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# Historic Documents on the Diaconate

edited by

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## Introduction

These documents include ordination prayers of the third and fourth centuries, canons of the Episcopal Church in 1871-1988, and reports and resolutions of Lambeth conferences and the Anglican Consultative Council in 1958-98. I compiled some of them for an appendix to *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1991), but space permitted the inclusion of only a few. Here I present them in full.

### A. Early ordination prayers

Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* (Rome, c. 215)

The bishop lays hands on the person chosen (in ancient Rome, a man), in silence, while all pray for the descent of the Spirit. Hippolytus comments:

In ordaining a 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; receiving not the common spirit of the presbytery, in which the presbyters share, but what is entrusted under the bishop's authority. Therefore the bishop alone makes him a deacon; on a presbyter, however, the presbyters also lay hands because of the common and like spirit of the clergy. The presbyter has the power only to receive, not to give. Because of this he does not ordain clergy; instead he puts a seal on the ordination of a presbyter whom the bishop ordains.

The bishop then prays over the person:

God, who created all things and set them in order by the Word, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you sent to serve your will and to show us your desires, give the Holy Spirit of grace and care and diligence to this your servant, whom you have chosen to serve your church and to offer [to bring forward] in your holy of holies

the gifts which are offered you by your appointed high priests, so that serving without blame and with a pure heart, he may be counted worthy of this high office and glorify you through your Servant Jesus Christ, through whom glory and honor to you, the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, both now and to the ages of ages.<sup>1</sup>

*Apostolic Constitutions* (Syria, late fourth century):

At the ordination of a man as deacon, the bishop, in the presence of the whole presbytery and the deacons, lays hands on him and prays:

God the ruler of all, true and faithful, rich to all who call on you in truth, awesome in will, wise in mind, strong and great, hear our prayer, Lord, and listen to our plea, and show your face on this your slave, presented to you for the diaconate, and fill him with spirit and power, as you filled Stephen the martyr and imitator of the passion of your Christ, and make him fit to carry out the work of deacon committed to him, constant, blameless, and irreproachable, that he may be worthy of higher office, by the mediation of your only begotten Son, through whom in the Holy Spirit glory, honor, and veneration to you to the ages. Amen.

At the ordination of a woman as deacon, the bishop, in the presence of the whole presbytery and of the men and women deacons, lays hands on her and prays:

God eternal, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, creator of man and woman, who filled Miriam and Deborah and Hannah and Huldah with the Spirit, who did not shun the birth of your only begotten Son from a woman, and in the tent of witness and in the temple set women as keepers of your holy doors, now look down on this your slave, presented for the diaconate, and give her your Holy Spirit, and cleanse her from all stain of flesh and spirit, that she may worthily complete the work committed to her, to your glory and the praise of your Christ, through whom in the Holy Spirit glory and worship to you to the ages. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **B. Episcopal Church: canons on the diaconate**

1871 General Convention (missionary or indigenous deacon):

A Candidate for the Office and Ministration of a Deacon only shall not be ordained within one year from his admission, unless the Bishop, with the consent of the Standing Committee, shall deem it

to ordain him after the expiration of a shorter period, in no case to be less than six months. [I.6.1]

At the 1892 General Convention, the provision for shortening the time of candidacy to six months was removed [I.7.2], and in 1904 the entire section for “a Deacon only” was removed.

1889 General Convention (deaconess):

A woman of devout character and proved fitness, unmarried or widowed, may be appointed Deaconess by any Bishop of this Church, subject to the provisions of this Canon. Such appointment shall be vacated by marriage. [1.10.1]

In 1961 “appointed” was changed to “ordered,” and in 1964 the requirement that a deaconess be “unmarried or widowed” was removed. In 1970 the canon was repealed.

1952 General Convention (perpetual deacon):

(a) A man of devout character and proved fitness, desirous to serve in the capacity of Deacon without relinquishing his secular occupation and with no intention of seeking advancement to the Priesthood, may be accepted as a Postulant and admitted as a Candidate upon the following conditions:

(1) He shall be not less than thirty-two years of age.

(2) He shall be accepted as a Postulant as provided in Canon 26.

(3) Fulfillment of the requirements of Clause (c) of Section 5 of Canon 26 shall suffice as education qualification for admission to Candidateship.

(b) A Candidate so admitted may be ordained to the Diaconate at any time after six months from his admission as a Candidate, upon the following conditions:

(1) He shall have passed examinations in the subjects set forth in Section 2(a) of Canon 29; but the Bishop may at his discretion dispense him from examination in subjects (c), (d), and (e) of Practical Theology.

(2) He shall be recommended for ordination to the Diaconate by the Standing Committee or Council of Advice, as required by Section 5 of this Canon, except as to terms of Candidateship.

(c) A deacon under the provisions of this Section shall exercise his Ministry as assistant in any parish or parishes to which, at the request or with the consent of the Rector and Vestry, he may be assigned by the Ecclesiastical Authority. As such assistant he may execute all functions appertaining to the office of Deacon; he may

not in any respect act as Minister in charge of a congregation. He may not be transferred to another jurisdiction except upon the express request in writing of the Ecclesiastical Authority thereof.

(d) The provisions of Canon 7, Of the Church Pension Fund, shall not apply, as to either assessments or benefits, to Deacons ordained under the provisions of this Section.

(e) Any Deacon ordained in accordance with this Section who may afterward desire to be advanced to the Priesthood shall be required to pass all examinations required of other Candidates for the Priesthood and to comply with all other canonical requirements precedent to such ordination. In such case the provisions of Canon 7 shall apply to him from the date of his ordination to the Priesthood. [I.34.10]

In 1964 the section was amended to provide that a deacon, after further examination, might be placed in charge of a congregation.

1970 General Convention (deacon today):

A man of Christian character, proven fitness, and leadership in his community, who is willing to serve in the capacity of Deacon without relinquishing his secular occupation, may be proposed and recommended to the Bishop, for enrollment as a Postulant, by the Minister and Vestry of the Parish in which his service is desired, or (should the Parish be without a Minister) by the Vestry and some other Presbyter of the Diocese or Missionary District in good standing, or (if it is intended that the Postulant should serve outside, or apart from, an organized Parish) by one such Presbyter and six Lay Communicants of this Church in good standing who are well informed regarding the area or circumstances within which it is proposed that the Postulant should serve. This recommendation shall be in writing, and shall include a statement indicating whether the man is being proposed for the Diaconate only, or for the Diaconate and subsequently for the Priesthood. . . . [III.10.10(a)]

The section continued with provisions for candidacy and preparation, much as before, and for ordination to the priesthood “if he has been recommended for this Order in accordance with the provisions of Section 10(a) of this Canon, or if he has been so recommended subsequently.” In 1973 the paragraph on preparation was amended to require study in six academic topics (scripture, church history, theology, liturgics, contemporary issues, theory and practice of ministry)—

for such time and to such extent as is judged suitable by the Bishop, after consultation with the Commission on Ministry, and with the Member of the Clergy and Lay Persons who proposed and

recommended the said Candidate. Similarly, after consultation with persons experienced in the area or field in which this Candidate for the Diaconate is to serve, the Bishop shall appoint such other training or practical experience as is suitable to the Candidate's occupation, his role in the community, and his ecclesiastical ministry. A record of all such training, and an evaluation of the Candidate's attainments, shall be made in writing and kept on file. [III.10.10(b)(1)]

In 1973 the provision for postulancy was dropped, and in 1976 restored. In 1979 "man" was replaced by "person."<sup>3</sup> In 1988 General Convention repealed the canon. A new canon III.6, "Of the Ordination of Deacons," refers to those intended for the diaconate only, and canons 4 and 5 deal with postulancy and candidacy for both orders.

### **C. Lambeth Conference and Anglican Consultative Council**

Lambeth 1958: Resolution 88, "The Office of Deacon"

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.<sup>4</sup>

Lambeth 1968: Resolution 32, "The Diaconate"

The Conference recommends:

- (a) 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.
  
- (b) That Ordinals should, where necessary, be revised:
  - (i) to take account of the new role envisaged for the diaconate;
  - (ii) by the removal of reference to the diaconate as "an inferior office";
  - (iii) by emphasis upon the continuing element of diakonia in the ministry of bishops and priests.
  
- (c) That those made deaconesses by laying on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the diaconate.

(d) That appropriate canonical legislation be enacted by provinces and regional Churches to provide for those already ordained deaconesses.<sup>5</sup>

### ACC-3 (1976): Conclusion of report on the diaconate

We appreciate Lambeth's concern to bring the serving or diaconal ministry of the Church more fully within the worshipping and liturgical functions of the whole community. We do not think that the making of deacons on a wider scale than hitherto would cause the laity to feel themselves to be released from responsibility to serve as well as to worship. We would therefore see the Diaconate conferred upon men and women who are deeply committed to Christ within the Church, and who are performing a caring and serving ministry in the world in the name of the Church, or who are carrying out a pastoral ministry in the Church.<sup>6</sup>

### ACC-3 (1976): Resolution 10, "The Diaconate"

The Council advises:

(a) that the use of the Diaconate as a period of preparation for the priesthood be retained; and that every church should review its practice to ensure that this period is one of continued training and further testing of vocation; but that it is not to be regarded as necessarily leading to the priesthood;

(b) that the churches, and particularly the laity, be invited to examine the concept of the Diaconate as an Order to which lay people serving the Church, or serving in the name of the Church, could also be admitted, to express and convey the authority of the Church in their service. And, in this consideration, to take into account Resolution 32 of Lambeth 1968, and Bishop John Howe's article on the Diaconate written in preparation for that meeting of Lambeth. This study should include the status of deacons in Synods.<sup>7</sup>

### Lambeth 1978: Resolution 20, "Women in the Diaconate"

The Conference recommends, in accordance with resolution 32(c) of the Lambeth Conference of 1968, those member Churches which do not at present ordain women as deacons now to consider making the necessary legal and liturgical changes to enable them to do so, instead of admitting them to a separate order of deaconesses.<sup>8</sup>

### ACC-6 (1984): Report on the diaconate

We would see the diaconate as a ministry of service particularly to the poor, the disenfranchised, the sick, the weak, and the lonely. This ministry should be exercised directly under the bishop seeking with him to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of those the deacon is called to serve.

In the renewing of the diaconate each person in this order would be asked to: first, express this ministry in a specific outreach (hospital, prison, hospice ministry, etc.); and secondly, be prepared to teach and enable lay persons to join in the same ministry.

This renewal of the diaconate must give careful thought to the selection process, training, and the place of the deacon within the ecclesiastical polity of the Church. In dioceses where the diaconate is being reviewed, the deacon is found in some cases in the lay order and in others within the clergy order.<sup>9</sup>

#### ACC-7 (1987): Resolution 6, "The Diaconate"

That this Council asks the Secretary General to assemble material from all provinces about reviews which have been made or are in hand concerning the diaconate, particularly about steps which are being contemplated about "a distinct order of servanthood ministry." This is to be done by the end of 1987 so that it might be considered at Lambeth in 1988 and ACC-8.<sup>10</sup>

#### Lambeth 1988: "Mission and Ministry" report

120 "A deacon is to focus or be a sign of the ministry of servanthood in the Church and in the world. As the New Zealand Ordinal indicates, the diaconate is to remind the whole Church that the essence of ministry is service. The ministry of servanthood is particularly directed to those in need. This is evident from Acts 6. So service to the poor and troubled, the outcasts and voiceless ones, the sick and destitute within the Church and in the world, is especially signified in the deacon's ministry. But the ministry is not only directed outwards. As Ordinals in Brazil, Canada, and ECUSA show, the functions of the deacon include the interpretation of the needs, concerns and hopes of the world to the Church, thus transforming the Church's intercession, helping its understanding of the world in the light of the Gospel and making more effective its participation in God's transforming work in the world."

121 In response to this sort of understanding of the office and work of a deacon there is a growing demand in several parts of the

Anglican Communion for the revival of a permanent and distinctive diaconate. For example, recent experience in the Episcopal Church in the United States, a recent report to the House of Bishops of the Church of England, and the considered advice of ACC-6 all point in this direction. We are confident that there is a need for a more credible expression of the diaconate. We need to rediscover 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.

122 We feel it right to draw attention to some difficulties.

(a) In some Provinces, particularly those in which women are not ordained to the priesthood but are ordained to the diaconate, the deacon's ministry is rarely distinctively diaconal. These deacons are given training identical to that of priests for a ministry that closely parallels that of their colleagues. It is difficult to see a permanent diaconate with an entirely distinctive diaconal ministry coming into existence in such circumstances.

(b) Similarly the long-standing tradition that the diaconate is an "inferior" order (cf. the old ordinals) through which you pass on the way to the priesthood is also an obstacle to the emergence of a distinctive diaconate.

(c) There are difficulties too over stipend, status, distinctive dress, title and relationship to the parish and bishop.

123 These difficulties together with our enthusiasm for this ministry encourage us to recommend to the Provinces the need:

(a) to review and if necessary to revise ordinals and canons to recognise the distinctive and permanent diaconate.

(b) to share our experiences of this ministry.<sup>11</sup>

## Lambeth 1998: "The Diaconate" study document

87. In 1988, the Lambeth Conference noted that a number of developments were occurring in some of the churches of the Anglican Communion with regard to the diaconate as a separate and distinct order of ministry. These developments have continued since 1988, particularly in some of the churches of the northern

hemisphere, and have also been considered ecumenically, especially in conversations with the Lutheran churches.

88. One of the significant issues raised by these developments is the identification of the ministry associated with the order of deacons. Like the ministries of oversight and priesthood, the ministry of service and proclamation of the word traditionally associated with the diaconate belongs to the whole laos. Where deacons exercise their special ministry within the Church, they do so by illuminating and holding up the servant ministry of the whole church and calling all its members to that ministry.

89. While all the churches of the Anglican Communion embrace servant-ministry as an integral part of their life together, not all have chosen to restore the diaconate to its more traditional form. In some places, specialised lay roles, such as the lay reader or catechist, may exercise similar functions on the local level.

90. Hence, renewed attention to the order of the diaconate also raises questions about its relationship to the church and the other orders with which its ministry is carried out. While deacons have traditionally been responsible directly to the bishop, the nature of their ministry often places them at the intersection between the church and the broader society in which they serve.

91. The last Lambeth Conference commended to the Provinces a review of member churches' ordinals and canons in order to identify and learn about the ministry of a distinctive and permanent diaconate. The 1998 Lambeth Conference provides the opportunity to carry on our reflection about the diaconal ministry in different contexts within the Anglican Communion and in the ecumenical context. How, in the varied settings represented within our Communion, can the relationship between servant-ministry and sacramental worship be clarified? How are we to understand the relationship between the ministry of deacons and priests as they serve to build up Christ's Body? How is the work of deacons on behalf of the church in the world drawn into and reflected in the life of the church and its member congregations?<sup>12</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> My translation from the Latin in H. B. Porter, Jr., *The Ordination Prayers of the Ancient Western Churches*, Alcuin Club Collections 49 (London: SPCK, 1967), p. 10. The Latin breaks off at *et offerre* (and to offer, to bring forward). The rest of the prayer comes from Syrian and Ethiopian versions, and the doxology is adapted from the prayer for a presbyter. See also Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 108-109.

<sup>2</sup> My translation from the Greek of AC 8.17-20 in Franz Xaver von Funk, ed., *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum*, 2 vols. (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 1905), 1:522-525. See also W. Jardine Grisbrooke, ed., *The Liturgical Portions of the Apostolic Constitutions: A Text for Students*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Studies 13-14 (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1990), pp. 75-76, and Bradshaw, pp. 116-17.

<sup>3</sup> See Edwin Augustine White and Jackson A Dyckman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1981 ed. (New York: Office of the General Convention, 1985), 2:620-645, 2:910-917, 2:949-951.

<sup>4</sup> Lambeth Conference 1958, *The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with the and Reports* (London: SPCK, 1958), 1:50.

<sup>5</sup> Lambeth Conference 1968, *Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK; Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1968), pp. 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> ACC-3 (Report of Third Meeting: Trinidad 1976) (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1976), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Lambeth Conference 1978, *The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978* (London: CIO, [1978]), pp. 44-45.

<sup>9</sup> *Bonds of Affection. Proceedings of ACC-6: Badagry, Nigeria 1984* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1984), p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Many Gifts, One Spirit. Report of ACC-7: Singapore 1987* (London: Church House Publishing, 1987), p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988, The Reports, Resolutions and Pastoral Letters from the Bishops* (London: Church House Publishing, for Anglican Consultative Council, 1988), pp. 55-56. Sec. 120 is a quotation from sec. 103 of the pre-conference working papers. A note to sec. 123(b) observes: "An organ that encourages the sharing of such experiences is *Distinctive Diaconate*, edited by Sr Teresa of the Community of St Andrew in London."

<sup>12</sup> The Lambeth Conference 1998. "The Diaconate" is part of Section 3: "Called to be faithful in a plural world."

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