of service. The Church is compassion, the Church is *caritas*, love, and not anything else; if the Church becomes something else, then she ceases to be the Church in all of her fullness. The deacon is meant to be the sacramental sign, par excellence, of the Church's *caritas*.

The deacon, a co-worker with the bishop and priests, must be, with them: "*...the living and working expression of the charity of the Church that is simultaneously bread for the hungry, light and co-operation for social progress and development, word and action for justice. The deacon is the privileged vehicle for the social teaching of the Church.*" (Homily of Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, Jubilee for Deacons, Rome, 2000). To the deacon then is entrusted in a special way the ministry of charity that is at the origin of the institution of the diaconate.

At the end of September, I launched 'Caritas Leeds'; an initiative whereby we, as members of one local diocesan Church, can serve Our Lord Jesus Christ who lives now in the poor and in those in need within our diocese. This initiative was in response to a resolution of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales: "...to

explore the possible creation and development of appropriate local 'Caritas' structures, and to further local collaboration of existing work" with the aim of "deepening the Church's social engagement at the service of the gospel" It was also in response to a subsequent development in the Universal Church of a legislative framework which encourages, "...the diocesan Bishop...to establish in the Church entrusted to his care, an Office to direct and coordinate the service of charity in his name" .

As I am sure you know, 'Caritas' is the name given by the Catholic Church, internationally, nationally and at a diocesan level to an organised and co-ordinated expression of the Church's ministry of charity and its service to the poor and to those in need.

In Benedict XVI's first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love/Charity), the threefold responsibility of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia), "...presuppose each other and are inseparable" (No. 25). Benedict describes 'Caritas', the specific ministry of charity (diakonia) as "...the ordered expression of love of neighbour within the communion and mission of the Church". By ensuring that we develop more strategically and consistently this important area of the Church's mission, we not only enrich our service of the poor and needy, but we also enhance the witness we give to the love of Christ that we proclaim in His word and celebrate at His altar.

Having established Caritas Leeds within my diocese, I see therefore a very specific and fruitful role for the deacons within my diocese to assist me in my ministry of charity and service of the poor, by fostering, encouraging and supporting the work of Caritas at a local level. Indeed, I have appointed a deacon to be the Co-ordinator of Caritas Leeds and to work with the diaconate of the diocese to take this initiative forward.

All deacons have been ordained to be ministers of charity; they are called to be the sacramental, personal presence, of Christ the Servant in the Church and to express that *diakonia* in loving service. This ministry of charity is an essential part of the mission of the Church. For this reason the deacon must have, and demonstrate in his ministry, a special love for the poor, the sick and the suffering. A deacon must go out, as Pope Francis tells us, to the edges and the peripheries, to the vulnerable

and forgotten. In a deacon's ministry, he must go out, like Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was always close to the poor and outcast. God's heart has a special place for the poor and so too must our hearts.

I see then, there being a unique opportunity for the diaconate in my diocese to demonstrate very clearly the specific and distinct, "theological, liturgical and canonical identity proper to the sacrament conferred on deacons" and to do this by taking a leading role in their local communities in developing Caritas, that ministry of charity which is proclaimed in God's word and which pours out from the sacrifice offered upon His altar.

I hope that this theological and personal reflection of a bishop about his deacons has been of some interest to you and I pray that Almighty God will continue to bless you all in your ministry and keep you always firm in your knowledge and love of Christ Jesus Our Lord, who came not be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. Amen.

**✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds**