

Abstract

In 2009, the first group of students began the new MTh course of studies at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute in Dublin. The new course promised to equip “professional ministers (lay and ordained) for their role in contemporary society by developing key competencies in the areas of mission and ministry, through appropriate engagement with theology and biblical studies”.¹

The training consists of three parts. The first is the Foundation Course, which brings students through a series of modules with assessments of increasing difficulty. The second brings students to ordination to the diaconate. The last requires the completion of a dissertation after which successful students are ordained to the priesthood. The training assumes a model of transitory diaconate where it is assumed that all deacons continue through to ordination to the priesthood.

My goal in this dissertation therefore is to consider whether, in the light of discussions within Porvoo, the Church of Ireland should implement the permanent diaconate as a distinct ministry and what would be the implications, if any, for the Church’s understanding of the orders of bishop, priest and deacon. The permanent diaconate breaks the assumption that the diaconate is a training ground for the priesthood and stresses that the vocation to the diaconate is sufficient in its own right. It breaks the *cursus honorum* which has been in place for centuries.

The study begins with a review of leadership in the Old and New Testaments and then reviews the development of the diaconate over the centuries to the present day. I include a survey from a sample of clergy and laity to see if there would be support for a change in the current model and to understand how the diaconate is understood.

I hope that this study will, at the very least, cause people to question the state of the diaconate within the Church of Ireland and lead to a movement to have the diaconate restored as a full and equal order, “to lead to the recovery of a truly organic conception of the Church and its ministry as is found in the New Testament”.²

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¹ Church of Ireland Theological Institute MTh Course Information
<http://www.theologicalinstitute.ie/courseinformation/index.php> (Last accessed 19.04.2016).

² James M. Barnett, *The diaconate – a full and equal order* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1995) 217.