

Report from Zimbabwe (Rev Deacon Charles Dube)

The Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples granted the permission for the restoration of the Permanent Diaconate in the diocese of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe then Rhodesia on 10 May 1969.

On 22 April 1979 Archbishop Henry Karlen ordained the first nine married men to the permanent diaconate. In 1987 he ordained one man who had completed his training in 1979 but was too young to be ordained at that time. In 1992 five more married men were ordained. In April 2005 his successor Archbishop Pius Ncube ordained thirteen married men after completing a five year theological and pastoral training program and again seven more in May 2006. These included two men from the dioceses of Gokwe and Gweru at the request of their local ordinaries. The Archdiocese of Bulawayo remains the only diocese in Zimbabwe that has trained and ordained permanent deacons up to April 2006. There are 19 permanent deacons in the Archdiocese of Bulawayo, one in the diocese of Gokwe and one in the diocese of Gweru. All the permanent deacons are assigned to parishes where they assist priests in preaching, teaching and administering those sacraments which they are ministers. They also undertake home and hospital visits to the sick. To note and what has been of concern to the permanent deacons is that before their ordination these men were passionately active and committed in diocesan specialized ministries such as adult education, St Vincent de Paul (feeding the poor), Justice and peace (social teaching of the church) etc. After ordination, contrary to their letters of appointment, most of these men were assigned parish marginal duties done by lay faithful that excluded the special ministries which were the basis for their training and ordination to the permanent diaconate. While deacons like priest have the faculty to preach everywhere, few are blessed to work with priests who give them the opportunity to preach during Holy Mass. These concerns were communicated to the Archbishop in April, 2014 through a letter signed by all the deacons except one based in a rural mission. No formal response has been made to date.

The successes of the permanent diaconate in the new evangelization have suffered a set-back since September, 2009 when Archbishop Alex Thomas the successor of Archbishop Pius Ncube suspended the training to the permanent diaconate. Men who had completed training then were not ordained. The permanent diaconate in Zimbabwe faces extinction if the Archbishop does not review his position soon as the current deacons are close to retirement age.