

The Diaconate Renewed: Sacrament, Word, and Service

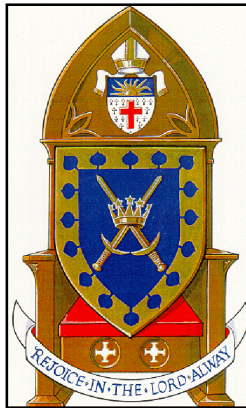


D. Michael Jackson

Diocese of Qu'Appelle
Anglican Church of Canada

Revised July 2021

*Dedicated to Bishop Duncan Wallace (1938-2015)
Enabler of the Diaconate*



*St. Paul's Cathedral
Regina*



Diocese of Qu'Appelle

© D. Michael Jackson 2021

The image on the cover is the logo designed by Deacon Joe Lang of the Archdiocese of Regina for the International Anglican - Roman Catholic - Ukrainian Catholic Conference on the Diaconate, held at Campion College, University of Regina, in 2018.

Table of Contents

Introductory Message	3
Foreword	4
Author and Acknowledgements	5
Preface	6
Introduction	7
I The Diaconate in History	8
The Origins of the Diaconate	8
The Diaconate Flourishes	9
The Diaconate – Ministry Open to Women?	11
The Decline of the Diaconate	13
The Diaconate in the Church of England	14
II The Revival of the Diaconate	16
The Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church	17
The Church of England: Ambivalence and Negativity	18
Interest in the Scottish Episcopal Church	20
Evolution in Canada	21
III The Renewed Diaconate	23
Re-interpreting <i>Diakonia</i>	23
Deacons in Action	24
<i>Worship</i>	25
<i>Preaching</i>	28
<i>Lay Ministry</i>	29
<i>Outreach and Prophetic Ministry</i>	29
Discernment, Formation and Ordination	31
<i>Discernment and Acceptance</i>	32
<i>Formation</i>	33
<i>Ordination</i>	33
IV Contemporary Issues	35
Objections to the Diaconate	35
Women in the Diaconate	36
The Lutheran Diaconate	38
The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity	41
Direct Ordination: Once a Deacon, Always a Deacon?	43
Conclusion	48
Bibliography	49
1. History and Theology of the Diaconate	49
2. Ministry and Formation	50
3. Women and the Diaconate	51
4. Liturgy and Worship	52
5. Reports	53
6. Selected Websites	54

Introductory Message

The Most Reverend Donald Bolen Roman Catholic Archbishop of Regina

It is a privilege to write an accompanying message to Deacon Michael Jackson's study of the diaconate. He has been a colleague and friend for many years, dating back to 2010 when we were both involved in drafting a covenant between the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina.



Deacon Michael's study of the diaconate has always been a living document. He has consistently, even relentlessly, sought to improve and update the text in light of his ongoing commitment to and engagement with the broader scholarship on diaconate. And it is not only the text itself, but precisely this vigorous commitment and engagement of which it is a product and symbol, that has been such a blessing to our local churches.

There is a special relationship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in this part of the world, as indicated by our covenant. Cooperation and dialogue between our local churches began when Deacon Michael's father was Bishop of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle, at the time of the Second Vatican Council. Building on that history of walking together, we understand and try to live out what it means to be in real and profound communion, even if that communion is not yet complete.

One of the places where that close relationship is most in evidence is in our cooperation on the diaconate. On that terrain, Deacon Michael's contribution is hard to overstate. As the present study makes clear, he is deeply conversant with the leading Roman Catholic as well as Anglican thinking on the topic, and his approach to this question has always been profoundly ecumenical. This is clear from his use of sources, but also from the fact that, though he holds some of his opinions fiercely (just ask him about the transitional diaconate!), his engagement with other points of view is always nuanced and fair – modelling just the kind of rigorous dialogue that ecumenical relations need if they are to bear fruit.

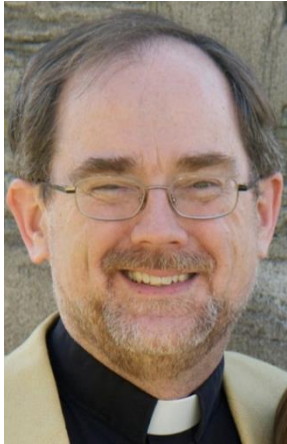
A high point of our ecumenical engagement on this topic was an international conference on the diaconate, held at Campion College, University of Regina, in the spring of 2018, co-sponsored by our two dioceses and the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy. While many from both our communities made important contributions to the success of this remarkable meeting, the conference would have been unimaginable without Deacon Michael's energy, diligence, expertise (from the theological to the organizational), and broad range of ecumenical connections, built through years of engagement with the international community of diaconate scholarship. This study is also a reflection of those gifts and commitments. May our two communions and many others besides, continue to be blessed by Deacon Michael's work and ministry.

+ Donald Bolen, Archbishop of Regina

Foreword

The Reverend Dr. Iain Luke

Principal of the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad, University of Saskatchewan



There is a lot to be learned from absorbing the history of an institution. The sheer fact of survival, over decades or even centuries, tells you something about its resilience and the spirit of those who inhabit its structures. Crises and great episodes reveal what has changed about an institution, and what remains the same over time. But it is equally important to look at its history up close, in order to discover the texture, the feel, the particular human experience of being part of something large enough to bind people together across time and space.

Deacon Michael's survey of the diaconate works on all these layers. It gives the broad strokes of a movement which has unfolded, within and alongside the church, over two millennia. Just as importantly, it brings to light the complexities, the nuances, and the personal wrestling that come with being part of such a multi-faceted institution.

The author quickly, but wisely and kindly, dismantles any simple answer to the question, "What is a deacon?" He describes the functions which deacons have performed, but then demonstrates how any merely functional definition is inadequate: the diaconate cannot be reduced to a role, whether in liturgy or in social service. Likewise, he touches on the idealized definitions which have made deacons either the junior grade of ministry, or else the focus for ministry outside the church walls: the diaconate cannot be reduced to such concepts, either.

In place of any easily summarized account, the reader instead gains a perspective on two thousand years of ups and downs, in a way which can only build appreciation for the ministry of deacons. It is that spirit of appreciation which I hope this study can harness, in service to the goal declared in its title, *The Diaconate Renewed*.

Such a renewal will not simply be a re-structuring, or a new injection of resources and energy, but rather a fresh performance of the living, evolving history of the diaconate. The spirit of that history is a thread that runs through the church's liturgy, its structures, and its call to live and proclaim the gospel in the world. The ethos of the diaconate cannot be grasped in any one word, but it embodies qualities like stirring up and extending the community of faith, and an identity rooted in being agents and heralds of God's reign.

These are exactly the qualities which the church needs to build up its own life in the twenty-first century. Perhaps it is no wonder that the Holy Spirit is sometimes invoked as the pattern for the ministry of deacons. Although often hidden and under-appreciated, the story of the diaconate, which you are about to read, is a gift which can reconnect us to what God is doing in creation, and our place in God's mission.

Iain Luke

Author



D. Michael Jackson, ordained in the Diocese of Qu'Appelle in 1977, is the longest-serving deacon in the Anglican Church of Canada. He is deacon at St. Paul's Cathedral in Regina and a canon of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle. He was coordinator of the Anglican-Roman Catholic-Ukrainian Catholic Conference on the Diaconate at the University of Regina in 2018 and editor of the resulting book, The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective. Canon Jackson facilitates an international ecumenical network of deacons and others interested in the diaconate. In 2021 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa) by the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad in the Saskatoon Theological Union.

Acknowledgements

The original version of this study of the diaconate was prepared in 1997 for the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle at the request of Bishop Duncan Wallace. It was revised and expanded in 2008 at the request of his successor, Bishop Gregory Kerr-Wilson. In 2014 Bishop Robert Hardwick commissioned a new edition for diocesan website publication. Ongoing developments and publications in the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Methodist Churches have prompted – and will undoubtedly continue to prompt – subsequent revisions and additions.

Among the writers consulted and quoted we particularly acknowledge Deacon Maylanne Maybee and the Rev. Dr. Iain Luke (Anglican Church of Canada); Deacon Susanne Watson Epting (Episcopal Church in the USA); Professor Paul Avis, Canon Rosalind Brown, Deacon Gill Kimber, and Dr. Francis Young (Church of England); Deacon Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, Deacon William T. Ditewig, Deacon James Keating, and Dr. Phyllis Zagano (Roman Catholic Church in the USA); and Deacon David Clark (British Methodist Church).

We thank Deacon Canon Jacquie Bouthéon for liaison with Anglican Deacons Canada (ADC) and Deacons Lori Mills-Curran and Anne Pillot for similar liaison with the Association for Episcopal Deacons (AED). We express our appreciation to the Right Reverend Robert Hardwick, Bishop of Qu'Appelle, and the Most Reverend Donald Bolen, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Regina, for their keen interest in the ecumenical dimension of the diaconate, evidenced in their enthusiastic co-chairing of the 2018 international conference on the diaconate in Regina. We thank Archbishop Bolen for contributing an Introductory Message to this study and the Rev. Dr. Iain Luke, Principal of the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad at the University of Saskatchewan, for his Foreword.

Preface

The author has been a deacon since 1977 and is now the longest-serving deacon in the Anglican Church of Canada. For many years, he was challenged about why he was a deacon: “When are you becoming a real minister?” “When are you being ordained?” “Why are you not going on to the priesthood?” While Anglicans have traditionally paid lip service to the three orders of ordained ministry of bishop, priest or presbyter, and deacon, in practice they have more often been in the situation described by a preacher at an ordination of “transitional” deacons in the 1980s in the Episcopal Church in the United States: “[The preacher] knows full well that this person in front of him, now being ordained with such solemnity, will to all intents and purposes have to go through it all again in six months or a year’s time to be ordained as a priest. Of course we say, ‘Once a deacon, always a deacon,’ but this is pious fiction. The ordination of a deacon, as at present practised, is usually little more than a farce.”¹

The diaconate has evolved immensely in the generation since those words were written, not only in the Anglican Communion but in the Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and other churches, where the “vocational” diaconate has come to the fore and proved its value. Changed understandings of *diakonia*, diaconate and deacons have very much influenced this evolution.

The ecumenical dimension of the diaconate is prominent in *The Diaconate Renewed*. The Anglican Diocese of Qu’Appelle entered into a covenant relationship with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina in 2011; the diaconate was very much on the agenda, culminating in the conference held in Regina in 2018. In 2020 the covenant expanded to include all jurisdictions of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the Province of Saskatchewan. The four churches, locally and worldwide, share a historical experience of the order of deacons and now share in its renewal. This is evident in the book resulting from the 2018 conference, *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*.²

A detailed study of the liturgical role of the deacon is provided in a separate paper, *The Deacon in the Worshipping Community*, available on the website of the Diocese of Qu’Appelle.

Michael Jackson
Regina, Canada
Pentecost Season, 2021

¹ Reginald Fuller, quoted in James M. Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, revised edition (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), xi.

² D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective: Ecclesiology, Liturgy and Practice* (Durham, UK: Sacristy Press, 2019).

Introduction

The diaconate has traditionally been known as a ministry of service. The biblical Greek word *diakonia*, from which we derive “diaconate” and “deacon,” is usually translated as “service,” with connotations of humble assistance to others. However, in the 1990s the New Testament scholar John N. Collins challenged this interpretation. *Diakonia* and its cognate words, he pointed out, had a much broader sense than “service” in New Testament Greek, also including “ministry,” “message,” “agency” or “attendant.”³ Similarly, the office of deacon, from the Greek word *diakonos*, has often been misinterpreted, particularly since the nineteenth century, as essentially a servant focusing on charitable work, whereas it originally had wider meanings of minister, agent, messenger, ambassador, envoy and representative.

In any event, the notion of service to others, taken from Jesus’ references to himself as a servant and to the ministry of humble service, applies to *all* his followers and not just to one particular ecclesial office; it is a key to the new life, the Kingdom of God. The early Church’s fundamental nature was organic, not hierarchical, stressing the oneness of a community where all have both common and particular functions. It is in *baptism* that all Christians are given a charisma which includes the service aspect of *diakonia*. Deacon Susanne Watson Epting of the Episcopal Church in the USA has put it this way: “Even though ordained, our primary identity remains baptismal and our ordination charges and vows serve only to expand, enhance, and urge us on in animating and exemplifying the *diakonia* to which all the baptized were called.”⁴ She writes of “the radical equality of baptism.”⁵

Church of England theologian Paul Avis takes this a step further: interpreting *diakonia*, like John Collins, as “ministry” rather than “service,” he sees the diaconate as the foundation of ordained ministry, distinct from the common discipleship of all the baptized. “Diaconal ministry,” he says, “consists of the one mission and ministry – a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility – that is entrusted to the Church.”⁶ Presbyters and bishops, in his view, take this *diakonia* to a wider sphere and a different dimension.

The order of deacons and the notion of *diakonia* have evidently and inevitably evolved considerably since the New Testament period and the early and patristic Church, through the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the ensuing four centuries, to a distinct rethink and revival in the late 20th and the 21st centuries. Our first task, then, is to trace this historical evolution.

³ Collins examines in detail the linguistic evidence in *Diakonia: Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). In *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new* (Leominster: Gracewing; Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), he further analyses his findings and applies them to the diaconate. The results of this research are well summarized by Ormonde Plater in *Many Servants: An Introduction to the Diaconate*. Revised Edition (Cambridge, MS: Cowley Publications, 2004), xii-xiii; and by Paul Avis in *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2005), especially 105-111.

⁴ Susanne Watson Epting, “Common Views and Common Mission,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 92, Winter 2010.

⁵ Susanne Watson Epting, *Unexpected Consequences: The Diaconate Renewed* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 36.

⁶ Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 112.

Chapter I The Diaconate in History

The Origins of the Diaconate

Given the original notion that ministry belonged to the *laos*, to all the baptized in a horizontally-structured church, it took some time for specific orders of ministry to emerge. *Acts* 6: 1-6 recounts, according to most translations, how the disciples responded to complaints from the Hellenists that “their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.” The community appointed “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to handle this task, freeing the disciples to devote themselves “to prayer and to serving the word.” The apostles prayed over and laid hands on the seven. Some commentators have read much into this passage, citing it as the origin or at least the forerunner of the diaconate, since the mission of the Seven was apparently the administration of charity in the young church. There is a widespread assumption that these were the first deacons. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI viewed this passage as “the origin of the diaconal office”; his successor, Pope Francis, said that “the Holy Spirit inspired [the Apostles] to create deacons.”⁷

However, Orthodox scholar and deacon John Chryssavgis cautions that “it is difficult, if not dangerous, to search for a fully developed diaconate in the New Testament or early Apostolic Fathers.”⁸ Most authorities now agree that the accounts of the ministry of Stephen and Philip in *Acts* and the commissioning of the Seven in *Acts* 6: 1-6 do not refer to a distinct order of deacons.⁹ “Both modern and ancient exegetes do not consider the ‘seven’ in *Acts* 6 to have been what were later called ‘deacons’.”¹⁰ The aforementioned passage in *Acts* may well refer to the apostolic ministry of word and Eucharist, not literally waiting on table.¹¹ The notion that the Seven were deacons began with Irenaeus (c. 185), who retrospectively identified Stephen as the first deacon. “In light of the evidence from Scripture and the early Church, and of recent scholarship regarding the controversy and appointment of the Seven in *Acts* 6, we must conclude that the Seven were *not* deacons,” said a leading diaconal scholar.¹²

While Paul refers to *episcopoi* and *diakonoi* in *Philippians* 1:1, these terms are often translated as “overseers” and “agents” or “supervisors” and “assistants” as well as “bishops” and “deacons.”¹³ It has been noted that the early Church tended anachronistically to “read into apostolic Church order the fully developed diaconate of the second century.” However, “ordering was underway when Paul greeted the *episcopoi* and *diakonoi* at Philippi;” the role of Epaphroditus (*Philippians* 2: 25-30) shows the emergence of the diaconal function.¹⁴ In 1 *Corinthians* 12: 4-11 and 27-31, we note the variety of ministries, not necessarily permanent and not always formally commissioned.

⁷ See Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 2020), 17-22.

⁸ John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diaconia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009), 32.

⁹ Barnett, 33. See also Collins, *Deacons and the Church*, 47-50, 87-89, and Plater, *Many Servants*, 11-12.

¹⁰ Cipriano Vagaggini, *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, edited by Phyllis Zagano (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 10.

¹¹ See Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 108-109.

¹² James M. Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, 32-33.

¹³ See Collins, *Diaconia*, 235-236, and Plater, *Many Servants*, 11.

¹⁴ Edward P. Echlin, S.J., *The Deacon in the Church, Past and Future* (New York: Alba House, 1971), 5, 9, 10.

The consensus of scholars is that in the Pauline churches of the early New Testament period there was no uniform structure of offices. However, the roots were there and formal ministry was taking shape; by the time of 1 *Timothy* and the later New Testament church we find more consistent references to orders of ministry. 1 *Timothy* 3: 1-7 lists the qualifications of bishops. Verses 8-13 describe those of deacons: “Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” This passage includes a verse about possible women deacons: “Women must likewise be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.”

One theory is that the offices of bishop and deacon originated in the Pauline or Hellenic churches, while that of presbyter or elder originated in the Judaistic churches, especially in Jerusalem. The two systems gradually link up and by the end of the first century a synthesis into three orders is more or less complete. Bishops are overseers and liturgical presiders, in conjunction with presbyters or elders, who form a governing council. Deacons work closely with the bishop, act as episcopal agents, and have special responsibilities in pastoral, charitable, and administrative work and in the liturgy. Writers at the end of the first century, such as the authors of the *Didache* and *The Shepherd of Hermas* and Clement of Rome, refer to the link between bishop and deacon and to the liturgical role of the deacon.

In the post-apostolic or “Ignatian” era, the “mono-episcopate” emerges, the “rule of the local church by a council of presbyters [...] over which one bishop presides.”¹⁵ St. Ignatius of Antioch refers in his letters written at the beginning of the second century to fully-developed orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon. “[Deacons] are seen [by St. Ignatius] to have as integral a part in the ministry as the bishop and the presbyters: they are not an optional extra, but are mentioned first.”¹⁶ Deacons are officers or functionaries of the Church community, ministers of liturgy, word, charity and administration. The direct association of deacons with the bishop is clear to Ignatius: “their *diakonia* is to carry out the will of the bishop.”¹⁷ So is their liturgical role; for Ignatius, they are “deacons of the mysteries of Christ” at the eucharistic celebration,¹⁸ a role identified even more specifically in the writings of another second century writer, Justin Martyr: “After the president has given thanks and all the people have shouted their assent, those whom we call deacons give to each one present to partake of the eucharistic bread; and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.”¹⁹

The Diaconate Flourishes

In the two centuries from the time of Ignatius to the Council of Nicaea, deacons are “vitaly important ministers of the Church,”²⁰ a complementary order, not a subordinate one. People are ordained directly to the episcopate, the presbyterate or the diaconate, with all three seen as permanent. The deacon’s special relationship with the bishop is symbolized in the diaconal ordination rite where the bishop alone lays hands on the ordinand, whereas the college of priests

¹⁵ Barnett, 49.

¹⁶ Jill Pinnock, “The History of the Diaconate,” in Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon’s Ministry* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1992), 12.

¹⁷ Collins, *Deacons and the Church*, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹ Quoted in Plater, *Many Servants*, 18-19.

²⁰ Echlin, 29.

join the bishop in the laying-on of hands for the presbyterate. The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Rome, c. 215) notes that “on ordaining the deacon, the bishop alone lays hands, because he is ordained not to the priesthood but to the ministry of the bishop, to carry out commands. He does not take part in the council of the clergy, but attends to duties and makes known to the bishop what is necessary...”²¹

The *Didascalia* of the Apostles (c. 250), a pastoral handbook for bishops, compares bishops to the high priests of Old Testament times, priests to Old Testament priests, and deacons to Levites. Deacons have a major liturgical role and administrative and charitable duties. They act as administrative assistants to the bishop. They baptize. They have clear functions in the Eucharist. They are even known – though rarely – to have presided at eucharistic celebrations.²² They are ministers of charity, ministers to the sick and the aged. They may reconcile penitents. But, though ministers of the “Word,” apparently they do not normally preach.²³ They are sometimes placed in charge of small congregations. Some are elected bishops. For example, in 218 Callistus, a deacon, became a bishop, then pope. Cyprian of Carthage was ordained presbyter in 257 without having been a deacon. “The third century was a period in which the dignity and importance of the deacon increased at the expense of the presbyter. Perhaps the climax is recorded in the *Didascalia*, where the deacon usually takes precedence over the presbyter.”²⁴ In the following century, Athanasius was directly ordained bishop of Alexandria in 328; in 374, Ambrose was baptized and then directly ordained bishop of Milan; Augustine was ordained directly to the presbyterate in 391.

A description of ministry in the early Church shows the relatively low profile of presbyters compared to deacons:

[The] bishop is responsible for seeing to it that the congregation develops and grows and that the presbyters form with him a ruling group assisted by the deacons. At the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, the local bishop inevitably presides, the deacons fulfilling their roles too...But it is the presbyters, who are by far the commonest in today’s Church, who do not appear to “do” very much, apart from sitting there as elders.²⁵

Indeed, as Phyllis Zagano has pointed out, “the ministerial diaconate for the most part predates the sacerdotal priesthood”; “the first Church ministries were episcopal and diaconal, the overseers and the helpers.”²⁶ John Chryssavgis wryly comments that “as close co-workers and confidential collaborators of the bishop, deacons assumed prominence, charged with special missions and routine inspection. Compared with presbyters – the very term ‘presbyter’ implies a senior, even elderly minister – deacons were generally young and enthusiastic.”²⁷

²¹ Ormonde Plater, ed., *Historic Documents on the Diaconate* (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, revised 1999), 1.

²² Echlin speculates that Ignatius may on occasion have delegated eucharistic presidency to deacons (*The Deacon in the Church*, 22) and observes that the Council of Arles in 314 directed that the practice cease.

²³ See Barnett, 80-83, who challenges the assertion of Echlin that deacons exercised a preaching ministry (76, 88, 103, 106).

²⁴ Barnett, 71.

²⁵ Kenneth Stevenson, *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989), 74-75.

²⁶ Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ*, xviii, 6.

²⁷ John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, 60.

*The Diaconate – Ministry Open to Women?*²⁸

In *Romans* 16:1, Paul refers to Phoebe as a *diakonos*: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” Says Phyllis Zagano, “in Scripture, the only person with the actual job title ‘deacon’ is Phoebe of Romans 16.”²⁹ While there is debate as to whether this refers to a deacon as the office as later understood, Origen (185-255) asserted that “this text teaches with the authority of the Apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the Church”.³⁰ St. John Chrysostom (4th century) considered Phoebe to be a deacon.³¹ Indications are that women were officially commissioned for *diakonia* and when the office of deacon later emerged it appears to have been open to women. According to Collins, in 1 *Timothy* 3: 11 there is a “seemingly clear case to be made for the inclusion of women among the deacons.”³²

There is considerable evidence to show that women were ordained deacons in the third through the seventh centuries; beyond that in the East, especially in Constantinople, as late as the twelfth century; in Syria and Greece; but also in Gaul and possibly even Rome. The *Didascalia* explains the role of the female deacon for ministry among women, such as in baptisms and house visits: “The woman deacon should be honored by you as [the presence of] the Holy Spirit [...] Choose some people who most please you and institute them as deacon: a man for the administration of the many necessary tasks, but also a woman for ministry among women [...] You need the ministry of women deacons for many reasons.”³³ The *Apostolic Constitutions* of the late fourth century in Syria, which incorporate the *Didascalia*, expand the references to female deacons.³⁴ However, the practice was not universal and some parts of the church, notably in the West and Egypt, were opposed to deaconesses.

There has been disagreement among theologians as to whether these women were actually deacons. Some believe that they were not: commenting on the *Didascalia*, historian Aimé Georges Martimort argued that “deaconesses took no part in the liturgy [...] In no way could they be considered on the same level as deacons: they were their auxiliaries.”³⁵ Yet, while early women deacons had a more restricted liturgical role than their male counterparts (they anointed females candidates for baptism for reasons of modesty, but did not actually baptize and did not normally serve at the Eucharist), other scholars maintain that they were indeed deacons, with a role different from that of male deacons.

²⁸ The history of women deacons is summarized in Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants*, 21-27. See also Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon's Ministry*; Edward Echlin, SJ, *The Deacon in the Church*, 62, 73; Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999); and the books by Phyllis Zagano referred to in this study.

²⁹ *Women: Icons of Christ*, xviii.

³⁰ John Winjgaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (Norwich: Canterbury Press; New York: Crossroad, 2002), 149.

³¹ Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds. & translators, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 15.

³² Collins, 99; see also Plater, 12. Some writers believe that the reference in this verse is to deacons' wives. But Madigan and Osiek, citing again St. John Chrysostom, give more weight to evidence that the reference is to female deacons (*Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 18-21).

³³ Cited in Winjgaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church*, 151-152.

³⁴ See Madison and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 106-116.

³⁵ Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 43. However, Cipriano Vagaggini and John Winjgaards rebut Martimort's arguments.

Cipriano Vagaggini asserted that for the author of *Didascalía* “this diaconal ministry in the church includes two branches: one male and one female,” even if the “duties of the deaconess are restricted to ministry for women.”³⁶ And when adult baptism gave way in the majority of cases to infant baptism, women deacons still continued their ministry – “there was more to their role than that.”³⁷ Kyriaki FitzGerald observes that “while the early Christians recognized a radical equality between women and men before the loving God, they generally accepted the customs and norms of society which did not run counter to their understanding of the faith [...] Both the enumeration of responsibilities and the ordination prayers indicate that gender and social norms have a bearing on the expression of ministry.”³⁸

German theologian and bishop (later cardinal) Gerhard Müller maintained that deaconesses held appointed offices like sub-deacons and lectors and were not sacramentally ordained.³⁹ Others suggest that they received a form of ordination for a separate order of deaconesses but were not considered deacons. Still others argue that deaconesses were indeed female deacons and this view now seems to be the most widely accepted.⁴⁰ Roman Catholic liturgical scholar Roger Gryson asserted “that women were ordained to and ministered within the order of deacons.”⁴¹ Cipriano Vagaggini, in his examination of the evidence, concluded that women deacons were sacramentally ordained with episcopal laying-on of hands like their male counterparts (and like presbyters), rather than being blessed like sub-deacons and those in minor orders: “Deaconesses are clearly part of the clergy.”⁴² Indeed, the *Apostolic Constitutions* cite a prayer for episcopal ordination of a woman deacon which is a direct counterpart of that in the ordination of a male deacon.⁴³ Unlike candidates for minor orders, they were ordained before the altar inside the sanctuary. They received the diaconal stole, or *orarion*. And they received the chalice from the bishop after the ordination.⁴⁴ In her detailed examination of the Byzantine ordination rite, Kyriaki FitzGerald describes how female deacons were ordained.⁴⁵

Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek affirm that “by the third century, the special office of female deacon or deaconess had developed in the East, intended especially for ministry to women. It is clear that in most churches that reflected this custom in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, *the deaconess was considered an ordained member of the clergy with special tasks* [our emphasis]. [...] for some tasks (e.g. representation of the church in business or political contexts), their roles overlapped with the male deacons.”⁴⁶

³⁶ *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, 14.

³⁷ Madison and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 205.

³⁸ *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, 24, 25.

³⁹ Gerhard Müller, *Priesthood and Diaconate* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 204 ff.

⁴⁰ For a summary of these points of view, see Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M., *The Permanent Diaconate: Its History and Place in the Sacrament of Orders* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 170-174.

⁴¹ *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1976), cited by Phyllis Zagano in Vagaggini, *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, x.

⁴² See “The Ordination of Deaconesses in the Greek and Byzantine Tradition” in *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, 34.

⁴³ Madison and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 113-114.

⁴⁴ Vagaggini, 53-55.

⁴⁵ Kyriaki FitzGerald, “The Charism of Women Deacons: The Byzantine Ordination Rite,” in *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, 78-110. She discusses the controversy over female diaconal ordination in “The Ordination Issue” (*ibid.*, 111-133).

⁴⁶ *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 203.

These female ministers are referred to as *diakonissa* in the canons of the Council of Nicaea (325). But the terms “deacon” (*diakonos*) and “deaconess” (*diakonissa*) are often used concurrently or interchangeably for female deacons.⁴⁷ Kyriaki FitzGerald points out that “the term ‘deacon’ with the feminine article before it” was used in the early ordination rites and that the term “deaconess” appeared much later.⁴⁸ St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379), St. John Chrysostom (344-407) and St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) refer to women deacons.⁴⁹ The Council of Chalcedon (451) promulgates a canon regulating the ordination of deaconesses, who must be over forty years of age. The code of the Emperor Justinian I (529-564) includes a number of rules governing the ordination and discipline of women deacons. As Vagaggini tells us, “from Justinian (527-565) to Heraclius (610-640) the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople had forty deaconesses.”⁵⁰ The Council of Trullo (692) reiterates the Chalcedonian rule of ordination of women deacons after age forty.

A number of manuscripts dated between the eighth and fourteenth centuries reproduce ordination rites for women deacons.⁵¹ Kyriaki FitzGerald records the sacramental ordination of women to the diaconate in various parts of the East, even during the Middle Ages, especially in monasteries (there were “deacon-abbesses”). Phyllis Zagano concludes from studies of ancient manuscripts, frescoes, tombs and inscriptions that

...early women deacons were ministers of the Word, of the liturgy, and of charity in their teaching, in their ceremonial functions, and in their charitable and administrative tasks. They were chosen by the ecclesial leadership and, as structures and rituals developed, they were ordained to these duties with the laying on of hands. They continued to be so chosen, and so ordained, up until the twelfth century in the West and, apparently, to the present in portions of the East.⁵²

At the same time, Dr. Zagano records the decline of the female diaconate from about the sixth century; as misogyny increased, women were viewed as unworthy to approach the altar and the doctrine of the “unicity of orders” – the notion that diaconal ordination led to the priesthood, from which women were barred – took hold. This was a prime factor in the decline not just of the female diaconate but of the diaconate in general.

The Decline of the Diaconate

From the fourth century, the diaconate went into gradual decline. Dioceses emerged and bishops presided over them instead of over local churches; presbyters replaced bishops in that role and at last gained the right to preside at the Eucharist. In other words, bishops and presbyters switched functions so that bishops governed and presbyters presided. Deacons moved from assisting the bishop to assisting presbyters and lost their influence. The Council of Nicaea (325) reflected a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8, 203.

⁴⁸ *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, 82.

⁴⁹ Winjgaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church*, 156-158.

⁵⁰ *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, 43.

⁵¹ Winjgaards, 167-188.

⁵² Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ*, 7.

growing sacerdotalism, concurrent with a decline in the prestige of the diaconate.⁵³ By the next century, St. Jerome (d. 419) considered the diaconate “inferior” to the presbyterate. The church adopted for its ministers the model of governance of the Roman Empire: the *cursus honorum*, a passage up the hierarchical ladder from one grade to another – and on that ladder the diaconate became classified as the lowest of three rungs.

Furthermore, the concept of the unity or “unicity” of orders implied that holy orders were one sacrament with three grades, with the diaconate merely a stage towards the priesthood rather than an order in its own right. In accordance with this understanding of ordination, men – and it could only be men – would spend a year or some months, or at the limit even days or hours, in the diaconate before being made priests. It took several centuries before this ordination in succession to the diaconate, then the presbyterate, then the episcopate, became generalized into what we now know as “sequential” ordination. After the tenth century, however, the organic notion of the body of Christ was effectively replaced by clericalism and hierarchy and the diaconate ended up as a pro forma transition period to the priesthood.

There were exceptions. Leo the Great (440) and Gregory the Great (590) were in deacon’s orders when elected to the papacy; so was the eleventh century archdeacon Hildebrand, who became Pope Gregory VII. The Venerable Bede was a deacon for eleven years. Alcuin, the great English scholar in the eighth century, was a deacon, as were St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century and Gerard Groote, founder of the Béguinage movement in fourteenth century Holland. William Wareham was a deacon when appointed Bishop of London in 1502; so was Cardinal Reginald Pole when appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1556. But they were rare exceptions. In the Latin West – though less so in the Orthodox East – deacons were relegated to the side-lines. And this was to be their fate for over a thousand years.

The Diaconate in the Church of England⁵⁴

At the time of the Reformation, the Church of England emphatically proclaimed its intent to maintain the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, on the rationale that “It is evident unto all men, diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles’ time there hath been these orders of Ministers in Christ’s church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons...” Indeed it did maintain them, but still clinging to the mediaeval concept that the diaconate was transitional, a mere stepping-stone to the “full” ministry – the priesthood. This is bluntly summed up in the ordinal of 1550, added to the First Prayer Book of King Edward VI (1549). The rite for the making of deacons concludes with a post-communion prayer, based on a prayer in the Sarum Pontifical, asking that those just ordained “may so well use themselves in this inferior office that they may be found worthy to be called unto the higher ministries in thy Church.”

⁵³ Susan K. Wood notes that canon 2 of Nicaea mandating sequential ordination was “directed against the abuse of advancing recent converts to the episcopate or the presbyterate as soon as they had been baptized” (*Sacramental Orders* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 169).

⁵⁴ For a thorough study, see Francis Young, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2015). We owe much of the following to Dr. Young’s work.

During the Reformation period, the prevailing notion of the diaconate as a brief, probationary period for the priesthood continued to hold sway, even to the point of some individuals being ordained deacon one day and priest the next. There were some attempts by the reformers, including Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, evident in the ordinals of 1550 and 1552, to give more substance to the diaconate through its role of service to the poor and preaching, and there was a requirement that future priests remain in the diaconate for a year. With the Elizabethan settlement and into the seventeenth century, under the influence of theologian Richard Hooker, the teaching and preaching roles of deacons were emphasized. Some clergy remained in deacon's orders for a long time or indefinitely – individuals who could not meet the educational standards for priests, others who were “deacon-schoolmasters” and “deacon-administrators,” and still others who could not find full-time clerical employment.

After the restoration of 1660 ended the eleven-year Puritan interregnum, the diaconate was defended against Protestant criticism on theological grounds as an integral part of the three-fold catholic ministry inherited by the Church of England. Although deacons were few in number in the eighteenth century, there were some “deacon-curates” in remote parishes in northern England, university lecturers, canon lawyers, and, again, deacon-schoolmasters. Nicholas Ferrar, who led the experimental Christian commune at Little Gidding in seventeenth century England, was a deacon. So was Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

In the Victorian era, there was much discussion about using the diaconate to expand the ministry of the class-bound Church of England to a wider social spectrum, as well as reviving the deacon-schoolmaster tradition. As Francis Young points out in his chapter “The Victorian Call for Deacons, 1839-1901,” the newly-emerging Tractarian or Anglo-Catholic tradition and the evangelical and liberal wings of the church, for different reasons, all showed interest in the revival of the diaconate. Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby School, promoted it in the 1840s and the matter was discussed at the Convocation of Canterbury in the 1860s. However, the rigid structure of the established church, including the thorny question of how deacons could be stipendiary clergy, meant that little came of it in practical terms. Instead, the institutions of lay readers and deaconesses emerged. Dr. Young observes that “the Victorian Church of England's inactivity against the odds to the ongoing demand for distinctive deacons from both the clergy and the laity might be seen as one of the great missed opportunities of Anglican history [...] a visionary measure anticipating the non-stipendiary clergy of today.”⁵⁵

By the mid-20th century, the diaconate was almost invisible in the West, whether Roman Catholic or Anglican. Transitional deacons, apprentice priests in their parishes or sometimes in their last year of seminary, for a few months or a year wore priest's stoles crossways, administered the chalice at communion and, if their priests were liturgically aware enough, might be allowed to read the Gospel. Their sights were firmly set on the “real” ordination, the one for professional ministry: the priesthood. The Anglican Church of Canada's Prayer Book of 1959, a very conservative revision of the traditional *Book of Common Prayer*, unfortunately timed just when real liturgical reform was beginning, reflects the old assumptions about the diaconate. In its eucharistic rite, for example, the reference to “the Deacon or Priest who reads [the Gospel]” is the sum total of the deacon's role in the service.

⁵⁵ *Inferior Office*, 84-85.

Chapter II The Revival of the Diaconate

Two factors helped to resuscitate the moribund order of deacons. The first was the growing, ecumenical influence of the liturgical movement, which liberated Christian worship from the solo domination of the priest or pastor and brought into play the active participation of the entire community. For Anglicans, it meant going beyond the passive, reactive stance assumed for the congregation in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Here was fertile ground for the ancient liturgical role of the deacon. The other factor was the changing understanding of ordination, from a clerical caste which does things on behalf of the remainder of the Church to persons “to whom the community has entrusted a practical and symbolic leadership role.” In this view, as Deacon Maylanne Maybee expresses it,

[B]ishops give symbolic focus and practical leadership to the apostolic Church in areas relating to oversight, unity, tradition, catholicism, and ecumenism. Presbyters give symbolic focus and practical leadership to the local, gathered Church in its life of worship, fellowship, and reconciliation. In the same way, deacons are needed to give symbolic focus to the “sent forth” Church in its mission of service, proclamation, peace, and justice-making.⁵⁶

Of course, neither of these factors was “new.” The full participation of the worshipping community and the symbolic role of ordained ministers within that community were practices of the ancient Church in which the diaconate had thrived. The recovery of these practices set the stage for, among other things, the return of the deacon.

At first, efforts to renew the diaconate were inconclusive. In the 1950s there were a number of “perpetual deacons,” particularly in the Episcopal Church in the United States. They usually functioned as unpaid curates, their duties ranging from genuine pastoral work to merely administering a chalice at communion. Some used this as a back door to the priesthood at a time of shortage of clergy.

The real stimulus to the revival of the order of deacons was the Second Vatican Council, which, through the Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1964, approved the restoration of the diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church as a permanent vocation, open to married men. The *motu proprio* of Paul VI in 1967, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, effectively revived the diaconate in the Latin West after a slumber of a millennium. By 1999 there were over 27,600 deacons in the Roman Catholic Church world-wide. In 2014, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States reported having some 18,700 deacons, of whom 93% were married.⁵⁷ The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the largest in the country, had “nearly four hundred permanent deacons serving in parishes, schools, and a diverse array of ministries and leadership positions.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Maylanne Maybee, “The State of the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada,” in Richard Leggett, ed., *A Companion to the Waterloo Declaration. Commentary and Essays on Lutheran-Anglican Relations in Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1999), 104-105.

⁵⁷ *A Portrait of the Permanent Diaconate: A Report for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops*, 2013-2014 (Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate, Georgetown University, May 2014).

⁵⁸ José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, “Foreword,” in James Keating, *The Heart of the Diaconate*, ix.

The Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church

As early as 1958, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican and Episcopal bishops from around the world made a tentative approach to renewing the diaconate: “The Conference recommends that each province of the Anglican Communion shall consider whether the office of Deacon shall be restored to its primitive place as a distinctive order in the Church, instead of being regarded as a probationary period for the priesthood.”⁵⁹ Lambeth 1968, while advising retention of the transitional diaconate, took a strong stand in favour of the distinctive diaconate: “The Conference recommends [...that] the diaconate, combining service of others with liturgical functions, be open to (i) men and women remaining in secular occupations (ii) full-time church workers (iii) those selected for the priesthood.”⁶⁰ In 1978 Lambeth urged the churches to ordain women deacons and in 1988 continued the momentum: “We need to recover the diaconate as an order complementary to the order of priesthood rather than as a merely transitional order which it is at present. We should ensure that such a diaconate does not threaten the ministry of the laity but seeks to equip and further it. Such a diaconate, furthermore, would serve to renew the diakonia of the whole Church: laity, deacons, priests and bishops.”⁶¹

The Episcopal Church in the United States paid early and serious attention to the diaconate. A Center for the Diaconate was founded in 1974. It was succeeded in 1986 by the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), called since 2010 the Association for Episcopal Deacons, or AED. It has actively promoted the order through education, publicity and fellowship among deacons. Its conferences and impressive list of publications have had a major influence on the renewal of the diaconate in the USA, Canada and elsewhere in the Anglican Communion. In the light of these developments, the 1998 Lambeth Conference sent a positive message on the diaconate: “Where deacons exercise their special ministry in the Church, they do so by illuminating and holding up the servant ministry of the whole Church and calling its members to that ministry [...] The re-establishment of the diaconate [...] liberates bishops and presbyters to exercise their complementary and distinctive tasks.”⁶²

Episcopal deacon Susanne Watson Epting, a former director of NAAD, has identified seven “waves” in the development of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church: 1) missionary or indigenous deacons in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 2) the deaconesses of 1885-1970; 3) perpetual deacons; 4) the “real” transitional diaconate, as deaconesses moved into the diaconate; 5) the definition of the vocational diaconate in the 1970s and 1980s; 6) interpretation and prophetic voice; and 7) “integration,” focusing on baptismal *diakonia* in the twenty-first century. Quoting a mentor of hers, she notes that “it is no small thing that the renewal of the diaconate and the renewed understanding of baptism occurred at the same time.”⁶³ As of 2020, there were 2,157 active deacons in the Episcopal Church, 942 retired, and 185 in formation.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Plater, *Historic Documents on the Diaconate*, 5.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² “The Diaconate as a Distinct Order of Ministry,” in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1998* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 203.

⁶³ Susanne Watson Epting, *Unexpected Consequences*.

⁶⁴ Figures provided by the Association for Episcopal Deacons, July 2020.

The Church of England: Ambivalence and Negativity

However, support in the Anglican Communion for the renewed diaconate has been far from consistent, notably in the “mother church” of the Communion, the established Church of England. A report published in 1974 (just when the Episcopal Church’s Center for the Diaconate was established) actually recommended abolition of the diaconate, on the grounds that it had no exclusive functions and would interfere with lay ministry.⁶⁵ Discussions on the diaconate in the Church of England have always had to take into account the strength of the order of lay readers, seen as rendering deacons unnecessary. This negative attitude was reflected in the 1980 *Alternative Service Book* of the Church of England, where deacons are almost invisible: there is no mention of the deacon reading the Gospel or giving the Dismissal, even in the contemporary eucharistic rites.

The Church of England finally admitted women to the diaconate in 1987, but most of the new deacons were women waiting for the Church of England to accept women priests, which it did in 1994. Says Iain Luke, Principal of the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad in Saskatoon, Canada:

The story of deacons in the Church of England is affected by a number of specific factors, including the perception of a competition with licensed lay ministry. Perhaps stronger than that is the influence of what was effectively a seven-year collective transitional diaconate for all the women in leadership who were ordained deacon when it was first open to them in 1987. I ... hoped this might offer an unprecedented exposure to diaconal ministry in the church there; but I did not reckon with the lived experience of women in that position, who saw themselves as waiting for the inevitable but long-delayed acceptance of their priestly calling. Far from enhancing the diaconate, that experience reinforced the interpretation of diaconal ordination as a waiting period.⁶⁶

The vocational diaconate had clearly not taken hold in the C of E. This is evident in the 2000 *Book of Common Worship* of the Church of England, where references to deacons are almost as rare as in the *Alternative Service Book* published twenty years earlier. *Common Worship* grudgingly allows that “in some traditions the ministry of the deacon at Holy Communion has included some of the following elements,” such as reading the Gospel, intercessions and preparation of the table. It goes on to say that “the deacon’s liturgical ministry provides an appropriate model for the ministry of an assisting priest, a Reader, or another episcopally authorized minister...” Reflecting the C of E’s preoccupation with lay readers, *Common Worship* adds that the president may “delegate the leadership of all or parts of the Gathering and the Liturgy of the Word to a deacon, Reader or other authorized lay person.”⁶⁷ This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the diaconate in the Church of England!

In his fascinating book, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England*, Cambridge scholar Francis Young tells the story of deacons in the Church of England since the sixteenth century, examines their situation today, and sums up the arguments for and against the

⁶⁵ *Deacons in the Church*, Church of England ACCM Working Party (London: CIO, 1974).

⁶⁶ Communication to the author, 7 October 2020.

⁶⁷ *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), 158-159.

distinctive diaconate. He contrasts the C of E's lacklustre response to the diaconate with the revival of the order in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church, and Lutheranism. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, there were fewer than two hundred distinctive deacons in the entire Church of England, in sharp contrast with the Anglican Church of Canada (over 400 deacons in 2020) and the Episcopal Church in the USA (3,000 deacons in 2020). Dr. Young calls this "a curious anomaly," noting that while deacons existed in both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in England, only in the former was there a widespread practice of permanent deacons assisting priests in parishes. In the Church of England "readers regularly assume many of the same roles performed by the deacon in the Roman Catholic liturgy."⁶⁸

A seminal study in 2001 by a Working Party of the House of Bishops, *For such a time as this – a renewed diaconate in the Church of England*, argued that "there is distinctive but not exclusive ministry for a renewed diaconate."⁶⁹ The Dioceses of Portsmouth and Salisbury actively promoted the order of deacons; in 2003 the latter diocese issued its own report, *The Distinctive Diaconate*, which set out a plan, both theoretical and practical, for implementing the vision of *At such a time as this*.⁷⁰ In 2007, another Church of England study, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, called for the diaconate to be taken more seriously: its theological framework was already in place but "has gone largely unrecognized;" the distinctive diaconate should be encouraged, especially for some lay Readers; and the transitional diaconate should be extended beyond a year.⁷¹ Despite these positive studies, the vocational diaconate made little headway, to the point that the Diaconal Association of the Church of England (DACE), founded in 1988, was dissolved in 2017 for lack of funds and membership.

The reasons for the reluctance towards the diaconate in the Church of England appear to be as follows:

- The diaconate primarily provided a form of ordained ministry for women from 1987 (replacing the order of deaconesses) until they were admitted to the priesthood in 1994. Few men opted for the diaconate. This was unlike Canada, where the women were ordained deacons from 1969 and priests from 1977.
- The powerful institution of lay readers has been a major factor in discouraging the diaconate in England, on the grounds that (a) it goes counter to the empowerment of the laity, notably in worship; and (b) deacons are redundant because lay readers can fulfil the same functions. Vigorous opposition from lay readers stymied the reception of *At Such a Time as This* at the General Synod in 2001.

⁶⁸ *Inferior Office?* viii.

⁶⁹ *For such a time as this – a renewed diaconate in the Church of England*, Working Party of the House of Bishops, Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), Chapter 7.

⁷⁰ *The Distinctive Diaconate: A Report to the Board of Ministry, The Diocese of Salisbury* (Salisbury: Sarum College Press, 2003).

⁷¹ *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives* (London: General Synod, 2007).

- Prevailing opinion in the Church of England firmly adheres to the doctrine of cumulative ordination. Presbyters and bishops are another group of deacons and you don't need distinctive deacons to represent the diaconate. Even those favourable to the distinctive diaconate advocate a longer and more meaningful transitional diaconate. We shall examine this further in Chapter IV.
- The Church of England, as the established state church, treats deacons as “clerks in holy orders” like priests, requiring formal training and subsequent employment. This system has difficulty adapting to the diaconate. Locally-ordained, non-stipendiary deacons, the norm elsewhere in the Anglican Communion, are not widely prevalent in England.

Despite this disappointing record and the dissolution of DACE, interest in the vocational diaconate persists in the Church of England. A leading deacon, Gill Kimber, has taken active steps to revive diaconal dialogue through a website and blog from her base in the Diocese of Exeter⁷² and has self-published a book about her own journey.⁷³ By 2020, the bishops and dioceses of Chichester, Portsmouth, Carlisle, Exeter, London, Plymouth, York, and St. Edmundsbury & Ipswich had expressed support for the diaconate and a number of diaconal ordinations had taken place, including seventeen lay readers ordained deacon by the Archbishop of York. Bishop James Newcome of Carlisle in particular is a strong advocate for the vocational diaconate,⁷⁴ as is theology professor Paul Avis.⁷⁵ Prospects for the diaconate in the C of E are finally improving.

Interest in the Scottish Episcopal Church

The Scottish Episcopal Church has shown much more interest in the diaconate than its sister-church in England. In the 1980s, several studies and reports supported the idea of vocational deacons, notably *Truly Called by God to Serve as a Deacon*, The Report of the Bishops' Working Group on Distinctive Diaconate, in 1987.⁷⁶ However, in the words of a second major report in 2012, *Truly Called...Two*, as in England “the diaconate enjoyed what now seems like a false dawn in the late 1980s when many women were ordained Deacon [...] but it turned out to be only as a transitional phase prior to most of those women going on to ordination as Priests.”⁷⁷ The latter report was the outcome of a diaconal working group which produced a set of specific criteria for the discernment of diaconal vocations and formational outcomes for the various stages of training. This was done in close touch with Porvoo Communion Lutheran partners, looking at the similarities and differences of the diaconate in the two Communion. Says Canon Anne Tomlinson, a prominent Scottish deacon and principal of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, “We are noticing a resurgence in interest in the diaconal vocation as the Scottish Episcopal Church becomes ever more missional and outward-facing.”⁷⁸

⁷² <https://deaconstories.wordpress.com>

⁷³ *Deacon by Design: The ups and downs of an Anglican deacon*. Worthing, UK: Verité CM, 2019.

⁷⁴ See James Newcome, “The Case for a Distinctive Diaconate,” presentation to a conference on the diaconate, Diocese of Carlisle, 13 March 2018.

⁷⁵ See Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* and “The Diaconate: a flagship ministry?” in *Theology and Ministry* 2 (2013).

⁷⁶ Edinburgh: General Synod Office, 1987.

⁷⁷ Edinburgh: General Synod Office, 2012, 5.

⁷⁸ Communication to the author from Canon Anne Tomlinson, August 2016.

Evolution in Canada

In the Anglican Church of Canada, a first wave of ordinations for the distinctive diaconate occurred in the 1970s, when some dioceses in the ecclesiastical provinces of Rupert's Land (Rupert's Land, Brandon and Qu'Appelle) and British Columbia (New Westminster, Caledonia, Cariboo, and Kootenay) established diaconal programs. The Province of Ontario considered the idea but ended up instead with a moratorium on the vocational diaconate, meaning that the bishops would only ordain transitional deacons. There was no activity at all in the Province of Canada (Quebec and east). However, the programs in western Canada faltered after the first few years. In some cases a change in episcopal leadership resulted in a reluctance or even refusal to ordain more deacons. Some supposedly vocational deacons were ordained to the priesthood, undercutting the rationale for the vocational diaconate and renewing suspicion that it was a back door to the priesthood.

Attitudes changed in the following decade. The 1986 General Synod recommended that “the renewal of the diaconate as an order with an integrity of its own be considered in the context of ... the baptismal ministry of the whole people of God.”⁷⁹ The 1989 General Synod approved guidelines for the restoration of a distinctive diaconate and a second wave of ordinations began in the 1990s. The bishops of the Province of Ontario rescinded their moratorium on the ordination of vocational deacons and the Diocese of Toronto in particular launched an active diaconal program. The Province of Canada did the same after 1996, in the dioceses of Montreal, Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador, and Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island. In the Province of British Columbia & Yukon, diaconal programs recovered their momentum.

Rupert's Land province, a leader in the diaconate in the 1970s, subsequently backed off, despite a favourable report on the diaconate by its committee on ministry in the late 1980s. By the end of the 1990s, no diocese in the ecclesiastical province had an active diaconal program and the only vocational deacons were those remaining from the first wave of ordinations in the 1970s and 80s. Of the three dioceses in the civil Province of Saskatchewan, only Qu'Appelle had explored the distinctive diaconate. However, there was no consistent follow-up or policy on the diaconate in the diocese. Some candidates, specifically ordained for the vocational diaconate, became priests a few years later, and this effectively put an end to the program. In the 1990s, when Qu'Appelle was at the leading edge of locally-ordained ministry, its official material at first only referred to priests.

It is hardly a surprise, then, that no candidates for the diaconate came forward in Qu'Appelle until 2000. When they did, however, it was with an enthusiasm and commitment that obliged the diocese to seriously re-examine a form of ordained ministry it had virtually allowed to lapse for twenty years. The diaconal program was revived and a number of women and men were ordained deacons. But the regrettable practice continued of treating the diaconate primarily as a transitional period for the priesthood. In 2015, the diocese reviewed this practice and appointed a ministry development officer, one of whose roles was to create distinct lay, diaconal, and presbyteral streams of education and training for non-stipendiary ministry.

⁷⁹ *A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. General Synod Committee on Ministry (Toronto: Anglican Church of Canada, 1989), 4.

With hindsight, the first wave of programs for a distinctive diaconate in Canada in the 1970s and early 1980s lacked depth and sustainability. They were launched with commendable enthusiasm when the diaconal movement was spreading in the Anglican Communion, partly on the impetus of Vatican II. But too often they were *ad hoc* in nature, were overly dependent on the interest, or lack thereof, of individual bishops, and did not benefit from coherent formation programs. There was insufficient education in the parishes about the purpose of the diaconate and frequently a lack of support and understanding from the presbyterate. As a result, many deacons ordained in the “first wave” found themselves isolated, relegated to an exceptional or experimental status instead of being seen as a prototype for a renewed and expanding form of ministry.

The second wave of diaconal programs, dating from the mid-1990s, was much more coherent and grounded in a solid theology of baptism and ordination. Canadian deacons, and the Anglican Church of Canada at large, had learned from the example of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church (and in the Roman Catholic Church) and had benefited for twenty years from the informational and educational programs of NAAD. Canadian bishops looked with renewed interest at the diaconate. When they began diaconal programs, they usually did so based on wide consultation and employing a careful process of discernment, selection, formation and training, as well as systematic follow-up after ordination.

In 1999, fifteen Canadian deacons attending the biennial conference of NAAD in Northfield, Minnesota, decided that a meeting of Canadian deacons should be convened the following year. In 2000, this historic, first-ever conference of Canadian deacons met in Winnipeg. Forty were present, one-third of the 120 deacons then known in Canada. Reflecting the vigour of the existing diaconal programs, there was strong representation from the ecclesiastical provinces of British Columbia & Yukon, Ontario, and Canada. From the vast Province of Rupert's Land, however, came only one deacon – the author!⁸⁰ The conference concluded with a unanimous decision to form an association of Canadian deacons affiliated with the North American Association for the Diaconate. This was the genesis of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada (AADC), which was recognized by NAAD (subsequently AED) as its Canadian affiliate, arranged for joint memberships, and now holds conferences in off-years of the triennial AED conferences. Six of these have been held, in Charlottetown in 2004, Vancouver in 2008, London (ON) in 2011, Halifax in 2014, Victoria in 2017, and online virtually in 2021. In 2020 AADC simplified its name to “Anglican Deacons Canada” (ADC).

In 2020, ADC estimated that there were 420 vocational deacons in Canada, of whom about 340 were active. Two-thirds of them were women. By then, every diocese in Canada had deacons, with the sole exception of the Diocese of Saskatchewan (the latter, like the Church of England, has an active lay readers' program). Some dioceses had very few deacons: two each in Central and in Western Newfoundland, three in Athabasca, four in Moosonee, five in Quebec. On the other hand, the diaconate was thriving in other dioceses: 19 in Rupert's Land, 21 in Edmonton, 27 in Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador, 28 in Niagara, 42 in Huron, 47 in New Westminster, and 56 in Toronto.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Dioceses represented were: British Columbia, New Westminster, Kootenay, Cariboo, Caledonia, Yukon; Toronto, Ontario, Huron, Algoma, Moosonee, Montreal, Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island, Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador; and... Qu'Appelle.

⁸¹ Figures provided by Deacon Canon Jacquie Bouthéon for Anglican Deacons Canada, October 2020.

Chapter III The Renewed Diaconate

It is appropriate at this juncture to review terminology for the diaconate. The “transitional” deacon is a person in deacon’s orders for a usually brief, *pro forma* time on the way to ordination to the priesthood. The term “permanent” deacon has been used to delineate the continuing diaconal minister from the transitional variety (and continues to be the preferred Roman Catholic usage). The appellation “vocational” deacon has become a more accepted term for Anglicans, but it is giving way to “distinctive deacon” or just plain “deacon,” on the grounds that it is *transitional* deacons who should be considered the exception to the norm.⁸² There are some “stipendiary” deacons who earn their living through this ministry, but these are rare outside the Church of England. Most deacons (other than the transitional brand) are “non-stipendiary” – in other words, they earn their living outside the church structure, which is one of the most powerful signs of the contemporary diaconate.

Re-interpreting Diakonia

As we noted in the Introduction, recent scholarship has broadened the meaning of *diakonia* from “service” to “ministry” and to include not only forms of direct service but much more: messenger or communicator, agent, “go-between.” The Australian Roman Catholic scholar John Collins challenged the long-accepted interpretation of biblical and early church references to the diaconate as meaning humble, even menial, service. In his view, a misreading of the biblical term *diakonia* in the story of the commissioning of the Seven in *Acts* 6 resulted in “social work becoming the defining activity of deacons” in some parts of the church after the Reformation,⁸³ for example, the mid-nineteenth century Lutheran deaconesses in Germany. In that country, the Nordic countries and Holland *Diakonie* (the German word) became known “as the church’s form of social service.”⁸⁴ Its legacy to this day has been too restrictive an understanding of the diaconate, for “in some sectors of the modern diaconal movement this is precisely how the modern deacon’s identity has been defined.”⁸⁵ Deacons, says Collins, were and are much more: in the early Church they were, for example, “executives of the corporate leadership,” relational figures, “agents of the church.”⁸⁶ The work of Collins has changed our understanding of the diaconate. As the 1996 Anglican-Lutheran *Hanover Report* said,

In the world in which the early church lived, *diakonia* seems to have referred to the service of a ‘go-between’ or agent who carries out activities for another [...] *Diakonia* seems more concerned with apostleship than with our present understanding of the diaconate. [...] Diaconal ministers are called to be agents of the church in interpreting and meeting needs, hopes, and concerns within church and society.⁸⁷

⁸² Maylaine Maybee points out that “[a]djectives such as ‘vocational,’ ‘permanent’ or ‘perpetual’ suggest that the norm is a diaconate to which people are ordained as a condition of their priesthood” (“The State of the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada,” 97).

⁸³ *Deacons and the Church*, 50.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 127-131.

⁸⁷ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*, published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation (London: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996), 7, 16.

In the words of the 2001 Church of England report *For such a time as this*, “the deacon is a person on a mission, an ambassador or messenger, making connections, building bridges, faithfully delivering a mandate.”⁸⁸ Rosalind Brown adopted this broader view of the diaconate, referring to it as “enabling people to worship, providing pastoral care and proclaiming the gospel. Deacons are... role models and catalysts for the baptismal ministry of all Christians.”⁸⁹ The 2007 Church of England report, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, evidently influenced by Collins’ research, stated that the ancient function of the deacon as a “responsible agent [...] who carried out duties on behalf of the bishop [...] has been eclipsed in recent decades by a rhetorical appeal to ‘humble service’ on the part of deacons.” For Paul Avis, “a deacon has a representative, assisting and non-presidential ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care.”⁹⁰

Roman Catholic scholarship is careful to strike a balance between the ecclesial and sacramental dimension of the diaconate and the practical ministry of social activism, service and outreach. Says Deacon James Keating in *The Character of the Deacon*, “The deacon’s primary ministry is twofold: to serve at the altar and ambo and from such service be sent by Christ, while always abiding with him in prayer, to respond to the spiritual and corporeal needs of people.” The underlying premise of the essays in this book is the tripartite role of the deacon, based on the sacramental identity given through ordination: word, liturgy and service to others. As one contributor neatly puts it, they are “three atoms united in a single molecular ministry.”⁹¹ Another leading Roman Catholic deacon says, “Deacons serve in a balanced and integrated threefold ministry of Word, Sacrament and Charity.”⁹² John Chryssavgis offers a similar view from the Orthodox perspective: “There needs to be a paradigm shift in our understanding of the diaconate – from a perception of the deacon as a social or charitable servant to an appreciation of the deacon as an integral and indispensable part of the ordained ministry. [...] Acts also implies the ministry of preaching and witness in the service of *diakonia*.”⁹³

Deacons in Action

There is a wide variety of ways in which deacons function, once ordained. Their activity may be diocesan or parochial or both or neither. Many have a ministry of direct service, pastoral, social or charitable in nature – as hospital or prison or institutional visitors, or working with the poor and the marginalized, with minority groups, with the disabled, with advocacy organizations. Deacons may have a teaching ministry or be involved in communications. They may undertake Christian education, youth work, home visiting, taking the reserved sacrament to shut-ins, seniors’ residences and care homes, and administrative or organizational or liturgical duties. Deacons may be involved in ministry to the elderly, the disabled, and those in hospitals.

Although deacons may exercise much of their ministry outside “the Church,” they are not meant to be freelancers. Deacons should be firmly “rooted in the local church, living out with the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁹ Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today*, xi.

⁹⁰ *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 99.

⁹¹ *The Character of the Deacon*, xi, 111.

⁹² William T. Ditewig, *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 22.

⁹³ *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, 41.

people there... a life that reflects the love of Christ.”⁹⁴ Their role in a parish context is one of assisting, not presiding, although this does not preclude – indeed it presupposes – “leadership.” Ormonde Plater once said that “deacons serve best when they dare, when they speak out and act out, when they get themselves and others in trouble – even when they arouse the mob.”⁹⁵ Amidst all the variety of diaconal ministry there are some common threads for most deacons.

Worship

The first is **liturgical, sacramental**. *It is essential that deacons fulfil, and be clearly seen to fulfil, their liturgical roles, especially at the Eucharist:* proclaiming the Gospel; sometimes leading the Prayers of the People and the confession; inviting the people to share the peace; preparing the table; administering communion; and giving the Dismissal. The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the ministry of the Word and of the deacon’s role in the Eucharist.



Word and Sacrament are integral parts of the deacon’s ministry, as symbolized by the Book of Gospels and the ciborium for the bread of Holy Communion.

Significantly, while the presbyter (or bishop) convenes the assembly at the beginning of the eucharistic liturgy, it is the deacon who disperses it in the Dismissal, sending the faithful “to love and serve the Lord [...] over the church threshold and out into the world.” As Rosalind Brown puts it, “[t]here is no diaconal ministry without service in the Eucharist where the deacon, with others, enables the church to express its identity as God’s people.”⁹⁶ Canon Brown traces the diaconal role of welcoming and sharing from the church door at the beginning of the service, through all the deacon’s liturgical eucharistic actions, to the dismissal and departure.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today*, 3.

⁹⁵ *Many Servants*, First Edition, 61.

⁹⁶ *Being a Deacon Today*, 55, 6.

⁹⁷ Rosalind Brown, “The Deacon in Worship: A Ministry of Hospitality,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*.

The deacon plays an *assisting* or *collaborative* role for the presiding celebrant, whether bishop or priest. Deacons do not normally preside. Deacon and celebrant function with other ministers as a team. (A detailed study of the liturgical role of the deacon may be found in another paper by this author, *The Deacon in the Worshipping Community*.) Following is a summary of the diaconal role in the Eucharist. The roles in **bold** are the ones which the deacon, when present, should *always* fulfil. The others are recommended but are optional according to local custom.

The deacon...

- Carries the Book of Gospels in the entrance procession.
- **Proclaims the Gospel.**
- Sometimes leads the Prayers of the People.
- Gives the invitation to confession.
- At the Peace, invites those present to exchange a sign of peace.
- **Prepares the table at the offertory.**
- Says the Prayer over the Gifts.
- Raises the cup at the doxology and at the invitation to communion.
- Assists in the administration of communion.
- Supervises ablutions.
- Makes closing announcements.
- **Gives the Dismissal.**



“The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point both of the ministry of the Word and of the deacon’s role in the Eucharist.” St. Paul’s Cathedral, Regina, 2016.

The diaconal role is not limited to the Eucharist. Deacons may officiate at Morning and Evening Prayer. They assist the bishop in episcopal liturgies: ordination, confirmation, blessing of the oils. Reflecting their involvement in “the world,” they have a role in pastoral liturgies – baptisms, marriages and funerals – paying special attention to occasional worshippers.⁹⁸ With permission of the appropriate authorities, deacons may preside at baptisms, marriages and funerals, for example in the absence of a priest or when a personal connection makes this desirable. Again with the permission of the appropriate authorities, deacons may preside at services of Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament, for example in hospitals, retirement homes or long-term care facilities. On occasion, and with similar permission, deacons may also preside at services of Communion from the reserved sacrament in churches when a priest is not available and a liturgy of the word is deemed insufficient for the needs of the congregation.⁹⁹

The liturgies of Holy Week and Easter assign major duties to the deacon: on Palm Sunday, reading the Gospel of the Liturgy of the Palms; on Good Friday, leading the Solemn Intercession; at the Easter Vigil, carrying the paschal candle and singing the *Exsultet*.

The deacon also has a natural role as worship coordinator or master of ceremonies. As “liturgical *major domo* ... the deacon is the servant of the liturgical assembly... [showing] attentive concern for the entire ensemble of word and song and gesture that constitutes the liturgical action.”¹⁰⁰



The deacon assisting in an episcopal liturgy: Bishop Robert Hardwick presides at Confirmation on the Day of Pentecost 2015, at St. Paul’s Cathedral, Regina. The author is on the bishop’s right.

These liturgical roles are not incidental or peripheral; they are crucial for both the deacon and the assembly – not because deacons do useful things in the services (although they do!), but because they are primarily a symbol, an icon. “The point is,” said Ormonde Plater, “that a deacon, as a major performer in the assembly, plays a vital role in the complete action of the assembly by acting out messages of diaconal ministry.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ See Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today*, 56-59, for a good discussion of this pastoral/liturgical role.

⁹⁹ See D. Michael Jackson, “Appreciating the Liturgical Role of the Deacon,” in *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, 180-181.

¹⁰⁰ Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, “Attentiveness: The Liturgy in the Spiritual Life of the Deacon,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, 168, 170.

¹⁰¹ *Many Servants*, 109.

Preaching

Should the deacon exercise a **preaching ministry** – or not? In the Anglican Communion, the response is ambivalent. James Barnett, in *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, stated categorically that “preaching was never a function belonging to the diaconate in the early Church” and that it should not be the norm for the restored diaconate, as it would confuse the diaconal and presbyteral roles.¹⁰² Deacon Ormonde Plater, on the other hand, considered this to be an “antiquarian attitude.” True, he said, bishops and priests are the “normal preachers,” but deacons may “preach by invitation, not by order.”¹⁰³ For Rosalind Brown, while “regular preaching during the principal Sunday services is not necessarily integral to the ministry of deacons [...] nevertheless deacons may be called upon to preach at pastoral services and therefore it is appropriate that all deacons be trained to preach.”¹⁰⁴ If the deacon’s high point in the liturgy is proclaiming the Gospel, preaching that Gospel is a natural corollary and should be part of the diaconal role, even if only occasionally.



Deacons may preach and teach. Here, the author does a “role play” on the story of the “Road to Emmaus” with young people of the parish. To the left is Bishop Duncan Wallace.

The Roman Catholic view is unambiguous. Deacons are authorized to preach with the approval of their priest, and Roman Catholic deacons see preaching as a normal part of their ministry. Deacon Jay Cormier, in *The Deacon’s Ministry of the Word*, places it in a broader context. “This book,” he says, “is about the deacon’s ministry of proclaiming the Word of God. In the deacon’s ministry, such proclamation takes place in a number of venues: the church, the classroom, the living room, sometimes even the local tavern.”¹⁰⁵ Episcopal deacon Ormonde Plater said that when preaching, “[d]eacons are the chief aggravators in the congregation – or they should be – and they don’t have to worry about pleasing people.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, 191, 211-212.

¹⁰³ “Through the Dust,” in *Diakoneo*, Vol. 28, #4, 2006 (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate), 16.

¹⁰⁴ *Being a Deacon Today*, 80-81.

¹⁰⁵ *The Deacon’s Ministry of the Word* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 6.

¹⁰⁶ “Through the Dust.”

Lay Ministry

The liturgical role of the deacon is only valid if it symbolizes a ministry in conjunction with others within and without the worshipping community. The team approach mentioned above with respect to liturgy is a hallmark of the diaconate in general. Says Rosalind Brown, “diaconal ministry... is always collaborative, and the relationship of the deacon to all the other members of the church is a litmus test of that person’s diaconal ministry.”¹⁰⁷ And so another thread is that deacons **enable lay ministry**. Indeed, this should be one of their primary functions, “playing a part in meshing together all the ministries of all the baptized.”¹⁰⁸ Some observers have noted a change in emphasis in the diaconate from being a “provider of service” to being a “promoter of service.”¹⁰⁹ The Scottish Episcopal report previously cited affirms that “the mark of true Diaconate is to foster the initiation of lay ministries galore.”¹¹⁰

And this means searching, co-opting, pushing, reconciling, leading, stimulating, organizing, encouraging lay members of the assembly to fulfil active functions in the liturgy, in the community, and beyond. Examples are recruiting, training and coordinating readers, greeters, servers, intercessors and communion ministers for worship; participating in teams of hospital and home visitors; prison and institutional ministry; representing the parish in outreach programs and liaison with community or advocacy organizations.

The president of the Diakonia World Federation, speaking about writings by David Clark, a leader in the British Methodist diaconate, noted that these portray

a movement from diaconal ministry as something Deacons undertake on behalf of the church ‘out there’ to Deacons equipping and empowering the laity, the whole people of God, for diaconal ministry, and Deacons collaborating in collective action with others in the community, beyond the four walls of the church. It places Deacons within the heart of the congregation – visioning, animating, equipping, empowering, sending. It places Deacons within the heart of the community – building relationships, standing in solidarity, drawing alongside people and groups, committing to collective and collaborative action in cooperation with community groups to work towards an outcome that will enable flourishing for all.¹¹¹

Outreach and Prophetic Ministry

The above statement leads us to another thread of the diaconate: the role of **agent** or **ambassador** in the so-called secular world, acting as a go-between for the Church and society at large, functioning concurrently within the ecclesial community and outside it. Of course, this is part of the discipleship of all the baptized. But deacons have a special identity in this area because they are *ordained*. Non-stipendiary deacons can discreetly make it known in their secular employment or in a social context that they are ordained ministers. This may not result in any specific pastoral activity. It should not be a pretext for recruiting parishioners. But at the very least it means the deacon is a living symbol for the Church outside its own membership.

¹⁰⁷ Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Elaine Bardwell, “The Pastoral Role of the Deacon,” in Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon's Ministry*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Susanne Watson Epting, *Unexpected Consequences*, 36-37.

¹¹⁰ *Truly Called by God to Serve as a Deacon*, 10.

¹¹¹ Deacon Sandy Boyce, address to the Diakonia World Federation Assembly, Chicago, July 2017.

Thus, whereas the ministry of the presbyter is *primarily* (but certainly not entirely) to the gathered community, that of the deacon must be operative *both* inside and outside it – which is why the deacon should retain a base in a parish or other church community. Paul Avis writes of “the bridging, go-between role of deacons [...] their involvement in and linking of the divine liturgy and the needs of the unchurched out in the community.”¹¹² Deacon Susanne Watson Epting cautions against a “dualistic” view of diaconal and presbyteral ministry, one outside and the other inside the church community. This, she says, might “discourage deacons from an appropriate kind of teaching, preaching, and equipping of saints inside the church’s walls.”¹¹³

Although, as we have already noted, the diaconate should not be narrowly defined as social service, ministry to the poor and marginalized has become one of its key characteristics. For many deacons this is their prime ministry. They are found playing leading roles in prison ministry, community advocacy groups, inner city outreach, food banks, assistance to victims of violence and abuse, work with Indigenous and racialized peoples, immigrants and refugees, and political and environmental activism. Anglican deacons in Canada are paying special attention to the Church’s ministry of reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples.

Diaconal ministry to the marginalized has had a renewed impetus in the 21st century.¹¹⁴ The Churches, increasingly marginalized themselves in a post-Christian, secularized society, are rediscovering or re-emphasizing their historical and biblical mission to the poor and needy. Christian leaders are calling on faith communities to revitalize their diaconal mission.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, made a clarion call to servant ministry at the 2014 conference of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada. He took much of his inspiration from Pope Francis, especially his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”). He quoted Francis as saying, “Our redemption has a social dimension because God in Christ redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between people.”

Archbishop Hiltz spoke to the assembled deacons about

your servant ministry, your political ministry, your ministry of engaging others in this work. While all the baptized are called to respond to human need by loving service, to respect the dignity of every human person and to strive for justice and peace among all people, deacons by virtue of their ordinations are publicly accountable servants.¹¹⁵

The Methodist Church in the United Kingdom is similarly committed to prophetic ministry. A member of the British Methodist Diaconal Order, David Clark, summarizing his book, *Building Kingdom Communities*, says,

¹¹² Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 112.

¹¹³ *Unexpected Consequences*, 37.

¹¹⁴ See Josephine Borgeson, “The Prophetic Role of the Deacon in the Context of Church and Creation,” and Gloria Marie Jones, OP, “Living the Prophetic Ministry of the Deacon,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*.

¹¹⁵ Most Rev. Fred Hiltz, Address to the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada Conference, Halifax, 2014.

In a world in which resources are unjustly distributed, identities are under threat and solidarity is fragile, the toughest task facing humanity is the quest for community. Christians fail to grasp that in the gifts of the kingdom community – life, liberation, love and learning – they hold the key to what the search for community is all about. This book describes those gifts and how a servant church, through the creation of its diaconate as an order of mission, might offer a fragmented world new hope.¹¹⁶



Service is the calling of all the baptized. Volunteers at St. Paul's Cathedral in Regina prepare lunches for the needy in the community.

Discernment, Formation and Ordination

The process of identifying candidates for the diaconate and then, once approved, of following through with their training and eventually ordination, varies a great deal. Some dioceses have quite elaborate, formal programs, requiring several years. In others, the process may be shorter and more informal. Much depends on the preferences of individual bishops. Because of this variety, it is not possible to do justice to the subject here. There is, however, in the words of Archbishop Fred Hiltz, “a fairly common admission across our Church and across The Episcopal Church too that our discernment, training and formation programs have been weak and wanting in helping deacons to grasp and take hold of this ministry [of ‘interpreting to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.’] with competence and confidence.”¹¹⁷

In 2016, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada submitted for the consideration of its dioceses *The Iona Report: Final Report of the Task Forces on the Diaconate*.¹¹⁸ The report set out desired competencies for deacons in seven areas: Diakonia and the Diaconate; Human Awareness and Understanding; Spirituality and Spiritual Practice; Practical Training and Experience; Church Polity and Diaconal Ministry in the Public Square; Scripture; and Christian History.

¹¹⁶ David Clark, *Building Kingdom Communities – with the diaconate as a new order of mission*. Peterborough, UK: Upfront Publishing, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Most Rev. Fred Hiltz, Address, 2014.

¹¹⁸ *The Iona Report: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. Toronto: The General Synod, The Anglican Church of Canada, 2016. www.anglican.ca/diaconate

The Diocese of Qu'Appelle proposed revisions to the document in 2019. Deacon Krista Dowdeswell, principal author of the diocese's response, observed that the task force had discovered "a great diversity in understanding and practice among the dioceses." She called for "a concise theological vision of the diaconate precisely *because* there is so much diversity in practice." She went on to say,

There is a necessary link which is not made explicit in the Iona Report: "word" and "service" are descriptors of the liturgical function of the deacon and, as such, cannot be understood as foundational to the diaconal ministry apart from it. The liturgy, and God's spirit within it, calls us again and again back to our vows, reminds us of our vocational call, teaches us who we are to be amidst and among the whole people of God, and only then sends us out into the world to continue that worship and work in the world.¹¹⁹

Discernment and Acceptance

Experience has shown that candidates for the diaconate have usually been active members of the Church for a fairly long time and are already exercising leadership within the church community or outside it or both. The discernment process for locally-ordained ministers may be undertaken through a parish discernment group or a similar diocesan process. Some cautionary words:

- Candidates for the diaconate should be screened for both personal motivation and community support. Their vocation should not, from either point of view, appear to be a new form of *cursus honorum*, moving upwards through the ranks of lay offices to be rewarded by the accolade of ordination. Nor should it be satisfying a desire for authority, or prestige, or liturgical visibility. Nor should a candidate be pushed forward by the incumbent of the parish for reasons of personal favouritism or vague notions that "it would be nice to have deacon." If these danger signals appear, the candidate is seeking ordination for the wrong reasons and should be gently but firmly dissuaded. Otherwise, the perennial accusation of clericalizing lay ministry may be warranted.
- Diocesan discernment committees must assiduously avoid classifying the diaconate as a secondary order of ministry or as "next-best" to the priesthood. In some instances, candidates for non-stipendiary ministry not considered suitable for the priesthood have been told that they should satisfy themselves with the diaconate instead.
- The continued existence of the transitional diaconate beside the vocational diaconate presents its own set of problems:
 - Candidates for the diaconate may not make the distinction between the two and consider that their diaconate is a step to "full ordination" – an unfortunate phrase used in the author's experience. Diocesan discernment processes must, from the outset, clearly identify the diaconate as a unique, permanent vocation – no easy task, since so many Anglicans, including clergy, persist in assuming that the diaconate should normally culminate in the presbyterate.

¹¹⁹ "Response to *The Iona Report: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*," Diocese of Qu'Appelle, February 2019.

- Some deacons, once ordained as vocational deacons, may then seek ordination to the priesthood. If this is allowed to happen, another perennial accusation is justified: the diaconate being used as a back door to the priesthood. Dioceses must take a firm stand both before and after diaconal ordination. If a locally-ordained deacon subsequently feels a call to the priesthood, that person should be required to go back to “square one” and start anew the process of discernment, formation and ordination.
- Beware of “episcopal end-runs,” to use an expression of one Canadian director of deacons. Bishops sometimes ignore or override the recommendations on diaconal ordination of the appropriate diocesan body, or pressure that body, or let it be known that the candidate has the personal support of the bishop, or seek to do a favour to a priest who ardently wishes the candidate to be a deacon in his or her parish. This can wreak havoc with the process and lead to ordinations of unsuitable candidates. While bishops in theory can ordain whomever they wish, they should discipline themselves to follow due process.

Formation¹²⁰

A variety of training programs for the diaconate exists. Much will depend on the educational background and life experience of the postulant, given that most candidates for the vocational diaconate seek ordination later in life. Diocesan programs normally take this into account and adapt their formation to the perceived needs of the candidate. At a minimum, postulants should have training in the Old and New Testaments, basic theology, church history, pastoral care, prayer and spirituality, preaching, and liturgy. This can be done through a combination of correspondence or on-line courses, seminars and webinars, weekend and summer courses.

Consultation and fellowship with, and mentorship by, existing deacons should be part of the process. Thorough study of the diaconate is vital – its history, its place in the theology of orders, its contemporary practice, the roles and expectations of the deacon, the place of the deacon in church polity and in parish life, the liturgical function of the deacon. Only if these are clearly explained to, and acknowledged by, the candidate, will that person approach ordination without the misconceptions alluded to in the Discernment section above.

Ordination

The sacramental rite of ordination is the formal commissioning of the deacon by the Church. Frederick Bauerschmidt says “one truly becomes a deacon through the sacrament of order, because it is here that one receives the mandate of Christ, through the instrumental action of the bishop.”¹²¹ What is given in ordination that differentiates the ordained minister from other members of the *laos*? Paul Avis identifies five “affirmations”: “public recognition of the gifts and calling that come from God and are discerned by the Church;” public acknowledgment of the call and gifts in the liturgy; bestowing strength for tasks ahead; conveying authority to minister in the Church; and inducting the ordinands into a new set of relationships.¹²²

¹²⁰ See the chapters by Alison Peden, “Challenges to Diaconal Formation in the Scottish Episcopal Church,” and George Newman, “Roman Catholic Diaconal Formation in Canada,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*.

¹²¹ Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, “The Deacon and Sacramental Character,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, 29.

¹²² Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 114-115.

The actual ordination service is thus of vital importance, not only to the ordinand but to the gathered community for which he or she is being ordained. The symbolism of the rite cannot be over-emphasized. Of course this is true for any ordination, but it is crucial for the diaconate, which, as we have seen, is so often misunderstood, under-valued and even distorted. A well-conducted ordination can send all the right messages. Conversely, a poorly-done ordination sends very wrong messages.

- *The candidate should study the ordination rite.* Some ordinands have been known to approach the ordination service unprepared and not fully aware of what is going to happen. An appropriate person should take them through the liturgy step by step.
- *The diocesan authorities should carefully prepare the service:* its location, music, preacher, readers and other individual roles. There must be a rehearsal – not last-minute and rushed, but calm and prayerful, allowing all the time it takes for the participants to be comfortable.
- *Do not combine diaconal ordinations with others.* Deacons should *never* be ordained at the same service as priests. We would go further and urge that transitional and vocational deacons not be ordained at the same service; to do so aids and abets the confusion of orders. And at ordinations to the presbyterate, the ordinands should *not* begin the service wearing a diaconal stole, to have it replaced after the consecration by the priest's stole. This sends precisely the wrong message about graduation to higher office in the Church.
- *The service should visibly involve other deacons.* While deacons do not historically form a “college” like that of the presbyters, they should enjoy fellowship, meet regularly, and, at diaconal ordinations, collectively welcome the ordinands to their number. Deacons fulfil their normal roles at the ordination: assisting the bishop; reading the Gospel; leading intercessions; preparing the table. A newly-ordained deacon typically assists at the altar for the Eucharist and gives the Dismissal. At diaconal ordinations in the Diocese of Qu’Appelle, deacons form a semi-circle around the bishop at the prayer of consecration. Deacons may help vest the new deacon in the dalmatic (if worn) and stole. Deacons can also act as presenters, litanist or communion ministers.

Chapter IV Contemporary Issues

Objections to the Diaconate

The 1974 report to the Church of England recommending abolition of the diaconate based its conclusion on two main arguments: that “there was no functional task that belonged exclusively to deacons” and that “deacons take away from, and indeed clericalize, ministry which properly belonged to lay people.”¹²³ One objection to the diaconate, then, is that deacons are not necessary because lay people can do everything they can. Technically this is true. But it is also very misleading. For one thing, lay people rarely do *all* the things that a deacon does: the liturgical functions at the Eucharist; officiating at Morning or Evening Prayer and sometimes services of Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament; presiding at baptisms, weddings and funerals; occasionally preaching; pastoral, teaching or administrative duties; social action; enabling lay ministry; playing a practical and symbolic role in the wider community. Furthermore, deacons are *ordained*, officially commissioned by the Church to which they make a lifetime commitment. Of course, in baptism (and confirmation) every Christian makes a commitment to discipleship, but there is a major difference of role for ordained ministers. “The deacon is thrust into a position of leadership and is acknowledged, on account of the solemn rite of ordination, as a leader who serves, enabling the *diakonia* of the whole church.”¹²⁴

The second objection is that a revived diaconate risks clericalizing lay ministry: we do not need another clerical order to do things which should be done by lay people, and some deacons act like mini-priests. There is indeed that risk, and some deacons do fall into that trap. But if we are worried about clericalism, we should also look at the “omnivorous priesthood,” the one-man-band syndrome still often found in the Anglican Church (Lutherans are in a similar situation with the pastorate). Most assuredly, the risk of clericalism is not limited to the diaconate! In any event, we have emphasized that enabling lay ministry should be one of the prime objectives of the deacon; deacons who are not doing so should have a long, hard look at themselves. The diaconate need not and should not discourage lay ministry; in fact, it should do exactly the opposite. The Report of the 1998 Lambeth Conference addressed this very issue: “The experience of many dioceses indicates that the appropriate training and oversight of deacons at work in dioceses, congregations and agencies of care, advocacy and justice will ensure that more, not less, lay participation in servant ministry will occur.”¹²⁵ In *The Hanover Report*, the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission responded to both of the above objections: “[...] deacons have no special powers or activities exclusively reserved to them. What is, however, distinctive is their call to be *publicly accountable servants of the church* [our emphasis] who have a charge to model, encourage and coordinate diakonia. This is the particular call or vocation of the deacon that is not shared by all Christians.”¹²⁶

Other objections to the diaconate are more pragmatic. Some bishops fear losing control over ordained clergy who are not employed by the Church – even though non-stipendiary deacons (and, for that matter, non-stipendiary priests), like all clergy, must be licensed to carry out their

¹²³ Quoted by Bishop David Stancliffe in the Foreword to Rosalind Brown, *Being a Deacon Today*, vii.

¹²⁴ John Booty, *The Servant Church*, 89.

¹²⁵ *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1998*, 203.

¹²⁶ *The Hanover Report*, 23.

functions. Some priests, especially those accustomed to solo ministry, are apprehensive that deacons will challenge their status. Lutheran deaconesses attending the 2000 conference of Canadian Anglican deacons mentioned the same issue vis-à-vis their pastors. The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission recognized it as a challenge for both Churches:

In both traditions, the presbyters may perceive a renewed diaconate as a threat to their own identity and role. *This will be especially so where the presbyteral office is seen as the embodiment of all ordained ministry* [our emphasis]. If, however, presbyters can welcome deacons as partners-in-ministry, both liturgically and within the church's mission, then they themselves may be freed to exercise a more focused ministry, bearing responsibility for the life of the community in Word and sacrament. In this way, too, the diaconate can stand as a witness against the perennial threat of clericalism, an ecclesiastical distortion rooted in exclusivist attitudes and practices. Deacons are called by the very nature of their order to stand as a witness to presbyters and bishops that the authority of all ordained ministry is for service alone.¹²⁷

Women in the Diaconate

In the Orthodox Churches, theologians have recognized that women were ordained deacons (often called deaconesses) in the Byzantine Church, and several efforts have been made since the 19th century to resume the practice. Kyriaki FitzGerald records such attempts, and some actual ordinations, in the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries. The Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation held in Rhodes in 1988 formally recommended restoring “the apostolic order of deaconesses.”¹²⁸ The Rhodes Consultation “clearly affirmed women deacons were ordained in the Byzantine period and recommended that this practice be restored.” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated in 1995 that “there is no canonical difficulty in ordaining women as deacons in the Orthodox Church.” Two years later, at a consultation of Orthodox women at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, Bartholomew spoke of the “call for the full restoration of the order of the deaconesses.”¹²⁹

Phyllis Zagano notes that the Armenian Apostolic Church, one of the Oriental Churches, “has never abandoned its practice of ordaining women to the diaconate.” Since deacons were required at celebrations of the Eucharist, women were ordained for this purpose in convents. In the 20th century, this ministry was extended to parish churches.¹³⁰ The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece voted in 2004 to restore the female diaconate (Metropolitan Christodoulos had already ordained a woman deacon in 1986).¹³¹ In 2017, Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa ordained five women deacons.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁸ Kyriaki FitzGerald, “A Commentary on the Diaconate in the Contemporary Orthodox Church,” in Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon's Ministry*, 156.

¹²⁹ Kyriaki FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, 165, 168-9, 171.

¹³⁰ Phyllis Zagano, *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 171-172.

¹³¹ Phyllis Zagano, *Women in Ministry: Emerging Questions about the Diaconate* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 23.

The issue today, explains Ukrainian Catholic scholar Brian A. Butcher, is not the historical existence of female deacons, but its theological implications, then and now. He cautions that “the Christian East has served as a quarry from which scholars have mined evidence for a predominantly Western debate,” whereas opinion and practice have varied widely among the Oriental and Orthodox Churches, and the partial revival of the female diaconate there is not without controversy.¹³² On the other hand, Orthodox scholar John Chryssavgis sees the renewed ordination of women deacons as an integral part of the revival of the diaconate in Orthodoxy: “...inasmuch as the Eastern Orthodox Church proved to be the exceptional cradle of the female diaconate through the centuries,” he says, “restoring the female diaconate will invariably be an important consequence of remembering and reclaiming the diaconate itself.”¹³³

The question of ordaining women to the diaconate is not excluded in the Roman Catholic Church. In what she calls “unfinished business of Vatican II,” Phyllis Zagano affirms that “there has been no modern ruling against the ordination of women deacons in the Catholic Church, and no ruling that overrides the conciliar documents or historic practice.”¹³⁴ The majority of scholarship there appears to have concluded that women were indeed ordained to the diaconate during the first millennium. Dr. Zagano contends that the Church could, and now should, resume the ordination of women as deacons. Indeed, since the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the validity of the orders of the Orthodox and Oriental churches, it *de facto* recognizes that of women deacons such as those of the Armenian Apostolic Church.¹³⁵

Roman Catholic deacon William Ditewig notes that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said that “the possibility of ordaining women as deacons remains a question open for debate and discussion.” While some theologians maintain the doctrine of the unity of orders (the priesthood incorporates the diaconate), others argue that “sufficient diversity exists to distinguish between the sacerdotal (priestly) orders of bishops and presbyters, and the order of deacons. Because of this diversity, they argue, it might be possible to ordain women deacons.”¹³⁶ Fr. Kenan B. Osborne believes that “if the permanent male diaconate can be re-established after eleven hundred years of inactivity, then in a similar way there can be a re-establishing of the ministry of deaconesses after a similar length of inactivity.”¹³⁷ Various Roman Catholic bishops and episcopal conferences – for example, that of Ireland in 2014 – have recommended admitting women to the diaconate.

However, there has been and remains strong opposition to female deacons in the Roman Catholic Church. It is believed that Pope Paul VI, after his restoration of the permanent (male) diaconate, asked for a study of the possibility of admitting women to the order. The result was Benedictine Father Cipriano Vagaggini’s landmark 1974 article, “The Ordination of Deaconesses in the Greek and Byzantine Tradition,” an erudite research paper which concluded that “theologically,

¹³² “Women Deacons in the Christian East: What is the State of the Question?” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*.

¹³³ John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, 19.

¹³⁴ *Women in Ministry*, 23.

¹³⁵ *Holy Saturday*, 173-174.

¹³⁶ William T. Ditewig, *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons*, 52.

¹³⁷ Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, *The Permanent Diaconate: Its History and Place in the Sacrament of Orders*, 174.

in virtue of the use of the Byzantine Church, it appears that women can receive diaconal ordination, which, by nature and dignity, is equated to the ordination of the deacon, and not simply to that of subdeacons or lectors, and much less [...] to that of some lesser ministry constituted by what today one would call a simple benediction.”¹³⁸

This article was written for – and later suppressed by – the International Theological Commission, of which he was a member. In 1987, Vagaggini was asked to “make an intervention before the Synod of Bishops on the Laity” in the area of “women in the church.”¹³⁹ Referring to his much longer 1974 essay, Vagaggini said, “In that article, I maintained, and still maintain today, that the competent authority of the church, if it judges it appropriate, can admit women to the sacrament of order in the diaconate.”¹⁴⁰ As was the case with his 1974 article, Vagaggini’s 1987 study was not acted upon by the Vatican.

Phyllis Zagano maintains that for the Roman Catholic Church the female diaconate is a question of authority (*magisterium*), not of theology. While the Church states clearly that it cannot ordain women as priests, if it wishes to ordain women as deacons it presumably can. In 2016 Pope Francis appointed a commission to study the issue of women in the diaconate, with Dr. Zagano as one of its members. However, the commission wrapped up its work in 2019, apparently unable to agree whether women were validly ordained to the diaconate in the early church. In 2020 Pope Francis appointed a second commission with an entirely new membership, including for the first time some deacons, to further study the question.

The Lutheran Diaconate

Lutherans generally did not preserve an ordained diaconate at the Reformation, but they later commissioned diaconal ministers, including deaconesses. The Lutheran diaconate stems from the influential deaconess movement in nineteenth century Germany, which soon spread to the Scandinavian Lutheran Churches and around the world. Practices differ considerably between the national churches: in some of them, deacons are ordained as part of a threefold ministry, in others they are commissioned; in some, deacons have parish and liturgical functions, in others they are primarily involved in social service.¹⁴¹

In the Church of Sweden, there are permanent, ordained deacons as part of a three-fold ministry – but no transitional diaconate. The Church of Sweden’s official website, in a very Anglican way, emphasizes that at the Reformation the Church retained the historic episcopate and the orders of bishops, priests and deacons. It notes that in the nineteenth century “several deaconess institutions were founded in Sweden on the German model. The deaconesses were bound by vows to a motherhouse, and to a life of celibacy and poverty. Around 1900, men were admitted to the diaconate.” In the 1960s the celibacy and motherhouse requirements were dropped. Today, says the website, “a deacon (deaconess) visits, helps, and supports those in bodily or spiritual need; gives Christian nurture and teaching in the faith; is a sign of merciful kindness in

¹³⁸ Phyllis Zagano, ed., *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, 59.

¹³⁹ Phyllis Zagano, in *ibid.*, x.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴¹ See Anne Keffer and E. Louise Williams, “Diaconates – the Lutheran Experience,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*.

the parish and society at large, and in all things serves Christ in the neighbour.”¹⁴² Deacons in the Swedish church were traditionally engaged in social ministry, latterly as complementary to the state system; in recent decades that they have also developed teaching and liturgical roles.

In Anglican-Lutheran dialogue at both the international and Canadian levels, while more attention has been focused on the episcopate, there has also been interest on the Lutheran side in the diaconate as part of a three-fold ordained ministry. The *Hanover Report* noted that “ ‘Deacon’ in most Lutheran traditions refers to a person consecrated or commissioned to a ministry focused on parish work or social service, but not ordained.”¹⁴³ It added, however, that some Lutheran churches were actively reconsidering the ordained diaconate. The Church of Norway, for example, where deacons are parish workers, “has been wrestling with the issue of whether deacons are within the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*, together with the pastors and bishops.”¹⁴⁴ Iain Luke has commented:

Curiously, there are parallels between Roman Catholic accounts of unicity and the model of the unitary pastorate which we encounter in our full communion partners, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The parish pastor exercises such command over the imagination that everything else has to be defined in relation to that image. In the Lutheran case, though, the consequence is that the distinctive diaconate is not accepted as an ordained ministry at all! The idea that bishops are just elevated presbyters, on the other hand, is still very much present in the Lutheran ethos.¹⁴⁵

The Porvoo Agreement, concluded in 1996 between most Nordic Lutheran Churches and the Anglican Churches of the British Isles, stated that they would “welcome persons episcopally ordained in any of our churches to the office of bishop, priest or deacon to serve [...] in that ministry in the receiving church without reordination and work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry.” Consultations between the Porvoo partners have shown a wide measure of convergence on the diaconate: these occurred in London, 2006; Oslo, 2009; and Dublin, 2013. The latter issued a statement, *Diaconal Ministry as a Proclamation of the Gospel*.

A major report by the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, *To Love and Serve the Lord: Diakonia in the Life of the Church*,¹⁴⁶ appeared in 2012. Known as the “Jerusalem Report” after the location of the Commission’s meeting in 2011, the document focused on the understanding and practice of *diakonia* in the two Communion rather than on the diaconate as such. For this it deferred to and liberally quoted the *Hanover Report* issued by its predecessor commission sixteen years earlier. The *Jerusalem Report* stated that for both Lutherans and Anglicans *diakonia* is a “shared imperative,” crucial to the prophetic mission of the Church – reconciliation, healing, the alleviation of poverty, and the struggle against injustice and

¹⁴² <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se>

¹⁴³ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*, 14.

¹⁴⁴ Diocese of Salisbury, *The Distinctive Diaconate*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ Communication to the author, October 2020.

¹⁴⁶ *To Love and Serve the Lord: Diakonia in the Life of the Church. The Jerusalem Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*. Lutheran World Federation and Anglican Communion, 2012.

oppression. Its final chapter, “Diakonia and Ministry,” explores how the deacon can through servant leadership promote and facilitate the *diakonia* of the whole Church. The report’s Conclusion called for “recognition that “the *diakonia* of the whole Church is focused and channeled through the ministry of deacons and diaconal ministers.”

In 1993 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) rejected an ordained diaconate, saying it was not the Reformation tradition (despite the example of the Church of Sweden) and established a ministry of lay diaconal ministers. Although the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) also did not ordain deacons, Lutheran deaconesses who shared in the first gathering of Canadian Anglican deacons in Winnipeg in 2000 stated that the difference between their commissioning rite and the ordination of pastors was almost imperceptible. Subsequently, in the context of ecumenical dialogue, notably with the Anglican Communion, major developments occurred in both the ELCIC and the ELCA. In 2019 the ELCIC national synod adopted a motion that the church “recognizes that ‘ordination’ is the rite which marks and celebrates the acceptance of a first call into public ministry of a deacon, or a bishop or a pastor.”

The ELCA agreed at its 2016 Churchwide Assembly to combine its three lay “rosters” – associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers – into one roster of ministers of word and service called deacons. In 2019 the Assembly approved a report by its Entrance Rite Discernment Group recommending “the use of *ordination* as the rite of setting apart both ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service.”¹⁴⁷ The ELCA report is notable for its ecumenical tone. Deacons, it affirms, “proclaim the Word of God to the world and interpret the needs of the world to the church in ways that equip the baptized in their vocation of loving and serving their neighbor.” “The service of the deacon has been rooted in the worship of the church.” The report goes on to specify the liturgical functions of the deacon in terms immediately familiar to the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern traditions:

By virtue of their vocation, [...] deacons are distinctively positioned to contribute to the worshiping leadership of the Christian assembly. For example, in leading the intercessions and in preaching, deacons speak the needs of the world to the church, invite the assembly to join in prayer for those who suffer, and call upon those gathered to go out to serve. A deacon reading the gospel lesson traditionally has exemplified the close relationship between what God’s people believe and how they serve. Welcoming reclaimed liturgical roles for deacons works in mutuality with the increased roles lay persons have assumed in worship leadership. Deacons, for example, may be among those who take on the roles of assisting minister, those serving communion in the assembly or those carrying the communion to those who cannot be present.

The ministry of the deacon is “distinct from, alongside and in mutual complementarity with the ministries of pastors.” The convergence with the views of the diaconate in other churches is readily apparent. The same report noted that the Lutheran churches in Germany, Sweden, Brazil, Estonia, Iceland and Indonesia ordained deacons. The addition of the two North American churches has given a major impetus to the diaconate in Lutheranism.

¹⁴⁷ *Report and Recommendations of the Entrance Rite Discernment Group*, ELCA, 2019.

The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity

Given that the return of the deacon in the western Church occurred in the same period as serious ecumenical discussions, the inter-church context is of considerable interest. In the words of the *Hanover Report*, the diaconate could be viewed as an “ecumenical opportunity” and could assist Christian Churches in their quest for unity. A landmark 1982 document of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, succinctly expressed the deacon's role: “Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life.”¹⁴⁸

In dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the diaconate has rarely been singled out for particular attention, largely because these Communion share the same basic view of the order. However, whereas the Anglican Communion followed the Roman Catholic Church in reviving the diaconate after many centuries of neglect, the Eastern Churches have always maintained distinctive deacons (as well as the transitional diaconate). As Brian Butcher points out, the diaconate flourishes in all four “ecclesial communions” of the East – Assyrian, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Eastern-Rite Catholic – amidst a great variety of theological and liturgical traditions.¹⁴⁹ Where, then, is the “ecumenical opportunity” for the diaconate?

First, the existence, revival or introduction of deacons in so many different church traditions – Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed – points to a widespread recognition of the need and desirability of diaconal ministries. This provides a common bond between the Churches and an invaluable experience of shared ministry, even if the forms may be different – as we have seen, in some traditions deacons are ordained, while in others they are not; in the case of Lutherans, ordination to the diaconate is practised in some national Churches and not in others. The International Anglican-Roman Catholic-Ukrainian Catholic Conference on the Diaconate, held in Regina, Canada, in 2018, witnessed to a resurgence of interest in the diaconate in those three traditions. It resulted in the book *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*, based on the conference but expanded to include contributions on the Methodist and Lutheran diaconates.

The World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities gives voice to the world-wide diaconal movement. Also known as Diakonia World Federation, it is organized into three regions: Diakonia Region Africa-Europe (DRAE), Diakonia Asia-Pacific (DAP), and Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC). There is an evident opportunity here for practical ecumenical relations and a growth in mutual understanding between churches, stemming from their interest in diaconal ministry.

Second, deacons can work together on a local level. Anglicans in Canada and Episcopalians in the United States enjoy a mutual recognition of ministries with the Evangelical Lutheran Church,

¹⁴⁸ Geneva: World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 1982, 27.

¹⁴⁹ “‘To Minister and to Mediate’: A Theological Consideration of the Diaconate in the Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox diaconate,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*. For a view of the Orthodox diaconate, see Kyriaki Fitzgerald, “A Commentary on the Diaconate in the Contemporary Orthodox Church,” in Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon's Ministry*, 147-158.

as do the Anglican and Lutheran parties to the Porvoo Agreement in Europe. Where there is not a mutual recognition of ministries – the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions do not recognize the validity of Anglican orders – there is still the potential for cooperation. For example, after the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina entered into a covenant relationship in 2011, deacons of both dioceses met and contributed to each other's formation programs. The 2018 conference on the diaconate was a case in point.



Anglican and Roman Catholic deacons worshipping together: at the left, Deacon Michael Jackson assists Bishop Robert Hardwick; at the right, Deacon Joe Lang assists Vicar General Lorne Crozon – at an Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Prayer Service, Pentecost Sunday 2015, in Holy Rosary Cathedral, Regina.

The *third* area of ecumenical potential for the diaconate is, in many respects, the most challenging: the ordination of women. As we have seen above, while women were admitted to the diaconate in the early church, especially in the East, and have been admitted to the order in recent times in the Anglican, some Oriental and Orthodox, Old Catholic, and Lutheran traditions, this is still not the case for the Roman Catholic and most of the Orthodox churches. Yet theologians from these traditions have recognized that historically women were once ordained deacons and theoretically could be again, despite the firm opposition of both Churches to the ordination of women to the priesthood (and of course the episcopate). A major obstacle to female diaconal ordination, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, appears to be the concern that, if women were ordained deacons, there would be increased pressure to ordain them priests.

Dr. Zagano has drawn attention to the theory of the “unicity of orders” as a stumbling-block to the revival of the female diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church: if women cannot be ordained priests, they cannot be ordained deacons either, because the diaconate is intrinsically part of the priesthood. But the scholarly consensus is that women *were* ordained deacons in the early Church. Although Dr. Zagano does not call for ordination of women to the priesthood, she observes that the unicity of orders is a double-edged sword: “if women in the ancient Church were ordained as deacons, they are equally able today to be ordained as deacons and priests.”¹⁵⁰ The case for abolition of the transitional diaconate, already a strong one, is reinforced by the potential for ordained ministry for women in those Churches which will not accept female priests. Ideally, the diaconate could one day be an order of ministry open to women in Churches of varied traditions. It is timely, therefore, to turn to the vexed issue of sequential ordination and the transitional diaconate.

¹⁵⁰ *Women: Icons of Christ*, xvi-xvii.

Direct Ordination: Once a Deacon, Always a Deacon?

Direct, or *per saltum* (by a leap), ordination, as we have already seen in Chapter I, applied to the episcopate as well as the presbyterate in the early Church: lay people could be ordained to any of the three orders of ministry. However, “sequential” ordination began in the fourth century and gradually became generalized over the next five centuries, although both practices continued side-by-side until as late as the tenth century. The main reason for electing bishops from the presbyterate was to ensure adequate episcopal preparation and training, although the diaconate could, and on occasion did, serve the same purpose. There was not the same rationale for presbyters to first be deacons and the practice emerged much later. It became codified from the tenth century as canonical practice, although in theory it was not required for priestly ordination.¹⁵¹ Deacon Ormonde Plater made a distinction between “sequential” ordination, a form of preparation, and “cumulative” ordination, the mediaeval theology of incorporating all three orders through sequential ordination: “Although cumulative ordination occurs in the context of sequential ordination, it is an entirely different concept [...] an interpretation of what happens in sequential ordination.”¹⁵²

Some contemporary supporters of the diaconate, especially in the Church of England, support cumulative ordination. “You are a deacon first and even if later you become a priest or a bishop, you never cease to be a deacon,” said the 2003 report for the Diocese of Salisbury.¹⁵³ This approach continued in the book *Being a Deacon Today* by the report’s chairperson, Rosalind Brown, written in part, says Bishop David Stancliffe in its Foreword, for “all those who are already deacons but are inclined to forget it – the priests and bishops of our Church.”¹⁵⁴ Canon Brown has referred to “the Russian dolls’ model of ordination... inside some baptized Christians there is a deacon, inside some deacons there is a priest, and inside some priests there is a bishop.”¹⁵⁵ This view is summarized by Paul Avis: “In catholic ecclesiology, with its practice of sequential ordination (rather than direct ordination to the presbyterate), a bishop is, at the same time, a priest, a deacon and a baptized believer, a member of the *laos*, the holy people of God. Once a deacon, always a deacon. Once a presbyter, always a presbyter. The episcopate does not supersede these ministries but includes and subsumes them.”¹⁵⁶

There is strong support for this view in the Roman Catholic tradition. Deacon James Keating states that “becoming a deacon is a prerequisite to the priesthood [...] There can be no sacrifice (priesthood without service (diaconate).” He quotes Pope Benedict XVI as saying “Every priest, of course, continues as a deacon.”¹⁵⁷ Deacon Dominic Cerrato affirms that “the priest is still, in

¹⁵¹ A good historical explanation is found in “Sequential Ordination in Historical Perspective” by Canadian scholar John St. H. Gibaut, in Edwin F. Hallenbeck, ed., *The Orders of Ministry, Reflections on Direct Ordination* (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1996).

¹⁵² “Through the Dust – Patristic Presbyterianism,” in *The Orders of Ministry*, 97-98.

¹⁵³ *The Distinctive Diaconate*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ *Being a Deacon Today*, viii.

¹⁵⁵ “Theological Underpinnings of the Diaconate,” in D. Michael Jackson, ed., *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?* (London & New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 139.

¹⁵⁷ James Keating, *The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 2-3.

a certain sense, a deacon”; “the diaconate is implicit in the priesthood.”¹⁵⁸ The consequences of sequential/cumulative ordination, however, differ between the two Churches. For Roman Catholics, because Christ only named male apostles, only a man can be ordained priest: “acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice.”¹⁵⁹ If one accepts the “unicity of orders” theory that ordination to the diaconate confers on the deacon the intrinsic capacity to be ordained priest, then women, who are barred from the priesthood, cannot be deacons either.

For the Church of England, this is no longer an issue, since, as in most provinces of the Anglican Communion, women can now be ordained priests. Instead, the effect of sequential/cumulative ordination has been to relegate the diaconate, both male and female, to an “inferior office,” to quote the title of the book by Francis Young. By and large, opinion in the Church of England views the diaconal ministry of service as an integral part of, and hence a necessary preparation for, the priesthood, to the extent that many advocate a transitional diaconate extending several years rather than the traditional year. The notion of direct or *per saltum* ordination to the priesthood and abolition of the transitional diaconate gains no traction in the Church of England, although it has been widely discussed elsewhere.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, both Francis Young and Paul Avis disagree with the term “transitional,” on the grounds that diaconal ordination is permanent. Dr. Young, stating that “every ordained minister in the Church of England is a ‘permanent deacon’,” also prefers to avoid using words like “permanent” and “vocational” in favour of “lifelong” to describe the person who chooses to stay in deacon’s orders.¹⁶¹

The arguments against *per saltum* ordination generally go as follows: a bishop needs to have been a priest, and a priest to have been a deacon, so that (a) in practical terms they acquire adequate experience and knowledge (sequential ordination), and (b) they may fulfil their ministries symbolically and sacramentally (cumulative ordination). Defenders of cumulative ordinations claim, for example, that they “make the role of the priests ampler and more intelligible both to themselves and to those they serve. Those who offer Eucharist must first offer themselves. It is appropriate that priests should be first deacons,”¹⁶² and that “ordaining is the distinctive vocation of the bishop precisely because the order of the episcopate alone is understood to contain within itself the other two orders of which the bishop is chief minister at ordination.”¹⁶³

Countering the practical argument for sequential ordination, Ormonde Plater pointed out that the rationale for the parish priesthood as preparation for the episcopate scarcely applies to the contemporary presbyterate: “Six months as a transitional deacon [...] doesn’t make one a logical choice for priest [...] [it is] too short a time in the wrong office.” Deacon Plater went on to say,

¹⁵⁸ Dominic Cerrato, *In the Person of Christ the Servant: A Theology of the Diaconate Based on the Personalist Thought of Pope John Paul II* (Bloomington, Ohio: St. Ephraem Press, 2014), 203, 205.

¹⁵⁹ *Lumen gentium* 10, cited in Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ*, xviii.

¹⁶⁰ See for example the chapters on “The Transitional Diaconate in Question” by American Episcopal deacon Susanne Watson Epting, Scottish Episcopal priest Alison Peden, and Canadian Anglican deacon Maylanne Maybee in *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective*.

¹⁶¹ *Inferior Office?* xxv-xxvi.

¹⁶² Charles P. Price, “The Threefold Cord: A Case for Cumulative Ordination,” in *The Orders of Ministry*, 24.

¹⁶³ J. Robert Wright, “Sequential or Cumulative Orders vs. Direct Ordination,” in *ibid.*, 50.

This leads to a common assumption that deacons are presbyters in a pupa stage, and to a popular theology that priests acquire *diakonia* from their brief passage through the diaconate. There is no scriptural or patristic basis for a theology of cumulative orders, and there is no medieval basis for extending it to the diaconate. [...] [In ordination rites] before becoming a priest *the deacon symbolically resigns the diaconate* [our emphasis].¹⁶⁴

Church of England deacon Gill Kimber comments that “so many in the C of E have theologised what was essentially a cultural and historical development, owing more to the *cursus honorum* and Constantine than to any high-flying theology!”¹⁶⁵ While there are now more bishops and dioceses in England ordaining people for the vocational diaconate, direct ordination finds very little support among the church leadership. However, Deacon Kimber notes an exception: Bishop James Newcome of Carlisle, a staunch promoter of the vocational diaconate. “Deacons are not – and should never have been – ‘mini-priests’ or ‘probationers in waiting’,” says Bishop Newcome. “It does therefore seem very hard to justify retaining a ‘transitional’ diaconate [...] Priests... could be ordained priest straight away: – or, ideally, given a probationary year as at present but without being called deacons.”¹⁶⁶

Church of England theologian Paul Avis, a strong supporter of the diaconate, sees it as an order with its own identity and integrity and as a key to “a ministry shaped by mission.” However, as we have seen, Professor Avis is also a supporter of sequential ordination. “Diaconal ministry embodies the fundamental commission of the Church in the service of the Lord,” he says. “Any further ordination can only be built on the foundation of the diaconate.”¹⁶⁷ His case is based on the “new hermeneutic of *diakonia*” as a divine commission, moving away from the traditional view of the diaconate as a ministry of (humble) service – now superseded by the work of John Collins¹⁶⁸ – to one of the *tria munera*, the three-fold diaconal ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care, representing Christ as prophet, priest and king. Canadian theologian Iain Luke says that “both the self-giving character of the priest and the authoritative witness of the bishop have to be grounded in the stewardly identity of the deacon.”¹⁶⁹

Episcopal bishop Thomas Breidenthal holds a similar view of the diaconate as the foundation of all ordained ministry – “the wellspring of ordained ministry rather than its bottom rung.” But, like Ormonde Plater – and unlike Paul Avis, Francis Young and Iain Luke – he maintains “[It is] not that bishops and priests remain deacons – a claim that deacons rightly find offensive.” He thus supports *sequential* but not *cumulative* ordination.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ “Through the Dust,” 97-98.

¹⁶⁵ Communication to the author, September 2020.

¹⁶⁶ James Newcome, “The Case for a Distinctive Diaconate,” presentation to a conference on the diaconate, Diocese of Carlisle, 13 March 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*, 113. See also his article “The Diaconate: a flagship ministry?” in *Theology and Ministry* 2 (2013).

¹⁶⁸ See his *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources and Deacons and the Church: Making Connections Between Old and New*.

¹⁶⁹ Communication to the author, June 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas E. Breidenthal, “Exodus from Privilege: Reflections of the Diaconate in Acts,” *Anglican Theological Review* 95:2 (2013).

Francis Young agrees that “the diaconate should be considered the default vocation of all who are called to ordained ministry.” He adds, “I see a reformed and restructured transitional diaconate as the way to get back to a distinctive diaconate, as transitional deacons choose to become distinctive deacons.”¹⁷¹ The pattern would thus be as follows:

<i>Ordination to Diaconate</i>	→ <i>vocational diaconate</i> OR → <i>presbyterate</i>
---------------------------------------	---

Could this pattern provide a *modus vivendi*, accommodating and promoting the vocational diaconate until the Churches – one hopes – eventually agree that the transitional diaconate is no longer warranted? And would it assist the Roman Catholic Church in restoring the female diaconate? There are those in that Church, as in Anglicanism, who argue for the elimination of the transitional diaconate. Deacon William Ditewig notes that “some theologians are beginning to suggest that since the vocation of the seminarian is properly to the priesthood and not to the diaconate, and because a transitional diaconate no longer seems to be serving the real pastoral and practical needs of the people of God, the practice should be discontinued.” He points out that “whether the Church continues to ordain transitional deacons or not is within her authority to adjust or adapt, just as was done with tonsure, the minor orders, and the subdiaconate.”¹⁷²

Susan K. Wood suggests that “it may be time to rethink the necessity of being ordained to the lower orders before being admitted to the higher orders as well as the imagery of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’.

More specifically, it is time to rethink the necessity of the transitional diaconate.” Citing Karl Rahner, she questions “whether we really need to ordain someone for an internship.” “A priest,” she says, “does not derive ... diaconal responsibility from his ordination to the diaconate, but from his ordination to the priesthood as a bishop or presbyter. One can also argue that every Christian is called to diaconal service of the neighbor because of the common priesthood assumed in baptism.”¹⁷³ Richard Gaillardetz remarks that “the ancient tradition in no way presupposed that one must advance from one ordained ministry to the next.” He argues that “the existence of a ‘transitional diaconate’ risks denigrating diaconal ministry by reducing it to a kind of pastoral internship or field education assignment.”¹⁷⁴

Phyllis Zagano points out that the ordination of women to the diaconate and to the priesthood are two different issues:

...there is no direct link between ordaining a woman as a deacon and ordaining a woman as a priest, except for the conflation of the diaconate into the priesthood in the West, and the concurrent reduction of the diaconate to a step on the way to priesthood. In other words, the permanent diaconate – of men and women – is just that. *Diaconal ordination does not imply priestly ordination* [our emphasis].¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Communication with the author, February 2020.

¹⁷² *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons*, 27-28.

¹⁷³ *Sacramental Orders*, 167, 170, 171.

¹⁷⁴ “On the Theological Integrity of the Diaconate,” in Cummings, Ditewig and Gaillardetz, *Theology of the Diaconate: The State of the Question* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 71.

¹⁷⁵ *Women in Ministry*, 12.

It is interesting to note that the Orthodox theologians already cited – Kyriaki FitzGerald and John Chryssavgis – do not consider the theory and practice of sequential or even cumulative ordination to be an obstacle to the female diaconate, although the Orthodox Churches firmly maintain the practice of the transitional diaconate. Ukrainian Catholic protodeacon David Kennedy sees a distinction between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox perspectives, while noting that “the Orthodox at present would require a presbyter to have been ordained to the diaconate first even if the man was a deacon for only a day.”

One problem with the RC position on the accumulation of orders is the doctrine on sacramental character that is imparted with baptism, confirmation, and each of the holy orders. While the actual doctrine says no more than these sacraments impart an indelible character that cannot be lost, which means it cannot be repeated if validly received, this has led the majority of RC sacramental theologians to teach that a presbyter is also a deacon.

The way around this is by looking at each order in the church not only ontologically and functionally, but also relationally. The deacon has a fundamentally different relationship with the bishop, the presbyters, and the laity than the way a presbyter or bishop relates to the other orders. Bishops and presbyters have oversight while deacons do not. This is not to say that the bishop or presbyter cannot do or function in some of the ways that a deacon does, but the presbyter no longer relates to others as a deacon, nor does he function as one. This is a much a matter of ecclesiology as it is of orders. The Orthodox do not teach a doctrine of sacramental character. An Orthodox priest would not vest as a deacon and function as such in a liturgical service. Deacons don't substitute for presbyters and presbyters don't act as deacons.¹⁷⁶

History, tradition, and solidarity with other episcopal Churches seem to be the real reasons for maintaining sequential ordination. Abolition of the transitional diaconate may be logical, historically justifiable and theologically sound. However, given a thousand-year history, the difficulty of reaching a consensus in the Anglican Communion, and ecumenical implications, it is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Yet ideally, Churches with the historic three-fold ministry of bishop, priest or presbyter, and deacon will one day ordain directly to the priesthood.

¹⁷⁶ Protodeacon B. David Kennedy, communications to the author, May-June 2021,

Conclusion

Until that day, we can promote the “distinctive” diaconate – as a permanent vocation for locally-raised-up, non-stipendiary ministry, and for professionally-trained stipendiary ministry too. A ministry symbolic of the *diakonia* of all believers, just as the presbyterate symbolizes the priesthood of all believers. An order which enables and encourages lay ministry. An order which is representational of the Church inside and outside the Church and helps carry out its mission beyond the gathered community.

Part of the problem for the diaconate has been simply the lack of deacons: if people don’t know and see what deacons are, there is no momentum to ordain more. On the other hand, the best argument for the diaconate is the presence and example of deacons. The diaconate will always rebound. It is resilient and irrepressible. It is, after all, an ancient form of ministry, rooted in the later New Testament, developing in the early Church and prospering in the first five centuries, in some cases the first millennium – and without interruption in the Eastern Churches. Despite a thousand years of neglect in the western Church, it has survived and revived.

We should not try to, indeed cannot, replicate in our era what the diaconate, male or female, may have been in past millennia. The office of deacon has developed and evolved considerably since then. Even if social activism and outreach do not fully correspond to the original meaning of *diakonia*, they are now increasingly associated with diaconal ministry in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern Churches, as they have always been in the Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed traditions. On the other hand, those traditions are rediscovering the value and importance of the liturgical and sacramental dimension of the diaconate. The deacon is called to a ministry of sacrament, word, and service in the *contemporary* Church. In the third millennium, the Holy Spirit is stirring us to make new and innovative uses of the ancient order of Deacons.

+++++

BIBLIOGRAPHY

* Available online from the Association of Episcopal Deacons

1. History and Theology of the Diaconate

- Barnett**, James Monroe. *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, Revised Edition. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995.
- Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 1982 (available online).
- Booty**, John E. *The Servant Church: Diaconal Ministry and the Episcopal Church*. Wilton, CT: Morehouse, 1982.
- Cerrato**, Dominic. *In the Person of Christ the Servant: A Theology of the Diaconate Based on the Personalist Thought of Pope John Paul II*. Bloomington, Ohio: St. Ephraem Press, 2014.
- Chryssavgis**, John. *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today*. Brookline, MS: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009.
- Collins**, John N. *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new*. Leominster: Gracewing; Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002.
- _____. *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- _____. *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Cummings**, Owen F. *Deacons and the Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.
- _____. *The Emerging Diaconate: Servant Leader in a Servant Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 2007.
- Cummings**, Owen F., William T. **Ditewig**, and Richard R. **Gaillardetz**. *Theology of the Diaconate: The State of the Question*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005.
- Ditewig**, William T. *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Echlin**, Edward P., SJ. *The Deacon in the Church: Past and Future*. New York: Alba House, 1971.
- Epting**, Susanne Watson. *Unexpected Consequences: The Diaconate Renewed*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2015.
- ***Grein**, Richard F. *Baptism and the Ministry of Deacons*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 1, 1987.
- _____. *The Renewal of the Diaconate and the Ministry of the Laos*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 3, 1991.
- Hall**, Christine, ed. *The Deacon's Ministry*. Leominster: Gracewing, 1992.
- Hallenbeck**, Edwin F., ed. *The Orders of Ministry. Reflections on Direct Ordination*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1996.
- Jackson**, D. Michael, ed. *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective: Ecclesiology, Liturgy and Practice*. Durham, Sacristy Press, 2019.
- ***Jeske**, Richard L. *The Role of the Deacon and the Unity of the Church*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 13, 2002.
- Keating**, James. *The Deacon Reader*. New York: Paulist Press, 2006.

- Maybee**, Maylanne. “The State of the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada,” in Richard Leggett, ed., *A Companion to the Waterloo Declaration: Commentary and Essays on Lutheran Anglican Relations in Canada*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1999.
- ***McArver**, Susan Wilds. *What Was Happening in Nineteenth-Century Germany That Ignited Diakonia?* Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 18, 2007.
- ***McCoy**, W. Keith. *The Deacon as a Para-Cleric*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 9, 1998.
- McKnight**, W. Shawn. *Understanding the Diaconate: Historical, Theological, and Sociological Foundations*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2018.
- Müller**, Gerhard Ludwig. *Priesthood and Diaconate: The Recipient of the Sacrament of Holy Orders from the Perspective of Creation Theology and Christology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002.
- Osborne**, Kenan B., OFM. *The Permanent Diaconate: Its History and Place in the Sacrament of Orders*. New York: Paulist Press, 2007.
- Plater**, Ormonde. *Deacons in the Episcopal Church*. Boston: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1988.
- ____ ed., **Historic Documents on the Diaconate*. Revised second printing. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 7, 1999.
- ____ *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*. Revised Edition. Cambridge, MS: Cowley Publications, 2004 (First Edition, 1991).
- ***Vena**, Osvaldo D. *Gospel Images of Jesus as Deacon: Upsetting the Hierarchies of His Culture*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 14, 2003.
- ***Willetts**, John W. *Deacon as Learner and Mentor for Today’s Church*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series, 2005.
- Wood**, Susan K., SCL. *Sacramental Orders*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000.
- Young**, Francis. *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015.

2. Ministry and Formation

- Avis**, Paul. *A Ministry Shaped by Mission*. London & New York: T&T Clark, 2005.
- Brown**, Rosalind. *Being a Deacon Today. Exploring a distinctive ministry in the Church and in the World*. Norwich: Canterbury Press; Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2005.
- Buelt**, Edward L. *A New Friendship: The Spirituality and Ministry of the Deacon*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011.
- Clark**, David. *Building Kingdom Communities – with the diaconate as a new order of mission*. Peterborough, UK: Upfront Publishing, 2016.
- ____ *The gift of a renewed diaconate and the contribution of British Methodism*. Peterborough, UK: Upfront Publishing, 2018.
- Cormier**, Jay. *The Deacon’s Ministry of the Word*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.
- Ditewig**, William T. *The Deacon’s Ministry of Charity and Justice*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015.
- ____ ed. *Forming Deacons: Ministers of Soul and Leaven*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.

- _____. *To Be and to Serve: The Ministerial Identity of the Deacon*. St. Meinrad IN: Abbey Press Publications, 2015.
- ***Epting**, Susanne Watson. *Prophetic Voice of the Deacon*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 19, 2008.
- ***Ferguson**, Thomas. *Lifting Up the Servants of God: The Deacon, Servant Ministry, and the Future of the Church*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 12, 2008.
- Flanagan**, John P. *The Joy of Being a Deacon*. Totowa, NJ: Resurrection Press, Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 2016.
- ***Hallenback**, Edwin F., ed. *Guidelines for Deacon Programs*. Second Edition. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 2002.
- Hughes**, Alfred C., Frederick F. **Campbell**, and William T. **Ditewig**. *Today's Deacon: Contemporary Issues and Cross-Currents*. New York: Paulist Press, 2006.
- Kasper**, Walter. "The Diaconate," in *Leadership in the Church: How Traditional Roles Can Serve the Christian Community Today*. New York: Crossroad, 2003.
- Keating**, James. *A Deacon's Retreat*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.
- _____. ed. *The Character of the Deacon: Spiritual and Pastoral Foundations*. New York: Paulist Press, 2017.
- _____. *The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ*. New York: Paulist Press, 2015.
- _____. *Remain In Me: Holy Orders, Prayer, and Ministry*. New York: Paulist Press, 2019.
- Kimber**, Gill. *Deacon by Design: The ups and downs of an Anglican deacon*. Worthing, UK: Verité CM, 2019.
- Maybee**, Maylaine (ed.). *All Who Minister: New Ways of Serving God's People*. Toronto: ABC Publishing, 2001.
- McCaslin**, Patrick, and Michael G. **Lawler**. *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Orton**, Andrew, and Todd Stockdale. *Making Connections: Exploring Methodist Deacons' Perspectives on Contemporary Diaconal Ministry*. Durham, UK: Sacristy Press, 2014.
- Petrolino**, Deacon Enzo. *Pope Francis. Deacons: Servants of Charity*. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018.
- ***Plater**, Ormonde, ed. *Deacons in the Episcopal Church: Guidelines on their selection, training, and ministry*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1991.
- ***Watson**, Susanne K. *Formation of Ministering Christians*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 11, 1999.
- ***Williams**, Louise. *Growing in Ministry: Formation for Diaconal Service*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series 1999.
- Zagano**, Phyllis. *Called to Serve. A Spirituality for Deacons*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2004.

3. Women and the Diaconate

- FitzGerald**, Kyriaki Karidoyanes. *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry*. Brookline, MS: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999.
- Gryson**, Roger. *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*. Translated by Jean Laporte and Mary-Louise Hall from French original, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne*. Recherches d'histoire 4 (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972). Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1976.

- Macy**, Gary, William T. **Ditewig**, and Phyllis **Zagano**. *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future*. New York: Paulist Press, 2012.
- Madigan**, Kevin, and Carolyn **Osiek**, eds. and translators. *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Martimort**, Aimé Georges. *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*. Translated by K.D. Whitehead from French original, *Les Diaconesses: Essai historique* (Rome: C.L.V. Edizioni Liturgiche, 1982). San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.
- Vagaggini**, Cipriano. *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*. Edited by Phyllis Zagano. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013.
- Wijngaards**, John. *The Ordained Women Deacons of the Church's First Millennium*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011.
- ___ *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church: Unmasking a Cuckoo's Egg Tradition*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: Continuum, 2001.
- ___ *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005; New York: Crossroad, 2006.
- Zagano**, Phyllis. *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*. New York: Crossroad, 2000.
- ___ *Women & Catholicism: Gender, Communion, and Authority*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- ___ ed. *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.
- ___ *Women in Ministry: Emerging Questions about the Diaconate*. New York: Paulist Press 2012.
- ___ *Women: Icons of Christ*. New York: Paulist Press, 2020.

4. Liturgy and Worship

- The Alternative Service Book, 1980*. Cambridge University Press; Colchester: William Clowes; London: SPCK, 1980.
- The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985.
- The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the use of The Anglican Church of Canada*. Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the use of The Episcopal Church*. The Church Hymnal Corporation and the Seabury Press, 1977.
- Common Worship: Services and Prayers of the Church of England*. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.
- The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Canadian edition*. Ottawa: Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.
- Public Distribution of Holy Communion by Deacons and Lay Persons*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987.
- Bauerschmidt**, Frederick C. *The Deacon's Ministry of the Liturgy*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016.
- Ditewig**, William T. *The Deacon at Mass: A Theological and Pastoral Guide*. Second Edition. New York: Paulist Press, 2013.

- Hefling**, Charles. *What Do We Bless And Why?* Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 15, 2003.
- Jackson**, D. Michael. *The Deacon in the Worshipping Community*. Diocese of Qu'Appelle, 2021.
- Kwatera**, Michael, OSB. *Come to the Feast: Liturgical Theology of, by, and for Everybody*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006.
- _____. *The Liturgical Ministry of Deacons*. 2nd Revised Edition. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005.
- _____. *Preparing the General Intercessions*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996.
- Pecklers**, Keith F., SJ. *Worship: A Primer in Christian Ritual*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- Plater**, Ormonde. *Deacons in the Liturgy*, Second Edition. New York: Church Publishing, 2009 (First Edition, 1992).
- _____. *Intercessions: A Theological and Practical Guide*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995.
- _____. **Music and Deacons*. Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, Monograph Series No. 8, 1995.
- Robinson**, Denis, OSB, ed. *Ordained to Serve: Prayers and Blessings for Permanent Deacons*. St. Meinrad IN: Abbey Press Publications, 2015.
- Stevenson**, Kenneth. *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989).

5. Reports

- The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*. Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation. London: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996.
- To Love and Serve the Lord: Diakonia in the Life of the Church. The Jerusalem Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*. Lutheran World Federation and Anglican Communion, 2012 (available online).
- “The Diaconate as a Distinct Order of Ministry,” in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1998*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999.
- The Distinctive Diaconate. A Report to the Board of Ministry, the Diocese of Salisbury*. Salisbury: Sarum College Press, 2003.
- For such a time as this. A renewed diaconate in the Church of England*. A report to the General Synod of the Church of England of a Working Party of the House of Bishops. London: Church House Publishing, 2001.
- The Iona Report: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. Toronto: The General Synod, The Anglican Church of Canada, 2016 (available online).
- The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives*. Church of England Faith and Order Advisory Group. London: General Synod, 2007.
- A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. General Synod Committee on Ministry. Toronto: Anglican Church of Canada, 1989 (available online).
- Truly Called by God to Serve as a Deacon*, The Report of the Bishops Working Group on Distinctive Diaconate. Edinburgh: General Synod Office, Scottish Episcopal Church, 1987.
- Truly Called...Two*. Edinburgh: General Synod Office, Scottish Episcopal Church, 2012.

6. Selected Websites

Anglican Deacons Canada (ADC) www.anglicandeacons.ca

Association for Episcopal Deacons (AED) www.episcopaldeacons.org

Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC) [DOTAC \(diakonia-world.org\)](http://DOTAC(diakonia-world.org))

Diakonia World Federation [Home - DIAKONIA World Federation \(diakonia-world.org\)](http://Home-DIAKONIAWorldFederation(diakonia-world.org))

Deacon Stories (ed. Deacon Gill Kimber) <https://deaconstories.wordpress.com>

Lutheran Diaconal Association [Lutheran Diaconal Association \(thelda.org\)](http://LutheranDiaconalAssociation(thelda.org))

Methodist Diaconal Order [The Diaconal Order \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://TheDiaconalOrder(methodist.org.uk))