

## Report on Diaconate in England and Wales (Deacon Mark Woods)

This report does not deal with the whole of UK as both Scotland and Northern Ireland are in separate Bishops' Conferences.

The Church in England and Wales is facing many challenges. There is an ongoing decline in the numbers of priests though compared to many countries there is still a high priest to number of Catholics ratio. This decline is leading to the merging of parishes and in some dioceses the closing of churches especially where Catholic populations have moved away to other areas. On the other hand in some parts of the country and mainly in cities there has been an increase in church numbers filling churches because of immigration from the Philippines, India (Kerala & Goa), Nigeria, Eastern Europe and many other countries. This has been a blessing, but also requires parishes to find ways to include and welcome such diverse groups coming from different cultural backgrounds and sometimes different liturgical rites. There has also been an increase in some dioceses of priests from overseas many of whom have no or little experience of the diaconate in their countries which can bring challenges. In some ways the picture for the Church in England and Wales is very similar to other West European countries though in some ways as a minority of the population and itself born to a large extent out of the immigration of Irish people to England and Wales brings a different history than many of the continuously Catholic experiences of other Western countries.

I said last time that the diaconate is coming of age in England and Wales. Indeed since last time the only diocese that does not have the diaconate out of 22 has under its new Bishop and with the overwhelming support of lay people and most priests has initiated a process for launching the diaconate in the diocese shortly. The diaconate is still on hold in one diocese, but has not been ruled out completely for the future. This year Liverpool archdiocese which has the largest number of deacons in the country, over one hundred, is about to celebrate 40 years of diaconal ministry. The number of diocese where the director of the diaconate is now a deacon rather than a priest continues to grow though it is still important that there are close links between deacons and priests.

There are approximately 800 deacons in England and Wales. The number is continuing to increase especially with many new Bishops encouraging the diaconate as a vocation in their diocese and the age profile appears to be coming down at the same time. At a national level the Bishops' Conference has a Bishop appointed with responsibility for deacons. Currently the Bishop is David McGough, an auxiliary Bishop in Birmingham Archdiocese. In many ways the Bishops' Conference depends on the work of the Assembly of Deacon Directors and Delegates for guidance and direction on the diaconate. The assembly meets annually though this year [2-4 September](#) there is instead a Deacon Study Conference taking place in the north of England, focussed on the social justice role of the deacon. There is also a Diaconate website [www.diaconate.org.uk](http://www.diaconate.org.uk) which of course has information on this upcoming Conference.

Below are some statistics for the Church, though some include Scotland from just before the papal visit of Pope Benedict to UK in 2010:

### Profile

The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in the world. It has more than 1.166 billion members worldwide – that means one in every six people walking the earth is a baptised Catholic.

Around six million Catholics live in Scotland, England and Wales.

Dioceses - The basic administrative unit of the Catholic Church is the diocese - an area presided over by a bishop, sometimes with auxiliary bishops to help him. There are 22 dioceses in England and Wales; eight in Scotland. These are divided into

parishes, the local communities of Catholics. There are also two dioceses covering the whole country for specific groups: the Bishopric of the Forces and the Apostolic Exarchate for Ukrainians.

There are five Provinces in England and Wales: Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Southwark and Westminster. There are two Provinces in Scotland: Edinburgh and St Andrews; Glasgow.

Weekly mass attendance is around 1.1 million.

There are 2,566 parish churches in England and Wales; 500 in Scotland. In addition, there are more than 500 chapels and churches open to the public.

Number of priests in Scotland, England and Wales:

- 4,400 active diocesan priests
- 811 retired priests
- 1069 religious priests

Number of deacons in England and Wales:

- 736 deacons

Ratio of priests to people in England and Wales:

- 1: 1147 (active diocesan priests: lay Catholics)

Number of convents in England and Wales

- 1066

Number of seminarians in England and Wales (Men in formation for priesthood)

- 136 (this has increased slightly towards nearer 200)