

Ralph

Bishop of Hallam

Pastoral Letter

**To be read at all Masses on the weekend of 26/27
October 2019**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

On Vocations Sunday in May, I invited, through a Pastoral Letter like this one, for men to come and meet me to find out more about becoming a Priest. Now I am offering the same opportunity for those who would like to explore the possibility of becoming a Deacon.

There have always been men ordained as Deacons with a special emphasis in their ministry on people in need. In the early centuries Deacons were commonplace in dioceses, assisting their Bishops in many ways according to their talents, but always modelling their lives on Christ, the Servant. Over time, Deacons faded from view as becoming a Deacon became only a stepping stone on the pathway to Priesthood. But more than 50 years ago the Church restored the holy order of Deacon, making it again a permanent order and open to married men.

Here in Hallam we have 15 Permanent Deacons at work across the diocese. But more are needed, and younger. More than half of our Deacons are now over 70, with very few under 60. Now is the time for us to ask men already active in their parishes and with a heart for those in need, to come and see how their existing life of service can be developed and more fully given for the life of the Church. "The harvest is ripe, but the labourers are few".

Deacons are ordained while in full time employment. Their talents, working life, as well as their married and family life all add to the life experiences brought into ministry. This working and family experience, enhanced by the grace of ordination, places Deacons in a unique position, enabling them to become a bridge between the Church and the wider world. Importantly, they are in a position, as ministers, to lead others in building these bridges.

So often people ask, "What does a Deacon **do**?" But this misses a vital and deeper question. Namely, what **is** a Deacon? It is what a Deacon **is** rather than what he does that matters. Any amount of '**doing**' does not make a Deacon. It is the '**being**' that is key. Deacons are to be "a living icon of Christ the Servant within the Church". So a Deacon is first to become as Christ in his servant roles, orientated to the needs of the community in which he serves. Only then does whatever the Deacon does make sense in the context of his ordination.

That said, the ordained ministry of a Deacon has three parts: teaching, sanctifying and pastoral leadership. Teaching is exercised by proclaiming the gospel, preaching and in catechising, especially adults at the margins of the Church. His sanctifying office is exercised in personal prayer, the solemn administration of Baptism, as an ordinary minister of the Eucharist, in blessing (including the blessing of Marriages) and as an ordinary minister for funerals. His pastoral role is exercised in many forms but includes his example, encouragement and servant leadership in whatever may be needed within and beyond the community he serves.

I am asking for men between 30 and 60 years of age to consider whether God might be calling them to greater ministry within the Church, especially for those in need within it and beyond.

Accompanying this letter are leaflets with very basic information about the Permanent Diaconate, but importantly, an invitation to those listening who may be interested, to meet with me on Monday 4 November at Bishop's House, at 7.30 pm, to explore further the vocation to the Permanent Diaconate. Wives would be most welcome to join us. These leaflets are available today as you leave the Church, or through my office.

Yours sincerely in Christ, the Redeemer.

+ Ralph