

I
**THOSE INVOLVED IN THE FORMATION
OF PERMANENT DEACONS**

1. The Church and the Bishop

18. The formation of deacons, like that of other ministers and all the baptised, is a duty which involves the whole Church. Hailed by the Apostle Paul as “the heavenly Jerusalem” and like Mary “our mother” (*Gal* 4:26), “by preaching and baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life”.²⁴ And not only this: imitating the motherhood of Mary, she accompanies her children with maternal love and cares for them so that they all may come to the fullness of their vocation.

The Church’s care for her children is expressed in the offering of the Word and sacraments, in love and solidarity, in prayer and in the solicitude of the various ministries. However, in this care, which is, so to speak, visible, the care of the Holy Spirit is made present. In fact “the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body”,²⁵ both in its universality and in the singularity of its members.

In the Church’s care for her children, the first figure, therefore, is the Spirit of Christ. It is He who

*The Spirit of
Christ, the
first figure in
formation*

²⁴ ECUM. COUNCIL VAT. II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium*, 64.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 8.

calls them, accompanies them and moulds their hearts so that they can recognise his grace and respond generously to it. The Church must be well aware of this *sacramental* relevance of its educational work.

*The Bishop
(or Major
Superior), the
one ultimately
responsible for
formation*

19. In the formation of permanent deacons, the first *sign and instrument* of the Spirit of Christ is the proper Bishop (or the competent Major Superior).²⁶ He is the one ultimately responsible for their discernment and formation.²⁷ While ordinarily exercising this duty through the assistants who have been chosen, nevertheless he will he commit himself, as far as is possible, to knowing personally those who are preparing for diaconate.

2. Those responsible for formation

20. Those persons who, in dependence upon the Bishop (or competent Major Superior) and in strict collaboration with the diaconal community, have a special responsibility in the formation of candidates for the permanent diaconate are: the director of formation, the tutor (where the number requires it), the spiritual director and the pastor (or the minister to whom the candidate is entrusted for the diaconal placement).

*The director
of formation*

21. The director of formation, nominated by the Bishop (or the competent Major Superior) has the

²⁶ Equivalent to the Diocesan Bishop in this regard are those to whom the following have been entrusted: territorial prelature, territorial abbey, apostolic vicariate, apostolic prefecture and a stably erected apostolic administration (cf *C.I.C.*, cans. 368; 381, § 2) as well as the personal prelature (cf *C.I.C.*, cans. 266, § 1; 295) and the military ordinariate (cf JOHN PAUL II, Apost. Const. *Spiritali militum curae* [21 April 1986], art. I, § 1; art. II, § 1: *AAS* 78 [1986], pp. 482; 483).

²⁷ Cf *C.I.C.*, cans. 1025; 1029.

task of co-ordinating the different people involved in the formation, of supervising and inspiring the whole work of education in its various dimensions, and of maintaining contacts with the families of married aspirants and candidates and with their communities of origin. In addition, he has the responsibility of presenting to the Bishop (or to the competent Major Superior) the judgement of suitability on aspirants for their admission among the candidates, and on candidates for their promotion to the order of diaconate after having heard the opinion of the other formators,²⁸ excepting the spiritual director.

Because of his decisive and delicate duties, the director of formation must be chosen with great care. He must be a man of lively faith and a strong ecclesial sense, have had a wide pastoral experience and have given proof of wisdom, balance and capacity for communion; in addition he must have acquired a solid theological and pedagogical competence.

He could be a priest or a deacon and, preferably, not be at the same time also responsible for ordained deacons. In fact, it would be better for this responsibility to remain distinct from that of forming aspirants and candidates.

22. The tutor, designated by the director of formation from among the deacons or priests of proven experience and nominated by the Bishop (or the competent Major Superior), is the direct companion of each aspirant and of each candidate. He is charged with closely following the formation of each one, offering his support and advice for the resolution of any problems which may arise and for helping to

The tutor

²⁸ This also includes the director of the specific house of formation, wherever it exists (cf *C.I.C.*, can. 236, 1°).

make personal the various moments of formation. He is also called to collaborate with the director of formation in the programming of the different formational activities and in the preparation of the judgement of suitability to be presented to the Bishop (or the competent Major Superior). According to circumstances, the tutor will be responsible for only one person or for a small group.

The spiritual director

23. The spiritual director is chosen by each aspirant or candidate and must be approved by the Bishop or Major Superior. His task is that of discerning the workings of the Spirit in the soul of those called and, at the same time, of accompanying and supporting their ongoing conversion; he must also give concrete suggestions to help bring about an authentic diaconal spirituality and offer effective incentives for acquiring the associated virtues. Because of all this, aspirants and candidates are invited to entrust themselves for spiritual direction only to priests of proven virtue, equipped with a good theological culture, of profound spiritual experience, of marked pedagogical sense, of strong and refined ministerial sensibility.

The pastor

24. The pastor (or other minister) is chosen by the director of formation in agreement with the other members of the formation team and taking account of the different situations of the candidates. He is called to offer to the one who has been entrusted to him a lively ministerial communion and to introduce him to and accompany him in those pastoral activities which he considers most suitable; he will also be careful to make a periodic check on the work done with the candidate himself and to com-

municate the progress of the placement to the director of formation.

3. Professors

25. The professors contribute in a relevant way to the formation of the future deacons. In fact by teaching the *sacrum depositum* held by the Church, they nourish the faith of the candidates and qualify them to be teachers of the People of God. For that reason they must occupy themselves not only with acquiring the necessary scientific competence and an adequate pedagogical ability, but also with witnessing with their lives to the Truth which they teach.

Scientific competence and witness of life

In order to harmonise their specific contribution with the other dimensions of formation, it is important that they be willing, depending on circumstances, to collaborate and be open to discussion with the others involved in formation. In this way they will contribute to providing the candidates with a unified formation and help them in the necessary work of synthesis.

Unified formation

4. The formation community of permanent deacons

26. Aspirants and candidates for the permanent diaconate, naturally constitute a unique context, a distinct ecclesial community which strongly influences the formation process.

A specific ecclesial community

Those entrusted with the formation must take care that this community be characterised by a profound spirituality, a sense of belonging, a spirit of service and missionary thrust, and have a definite rhythm of meetings and prayer.

The formation community of permanent deacons can thus be for aspirants and candidates for the dia-

A precious support

conate a precious support in the discernment of their vocation, in human growth, in the initiation to the spiritual life, in theological study and pastoral experience.

5. Communities of origin

27. The communities of origin of aspirants and candidates for the diaconate can exercise some influence on their formation.

Family For younger aspirants and candidates, the family can be an extraordinary help. It must be invited to "...accompany the formative journey with prayer, respect, the good example of the domestic virtues and spiritual and material help, especially in difficult moments... Even in the case of parents or relatives who are indifferent or opposed to the choice of a vocation, a clear and calm facing of the situation and the encouragement which derives from it can be a great help to the deeper and more determined maturing of a...vocation".²⁹ As far as married aspirants and candidates are concerned, their commitment must be such that their married communion might contribute in a real way to inspiring their formation journey towards the goal of the diaconate.

The parish community The parish community is called to accompany the path of its member towards the diaconate with the support of prayer and an appropriate catechesis which, while it makes the faithful aware of this ministry, gives to the candidate a strong aid to his vocational discernment.

Other ecclesial groupings Those other ecclesial groupings from which aspirants and candidates for the diaconate come can also

²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Ap. Exhort. *Pastores dabo vobis*, 68: *l.c.*, pp. 775-776.

continue to be for them a source of help and support, of light and warmth. However, they must show, at the same time, respect for the ministerial call of their members, not obstructing them, but rather promoting in them the maturing of an authentic diaconal spirituality and readiness.

6. Aspirant and candidate

28. Finally, the man preparing for diaconate "...is a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation: all formation...is ultimately a self-formation".³⁰ *Self-formation*

Self-formation does not imply isolation, closure to or independence from formators, but responsibility and dynamism in responding with generosity to God's call, valuing to the highest the people and tools which Providence puts at one's disposition.

Self-formation has its root in a firm determination to grow in life according to the Spirit and in conformity with the vocation received, and it is nourished in being humbly open to recognising one's own limitations and one's own gifts.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 69: *l.c.*, p. 778.