

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Sunday, November 27, 2005 by Fr Francis Bonnici, Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome.

Permanent deacons

Many years ago the Maltese Episcopal Conference issued the necessary norms and regulations for the institution of the Permanent Diaconate in the Maltese Ecclesiastical Province.

The Diocesan Centre for Vocations catered for a group of some 15 laymen who were very keen to enter the permanent diaconate. But no permanent deacon was ordained in Malta and Gozo.

It must be said that in Malta there are many diocesan priests, male and female religious and many lay people who can do the pastoral work Mr Joseph Zammit mentions (The Sunday Times, November 20).

There is no doubt that the diaconate is a fundamental institution in the Church. as *Lumen gentium* n. 29 says: "At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service'". What is to be learnt well from the teaching of the Church is the purpose for which deacons are ordained, namely to "serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the Word, and of charity to the People of God" (*ibidem*).

Talking over the matter with a number of priests last Sunday evening, one priest spoke of the necessity of deacons when pressure of pastoral work on the parish priest may result in exhaustion and doing everything in a hurry. Another priest suggested that deacons take their position on the frontline of the local Church making contacts with people who distanced themselves from the Church.

Another priest spoke of the need of deacons to carry out social work in favour of the poor and finally a priest believed that deacons should not be ordained at all because they can easily find themselves adorning the liturgy with their presence on the altar.

It should be pointed out that becoming a deacon, preferably at a young age, permanent (married/unmarried) or leading to the priesthood, is a vocation which God gives to His Church to serve the ecclesial community, then "hands are imposed unto ... a ministry of service."

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