

**DEACONS AND THEIR  
MINISTRIES**

**In the Episcopal Church**

*As reported by*

**Deacons**

**In**

**2008 & 1978**

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## **I. FOREWORD: The Diaconate and Design of the Study**

For those who will become and are deacons, their ongoing integration of mission discernment, theological education, experiential learning and spiritual formation is vital. This combination, differently shaped by ministry contexts, was seen as key to the future of the diaconate by diocesan and national leaders several decades ago. Leaders of the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD) have reaffirmed and highlighted these as essential components of diaconal formation and life-long learning. Deacons raise the importance of diocesan and national attention to defining and publicizing the diaconate and supporting deacons in their ministries.

### **A. Research on the Diaconate Thirty Years Ago**

Thirty years ago when the number of “permanent deacons” was under 600 in the USA, bishops, ordained and lay leaders raised questions about whether the diaconate was sufficiently “distinctive” to support its expansion. There were concerns raised by some about whether the expansion of the diaconate might impede the employability of priests or undermine the ministry of laypersons. Notwithstanding, a strong majority of a special committee appointed to analyze studies of the diaconate and make recommendations to the House of Bishops, concluded there existed potential value in the diaconate as an order that would “live out more clearly the understanding of the Church as the servant (diaconal) people of God.”<sup>1</sup> Still, the committee noted much ambiguity as to what this might involve in practice, what was unique about the diaconate, and how deacons, priests and laity could work together non-hierarchically in service to the world as an all-inclusive people of God. Therefore, this 1979 committee felt changes had to be made in the diaconate, as it had been previously understood, to fulfill this potential.<sup>2</sup> They recommended strongly that new models of selection and training be developed for the “new style” deacons and tested, with another report to the House of Bishops about five years hence.

Accordingly, in 1985 an evaluative research study of the diaconal programs in eight dioceses was completed.<sup>3</sup> In reflecting on the results for this report, Dr. Timothy

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Diaconate (Rt. Rev. Elliott Sorge, Chair), “The Future of the Diaconate: Recommendations to the House of Bishops” in *The Church, the Diaconate, the Future*, the Report of the Diaconate, submitted by the Council for the Development of Ministry to the House of Bishops, The General Convention, September 1979, Denver, Colorado. Quote Part III, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Diaconate, 1979, op.cit, p.2: “The disparity between the vision of diaconal ministry of servanthood and the actuality of a diaconate which is often seen -- and often sees itself -- as a minor order of priesthood understandably evokes the apparently conflicting responses ... There is reluctance on the part of many to continue support of the diaconate in its present form. At the same time, there is great interest in developing a Diaconate which would be distinctive from and yet enhancing the ministry of other clergy and of the laity.”

<sup>3</sup> Permanent Diaconate Evaluation Committee (D. Barry Menezes, Chair and Executive; Education for Mission and Ministry Unit, Rev. John Docker, Field Officer, Council for the Development of Ministry)

Sedgwick concluded that although there was great interest and activity concerning the viability of the diaconate within the eight dioceses, and that the importance of “professional” education and training for this order had been validated, there remained much diversity in opinions and hence confusion as to what was distinctive about ministry of deacons. <sup>4</sup> Since Sedgwick argued the successful “recruitment and selection, education, placement, supervision and support of deacons is dependent upon a clear conception of the diaconate that is shared throughout a diocese,” this meant that there was much still to be done for the diaconate “to be an effective sacramental sign of our common ministry of servanthood in Christ.” <sup>5</sup>

## **B. Research on the Diaconate in 2008**

The number of deacons in the USA has increased from 600 in 1978 to over 2,600 in 2008. Though there has been limited Church wide attention to the diaconate since the mid-eighties, the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD) has continued its voluntary work as a resource center, major initiator, and repository of information about educational innovations, reflections and assessments of diaconal formation programs. In the last twelve years NAAD has sponsored yearly conferences of formation directors, deacons and archdeacons to share their ideas and issues on how best to educate deacons and sustain interest in diaconal ministries. In 2008, Proclaiming Education for All (PEALL) supported two surveys connected with the diaconate. In the spring of 2008, Deacon Susanne Watson Epting, Executive Director of NAAD, Deacon John Willets, and researcher, Adair Lummis, with the input of other members of NAAD and PEALL, developed two surveys.

The first or “school survey” was an email survey sent in early March to directors of diocesan schools/diaconal formation programs who attended NAAD conferences. Most of the survey questions represent areas known by NAAD leaders to be of current importance in developing diaconal formation programs. A report on this study, from the 30 diocesan schools represented, was readied for discussion at conferences of archdeacons and directors in the spring and fall of 2008. Some of the findings from that survey will be cited in this report.

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*Raising up Servant Ministry: Eight Dioceses Work Toward the Future of the Diaconate and the Enablement of Servant Ministry*; The Episcopal Church Center, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Sedgwick identified the “need to have a coherently developed theology of diaconal ministry that is shared by the diocese as a whole. Such a theology moreover needs to include a clear description of what a deacon is and is to do. The report... (notes) five roles of the deacon as (1) a symbol of servant ministry, (2) someone committed to the development and execution of a ministry; (3) a liturgist and in most situations a preacher, (4) an authorized leader in the Church, (5) an enabler of lay ministry. These roles may indeed complement each other; however, they more accurately reflect a range of expectation that are too often taken for granted as complementary when in fact they reflect significant tensions between fundamentally different concepts of ministry and the diaconate that is unresolved.” See Timothy Sedgwick, p.3, “Foreword,” in *Raising Up Servant Ministry*, op.cit, (1985).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

The second or the “deacons’ survey” is a web survey. We were fortunate that survey (questions and percentage responses are available for deacons surveyed thirty years ago. Some of the 1978 questions asked were included in the 2008 survey to get trend data, and other questions were added that were particularly important in the education and ministries of deacons currently. Susanne Watson Epting directed the research effort overall and distributed the survey to deacons on various listservs as well as to deacons known to be in leadership positions. By late October, over 780 surveys had been received.

This report is primarily based on the results of the “deacon’s survey” in 2008, and secondarily on comparisons to deacons responding in 1978. Although only 2008 and 1978 are national samples of deacons, some comparisons where possible are made to responses on similar questions from deacons in eight dioceses experimenting with diaconal programs in 1983.<sup>6</sup>

### **C. Personal Characteristics of Deacons Present and Past**

The increase of women is the most dramatic change in the personal characteristics of deacons currently compared to those surveyed thirty years ago. Over four-fifths (83%) of those surveyed nationally in 1978 were men. In 1983, in the eight-diocese survey of deacons, the proportion of men had dropped to a little over two-thirds (69%). By the 2008 national survey of deacons, women made up a three-fifths (60%) majority of those responding. However, in all three surveys over 90% of the deacons are white.

There are proportionately fewer deacons now than earlier with salaried employment (58% in 2008, 63% in 1983, and 70% in 1978. This is possibly because in 2008 three-fifths of the deacons surveyed are age sixty or older. Although at least three-fourths of the deacons surveyed in both 1978 and 2008 had at least a two-year college degree; deacons in 2008 have garnered substantially more formal educational degrees (not necessarily prior to ordination).<sup>7</sup> Gender of deacons in 2008 is unrelated to whether they have salaried employment, or their age, or their educational attainment.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Direct comparisons between surveys of deacons can be made best where the question wording is identical. The comparative figures, when available, are given in the Appendix for each item. Crosstabulations and correlations between survey items can only be run for the 2008 data.

<sup>7</sup>See Appendix, page 24, q. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Somewhat over a fourth (27%) of the 2008 deacons had church employment of some type. Next most prevalent paid jobs were: working in a secular health or social work institutions (16%), or as executives, professionals in business or civil service organizations (16%). Deacons were also employed in educational institutions, as technical or financial specialists, as civil service and military personnel, and in a variety of other occupations

## **II. Formation of Deacons**

### **A. Review: The 2008 Diaconal Formation/School Study**

In 2008 as was true in 1978 and 1985, although the areas of education and skills for diaconal ordination are written into canon law (Title III, Canon 6), dioceses decide the amount of emphasis and the appropriate way in which to educate deacons-in-formation in each area. Both diocesan and program leaders' values, length of time the diocesan school or program has been in existence, as well as the contextual resources and restrictions of the dioceses affect the kind of diaconal formation program available to prospective deacons. Some dioceses had well-established programs with a core-curriculum of both required and elective courses in the five requisite areas of competence (per Title III Ministry Canons: Academic studies including; The Holy Scriptures, theology and tradition of the Church; Diakonia and the diaconate; Human awareness and understanding; Spiritual development and discipline; Practical training and experience), collegial sharing groups, spiritual formation counselors, and appropriate field experiences. In contrast, some dioceses had no set diaconal formation of their own, and sent aspirants to schools or seminaries of other dioceses or other denominations.

In 2008 some diocesan programs trained both future lay professionals and deacons, other were only open to deacons. In most of the programs, diaconal students needed to take at least some required courses to complete the program, although at over half the programs students could fulfill requirements by taking some elective courses within their program or another institution. Life experience portfolios may be required as part of the discernment process. Nearly three-fifths of the programs, however, did not accept "life experiences" as academic credit per se. Some dioceses require the same amount of CPE for those headed for the diaconate as for the priesthood; some require fewer units of CPE for deacons, some only require CPE for deacons headed for chaplaincy, and some dioceses prefer deacons forego CPE training in favor of field training in community ministries.<sup>9</sup>

### **B. Educational Credits for Ordination Requirements**

Seventy percent of the deacons responding to the 2008 survey were ordained since 1995, over half (56%) within the last eight years. Their experiences, while not reflective of all schools within the last few years, nonetheless represent diaconal education in far more dioceses (approximately 80) than those 30 dioceses represented in the 2008 "school study" just reviewed.

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<sup>9</sup> More information on current diaconal programs across dioceses can be found in the report entitled: "Diocesan Formation Programs and Schools," (and appendix). NAAD and PEALL, October 2008.

Most deacons in 2008 were prepared for ordination in diocesan schools or programs, proportionately twice as many as thirty years ago.<sup>10</sup> In addition to -- or in some cases instead of -- diocesan schools/formation programs, a fifth (20%) of the deacons responding both in 2008 and 1978 prepared by “reading on my own” from lists received from examining chaplains, and proportionately somewhat more in both years (37% and 30% respectively) engaged in “study with mentors.”

Among the 2008 sample, deacons who graduated more recently from their formation program, particularly within the last three years, are slightly more likely than those ordained earlier to have taken “mentored practice or supervised field work” as part of their requirements.<sup>11</sup>

### **C. Assessment of Educational Areas Taught**

Coverage of the “classics” (bible, theology and church history) in diaconal programs currently and thirty years ago was assessed by a strong majority responding as at least “good”. *Depth and coverage of biblical subjects* and *Coverage of church history* were rated “good” to “excellent” according to four-fifths of deacons responding in both years, and *Christian and moral theology, including Christian ethics* was deemed almost equally as good by a clear majority. Similarly, around three-fourths of the deacons in both years, but particularly in 2008 assessed as “good” to “excellent” what they learned about: *Theological understanding of the ministry of the bishop, priest, deacon, and laity and how these ministries are distinguished from and support one another generally*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, a number of deacons indicated they wanted more academic depth or these subjects taught more at a graduate level than was true in their particular program.<sup>13</sup> As for the area on *national and diocesan canons in 2008*, the majority felt that what they got was “fair” at best.

Deacons were somewhat less pleased with the education received in preaching and liturgy. Although deacons in 2008 were slightly more likely than deacons in 1978 to indicate their education was at least “good” in *Preaching, homiletics or public speaking* (51% to 40% respectively), even in 2008 about a fifth of the deacons responding said coverage of this area was “absent” or “poor” in their formation program. In questions worded only for the 2008 survey, over three-fourths of the current deacons rated what

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix to [this](#) report, page 3. In 2008, 87% of the deacons met educational ordination requirements in diocesan schools/programs compared to 41% in 1978. The full range of responses of 2008 deacons on how they met education requirements can also be found there.

<sup>11</sup> This item is only in the 2008 survey. In illustration, 42% of deacons ordained before 1990 compared to 63% ordained in 2005-2008 had taken mentored practice/field work to fulfill their diaconal educational requirements ( $r = -.15$ , sig.  $.001$ ).

<sup>12</sup> The percentage distributions on answers for these course areas and others to be discussed, for deacons responding in 2008 and where possible in 1978, are found in the Appendix, pp. 4-6.

<sup>13</sup> There were quite a number of written comments in 2008 from deacons about what they wished now they had more on in their diaconal training program. See Appendix, pp 8-12.

they received as “good” to “excellent” in: *Understanding of the role of the deacon in a variety of liturgical settings, and facility with the Book of Common Prayer, Hymnal, and other appropriate resources*. Several deacons, however, wrote comments to the effect that they needed more “hands-on” training in liturgy.

In education for diaconal ministries of caring for individuals and methods of working with church groups, responses to questions worded for the 2008 survey are somewhat mixed. Although over two-thirds of the current deacons assessed their training in *pastoral care* as at least “good”, only a third indicated this would be true on the question of how well their programs did in teaching them: *Skills in conflict management, working with volunteers and group dynamics*.

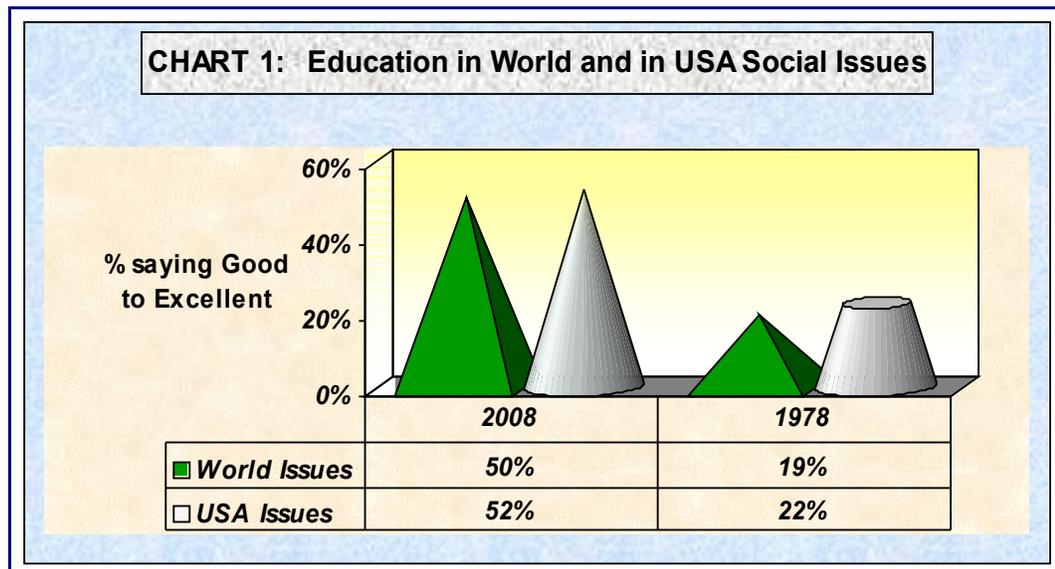
The quality of relationships students have with advisors, faculty and other students is an important part of their education. In both 2008 and 1978, somewhat over half of the deacons said *Opportunities for obtaining vocational guidance from faculty, assigned advisors, and counselors* were “good” to “excellent”. Similarly, a question asked of deacons in 2008, indicated that three-fifths gave at least a “good” rating to: *Opportunities for spiritual development and discipline with a spiritual director*. Peer learning and interaction was far better for deacons now on the average than thirty years ago. Although 46% of the deacons rated as “good” to “excellent” their *Opportunities for social and intellectual interaction, mutual support, etc. with other students studying for the diaconate* in 1978, fully 75% of the deacons in 2008 did so. This last improvement is likely due to more diocesan schools now underlining the importance of “community based” learning and providing opportunities for students to theologically reflect with peers on their ministries. Several suggested giving diaconal students more opportunities to interact with deacons during their formation program, possibly by having “already ordained” deacons are on the faculty.

Rather dramatically and in accord with 1978-1985 vision of developing formation for the “new style” deacon, diaconal education provided for diaconal ministry to assist individuals and groups in the congregation and community appears to have improved in 2008. From a positive perspective, the following areas are better in 2008

*Factual and conceptual background in:*

- a. *World issues affecting the Church, particularly international problems of poverty and hunger; or*
- b. *Contemporary social issues in the United States – particularly issues of race, class and gender.*

The following chart shows the proportion of deacons assessing education in these areas as “good” to “excellent” in the present compared to thirty years ago.



A principle delineated recently by NAAD as common to *quality* deacon formation programs is education in understanding the needs and concerns of the world today, including current social issues in USA and globally. As depicted above, clearly substantial advances have been made in meeting this educational goal.

More education to fulfill this principle, however, is desired by a number of deacons. Missing areas named by deacons in 2008 about their formation programs, included more on: justice issues such racism and homophobia; interfaith, immigration and cultural issues, as well as social issues most important in the Episcopal Church,

#### **D. Overall Value of Education Received and Other Wanted**

A key dynamic in any quality professional educational is the extent to which the “academic” aspects of the program are integrated with practical training needed for future work. Currently, diaconal formation programs appear generally to be somewhat better in their *integration of academic and practical work* than thirty years ago. In 1978 only about two-fifths of the deacons surveyed said such *integration* in their formation program was “good” to “excellent”, while approximately three-fifths of the deacons in 2008 gave this high a rating. Still, two fifths of the deacons in 2008 apparently now wish they had more assistance in integrating their “book” knowledge better with their learning how to carrying out various diaconal ministries.

In assessing the overall value of their diaconal education for their present ministries as deacons, about a four-fifths majority indicated their education has been at least “quite useful” in both 2008 and 1978, and around half said “very useful”.<sup>14</sup> At the same time,

<sup>14</sup> Slightly under or over half in 2008 (45%) and in 1978 (52%) indicated their diaconal training has been “very useful” to their diaconal ministry. See Appendix, question 32, page 12 for the full distribution.

slightly over half (53%) agreed there were *other areas or subjects* that they now wish *had been offered* in their diaconal programs.<sup>15</sup>

The more positively 2008 deacons assessed what they obtained in each of the curricular areas listed, the more highly they evaluated their overall diaconal education and training as useful to their present ministry. Yet the most important factor in (1) how useful they have found their diaconal education and (2) whether they wish other areas or subjects had been offered in their program, is the degree to which their program *integrated* academic and practical learning:

TABLE 1

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT	INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL WORK			
	<i>Absent/Poor</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
% Program “Very Useful”	16%	23%	47%	88%
% Yes, Wish had Other Subjects	74%	62%	48%	40%

Some deacons wished that their formations programs had included more curricular attention to: preparing sermons and preaching, deacons’ liturgical activities, and CPE or directed clinical pastoral study. A large number also mentioned their need to acquire interpersonal skills important for the development of diaconal ministry, such as: motivating volunteers, group facilitation, community organizing, advocacy skills, dealing with local politics, and greater instruction on conflict management. Several would have welcomed more courses on organizational and financial administration, or as one put it, “the business end of non-profits.”<sup>16</sup>

### **E. The Ordination Vows and Charges**

Deacons surveyed in 2008 were asked: *How well did your diaconal formation program prepare you for fulfilling each of your ordination vows?* For all five charges (and the attendant vows) in turn, deacons were asked to respond how “prepared” they were to meet each.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The deacons indicating a wish for course areas not included in their program were somewhat more likely to be those who were not fully satisfied with their diaconal program (r = .25, sig. = .001)

<sup>16</sup> For such areas named as absent but desirable in formation programs, see Appendix, Pp 8-10.

<sup>17</sup> The Appendix, page 7, gives the percent indicating how well deacons felt prepared on each, which are: (1) To study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them and to model your life upon them. (2) To make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live and work and worship. (3) To interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. (4) To assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God’s Word and Sacraments and

Deacons in about three-fourths majority indicated that they felt at least “quite well prepared” by their diaconal formation to fulfill every one of the vows. At the same time, less than two-fifths felt “fully prepared” on any of the five. Deacons who felt well prepared to meet one vow were also significantly likely to feel well prepared to meet each of the other four. The higher rating deacons gave to any one of the listed educational areas in their diaconal program, the better prepared they also felt to fulfill each of the five vows. Some components, however, appear to be somewhat more important for meeting one vow than another.

The charge for which more deacons feel they needed more education/training than they received is being: *Prepared: To interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.* A little over a fourth (28%) of the 2008 sample indicated that they were “somewhat prepared” to do this at best. Deacons who felt well prepared were more apt to be those who gained credits in part by *mentored practice or supervised fieldwork*. Further, the better deacons perceived their formation program had *integrated academic and practical work*, the far more positively they viewed their program as preparing them to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.<sup>18</sup>

The second charge for which deacons were somewhat more likely to have wanted more in their programs is: *Prepared: To study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them and to model your life upon them.* A little under a fourth (23%) indicated they were “somewhat prepared” to do this at best. Deacons who felt best prepared by their formation program to study and model their lives on the Holy Scriptures, were those also particularly likely to give high ratings to the *depth and coverage of biblical subjects, the Holy Scriptures* in their formation programs.<sup>19</sup>

Deacons seem to have formed their assessments on how well they were prepared to meet the other three ordination vows more variously through components of their formation programs, and because most, four-fifths or more, indicated they felt at least “quite well prepared” to meet each. Education for diaconal formation is not the only way deacons become prepared to fulfill their ordination vows. Experience as a deacon can also contribute to greater preparation for meeting the intent of each vow, as will be discussed in the next section.

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you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. (5) At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.

<sup>18</sup> In illustration, 86% of the deacons who had such field work compared to 66% of those who did not feel at least “quite well prepared” to fulfill Vow 3 ( $r = .16$ , sig.  $.0001$ ). Among deacons who saw themselves as “fully prepared” for Vow 3, 59% rated the integration in their program as “excellent”, 25% “good”, 7% “fair”, and 6% “absent/poor” ( $r = .50$ , sig.  $.0001$ ).

<sup>19</sup> In illustration, among deacons who saw themselves as *at least* “quite well prepared” for meeting Vow 1, 97% rated the depth and coverage of biblical subjects in their program as “excellent”, 79% “good”, 41% “fair”, and 28% “absent/poor” ( $r = .56$ , sig.  $.0001$ ).

### **III. Diaconal Deployment and Ministries**

#### **A. Where Deacons Minister and How Long**

Most deacons after ordination are assigned either to their home parish (57%) or to another parish (59%) depending on the diocesan regulations, sometimes negotiations with the deacon and rectors, and sometimes simply where the bishop wants the particular deacon to go. About a third said that in their dioceses deacons were assigned in both ways presently, such as sending the deacon to another parish for a year or so before he or she could return to the home parish. Only a fifth said that assigning deacons to agencies or other nonparochial organizations, as the major or sole diaconal ministry was at all typical their dioceses. Many deacons, as will be described later, although they may have a parish base for their diaconal ministries, also have specific ministries within secular educational, health care and community organizations as well as in diocesan offices. In whatever ways deacons are assigned after ordination, the important thing is that they have some assignment. In a few dioceses, the bishop or archdeacon does not assign new deacons to any site or supervisor, and they must find their own ministry location wherever, or as deacon put it, be “assigned to obscurity.”

Over four-fifths (86%) of deacons responding in 1978 were appointed to a congregation. Fewer in 2008 or two-thirds (67%) were assigned to congregations, and some of these deacons might serve two or more congregations, or more typically, have a combined appointment in a congregation and a chaplaincy appointment (school, police, prison, etc). Only about ten percent of the deacons in 2008 had a non-parochial assignment primarily or exclusively. These non-parochial deacons were often in health-care organizations, such as hospitals, hospices, and nursing homes. Some carry out their diaconal work solely within prisons or for police and fire departments, but more seem to combine these ministries with their parochial ones. Deacons who are chaplains or teachers in secondary schools, universities or in diocesan schools often have some at least secondary congregational appointment. Deacons heavily engaged in crisis counseling, or providing shelter and food to needy usually have a parish assignment as well, although a few are devoting the bulk of their time as staff of the providing organizations.<sup>20</sup>

As was the case thirty years ago, deacons in 2008 vary widely in how many hours they give at the location where they are assigned: from 25% who give 6 or fewer hours, to those who work 16 hours or more weekly. Neither age, nor gender, nor whether the deacons have secular employment have any significant relationship to the number of hours they devote weekly to diaconal ministries. However, financial recognition of the worth of their ministries does to some extent. Those few who are paid a salary of sorts particularly, but also the larger proportions of those who have a discretionary fund and/or are reimbursed for expenses are more likely to work a few more hours than those without. Deacons in larger congregations give more time weekly to their ministries than do those

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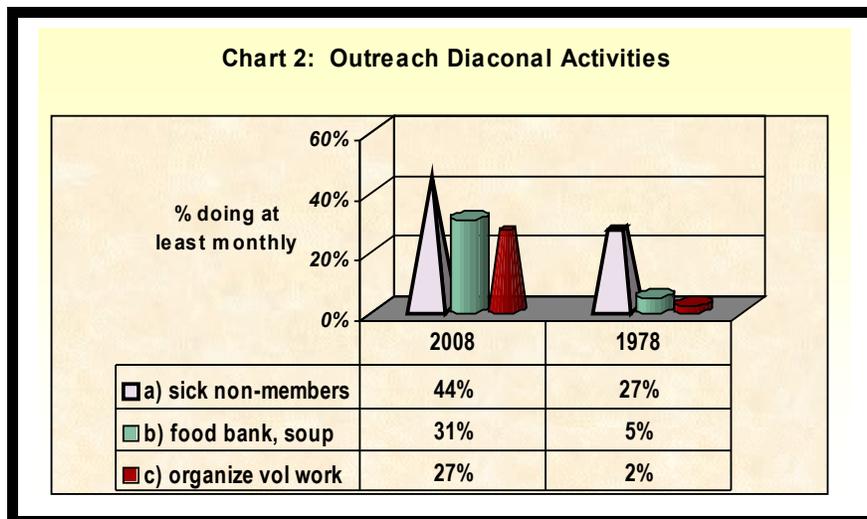
<sup>20</sup> For more breakdowns on current location of assignment, see Appendix, p. 15. The varieties of non-parochial ministries in which deacons are engaged are described in Appendix, pp. 16-18.

in smaller congregations,<sup>21</sup> probably because there are more ministry opportunities in the larger congregations, and possibly too because larger congregations have more funds for deacons' continuing education.

## **B. Present Ministries and Prior Education**

On the whole, deacons now do not differ significantly from deacons thirty years ago in the more pastoral diaconal activities. *At least monthly*, about two-fifths preached, two-fifths attended Vestry meetings, about a third counseled adults in crisis and bereavement, slightly under a third taught adult classes/ led bible study/ prayer groups among deacons in both 2008 and 1978. Few deacons in either year did anything with youth, children, or in counseling church youth or their parents. Thirty years ago deacons were somewhat more likely to visit the parish sick at least monthly than now (64% to 52% respectively). Deacons now are slightly more likely to officiate at baptisms, wedding or funerals at least several times years than thirty years ago (39% to 23% respectively).

In terms of outreach ministries, however, deacons in 2008 are far more active than 1978. In 1978, although only 28% *never* (a) “Ministered to hospice/hospital/nursing home patients who were non-parishioners,” 75% said they *never* spent any time in (b) “Food bank and soup kitchen outreach ministries,” and 63% *never* gave time to (c) “Organizing volunteer work or donation drives for worthy causes.” In contrast, deacons in 2008 were involved significantly more than those in 1978 in each of these ministries.



<sup>21</sup> Correlations between more hours worked and: are reimbursed for expenses (r -.19, sig. .01), do have a discretionary fund (-.16, sig. .001), are paid something for their diaconal time (-.31, sig. .001), have some funds for continuing education (-.16, sig. .01), and are in larger congregations (.20, sig. .001).

Advancing “mutual ministry”<sup>22</sup> and being an “enabler of lay ministry”<sup>23</sup> has been strongly affirmed as a central deacon’s role since the 1970’s. In 2008, there is probably more attention to also teach deacons when they should be doing counseling or organizing community outreach themselves and when it is more effective to refer those wanting counseling to others and to steer individuals to organizations already providing the resources or networks they need. In addition to the activities above, two other potential diaconal activities were added to the 2008 survey to explore these aspects: (1) *Involve, empower lay members for ministry*; and (2) *Counseling and resource referrals for needy in and outside of the parish*. Deacons in 2008 are rather divided in how much time they have given either. However, slightly over half of those surveyed were active in one or the other at least monthly (and if one, usually both).<sup>24</sup>

Getting congregational members active in ministry, whether it called “mutual ministry” or “enabling lay ministry,” as indicated, can be difficult and certainly takes time and interpersonal skills to accomplish effectively. It may noteworthy that those deacons who are active in “empowering lay members for ministry” are also somewhat more likely to be those who during their formation program had (according to their own ratings) good curricular components in:

1. Theological understanding of the ministry of the bishop, priest, deacon and laity and how these ministries are distinguished from and support one another generally.
2. Pastoral care
3. Opportunities for spiritual development and discipline with a spiritual director
4. Integration of academic and practical work.<sup>25</sup>

Not everything needed to stimulate lay ministry effectively is learned in formation programs. Deacons who are frequently active in organizing lay ministries (particularly weekly), are also more likely to have taken continuing education and have a learning plan for the coming year than deacons who less often or very seldom attempt to get lay members involved in ministries.<sup>26</sup>

Advocacy activities were added to the 2008 survey to better capture what deacons in the twenty-first century might be doing to change social policies in their communities and nation. Advocacy is not an activity that most deacons engage in often. At the same

<sup>22</sup> In the late seventies, dioceses were (or hoped to be) then experimenting with designing diaconal formation programs that taught students how “to come to the understanding and practice of mutual ministry.” Quote p. 12 in The Council for the Development of Ministry and the National Center for the Diaconate, *Consultation on the Diaconate: The Next Step in the Re-Examination of the Diaconate in the Life of the Episcopal Church*, (Episcopal Church Center, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> The discussion of the deacons as professional “enablers of lay ministry” and the difficulties in teaching deacons (and priests) how to motivate and organize volunteers in the congregation and elsewhere is throughout the report, *Raising Up Servant Ministry* (1985), op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Those who are active in one are significantly more likely to often be active in the other. (r .36 sig. .001).

<sup>25</sup> Statistically significant correlations (sig. .001 level or better) between deacons’ frequency of “involving, empowering lay members for ministry and: courses taken: (1) r -.15; (2) r -.14, (3) r -.15 (4) r -.13.

<sup>26</sup>

Correlation with frequency (esp. weekly) and taking continuing ed (r .19) and having learning plan (.17).

time, less than a fifth of the deacons never engage in “*advocacy activities on the behalf of homeless, families at risk*” and almost two-fifths are so engaged at least monthly. Fewer deacons are active in “*advocacy, grassroots organizing on the behalf of ethnic minorities*. Such “grassroots organizing” for ethnic minorities (or probably any social cause) is never engaged in by two-fifths of the deacons, and less than a fifth are active monthly or more. Deacons likely may feel more confident to undertake advocacy if they know something about the social and cultural situation of those for whom they are trying to change laws and policies. At any rate, deacons who indicated they had good courses during their formations programs in factual and conceptual background both in world issues affecting the Church (particularly poverty and hunger) and in contemporary social issues in the United States (particularly race, class and gender) were more likely to engage in advocacy for the poor and for ethnic minorities.<sup>27</sup>

Advocacy activities fit better perhaps with some diaconal ministries than others. Deacons who are active in one of these advocacy causes are very much apt to be active in the other. Furthermore, it seems that deacons who are grassroots organizers for changing social policies also have experience in referrals for the needy getting material resources or counseling. Deacons who are more frequently active in “involving, empowering lay members for ministry” are also more likely to engage in advocacy. Similarly deacons who fairly often “organize volunteer work or donation drives for worthy causes” or are involved in “food bank and soup kitchen outreach ministries” are among those deacons significantly more likely to be active advocates and grassroots organizers for families and individuals at risk and for obtaining greater equity for ethnic minorities.<sup>28</sup>

Deacons in 2008 who more frequently expended efforts in *empowering lay ministry* were also more likely than other deacons less active to believe that their formation programs had well prepared them to meet Ordination Vows 1, 2, 3, and 5.<sup>29</sup> Deacons well pleased with how well their formation program helped them meet their commitment to Vow 3, “To interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world” and Vow 5 “serving the helpless” are also particularly likely to be more active now in advocacy and referrals for those in need. It may be that these deacons’ formation programs helped them feel better prepared to begin ministries in community outreach, advocacy and encouraging congregational members to engage in these, and experience in doing these ministries led them to feel competent to do even more in these ministry areas.

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<sup>27</sup> Correlations between frequency of engagement in advocacy activities and having taken good courses in the social science areas described are all between  $r = -.11$  and  $-.13$ , sig.001.

<sup>28</sup> There is a high correlation between the two advocacy items ( $r .51$ ) and both with referrals for counseling and resources (.58 and .37 respectively) and with empowering lay members (.30 and .21 respectively), and with organizing volunteer work or drives for worthy causes (.37 and .32 respectively), including food banks and soup kitchen outreach ministries (.23 and .37 respectively) all are significant at the .0001 level.

<sup>29</sup> Frequency in empowering lay ministry is correlated with the Ordination Vows named between  $r = -.15$  and  $-.18$ , all significant at the .001 level.

### **C. Complementary Roles: Liturgical Duties and Lay Ministry Development**

Deacons were asked to give their perceptions of to what extent in their dioceses:

1. Congregations are generally eager to have deacons assigned them
2. Deacons exercise their full liturgical role
3. Deacons' work includes the diaconal ministry of lay members.

Most deacons were quite positive about how accepted deacons and their ministries are in their dioceses. The great majority (90%) perceived that it is at least “somewhat” the case that in their dioceses congregations hoped to have a deacon assigned; and a majority as well believe in their dioceses at least “fairly often” deacons are expected and permitted to exercise their full liturgical roles and to include lay members in their ministries. The two-fifths, who more strongly affirmed congregational “eagerness” to have deacons, also are more likely to indicate that in their dioceses deacons “frequently” exercise their full liturgical roles and engage in developing lay members’ ministries.<sup>30</sup>

More deacons, however, perceive that deacons “frequently” exercise their full liturgical roles than they perceive deacons’ “frequently” engaged in lay ministry development within dioceses (55% to 29% respectively). This may be because they are aware that some deacons in their dioceses are more focused on their liturgical roles in worship than on getting laypersons involved in caring and outreach ministries. It may also be because deacons’ liturgical roles are far more clearly delineated as belonging to the “deacon” than is being the organizer of congregational ministries involving lay members. While lay leaders may insist on being lay ministry coordinators themselves, they would have less leeway to undertake the deacons’ role in liturgy. Deacons who “agree strongly” that congregations in their dioceses very much want deacons assigned, are somewhat more likely to believe that deacons “frequently” exercise their full liturgical ministries than that deacons “frequently” engage in developing lay ministry (67% to 41% respectively).

Still, the combination of deacons being very active in both liturgy and lay ministry is obviously possible and can indicate a better situation for deacons. Of those deacons who “frequently” *combined both* liturgical and lay ministry activities, higher proportions agree strongly than disagree that congregations in their dioceses are eager to have deacons assigned.<sup>31</sup> Or perhaps, the more active the deacons as a group are known to be in a variety of ministries in the diocese, the more eager congregations are to have deacons in their presence.

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<sup>30</sup> Congregational eagerness to have deacons is correlated with frequency of deacons exercising full liturgical role (-.25) and with frequency of promoting lay ministry (-.29), both significant at .0001.

<sup>31</sup> Proportion of deacons saying that both liturgical and lay ministry diaconal activities are “frequently” done by deacons in their dioceses, and their responses on question of whether in their dioceses congregations are eager to have deacons: “Agree Strongly” 53%, “Agree Somewhat” 36%, and “Disagree” 29%.

## **D. Continuing Education**

A characteristic of quality deacon formation programs, as described by NAAD, is being: “Oriented toward life-long learning: The program authenticates that learning is on going and provides the learner with the foundation and resources for life long learning. The learner understands the program is simply one stage along the lifelong learning spectrum and is able to set learning goals and prepare learning plans beyond the prescribed program.”

Using this criterion, it would seem that deacon formation programs now are better than those thirty years ago on the whole, since about three-fifths of the deacons in 2008 to about two-fifths in 1978 have taken further formal courses since ordination. Among the 2008 deacons there no association between how useful they found their diaconal education/training and whether they have subsequently taken courses, so it seems they are not specifically pursuing deficits in their formation programs but continuing study in areas important to their ministries or interests, especially several years or more after ordination and are active as deacons.<sup>32</sup> Some deacons have continued to work for a master’s degree, some have taken language courses (particularly Spanish), and more have availed themselves of on-line courses in various areas.

Two-thirds of the deacons surveyed in 2008 have taken some form of continuing education. Their descriptions indicate that this continuing education takes the form of weekend or weeklong conferences and seminars sponsored by their diocese, a seminary, or professional association or one day training workshops or special lectures. Popular areas for continuing education foci are (1) in *pastoral care and counseling* for depression, bereavement, suicide intervention, disasters, anger management, and marriage enrichment, and healing ministry; (2) in *congregational spiritual and interfaith/interpersonal growth* through workshops and seminars on becoming a praying congregation, Christian meditation, spiritual care and direction, faith-based reconciliation workshops; (3) for *congregational ministries to/for specific groups* of leaders or members in youth ministry, Godly Play training, Safe Church training, and leadership in the church, EfM training; as well as Upward Bound, Fresh Start and congregational growth; (4) *understanding and addressing social issues* on community poverty, homelessness, anti-racism training, and workshops on various social justice concerns; (5) *specifically for the ministry of deacons* in preaching and through NAAD workshops. Some deacons, who have not had “continuing education” per se, mentioned that they read on their own or with a book group in areas of interest usually “pertaining to diaconal ministry.”<sup>33</sup>

A little less than half of the deacons surveyed in 2008 have a “learning plan” for the coming year. From comments made it appears that these “plans” range from specific intentions to more tentative hopes to read certain books, take particular courses or attend

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<sup>32</sup> These questions on formally offered courses are found in Appendix, page 12, #33. The correlation between have taken courses and more recently ordained is  $r = -.22$ , sig.0001.

<sup>33</sup> For this question and deacons’ descriptions of continuing education taken, see Appendix, pp. 13-15.

various diocesan or other organizational seminars and training events. Those who took continuing education during the last year are the deacons most likely to have a learning plan for the forthcoming year.<sup>34</sup>

Personal characteristics of deacons have some relationship with their interest in continuing education. Younger deacons (those under sixty) are somewhat more likely to have taken continuing education in last year, and although gender is not related to whether deacons actually had continuing education last year, female deacons are somewhat more likely to have thought about or settled on “a learning plan” for the next year.<sup>35</sup>

Another factor slightly important in whether deacons surveyed in 2008 took continuing education last year is whether there are “*any parish or diocesan funds made available to you?*”<sup>36</sup> It may be more important thing to note that congregations and dioceses in 2008 are much more likely to provide some funding to deacons for continuing education (63%) than was the case in 1978 (20%). This suggests there is now greater support within and across dioceses for deacons as well as for continuing education. For deacons in 2008 taking continuing education, the amount of funding from congregations is more important than whether it exists at all. The more funding available from either, the more likely deacons are to have had continuing education last year and plan on some in the coming year.<sup>37</sup>

#### **IV. FINANCING DIACONAL MINISTRIES**

##### **A. Money for Ministries**

Many deacons engage in continuing education, as seen, even if they do not have outside funding. At the same time, outside funding possibly makes getting further education

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix, p. 14. The correlation between having had continuing education and having learning plan for the next year (r .26, sig.0001)

<sup>35</sup> Correlation between having had continuing education last year and younger age (r .15 sig. 0001); correlation between having a learning plan for next year and female gender (r -.13, sig.001).

<sup>36</sup> Although the correlation between funds available and continuing education is statistically significant, (r .12, sig.001), the differences are not dramatic: 73% of those saying funds are available to 61% saying there are no funds have taken continuing education of some sort.

<sup>37</sup> The amount of money from either congregation or diocese is usually less than \$300 a year (in some few dioceses, the rule is appears to be that congregations give \$300 and dioceses match with \$300.) However, as far as can be ascertained from the survey responses, there were twice as many congregations as dioceses giving deacons over \$300 a year for continuing education. The correlation between whether deacons took continuing education and amount of congregational funding (r -.18 and with amount of diocesan funding (r -.14), both significant at the .0001 levels.

more attractive, and affirms that the congregation or diocese sees deacons' work as important and therefore worthy of funding their ongoing education.

The great majority of deacons volunteer their time in carrying out diaconal ministries. However, there are often expenses associated with these ministries. Sometimes deacons find that there are resources much needed by those they minister to and with in the congregation and community. To what extent do deacons get reimbursed or given a discretionary account that might be used for such expenses?

Less than half of the deacons surveyed nationally in both 2008 and 1978 are reimbursed for travel or other expenses incurred in their diaconal work.<sup>38</sup> Comments made by deacons in 2008 indicate their irritation and concern about this situation:

- *Reimbursement at current realistic levels for mileage and expenses and for continuing education and diocesan events. We are not paid, we do not get benefits, yet the diocese keeps making us pay for all the events we must attend. People of lower incomes cannot "afford" to do this work.*
- *Mileage and expense reimbursement at the same rate as priests. This is a vocation. Most people cannot afford to be deacons in this diocese.*
- *Provide some type of compensation in order to make the diaconate available to those other than the independently wealthy. Travel expenses to and from the location of our parish have become almost prohibitive to those on a fixed income.*

The practice of giving deacons a discretionary fund for their diaconal work has apparently expanded over the last thirty years. In 1978 only 20% of the deacons reported they had a discretionary fund, while proportionately twice as many, 41%, did in 2008.<sup>39</sup> Some deacons have a better deal than others.

<b>Reimbursed?</b>		
<b>Discretionary Fund?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>YES</b>	<b>25% (173)</b>	<b>16% (112)</b>
<b>NO</b>	<b>21% (142)</b>	<b>38% (262)</b>

<sup>38</sup> The eight dioceses experimenting with the diaconate in the early eighties were the most likely to see that their deacons were reimbursed for expenses. 71% of the deacons in these eight dioceses surveyed in 1993 said they were reimbursed, compared to 42% and 46% of the national samples of deacons in 1978 and 2008, respectively.

<sup>39</sup> Here too, two-fifths of the deacons in the eight dioceses in 1983 also got a discretionary fund. See Appendix, p. 22.

## **B. Money for Stipend**

“Permanent Deacons” have been and usually are defined as being a nonstipendiary order. It should be noted that there is nothing in the canons of the Church that precludes them being paid, however. Deacons occasionally serve in church offices and educational institutions as partly paid staff, but this is fairly unusual. For the last thirty years less than a fifth of the deacons have been *compensated for time as a deacon (i.e. paid a salary of sorts)*.<sup>40</sup> At least half of these deacons both in 2008 and 1978 were of the opinion that the congregation to which they were presently assigned could not pay them “*a salary comparable to that of an assistant rector.*” Deacons in 2008 who thought their congregation at least *probably* could pay were those assigned to the larger congregations.<sup>41</sup> Deacons in the larger congregations are among the few more likely to be paid a stipend and work longer hours. Yet deacons in the larger congregations typically work more hours even if they are not paid. Still, those who give the most hours are deacons in the larger congregations with a stipend (and often reimbursement and discretionary fund as well.)

## **C. Money, Recruitment and Respect**

The actual amount of money that might be part of a stipend paid to the deacon for his or her ministry seems less important to a number of deacons (through comments made on the survey), than the fact that they are so recognized as *paid professionals in ministry*. or as one put it, “When you are paid a stipend, you are valued.”

More deacons were worried about the impact on recruitment to the diaconate of young people and those of any age who are not well off. In illustration:

- *If I could hope for anything, it would be a paid diaconate that was taken from the diaconate asking, and then paid by the diocese directly to the deacon. I fear that we are building an order that will be open only to those who are financially well off or retired; and that there are many people who could make excellent deacons, but cannot because they literally cannot afford to live here without using all available time for paid jobs.*
- *Develop a model for combining diaconate with part time employment, and make it known – to encourage diaconal vocations especially among younger people and marginalized communities.*
- *If we want to attract young, energetic deacons, we must begin to pay them. I have always felt that the Church sees us as their free labor force and expects us to carry a*

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix, p. 22, question #46.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix, p. 22, question #47. Believing the congregation probably could pay a comparable salary and larger size of church correlation (r -.21, sig. .0001).

*very heavy burden. Most parishioners don't even understand that deacons are not paid, and need to be out in a "real job" to pay the mortgage and keep food on the table. Until they find out why, most parishioners think deacons are just not very good workers.*

- *In practical reality, generally speaking, you need to be childfree and have a certain level of income, and preferably be retired. It is not "user-friendly" to younger adults with families and/or persons with limited resources and/or time for what is after all a nonstipendiary position. Otherwise deacons will continue to come from the ranks of the gray haired and somewhat affluent.*

## V. COLLABORATIVE ASSOCIATIONS

### A. Deacons' Membership in Wider Church Associations

Deacons like individuals and professionals in any specialty may gain from associations with national groups from which they can get resources, advice, and form networks.

Among the deacons surveyed in 2008, a little over two-fifths (43%) were registered with the Church Pension Board, although less than a fifth (18%) were registered with the Church Deployment Office. Still those registered with one of these agencies also were more likely to be registered with the other, indicating a degree of network sharing among those deacons more interested in deployment.<sup>42</sup> Deacons registered with the Church Pension Board are more likely to be younger than other deacons, currently have salaried employment, and are most often among the relatively few paid a stipend for their diaconal work.<sup>43</sup>

Those deacons registered with Church Pension or Church Deployment are neither more nor less likely to be members of the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD). Deacons' gender is further unrelated to whether they are registered with either of these national organizations or are members of NAAD. A majority or about three-fifths (62%) of the deacons responding in 2008 are NAAD members. NAAD deacons are *somewhat* more likely than other deacons: to put in more hours in diaconal work, have a discretionary fund, and get more money from their dioceses and from their congregations for continuing education.<sup>44</sup> NAAD deacons are also more likely than those who are not members to "attend meetings of diocesan committees or commissions."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The correlation between being registered with the Church Pension Board and registered with the Church Deployment Office is .20, sig.0001.

<sup>43</sup> Deacons registered with CPG are younger (.22) earn a salary (.18), and are more likely to be paid a stipend for diaconal work (.19), all significant at the .0001 level.

<sup>44</sup> NAAD members put in more hours in diaconal work (-.13), have a discretionary fund (.12), and more funds for their continuing education from the diocese (-.11) and from their congregation (-.10), sig.002.

<sup>45</sup> Of the NAAD members, 70% attended diocesan committee meetings at least several times yearly to 56% of deacons who have not joined NAAD. (r .15, sig. .0001).

## B. Diocesan Involvement of Deacons

Deacons having influence in their dioceses would seem important for the diaconal recruitment, formation, and diocesan support. In another PEALL survey of Commissions on Ministry chairs, it is noteworthy that the greatest change over thirty years is the importance of having at least one COM member be a deacon.<sup>46</sup>

TABLE 3  
**COM Chairs (& Bishops in 1978) on a COM Member Being Deacon**

<i>Being a Deacon is:</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>1978</i>
<i>Formal criterion</i>	<b>39%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<i>Informal criterion</i>	<b>50%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<i>Not a criterion</i>	<b>11%</b>	<b>88%</b>
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

What suggestions would deacons like to make to Commissions on Ministry or other diocesan commissions and committees? Deacons made many suggestions about how their diocese could better support the ministry of deacons.<sup>47</sup> About fifty deacons advocated that dioceses take care to include deacons in the design of formation programs for those intending to be deacons, establish a diocesan school/program for diaconal formation if there was not one, and strengthen the mentoring process. About seventy-five asked that there be more continuing education courses for deacons and funding to pay for these, as well as have diocesan conferences more regularly for deacons to meet and learn with one another.

A major area of education needed in their dioceses, about sixty deacons aver, is not for them as much as for priests, in better understanding the ministry of the diaconate and deacons roles. With priests' support, then lay leaders and other members could be educated about the ministry of deacons and get others interested in working with the deacons in various ministries or maybe becoming deacons eventually too. Connected likely with this plea for diocesan push to better educate priests and lay members about the deacons roles and ministry is that is even in congregations with deacons a substantial minority of members have minimal understanding. Furthermore this situation has not changed substantially from thirty years ago.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Commissions on Ministry, 2008 and 1978*; (PEALL, December 2008. Study Director, Rev. Bud Holland, research analyst, Adair Lummis.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix, pages 24-27 for illustrations of the type of suggestions deacons made to dioceses.

Deacons or more deacons strongly urged that their dioceses give deacons voice and vote equal to that of priests in their dioceses, more full participation and membership on decision-making bodies in the dioceses, and as diocesan delegates to General Convention. These and other deacons were also likely to advocate more full participation of deacons in liturgical leadership roles.

## **VI. RECOGNITION OF THE DIACONATE NATIONALLY**

### **A. As a Distinctive, Full and Equal Order**

Deacons in suggesting specific steps that the Episcopal Church as a whole might take to strengthen the ministry of the deacons, made almost as many comments.<sup>49</sup> One of the major requests made by over fifty deacons is that the “National Church” set Church Wide standards for diaconal formation and formulate definitions about deacons’ ministries. Several indicated that canonical changes and strengthening canonical mandates is essential if deacons’ ministries are to be better understood. This is because getting greater “consistency” across dioceses in formation and deployment of deacons is perceived as a major factor in the diaconate becoming both more distinctive and more fully and equally combined with the ministries of priests and lay members. Without some standardization for diaconal formation across dioceses, deacons will face great barriers in being recognized as being part of a distinctive, full and equal order.

To accomplish this it would be important to have national visibility for the diaconate. Several suggested this might be approached by: (1) having the Presiding Bishop use deacons in her visits and ministry, or (2) have an archdeacon program officer or establish an office for the diaconate at the Church Center, or at least have a deacon on national staff; and as well (3) ensure that national publications give greater attention to explaining what a deacon is and does as deacon and a part of the Total Ministry of the Church.

### **B. Direct Ordination**

Although deacons are now typically referred as simply “deacons” rather than “vocational” or “permanent” deacons, one longstanding obstacle perceived by some to deacons being considered a full and equal order is: (1) the fact that priests are ordained to the “transitional” diaconate and then “go on” to be “priested”. There are other obstacles to equality based in church traditions as well, such as: (2) despite focus on the ministry of all baptized, lay and “total ministry,” official “orders” imply for many a hierarchy of church positions with attendant responsibilities, liturgy and leadership privileges; and (3)

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<sup>48</sup> A question asked of deacons in 1978, 1983, and 2008 is: “*How well do you think the bulk of the congregation in which you are assigned understand what a deacon is?*” Slightly less than two-fifths of the deacons in all three years said at best, “some understand, many do not.” See Appendix, page 23, question #48 for the full distribution of responses to this question.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix, pages 28-30, for illustrations of the type of suggestions deacons made to the National Church.

rectors are often the official “supervisors” of the deacons assigned to most congregations. However, a substantial number of deacons believe that if the above obstacle #1 were eliminated, it would be far easier for the diaconate to be considered a distinctive, full and equal order.

Advocacy for direct ordination is not new to the twenty-first century. In the seventies, this was a plea already being voiced by a growing number of deacons. Among the deacons surveyed in 1978, there were substantial differences of opinions, though a majority disagreed at least “somewhat” with the proposal to:

*“Ordain candidates for Holy Orders either as deacons or priests – i.e. ordain candidates for the priesthood “priests” directly rather than ordaining them deacons first.”*

By 2008, deacons were less divided than thirty years earlier mainly because the majority opinion has shifted to a stronger endorsement of this proposal. Proportionately almost twice as many deacons currently as in the seventies affirm this idea: in 2008 fully 54% agreed “strongly” that this proposal should be adopted compared to 26% in 1978.<sup>50</sup>

Over sixty deacons made strong statements about removing the diaconate as a step in the transition between postulancy and priesthood. In illustration:

- *Ordain priests directly; calling them “deacons” muddies the water.*
- *As long as all priests are deacons, the church will see us as junior priests.*
- *Eliminate “transitional deacons” or start calling them “transitional priests.”*
- *Ordain priests directly to the priesthood. Priests are beyond ridiculous when they wax sentimental about their six months of “being a deacon.”*
- *We need to let go of the idea of “cumulative orders”. It’s not a matter of going up a ladder. Such a mindset truly dilutes the symbol and function of the orders. When one is removed from the priesthood, they are not sent down the ladder to deacon....*
- *Pray for Direct Ordination legislation to erupt at General Convention.*

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix, page 2, question #4 for the full percentage distribution of responses to this question.

### **C. National Combination of Approaches to Strengthening the Diaconate**

Almost all deacons surveyed in 2008 and 1978 strongly aver, “The Church should have a vital diaconate.” They also advocate that there needs to be Church Wide attention to and publicity for the diaconate. Many suggest combining approaches described on the national level to have the greatest impact on defining the diaconate as a distinctive, full and equal order, in illustration:

- ❑ *Reinforce that deacons are truly an equal order. Actively and publicly promote the diaconate at the national level. Take a look at all of our gifts and then use those gifts publicly.*
- ❑ *Develop a set of expectations specifying the role of deacon in the liturgy and in diaconal ministry. This document should then be distributed to all Bishops and Priests so that everyone has a clear understanding of the role of the deacon as a full and equal partner in worship and ministry.*
- ❑ *Acknowledge that the diaconate is a full and complete order of clergy in the Episcopal Church; credit what they do, and validate their ministry, and along with that validate the ministry of every Episcopalian.*

## **VII. REFLECTIONS AND PROGNOSIS FOR THE DIACONATE**

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### **Some Conclusions**

It is clear from the study that in renewing this historic order, particularly as described in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the hopes of the study committee in 1978 have been addressed. The vast majority of deacons are outwardly focused and mission minded. In cases where deacons tend to be more liturgically and pastorally focused we see the tensions between what we call the “Third” and “Fourth” Waves of the Diaconate in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. After World War II, the “Third Wave” of Deacons were recruited for assistance, primarily with liturgy and pastoral care, in a church that was in the midst of a post-war boom. With the revision in the Book of Common Prayers, however, returning to a more historic interpretation of the diaconate, more similar to the early church, we saw a shift in the expectations of those called to be deacons. There is no question that those in the “Third Wave,” served faithfully and well, fulfilling what the Church asked of them at the time.

With the revision in the Prayer Book came new understandings. For all of us. With a focus more on baptismal identity, new collaborations and partnerships in carrying out the mission and ministry of the Church are encouraged. That is one of the reasons that the North American Association encourages the use of the Baptismal Covenant and the Ordination vows and charges to assess our ministries and learning plans each year. We would, in fact, advocate that our annual parish meetings include a major report booklet on how each person in the congregation has done in fulfilling their baptismal promises each year, rather than only the business and accomplishments of committees and commissions.

We were not surprised to learn that the ordination charge for which deacons felt least prepared was “*To interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.*” In the decades of gatherings and discussion among deacons, this has been clear. That is why we have begun to define skill sets associated with this charge and are urging those in leadership to incorporate new components in formation programs. It is important to note that this is also the charge for which the Church is least prepared – and it is our hope that deacons will share new found skills in this area in order to expand meaningful and compassionate mission initiatives.

It is also not surprising that deacons have a clear understanding of the ministry of bishop, priest, deacon and laity and how these ministries are distinguished from and support one another. Because the renewal of this order occurred with the most recent revision of the BCP, most deacons are grounded in that understanding. For those (of all orders) whose primary formation took place with the 1928 version of the BCP, there are often different understandings (of all the orders).

There has been a four-fold increase in the number of deacons since 1978. Ordinations are ongoing in a majority of dioceses. It is tremendously important for congregations and dioceses to realize what it means for their own identity every time a deacon is ordained. This study is, after all, a commentary on the Church herself as much as it is on the diaconate. And it is our prayer that we will continue to grow and serve in the ways the Church we love has asked.