

**National Association of Deacons – Biennial Conference
Brisbane – 30th June – 3 July 2011**

Update on Review of National Guidelines

Deacon Paul Simmons

As you are aware, the Guidelines for the Formation and Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in Australia expired in November 2010.

As an initiative of the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, the Bishop's Commission for Church Ministry, with the support of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, convened a meeting, in March 2009, of directors of formation and other interested parties, to develop basic standards in the formation of deacons to be incorporated into the revised guidelines. This initiative was seen to be important, in order to develop basic standards of formation across Australia. Eighteen (18) dioceses were represented at that conference.

I presented the recommendations of that Conference to the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry in May 2009, which were accepted and forwarded to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry.

The Commission accepted the recommendations at their meeting in November, 2009 which were tabled at the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry meeting in March 2010. I was subsequently requested to arrange for the incorporation of those recommendations into draft guidelines. The first draft has been written, which took longer than I had originally intended, due to my parish, diocesan and other national responsibilities.

A copy of the first draft was forwarded to +Michael Malone, Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, Fr Paul Cashen MSC and Fr Frank Devoy for their input. Following that input further amendments were made to the guidelines and they were tabled at the June 2010 meeting of the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, and referred back to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry for further comment..

As I estimated this process would take at least 12 months to complete, I requested +Michael Malone to seek the approval of the Bishops Commission to grant a 12 month extension to the current guidelines. This approval was subsequently granted at the November 2010 meeting of the Commission.

However, the Draft Guidelines were not discussed by the Commission until its meeting on 24th February 2011. While the members of the Commission were generally happy with the Guidelines, there was a strong recommendation they be contextualised into a broader document, along the lines of the recently publicised Directory of England and Wales.

The Commission also felt, that as part of the review, the language of the new Guidelines needed to mirror the terminology of the Vatican II documents and be more positive and life giving. They did not feel the language in the current guidelines adequately reflected those sentiments.

A further draft is currently being written to reflect the Bishops Commission request, and will hopefully, be presented to their meeting in November 2011. Following the Commissions input, the draft will be widely circulated throughout the diaconal

community for input. Following on from that input it is anticipated that a final draft would be tabled at the March 2012 meeting, of the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, and their recommendations be forwarded to the Bishops Commission.

I would envisage the new Guidelines to be approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in the second half of 2012. This of course, would mean the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry would need to grant a further extension to the existing guidelines. Whilst I can't pre-empt that outcome, I have every reason to believe the extension would be granted.

Paul Simmons
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30th June 2011