

Hong Kong Catholic Diocese
Study on Development of Permanent Deacon in Hong Kong
Executive Summary

Preface

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) in the last century confirmed the need for revival of the ministry of permanent deacon. Since then, dioceses around the world have started to consider whether it is necessary to re-establish such ministry. The churches in Europe and America have taken the lead in reaching an agreement to actively pursue the development of this ministry. According to the '2015 Pontifical Directory', there are 44,566 permanent deacons all over the world, with a majority in Europe and America. As for Hong Kong, we are the first diocese in Asia to promulgate this ministry, with currently a total of twenty-four permanent deacons. Compared with the long history of the Church, the development period of the ministry of permanent deacon is rather short, only of about 50 years, and the total number of permanent deacons accounts for only 10% of the total number of priests globally.

In March 1988, the Council of Priests of the Hong Kong Diocese initiated a formal consultation on the establishment of the ministry of permanent deacon and set up a Task Force in May to study its implementation in Hong Kong. However, the preparatory work took as long as one year. In 1990, the Task Force completed an information document – "*Should the Hong Kong Diocese set up a ministry of permanent deacon?*" Public consultation was launched in the following year to solicit community views. In 1992, the Catholic Research Center completed the opinion survey regarding the topic "*Should the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese set up a ministry of permanent deacon?*" . After listening to the views of the Priest Council and the Pastoral Council, the then Cardinal Wu Cheng Chung finally set up the ministry of permanent deacon for Hong Kong in 1996. On the fifth day after the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, for the first time the bishop ordained two permanent deacons for Hong Kong.

In 2013, in addressing the closing ceremony of the "*International Conference of Chinese Permanent Deacons*" held in Hong Kong, Cardinal Tong Hon, expressed his hope that Hong Kong would have more permanent deacons in future and that the Church in China would be able to develop this ministry in the long run. During the conference, Vicar General Dominic Chan, who is the Chairman of the '*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*', also stressed that the essence of Christian charity of the ministry of permanent deacon is to serve the weak and the under-privileged.

At present, the ‘*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*’ (*The Commission*), a body responsible for promoting the ministry of permanent deacon, is dedicated to addressing the various issues related to the development of the ministry. *The Commission* closely monitors the evolving changes in the process, compiles records of the tasks performed, and disseminates information on its activities and development. In December 2014, Hong Kong Catholic Diocese commissioned the Catholic Studies Center of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a comprehensive study on the development of the ministry of permanent deacon in Hong Kong.

Study Programme

Firstly, the Catholic Studies Center published advertisement in *Kung Kao Po*, the official weekly newspaper of the Diocese, to recruit members to join the research team. 27 responses were received, including retired principals, retired and current teachers, theology students, academic researchers, civil servants, clerical staff, social workers, university students, permanent deacons and their spouses. During the period from January to September 2015, the study team convened three meetings, followed by specific working group meetings on different topics. There are 6 groups, which are responsible for literature review, questionnaires, interviews, video production, report drafting and operation.

From December 2014 to July 2017, the work of the Study Group could be divided into four phases according to the objectives as follows:

<i>Time</i>	<i>Progress</i>
Stage 1 : Review of existing literature and theories	
Dec 2014	Reviewed literature to formulate research objectives and issues
Dec 2014	Conducted trial interviews to explore ways to achieve research objectives and issues
Stage 2 : Adoption of appropriate study methodology	
Jan 2015	Established research team
Feb 2015	Adopted overall research assumptions, objectives and key issues
Feb 2015	Design of questionnaires and questions
Stage 3 : Collection of relevant data, analysis and interpretation of research findings	
Mar-Jun 2015	Distribution of questionnaires to parishes, and over 4,000 collected
Jun 2015	Analysis of survey data
Jun 2015	Design of the mode of interview and questions based on result of survey findings
Sept 2015	First draft of study background was written on basis of literature review
Mar-Sept 2016	Conducted nearly 100 interviews
Oct 2016	Consolidated and integrated content of interviews
Stage 4 : Presentation of study findings	
Nov 2016	Formulated main composition of report: background, questionnaires, interviews
Nov-Dec 2016	Consolidated the organization and structure of the study report
December 2016	Submission of interim study
February 2017	Preparation for publicity and the conference
Mar-Apr 15 2017	Production of short videos for six permanent deacons, Chairman and one member of the ' <i>Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate</i> ' .
Apr 2017	Preparation of materials for publicity conference
April 23, 2017	Convened the publicity conference
July 2017	Printing and distribution of study report

Study Plan

The study was initially designed with the following six assumptions:

- Assumption (1) The laity and clerics have different understanding about the theory and practice of the ministry of permanent deacon.
- Assumption (2) At parish level, there is difference between parishes with and without permanent deacons,

- Assumption (3) Permanent deacons are assigned to both urban and rural areas to take up a broad range of parish services.
- Assumption (4) Members of the '*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*' and the permanent deacons have to be separately dealt with, given their special nature and insider understanding of the subject matter.
- Assumption (5) Questionnaires and interviews serve different purposes; while group interviews and individual interviews also have their own purposes.
- Assumption (6) Delivery of questionnaires to interviewees in person and dispatch of questionnaires by post serve different purposes.

As the combination of the above 6 assumptions has generated great variation and complication in the quantity and quality of responses collected, it is not possible to complete the study within the scheduled timeframe. Therefore, this study has decided to present the theme in a descriptive way - firstly based on a literature review, followed by a statistical survey, lastly with further in-depth interview.

In the questionnaire survey, there are two target groups:

- (a) laity or catechists, and
- (b) clergy, brothers, sisters, seminarians

For the interview, there are four target groups:

- (a) laity or catechists,
- (b) clergy, brothers, sisters, seminarians
- (c) permanent deacons, and
- (d) members of '*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*'

The respondents selected for questionnaires and interviews include:

- (a) people within the church, including laity, seminarians, sisters, priests, bishops and catechists in progress to be Catholics,
- (b) people who are, in certain extent, connected to and have relationship with the deacon ministry

This study conducted questionnaire survey and interviews with both the laity and clerics, as well as two groups comprising the permanent deacons themselves and the '*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*' (chairman and members).

The purpose of this study is to understand the development of the ministry of permanent deacon in Hong Kong and examine issues of its development in the long run. The main objectives of the study are:

- to understand the development of the ministry of permanent deacon in Hong Kong;
- to examine the role and functions of permanent deacon in Hong Kong; and
- to put forward recommendations for its future development.

For the study, there are two main focal points:

Focus 1 : degree of acceptance of permanent deacons by Hong Kong Catholic Church

- should they continue to accept the laity as permanent deacons?
- their views on the scope of work for permanent deacons, the focus of their duties and their roles.

Focus 2 : overall views of Hong Kong Catholic Church on current permanent deacons

- opinions on their performance and review of their services
- views and suggestions on the system of permanent deacons

The overall approach is to understand the background and historical development of the ministry of permanent deacon, including those circumstances in the Church and Hong Kong Diocese, so as to identify the key study focus and postulate thematic discussions for follow-up research. This would provide a basis for this study to adopt an integrated approach in its research. Following that, the quantitative data collected and statistical tabulations would be analyzed with overall results. After that, we would make use of the qualitative findings to verify the quantitative analysis in order to reach an in-depth conclusion. Lastly, we would put forward the relevant recommendations.

Part 6 Summary and Recommendations

It has been 25 years since the public consultation by the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese in 1992 on the subject of the ministry of permanent deacon. At that time, the churches in the entire Asia had not yet responded to the call of the Vatican Council II for setting up such a ministry. In the survey on "*Should the Hong Kong Diocese set up a ministry of permanent deacon?*", about *half* of the clergy did not support the establishment of such ministry in Hong Kong. Since the first batch of permanent deacons came into practice in 1997, permanent deacon has been in existence in Hong Kong for twenty years. This year, in the "Study Report on the Ministry of Permanent Deacon in Hong Kong Catholic Church – 2017", more than **90%** of respondents were willing to accept the continuation of laity as permanent deacons. Such findings clearly witnessed the far-sighted vision of Cardinal Wu and the unyielding effort of all those supporting its development over the past 20 years. They also demonstrated the vocation of our permanent deacons who had responded to God's calling, undergone formation and been ordained to take a consecrated life. During this period, the Diocese had been given increasing strength and support by a group of laity who were willing to serve the church and the society by their faith. Together with their wives and families, the permanent deacons unveiled many lovely and touching stories for us to share.

The Church is very delighted to the vocation of those who are inspired to be permanent deacons. Yet the vocation for permanent deacon is very different from that of the clergy. In fact, the lack of calling for priesthood has long been a recurrent concern. In the 1960's, even when there were about 40-50 seminarians in our small seminary where secondary school candidates were trained for their vocation, the Church has already endeavored to promote and recruit more young people to join the clergy. At that time there was a small episode. In the printed Chinese publicity leaflets, the word "workers" was unknowingly mixed up with the word "salary", and then mistakenly printed as "abundant harvest, insufficient salary." Indeed, the lack of calling for priesthood has long been a recurrent problem for the Church.

This report is not the outcome of formal theological and pedagogical studies. The findings are based on the research, understanding and analysis of the investigations and interviews, which are put into the context of historical perspectives, to present a comprehensive picture.

6.1 Study Findings

There was a controversy over the revival of the ministry for permanent deacon before and after the Vatican Council II, which was clearly a sign that the Church must face the world.

Being a permanent deacon in the society, he has to serve the community with charity and justice in the capacity of a church cleric. It is a great challenge for the churches in the world to determine whether and when to resume this ministry of the old days. In Asia, more than 50 years after the Vatican Council II, so far only India and Hong Kong have resumed the ministry of permanent deacon. The churches in other Asian countries are still considering and trying to understand the issue. This clearly indicates that they have their own difficulties and have not yet followed the directive of the Vatican Council II to set up the ministry of permanent deacon.

The historical development of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese shows that the establishment of the ministry of permanent deacon cannot be taken for granted. Nearly thirty years ago, Cardinal Wu decided to follow the directive of Vatican Council II (*Gaudium et Spes*) and set up the ministry of permanent deacon in Hong Kong, in the midst of objection from more than half of the clergy. Given the inertia to accept the existing system, the ministry of permanent deacon was able to put into practice unwillingly.

In the process of setting up the ministry of permanent deacon, there was a need to make adjustments to cope with the actual situation and solve various problems, such as the initial stages of discernment, selection and formation, as well as the subsequent stages of task assignments and service training. All these issues had to rely on continuous exploration and assessments in order to find out the appropriate stance and position. After 9 years of preparation, discussion and investigation between 1987 and 1996, the ministry was officially established in 1996, with two permanent deacons ordained in the following year. Moving into the new millennium, the Hong Kong Permanent Deacons Group has actively participated in international exchange and events, creating a positive and energetic image. Up to the present, we have 21 permanent deacons and 6 candidates.

Part 3 of the study report, the questionnaire survey, had taken up majority of our manpower and resources. Given the constraints in time and mode of design, we could only generate broad questions to collect objective information. This part of work also brought forward a series of tasks, including the in-depth interviews in Part 4 and Part 5.

6.2 Questionnaire Survey

The views collected from the survey are quite representative, reflecting the understanding and expectation of members of the church in Hong Kong, their acceptance of the ministry of permanent deacon as well as their perception of the current system in Hong Kong. The following are the seven main findings of the questionnaire:

6.2.1 More than **90%** of the respondents indicated that the Diocese should continue to accept the laity as permanent deacon. Compared to the 1992 consultation on "*Should the Hong Kong Diocese set up a ministry of permanent deacon?* ", the current level of acceptance by members of church is distinctly much higher. In 1992, the acceptance by the laity was **64.5% - 78.9%** while that for the clergy was **38.6% -58%**, which were increased to more than **90%** in the current survey.

More people agreed that the promotion of the ministry of permanent deacon has both religious and social significance. But on the question of whether such ministry would bestow the laity with higher glory, views of the respondents were diverse.

6.2.2 More respondents acknowledged the work of the permanent deacons and agreed that the Diocese needs more of them. But the respondents considered that the functions of permanent deacons should primarily be for religious and pastoral work, and secondarily for social and community services. The clerics (who were interviewed) expressed that there was no conflict of the permanent deacons with the identity and work of the priests, as their roles were not the same. Whether the scope of work of the permanent deacons was comprehensive or not, their feedback was neutral.

6.2.3 Regarding the views expressed by permanent deacons on social issues of Hong Kong, the respondents mostly remained neutral or were not aware of such views. They felt that the role of permanent deacons in enhancing their understanding of social issues was not obvious.

6.2.4 More than half of respondents agreed that the secular identity of permanent deacons had brought about a positive impact on the church and parish services. More people agreed or strongly agreed that the permanent deacons should provide services to places, like parishes, social services and church organizations, diocese committees, formation centers, outlying and remote parishes, but they were neutral in regard to permanent deacons' services for schools. On the key qualifications for being a permanent deacon, the respondents considered that he should be able to cooperate with the parish priest or the faithful, eager to serve, willing to sacrifice, and was solid in in-depth prayers and spirituality.

6.2.5 Many respondents indicated that they were not clear of the following:

- whether the views expressed by permanent deacons on social issues in HK were appropriate,
- whether the views expressed by permanent deacons had enhanced their understanding of social issues,
- whether permanent deacons had received adequate formation and training,
- whether the secular identity of permanent deacons had made them more aware of the difficulties and needs of laity,

- whether ministry of permanent deacons was a means for Hong Kong Diocese to expand its group of clergy

6.2.6 Many respondents indicated that the spirituality of permanent deacons had met with the role of a clergy, and that they were influenced by permanent deacons mostly on their faith, but less obvious in social issues.

6.2.7 For respondents responsible for pastoral duties, by completion of the questionnaires, majority of them agreed that the work of permanent deacons was in line with their duties. 60% of them indicated that they were happy to get along with permanent deacons, while over 70% welcomed permanent deacons to work in their parishes.

6.3 In-depth Interviews

The laity and people responsible for pastoral duties (mainly the priests and those in religious work) were interviewed and their views were integrated, with relevant findings shown in Part 4 and Part 5 of this report. Despite the scale and number of in-depth interviews were not as large as those for questionnaires, it demanded substantial manpower and resources. The results helped us delve more into the subject of Hong Kong's ministry of permanent deacon.

The interviews had assisted us in differentiating conceptual ideas and realistic circumstances. While personal interview could give a real feeling of sincerity, its nature was different from that of questionnaire. It might be personal and had a risk of biased thinking. However, the nature of an interview is very different from the questionnaire. Some of the views of interviewees might not be based on facts, which could only be taken as a reminder by the Church. Some of the views were obviously made up by imagination and hard to be put into effect. Some of the views were in fact being considered by the Church. Below is a summary of the findings in six main areas:

6.3.1 The interviewees considered that the establishment of the ministry of permanent deacon was due to the lack of vocation for priests. It is also God's will and such a ministry existed in rapid growth of the Church in its history. These reasons tend to be piecemeal, having no regard to the directive of the Vatican Council II to push forward the ministry of permanent deacon – to face the world, to serve the society, to speak for the justice and righteousness.

6.3.2 Some of the interviewees (who are members of laity) even believed that their services were more or less the same as those of permanent deacons. Such a view was not uncommon. This however reflects that some members are not clear of the distinction between the permanent

deacons and the lay persons in terms of New Evangelization as promulgated in the Vatican Council II. In other words, if the laity can understand more about the current situation of the Church and its development, the theology, as well as the experience of cooperation, they can delineate clearly the roles between the permanent deacons and the lay persons.

6.3.3 The interviewees in general accepted and gave credit to the permanent deacons, which is in line with the findings of the questionnaire. The main reasons are: permanent deacons have mature personality, setting up good example, living a life of vocation and maintaining good relationship with the laity. This demonstrates that the acceptance of permanent deacons is not simply based on their functions and work performances, but more importantly on their mature character, self-awareness of their vocation, the spirit of sacrifice, performance of witness, and dedication to new evangelization. For those interviewees who had a negative view on the permanent deacons, they mainly pointed out that the permanent deacons had not functioned fully in their capability as a cleric (which is their advantage).

6.3.4 On the role of a permanent deacon to voice out on social issues, the interviewees considered it a complex, extensive and sensitive topic, which might go beyond the scope of work of the permanent deacons. Such a response is exactly consistent with the findings in the questionnaire, in which most respondents replied that they remained neutral or did not aware of role of permanent deacons in speaking up on social topics. Very few interviewees had based on the high regard of the Vatican Council II in the relationship between the Church and the society, or in the active promotion of evangelization in the community, that they recognized that the permanent deacons have a role of making a voice on social issue.

6.3.5 Some interviewees considered that the permanent deacons were able to exert much greater influence within the church than out in the society. The three major tasks of permanent deacons are evangelization, liturgical services and charity work. They were seen mostly in the parishes for duties, including assisting liturgical rituals, reading gospels during mass, organizing catechist class, helping priests in daily management of the parish, doing charity work such as pastoral service in hospitals, marriage counseling, etc. This coincides with the results of the questionnaire, where lay persons expressed that they were influenced by the permanent deacons mostly in their faith. These views are contrary to those answered the questionnaires, i.e. the purpose of setting up the ministry of permanent deacon is to serve both the church and the society.

6.3.6 The study found that the impact of permanent deacons in the church was proportional to their degree of acceptance, which tends to be positive. However, their influence in society was relatively low. Such finding is also echo with that of the questionnaire, where

respondents' replies were neutral or did not know when coming to the question of permanent deacon's role in speaking out on social issues.

6.3.7 It is noted that the system of permanent deacons is closely related to its selection, expenditure and compensation, attire and clothing, living conditions and training programmes. On the topics of expenditure/compensation and training, interviewees generally had discussions on both positive and negative aspects.

6.4 Self-perception of permanent deacons

The analysis in this section is not based on conceptual or theoretical information, but on personal experience and individual practice of subject persons. This would enable us to perceive the life of someone in the capacity of permanent deacon, and the reality and limitation they need to face in their commitments and identity. Below are the six main points gathered during interviews with permanent deacons:

6.4.1 The interviewees indicated that they decided to be a permanent deacon in response to God's calling. Given the people and events around, they gradually generated an aspiration for being a permanent deacon. When knowing more about the ministry of permanent deacon on unplanned occasions and following invitations by priests, they made a first step. In general, they are supported by their families. In case there are concerns by family members, aspirants will deal with the family relationship through active communication and in a respectful manner.

6.4.2 The interviewees considered that they are servants of the Lord. The work of the servant is to care for the public and serve the poor/under-privileged in the community, which is essentially an outward-looking and human-oriented mission. A permanent deacon is a bridge between the laity and the priest, between the church and the society, not an honorable lay person or a priest.

6.4.3 Most of the interviewees considered that they have good relationships with priests, sisters and the faithful. This is in line with the findings of questionnaire, in which majority of respondents expressed that they were getting along well with the permanent deacons and welcomed them to serve their parishes. The interviewees opined that with longer service in the parishes and more familiar with the faithful, they have established close relationships and cooperation with the priests, the pastoral workers and the laity. On the misunderstanding arising from unfamiliarity, the interviewees felt that there is no need to do things intentionally, but to appear more frequently in the parishes. Time and presence will foster a relationship.

6.4.4 The interviewees expressed that doing charity work/services have helped them realize more of their identity and mission, to be more proactive and vigilant. The outcomes of their work/services could bring them joy and satisfaction, help them to be humble and meek, make them get along with others in harmony, and uphold justice as the working principle.

6.4.5 The interviewees found that the church does not provide specific requirements or guidelines on how to express views on social issues. They need to take into regard their own representativeness and position objectively with clear understanding of the nature of the issue, and then consider the most appropriate manner to express their opinions, whilst making prayers incessantly.

6.4.6 Some of the interviewees felt that in view of the changing society and unforeseen circumstances, there is a need for flexibility on the issue of subsistence allowance for permanent deacons. Some thought that protection of the livelihood and safety of permanent deacons would mean the protection of the interests of the church itself (even though they are well aware of not granting any living allowance except travelling expenses during the early stage of their selection). In any case, most of the interviewees agreed that the Diocese should continue adopting the consistent policy of a non-salary rank for permanent deacon, lest the sacredness of ordination will be compromised.

6.5 Views of Members of the ‘Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate’ (The Commission)

The membership of the ‘*Diocesan Commission for the Permanent Diaconate*’ (The Commission) comprises different representatives from the Church. For its mission, it is responsible for the planning, publicity, promotion, selection, training and investiture of permanent deacons; and also strengthening the understanding of this ministry and its formation in the Diocese. Members are dedicated to the development of the ministry of permanent deacons and have confidence on its prosperous future. They also have a strong sense of mission. Below are the six main points gathered from members during interviews:

6.5.1 Members considered that the role of the Committee was to enhance a two-way understanding between two clerical ranks, i.e. priest and permanent deacon. On the one hand, they will reflect to the permanent deacons how the priests think of them, while on the other, they will let the priests know how the permanent deacons see them.

6.5.2 Members believed that the purpose of the charity services of the permanent deacons is to show the very presence of the Church in the society. At present, they mainly provide services in different establishments of the society, including pastoral service in hospitals, visiting prisoners, while organizing activities for the marginalized sectors outside the establishment, such as dinner for the grassroots, care for residents of nano-partitioned flats and street sleepers.

6.5.3 Members considered that the *Committee* should also be aware of the needs of the wives of married permanent deacons, in a hope that they would not create hindrance in the work of permanent deacons or show their indifference. Marriage is a spousal union of two persons into one body, and the vocation of a permanent deacon is not only for the husband, but also his wife.

6.5.4 Members fully appreciated that it is not easy for a permanent deacon to take care of his work, family and training all at the same time. However, some opined that the training is capable of maintaining the quality of permanent deacons. For the formation/training, interviewees considered that its content will be revised constantly to meet the needs of permanent deacons in carrying out their duties. With the increasing knowledge of the faithful about the Church, the demand for permanent deacons will also be increased. Hence, permanent deacons must be fully qualified in terms of their theological knowledge, and one option is to space out the training with longer periods to avoid overloading. Even if the candidates are less competent in academic knowledge, the Committee will help them overcome the difficulties so long as they have strong faith.

6.5.5 Some Members were of the view that age and life experience will affect the degree of maturity of a person. So, the assessment should better be focused on the overall balance of the character of the candidate. Currently, most of the suitable candidates meeting the requirement for a permanent deacon are at the age of 40 and above, with stable job and family life.

6.5.6 Some Members highlighted that, in the process of selection, one of the prerequisites is financial stability of the candidate. While the travelling allowance for permanent deacons may be increased in future, the Church does not need to provide them with housing and medical benefits. For aspirants who are not economically sound, they will be encouraged to acquire more life experience and perform services at other platforms before considering to join the rank of permanent deacon.

6.6. Recommendations

As there is still quite a large number of respondents who replied “do not know” or “neutral” to many questions in the questionnaire, it shows that their stance is of ‘*not agree*’ or ‘*not disagree*’ because of their lack of clear understanding of many issues. This can be interpreted that the Church still needs to make efforts to let the laity understand more the role of permanent deacons. On the other hand, in discharging their duties, the permanent deacons need to let others know their presence in parish and community services, in particular, bringing back their witnesses in the society to the parishes, in order that the faithful joining the parish liturgy and activities could get a feel of the new evangelization. If this understanding is correct, the Church must further promote the vision of the Vatican Council II, which is to face the world by faith, and enhance the understanding by others on the ministry of permanent deacon.

Whether the work of permanent deacons being socially-focused or religiously-oriented is not an issue of mutually exclusive. Given the vision of facing the world by faith as promulgated by the Vatican Council II, there is a clear demand for the ministry of permanent deacon (as revived after the Council) to serve the Church in the capacity of a secular cum consecrated identity, in order that the spirit of charity and justice can be witnessed in the society.

Nowadays, in Hong Kong, it is fortunate that over **70%** of the clergy welcome the permanent deacons to work in their parishes. Currently, there are 21 permanent deacons, which is not enough for deploying to work in 52 parishes in Hong Kong. Turning to the selection and acceptance of permanent deacons, the consideration is not merely about the match of the number of permanent deacons with that of the parishes. It has to take into account a basket of key factors, including the character and personality of a candidate, the discernment of his vocation etc., as well as the social situation. Given the leading role of the Hong Kong Diocese in the development of the ministry of permanent deacon in Asia, it is believed that the Diocese will continuously carry out the mission of the Vatican Council II with the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some of the recommendations based on the analysis and inference of the research topics:

6.6.1 The bishop is a person directly responsible for and taking charge of the ministry of deacons. In the history of the Church, deacons had once attached to the bishop and devoted themselves fully to discharge executive duties in the Church, thereby neglecting the ‘service’ function in the society. This is the cause of conflict between clergy and deacon. In view of that the dispute between the two sectors was directly related to the bishop, it would be better for

the bishop to handle the selection principle and service scope for permanent deacons in one go to avoid repeating the same mistakes in history. As regards the questions of who should be responsible for the selection and formation of permanent deacons, whether a priest can set a good role model, whether a retired permanent deacon can serve as a consultant, what is an ideal committee for permanent deacons etc., no answer is provided in this study.

6.6.2 In respect of social witness, the Western Church (Roman Catholic Church) in the medieval times had long been taking the Church and society together as one for more than a thousand years. Social issues were then being handled under the internal administrative system of the Church, hence the social dimension of the deacon ministry was not prominent. But the Vatican Council II has clearly spelt out that the mission of the Church is world-oriented, and the revival of the ministry of permanent deacon is like a hand of the Church in reaching out to the world. The permanent deacons need to follow the directives of the Vatican Council II to spread the gospel to the society, and then bring back their witnesses in the society as well as the social situation to the Church.

But the Church cannot solely rely on the permanent deacons to make witnesses while ignoring their teaching roles in the Church. It is the responsibility of the Church to voice out on righteousness. While the bishop will take the lead, priests, permanent deacons and laity have to share the responsibility. Being a person leading a life in the secular world, a permanent deacon can be more sensitive to social justice and speak for the under-privileged.

6.6.3 For the attire and costume, the permanent deacons can innovatively present themselves with a unique color. The Church has always attached great importance to the identification of clerical ranks, cardinals in red, bishops in purple, priests in black or white to indicate their different ranks. Permanent deacons can be more creative in selecting a specific colour to represent their identity, which is not a sign of vanity.


Seminarians and brothers can also dress up in Roman style cleric costumes like the priests for special occasions. By the same token, permanent deacons, being a clerical rank, should also be allowed to do the same under similar circumstances. Moreover, as this is a new rank, they should be given more opportunities for exposure. Hong Kong has twenty-eight permanent deacons in a short history of two decades. Priests and sisters have been in Hong Kong for over one hundred and seventy years, with a number of several thousands. It is not appropriate to compare the newly revived permanent deacons with their long-established counterparts.

Most priests in Hong Kong usually do not put on Roman cleric costume, except for formal and special occasions. By doing so, they have given a healthy and fresh image. Perhaps, the consideration is not simply what to wear, but also why and when to wear.

6.6.4 Full-time salary work in the Church is different from the full-time voluntary service in the Church. The former should be employed through open recruitment process and provided with reasonable income. If a permanent deacon is to accept a full-time salary position in an institution of the Church, he is entitled to receive reasonable remuneration. However, he should not obtain such a position in the capacity of a permanent deacon, rather he must go through open recruitment and compete fairly with applicants (of lay persons). Otherwise, he will not comply with the church policy. The policy is not to allow the clergy to dominate and hold all different positions by themselves, falling into a state of traditional clericalism.

With regard to expenditure/compensation, irrespective of the proposals, it cannot be separated from the basic concept of rights and obligations. The relationship between rights and obligations varies amongst the laity, the priests and the permanent deacons. In the Church, the obligations of different ranks in the hierarchy are not the same, so are the corresponding rights they are entitled to. This would result in different forms of relationship between rights and obligations, making it more difficult to compare amongst various rankings. Maintaining a balance between the rights and obligations of permanent deacons would definitely be beneficial for them to carry out their missions and bring the Church to the world, as a momentum for new evangelization. This understanding is not derived from the findings of this study. Such discussion would be subject to further review and assessment of the actual situation and the financial availability of the Church.

Finally, according to the study findings and data collected on the system of permanent deacons, we have identified a few parameters and assess their impact on the ministry in ascending order:

Light to Heavy	Item	Impact on role and function
Light  Heavy	Attire/clothing	Have identifiable role for the individual, but may have negative impact on function of other clerical ranks.
	Expenditure Compensation	More travel/service subsidies would be more attractive. But expansion to salary system may attract people with other ulterior motives to join rank of permanent deacons.
	Living conditions	Either single or married status in the secular world would be useful, especially in highlighting the value of marriage and family.
	Vocation training	Ensure the ministry effectively respond to the calling, and the quality of the rank is able to meet the ministerial standards.
	Selection	Discernment to ensure applicant's genuine calling and assess the quality and maturity of personality to help improve acceptance.

Basically, items having more weight imply that they are more important, since these are matters of greater significance to be considered by the Church, especially relating to objective and future direction. For selection and vocation training, the focus is on whether we can follow the "Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons" and the "Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons" promulgated by the Congregation for Catholic Education, Congregation for the Clergy. For matters of living conditions, expenditure/compensation and clothing, these can be flexibly dealt with depending on actual situations.

The success or failure of the ministry of permanent deacon depends on many factors, the most important of all being the need to face and align with the future direction of the society. Permanent deacons are from different walks of life in the community, and also they belong to the rank of clergy. Hence, they have the dualistic role of being representatives of the church to serve as well as making witnesses in the community. In fact, this is the expectation of the contemporary Church on them to reach out to the world with love and social justice.

For permanent deacons to effectively perform their functions, it is necessary to strengthen their training on the Church teaching on social doctrine. In this way, the permanent deacons, together with the laity, can assist the underprivileged and voice out for the righteousness, particularly in maintaining social justice. The permanent deacons should also help the laity to understand the position and stance of the Church, its basic principles and values on social issues, so as to uphold justice and ethical judgement in a world of contradiction and tension.