

The purpose of this leaflet is to offer some introductory thoughts on the subject of ordained ministry within the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness. It covers both the ministry of a priest and of a permanent deacon.

Often we think of ordained ministry in terms of what people do. But this leaflet will take a different approach. Why will it do this? Because we live in times of change. In terms of priesthood, whilst some priests will continue to operate fairly traditional styles of ministry, others will find very different challenges and opportunities. Alongside this there is renewed interest in the place of permanent deacons in the church – an expression of ordained ministry for which there are few recent clearly identifiable roles. It is not helpful therefore to focus on particular tasks.

Given this fluidity in role how can we talk about ordained ministry? Hopefully the list below will help to identify certain benchmarks.

Called: All ordained ministry has at its root a sense of call (that is what the vocation means). In other words we are not talking about someone simply wanting to be a priest or deacon. There will need to be a sense of God's call which is recognised by the individual and by the wider church. This sense of call may

come through a variety of means and will always need to be tested through the selection processes of the church.

Set aside: Ordained ministers are set aside. That is to say that their ministry should shape the whole of their life (which is not the same as saying that they will be working full-time for the church). Obviously all Christians are called to have a faith which is reflected in everything they are, and do, but ordained ministers are rightly expected to set an example in this. They will, however, never be perfect.

Offering & Enabled: Ordination is a process by which service is offered and through the grace of God enabled. Any ordained person who thinks that they can possibly fulfil their calling in their own strength is seriously misguided. Both offering and being touched by grace have an unpredictable dynamic – we can never know where they might lead and an appreciation of that should accompany anyone considering ordained ministry.

Public: Ordained ministry involves a degree of public scrutiny. Whilst all Christians may be held to account by friends and neighbours failure is not likely to end up reported in the press or gossiped about in the local bar. But ordained ministry is open to that degree of public awareness and judgement. Such

public scrutiny will often extend to the members of clergy families.

Order: At the root of the word 'ordained' lies the sense of order – anyone ordained is 'in holy orders'. This involves a recognition that an ordained minister has a responsibility for the welfare of the church community, and to its means of governance and to those placed in authority within it. This is not about always being a 'yes man' (or woman) but it is about having an awareness of the effect of one's words and actions upon other members of the body of Christ and of the reputation of the church; and of speaking and acting responsibly in the light of that.

All of the above apply equally to priests and permanent deacons.

Priest or permanent deacon?

As stated above we live in a time of considerable fluidity about what the practical tasks of a priest or permanent deacon may involve. So can we in any sense define what these ministries are about? A suggested way of doing so is to reflect upon the Summary of the Law which forms part of the 1982 Liturgy:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

The first commandment relates to the centrality of our relationship with God. It is the function of a priest to call people to obedience to that commandment, to remind them of what it means, to help and encourage them as they explore what it means for them to seek to fulfil it. The second commandment relates to the centrality of our relationship with our fellow human beings. It is the function of a permanent deacon to call people to obedience to that commandment, to remind them of what it means, to help and encourage them as they explore what it means for them to seek to fulfil it.

Of course there will always be an overlap of these ministries. They are mutually dependent. The two commandments effectively form one challenge.

Nevertheless hopefully looking at this Summary of the Law does help to clarify the particular emphases of the ministries of priest and permanent deacons.

Selection and training

Those offering themselves for ordained ministry will face rigorous processes of both selection and training:

Selection: Those considering ordination will normally begin by having conversations with their Rector. They may then be referred to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands who will work with them, and possibly also to a Vocations Adviser. If it is thought that the vocation may be genuine, they will be referred to a Scottish Selection Panel (and in the case of prospective priest a joint Scottish Episcopal Church and Church of England Panel as well). This process takes time, effort and is emotionally draining.

Training: Those accepted for training will then be expected to fulfil the Church's requirements in that field. Training will focus on academic input, practical tasks and the preparation of the person for the demands and opportunities of ordained ministry. This training will be delivered through a variety of methods which will include written work, placements and weekends away. Again this is a demanding process.

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