

A contribution to the current debate about the mission and ministries of Methodism

Background

This paper is a response to the Methodist Conference's directive (2013) that the Faith and Order Committee 'in consultation with the Methodist Diaconal Order, ... undertake work on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate in Methodism, its place within the British Connexion and its place within the universal church'.

The key question behind this brief

What kind of ordained leadership does Methodism require to equip it for mission in today's world?

Proposals made in this paper

- The ordained leadership now required to equip Methodism for mission should be underpinned by a kingdom theology and a diaconal ecclesiology.
- In the light of this theology and ecclesiology, the ordained leadership of Methodism should take the form of two distinctive orders of ministry:
 - *a diaconal order of mission.*
Deacons would be enablers of a laity called to be kingdom community builders within every sector of society.
 - *a presbyteral order of continuity*
Presbyters would facilitate the building of gathered churches (inherited, planted and new expressions) as locality-based expressions of the kingdom community.
- Diaconal and presbyteral orders of ministry should become separate religious orders.
- Diaconal and presbyteral forms of leadership are theologically and ecclesologically of the same standing and should become so in practice.
- Lay people would remain the church's primary resource for mission. However lay people should be invited to become members of two distinctive third orders; one supporting deacons as an order of mission, the other supporting presbyters as an order of continuity.
- The development of these forms of leadership would be an immense contribution by Methodism to the mission and ministries of the wider church.

1. Introduction

In 2013, the Methodist Council requested the Conference of that year to direct Methodism's Faith and Order Committee 'in consultation with the Methodist Diaconal Order, to undertake work on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate in Methodism, its place within the British Connexion and its place within the universal church'¹. This request stemmed from some uncertainty as to the place of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order within the leadership of the Connexion. However, the working party considering that matter wisely discerned that a much fuller appraisal of the place of the diaconate, and implicitly other ministries within Methodism and beyond, needed to be undertaken for the benefit of the Connexion as a whole. The Methodist Council and Conference agreed.

Consequently a working party of the Faith and Order Committee was set up to address this brief.² Its Interim Report was submitted to and approved by the Methodist Conference in July 2016. In its final paragraph (6.7) that report states:

It is further recognised that many of these questions (regarding the Methodist Diaconal Order) relate to our understanding of ministry and oversight and they cannot therefore be explored in isolation. The Faith and Order Committee therefore presents this interim report to the Conference, with the intention of bringing a final response *as part of the work on ministry in the Methodist Church* (my italics) to the 2018 Conference.

My own ministry as both a presbyter and a deacon, and many years of reflection on how these two ministries might complement each other, leads me to believe that the exploration of 'ministry in the Methodist Church' now underway is potentially of considerable importance. This is because it has significant implications not only for diaconal, presbyteral and lay ministries as such, but for the mission of British Methodism *and* the wider church.

I believe that the exploration now underway needs to offer a radical re-appraisal of the theology and ecclesiology underpinning not only the diaconate but the ministries of the whole of Methodism. This would enable Methodism to reclaim its distinctive heritage as *a holiness movement*, as urged by the President at the last Methodist Conference, and check our drift towards becoming an institution which all too often clones the theology and ecclesiology of other more historically established denominations. It would also enable Methodism to make a distinctive and dynamic contribution to the ecumenical movement, at present at a low-ebb within the UK. Above all, it would inspire Christians to engage more energetically and effectively with the critical issues facing our society and world at a time of profound political and cultural change.

¹ Methodist Council's Paper MC/13/2/19 *Review of the Role of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order*.

² It should be noted that, in transmission, the original brief has somehow lost the broader ecumenical context originally intended and has become shortened to that adopted by the Interim Report of this working party and entitled 'The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate' (1916) available at:

www.methodist.org.uk/.../conf-2016-33-Theology-and-Ecclesiology-underpinning-the-Diaconate

I have argued elsewhere¹ that because the Interim Report of the Faith and Order working party unfortunately lacks any clear theology or ecclesiology of mission, it struggles to offer a vision for the future of the mission and ministries of Methodism. Consequently I am offering this paper as a personal contribution to the current debate. I do so as one who has been immensely grateful for what Methodism has offered me and deeply concerned that what it stands for is not lost to posterity. It is a contribution meant to be set alongside and debated with others, including that of the Interim Report.

This paper deliberately broadens the focus of the ongoing exploration from the life and work of Methodist Diaconal Order to the future of all forms of Methodist ministries, diaconal, presbyteral and lay. It sets these in the context of what I believe to be a missional imperative, a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology, which I am convinced we must now embrace if the church in the West is to regain credibility and make its unique contribution to the flourishing of society and world.

2. A kingdom theology imperative for mission in today's world

2.1 The contemporary context of mission

Before we can say anything meaningful about the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the ministries of any church (including Methodism), it is imperative to get real about the rapidly changing context of mission.

One of the most influential features of contemporary life is that human beings have become more mobile than ever before. Humanity has become geographically mobile (not only individuals but whole populations are now on the move), cognitively mobile (the Internet and, not least, social media, increasingly eliminate time and space as barriers to communication), socially mobile (the massive developments in education, especially literacy and numeracy, are breaking down traditional hierarchies) and culturally mobile (there is a universal emergence of 'rainbow nations'). Mobility on this massive scale has two consequences. On the one hand, it liberates billions of people to enjoy unprecedented freedom of movement and life-style choices (including who or what they worship). On the other hand, it breaks down the bonds of family and locality and threatens the security and identity of those who seek to hang on to a more settled way of life.

To make the future even more challenging, mass mobility has been accompanied by a number of immensely destabilising factors including the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, a global population explosion, accelerating climate change and a worldwide refugee crisis.

These issues mean that humankind is facing accelerating and disturbing change on a scale hitherto never experienced before. Nevertheless, behind these 'presenting' issues lies an even deeper crisis - a universal breakdown of community and the loss of identity that goes with it. Consequently, because humanity must find its way to becoming a global community of communities if it is to survive, it is imperative that the quest for community moves to the very top of the agenda. However, that quest must be for a form of community which is open

¹ *A critique of the Faith and Order Committee's Interim Report on the place of the diaconate within Methodism and the universal church.* September 2016. Obtainable from - david@clark58.eclipse.co.uk

and inclusive, not xenophobic and exclusive. In this context, the experience of Brexit, the Trump phenomenon and the fragmentation of the Middle East are simply indicators of the challenge ahead.

2.2 A communal focus for a contemporary theology of mission

It should be abundantly clear, therefore, that the mission of the church in our day and age must be, first and foremost, about the survival of humankind and not the survival of the church. The gospel for our time is a vision of community at its zenith, the kingdom community, and the offer of the power to make that vision a reality

The gospel of the kingdom community, as I interpret it, is founded on the nature of the divine community, the Trinity and its transformational gifts. Elsewhere I have suggested that these gifts might be identified as 4Ls - the gift of life offered by God the Creator; the gift of liberation, offered by Christ the Liberator; the gift of love, offered by the Holy Spirit the Unifier; and the gift of learning, offered by the Trinity as a learning community¹. It is these gifts that Christ associated with the essence of the kingdom, taught about throughout his ministry, exemplified in his life and death and which he entrusted to his followers to offer to others.

I believe that the mission of the church is to discern where the gifts of the kingdom community are already manifest in society and world, and to intervene to enable them to be given the fullest possible expression. Where these gifts are neglected or rejected, the church's mission agenda is to challenge the status quo, and seek to do all in its power to bring these gifts to the fore. This throughout history has been a very costly undertaking, as the cross demonstrates only too well.

At the same time, if the church is to engage with any credibility and effectiveness in a kingdom community building mission, the medium has to be the message. For this to happen, the mould of Christendom, that institutional form which has shaped the life and world of the church for too long, has to be broken. The church needs to become a *diaconal* church.²

3. A diaconal ecclesiology imperative for mission in today's world

3.1 A diaconal ecclesiology

The theology of a kingdom community building mission sketched out above has profound implications for the ecclesiology of the church and its leadership. Below, I summarise what I see as the most significant of these implications.

- The Christendom church must give way to the diaconal church.
- The diaconal church is the servant of the kingdom community.

¹ For example, Clark, David (2016) *Building Kingdom Communities - with the diaconate as a new order of mission*. Peterborough: Upfront Publishing, pp. 12-28

² A key text on the diaconal church is *To Love and Serve the Lord - Diakonia in the Life of the Church. The Jerusalem Report* (2012). Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III).

See also Clark, D. (2005; second printing 2014) *Breaking the Mould of Christendom: Kingdom community, diaconal church and the liberation of the laity*. Peterborough: Upfront Publishing

- Its servanthood is evident in the fact that it empties itself of everything that would prevent it accomplishing its mission of kingdom community building. The diaconal church is also a ‘*kenotic*’ church¹.
- The diaconal church liberates and equips the laity, the church’s primary missionary resource, to discern and make manifest the gifts of the kingdom community within every sphere of life - from family life to education, health and welfare to leisure, business to commerce, law and order to government. Thus the people of God can be described as kingdom community builders.
- To facilitate its mission the diaconal church requires a new form of leadership.

3.2 Leadership within the diaconal church

- The leadership of the diaconal church is founded on an ecclesiology which upholds the principle that ‘no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class’².
- To engage in kingdom community building within society and world, the diaconal church requires forms of leadership with a distinctive division of labour. I believe that the latter should take the form of:

A renewed presbyteral ministry taking the form of ‘an order of continuity’ - assuming responsibility for deepening the life of the gathered church by nourishing the gifts of the kingdom community within it.

A renewed diaconate taking the form of ‘an order of mission’ - assuming responsibility for equipping the laity to build communities which manifest the gifts of the kingdom community within every sector of society.

4. How Methodism currently manifests the signs of a diaconal church

Few churches manifest clearly the hall-marks of the diaconal church and the new forms of leadership needed for it to fulfil its mission as the servant of the kingdom community. However, I believe that Methodism comes as close as any to reflecting this missional and ecclesiological vision of the church to come.

I note below some of the distinctively diaconal features evident within the life and work of the Methodist Church today.

- Methodism retains many features of its origins as a holiness movement , a concept which, as I argue elsewhere³, embraces the gifts of the kingdom community.
- Like the diaconal church, Methodism has always had a deep concern for the poor and marginalised as an essential focus of mission.

¹ See Ditewig, W. T. (2007) *The Emerging Diaconate - Servants Leaders in a Servant Church*. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, pp. 130-132

² *Methodist Deed of Union*, 1932

³ Clark, D. (2010) *Reshaping the mission of Methodism - a diaconal church approach*. Oldham: Church in the Market Place, pp. 167-191

- As stated in its Deed of Union, the Methodist Church mirrors the diaconal church in that the ministries of laity, presbyter and deacon are held to be of equal standing.
- Within Methodism, lay people are seen as the church's primary mission resource.
- As with the diaconal church, Methodism is a profoundly communal church with a strong emphasis on 'fellowship' and pastoral care.
- Methodism's character as a Connexion reflects an important communal hall-mark of the diaconal church.
- The Methodist Church has consistently been in the van of the ecumenical movement in Britain, mirroring the diaconal church's commitment to openness and inclusivity.

Nevertheless, British Methodism has not always appreciated the importance of the deeply communal nature of its theology and the diaconal character of its ecclesiology. Nor has it fully grasped the significance of the life and work of its diaconal order as a means of developing the most creative aspects of Methodism's theology and ecclesiology and reshaping its approach to mission.

5. The implications for the Methodist Diaconal Order of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology

5.1 Signs of the kingdom community in practice

At the heart of the missional theology, which should inspire Christians engaged in a world facing so many critical issues today, are the gifts of the kingdom community - life, liberation, love and learning - and the power of these gifts to transform chaos into community. For the church, including Methodism, the call to build a world transformed by those gifts is I believe a divine imperative at the heart of mission. So how can we discern signs of the kingdom community and which might guide us in building kingdom communities here and now?

Many such signs exist in world¹ and church but we are often blind to them because they frequently appear in unexpected places and at unexpected times. However, whenever and wherever we do discern these signs, they need to be recognised as gifts of grace and treated as extremely precious. For me, the life of the Methodist Diaconal Order, with all its inevitable human limitations, offers Methodism and the wider church important insights into what mission as a kingdom community might mean.

5.2 Implications of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology for the MDO as a religious order

I believe that, as is the case with Methodism as a whole, the MDO has not fully grasped how its life *as a religious order* should be empowering *and* giving substance to its work as an order of ministry. My experience of ten years in the Order is that deacons know 'in their guts' that their life as a religious community bonds, supports and inspires them as an Order.

However, I also believe that MDO has an even more important reason to uphold the need for its life as a religious order and its work as an order of ministry to remain 'completely intertwined'². This is because, if the building of kingdom communities takes pride of place

¹ For examples of such glimpses in the world of work see Clark, D. (2014) *The Kingdom at Work Project - a communal approach to mission in the workplace*. Peterborough: Upfront Publishing

² *What is a Deacon?* (2004) 5.2

in mission, as I argue it must, *the life of the MDO as a religious community* offers a model of what that mission is seeking to achieve.

Insights into the nature of the kingdom community offered by the MDO as a religious order are not so much about forms and structures. They are far more about how the Order exemplifies the kingdom community's gifts of life, liberation, love and learning. I have described in detail elsewhere how, as a religious order, the MDO offers Methodism and the wider church many invaluable insights into what these gifts of the kingdom community might mean in practice.¹ This is the reason why the MDO can be designated 'a tool of Christian mission'² and this is its answer to the Interim Report's pressing question as to what Methodism and the wider church has to learn from it³.

5.3 Implications of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology for the MDO as an order of ministry

The MDO as an order of ministry should, therefore, seek to derive the deepest understanding of its apostolate from the way in which its life as a religious order embraces the kingdom community's gifts of life, liberation, love and learning. Furthermore, being a religious order not only informs and empowers the apostolate of the MDO, but offers Methodism, the wider church and, indeed, society precious insights into what the kingdom community and kingdom community building might look like in practice. This is a vital contribution to a deeper understanding of the nature of the mission of the church in our day and age.

Nevertheless, this distinctive missional contribution of the MDO to Methodism and the wider church would become clearer if, whilst remaining an order of ministry, the Order re-focused its apostolate to become *an order of mission*.

What would be key features of such re-focusing?

- The apostolate of an order of mission would be, first and foremost, concerned with the communal transformation of society, not the maintenance of the gathered church.
- Its primary task of an order of mission would be to further kingdom community building in daily life - within schools, hospitals, shops and offices, businesses, centres of government and situations wherever people live, work and play.
- The heart of such an apostolate would be enabling, educating and equipping the people of God - the church's primary mission resource - to become kingdom community builders throughout society.
- As members of an order of mission, the apostolate of deacons would move away from 'witness through service', to which it has been tied for too long, to assume the role of *enabler* and *educator*.

¹ See Clark, D. (2013) 'The hallmark of the Methodist Diaconal Order - its life as a religious order - and some implications for the future of Methodism' in *Theology and Ministry - An Online Journal*. (Vol. 2) University of Durham: St John's College - www.durham.ac.uk/theologyandministry
Clark, D. (2014) *The Kingdom at Work Project - a communal approach to mission in the workplace*. Peterborough: Upfront Publishing, pp. 173-184

² Interim Report, 5.3.7

³ Ibid, 5.1; 5.2; 6.1; 6.4

It is very important to note that the ‘mission statement’ of the MDO already feels after, even if the Order does not as yet fully grasp, this shift of priorities. It states that the MDO is ‘a mission focused, pioneering religious community committed to *enabling* (my italics) outreach, evangelism and service in God’s world’. Such a statement emphasises that the apostolate of Methodist deacons should be that of ‘mission *enablers*’ of the church in the world.

- At certain times and in certain places, an order of mission will need diaconal pioneers. However, the calling of the deacon to be a mission enabler means a commitment to encourage and equip others to take responsibility for any diaconal pioneering initiative taken as soon as feasible.

6. The implications for Methodist presbyters of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology

6.1 Implications of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology for presbyters *as an order of ministry*

I believe that, within the diaconal church, alongside Methodist deacons developing into an order of mission to facilitate kingdom community building within society, presbyters need to develop into *an order of continuity*, facilitating kingdom community building within the church. In this role, presbyters would have the explicit responsibility of enabling gathered churches, be they inherited, planted or fresh expressions, to manifest the gifts of the kingdom community - life, liberation, love and learning.

Many gathered churches, like the diaconal church as a whole, need to refocus their life and work to become servants of the kingdom community. It is just as important that the gifts of the latter are clearly manifest in and through the life of the gathered church as it is that kingdom community building is undertaken within the wider world. For the gospel of the kingdom community to have credibility, the medium of the gathered church must be the message.

6.2 Implications of embracing a kingdom theology and diaconal ecclesiology for presbyters *as a religious order*

Being a religious order enables deacons to empower and give substance to their apostolate as an order of mission enablers. Likewise, in order to empower *and* give substance to their apostolate as an order of continuity, presbyters should become *a religious order*. Such a development would go a long way to enabling Methodism to break the deadening hold of institutionalism and reclaim its heritage as a holiness *movement*

6.3 The need for deacons and presbyters to be members of different religious orders

None the less, one very important proviso needs to be added here. Presbyters as a religious order should remain distinct from deacons as a religious order. Just as within the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, different apostolates have always brought into being different religious orders, so should be the case with Methodist presbyters and deacons. To try and amalgamate Methodist presbyters and deacons into a single religious order would confuse identities, undermine a sense of solidarity and weaken the distinctive apostolates of both.

To retain deacons and presbyters as distinct religious orders is also to be realistic about the different structures and forms needed for orders that would differ considerably in size, spread and ethos.

7. Ensuring the equal standing of diaconal and presbyteral orders

In principle Methodism regards deacons and presbyters as orders of equal standing. Both are ordained at Conference and brought into ‘full Connexion’ together. Both are on the same stipend and experience the same housing arrangements. However, in reality, most Methodists regard the ministry of deacons as secondary to and, in many respects, dependent on that of presbyters. Here, Methodism is coming dangerously close to embracing the ecclesiology of those churches which uphold a hierarchical form of ministry, and to denying the profoundly important stance of its own Deed of Union¹. Methodism urgently needs to address the kinds of issues mentioned below which perpetuate this ecclesiological anomaly.

7.1 Within the gathered church

Deacons should *in principle* be authorised to preside at holy communion. For deacons in principle to be authorised to preside at holy communion does not mean that *in practice* this need happen frequently. However, if the MDO is to become an order of mission in genuine partnership with presbyters as an order of continuity, then deacons should be authorised to preside at holy communion as and when their responsibility for equipping the laity for their task of kingdom community building in daily life makes this appropriate.

Another important development in enhancing the role of deacons in worship might be that they are authorised from time to time to preside over the washing of feet as a sacrament of particular relevance to the ministry of the people of God in the world.²

Overall, however, the diaconate, as an order of mission, needs to have a more prominent role in worship. This could include being equipped to offer an exposition of ‘the Word’ and to lead prayers which would uphold the kingdom community building mission of the laity in daily life.

7.2 Across the Connexion

Two other developments are necessary if the ministries of deacon and presbyter are to achieve parity of standing across the Connexion.

- The presidency of the Methodist Conference needs to be open to deacons. The current anomaly stems in part from deacons not being authorised to preside at holy communion. However, the MDO will never be able to make its essential contribution to reshaping the mission of Methodism if deacons are barred from the opportunity to lead the Connexion in the same way as presbyters.

¹ ‘The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class’, *Deed of Union*, 1932

² *Building Kingdom Communities*, pp. 151-152; O’Loughlin, T. (2015) *Washing Feet: Imitating the example of Jesus in the liturgy today*. Liturgical Press: Norwich

- The transfer of presbyters to the MDO should become as normative as the transfer of deacons to presbyteral ministry, both forms of interchange already permitted by the constitutional practice of the Methodist Church.

I believe that a significant number of presbyters would transfer to the MDO if deacons were in principle authorised to celebrate holy communion. Up to the present time, I believe only one transfer of this kind has ever taken place (in stark contrast to a considerable number of deacons becoming presbyters), notably because presbyters are unprepared to surrender their calling to preside at holy communion.¹ This situation underlines Methodism's steady drift away from its own Deed of Union towards a hierarchical understanding of ordination

8. Changes required in selection, training, ordination and collective learning to further the ministry of deacons as an order of mission and presbyters as an order of continuity

8.1 Changes required to further the ministry of deacons as an order of mission:

- in *the selection process*
 - ensure that candidates are committed to becoming both members of an order of mission *and* of a religious order which would empower and give meaning to their apostolate.
- in *training* (pre- and post-ordination)
 - end diaconal training as a 'bolt-on' to presbyteral training and give it the time and attention it warrants as a distinctive order.
 - enable those in training to understand the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate as both an order of mission and a religious order.
 - offer deacons the professional skills required to fulfil the responsibilities of being members of an order of mission.
 - help deacons to become more aware of and confident in exercising their role as servant leaders of the people of God in the world.
- in *the ordination service*
 - include a commitment to the diaconate as a religious order.
- in the *life of the Order*
 - develop more fully the Order's life as a learning community, notably through diaconal area groups and Convocation.²

¹ *Building Kingdom Communities*, pp. 189-190 and 195-196.

Note. However, in 2005, when I moved from presbyteral to diaconal ministry, I was 'released' from my presbyteral commission to preside at holy communion, a commission which I had held for forty years as a circuit and sector minister. No one within Methodism seemed to give any thought as to the theological justification for this 'de-commissioning'.

² See Clark, D. *Convocation 2015* (2015), MDO (unpublished but on the MDO web site) and *The Methodist Diaconal Order as a learning community* (2015) MDO (unpublished)

8.2 Changes needed to develop the ministry of presbyters as an order of continuity

These steps would be similar to those for deacons outlined above only focusing on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning, and implications for *presbyters becoming an order of continuity and a religious order*.

9. Issues regarding numbers, spread and finance

9.1 Increasing the spread of and numbers within a diaconal order of mission

For the mission of Methodism to be reshaped, at least one deacon should be stationed in every large circuit. Though the MDO has expanded in recent years, this raises the practical problem of there not being enough deacons to meet such a development.

In response to this situation, it should be noted that there are many people, lay and ordained, already employed by Methodism who are striving, in a pragmatic and often isolated way, to undertake the role of ‘mission enabler’. Methodism would benefit immensely if they were offered a deeper understanding of the theology and ecclesiology underpinning that role and, at the same time, given an invitation to become members of a diaconal order which could support and give direction to their apostolate. Amongst those whom I include as potential members of a new diaconal order of mission are:

- those who currently assume the title of ‘mission enabler’
- those designated as ‘learning and development officers’ or with a similar title
- presbyters dedicated to working ‘on the margins’ of church and society
- chaplains who see their work as primarily missional rather than pastoral
- many training to form the new category of ‘pioneer ministers’.
- lay people already building bridges between church and world in a voluntary capacity.

In passing, it is worth noting here that an increase in the number of men and of those from a greater variety of ethnic backgrounds would be a welcome development for the MDO.

9.2 Financial requirements

The movement of personnel into the MDO as an order of mission suggested in 9.1 could be undertaken with relatively limited cost. Other funding might come from the following.

- Some large circuits already in being or coming into being have funds which could be used to employ a deacon as a mission enabler.
- There may be Christian voluntary organizations operating working within society (Action for Children, MHA and so forth) willing to fund a deacon as a mission enabler related to their particular sphere of work.
- There might be trusts willing to fund a deacon to work at community building in relation to the development of secular (or religious) organizations.
- It is not out of the question that the ‘launch’ of an new order of mission within Methodism might attract additional giving from the Methodist people.
- Some funding from the sale of Methodism’s redundant churches could go to support the new order.
- Finally, as described below, a partnership with the Church of England to establish an ecumenical diaconal order of mission should warrant some funding come from that denomination.

10. Changes in leadership, organisation and accountability needed for the Methodist Diaconal Order to develop as an order of mission

10.1 Leadership issues

If the MDO grew in size and spread there would need to be at least two Deputy Wardens, based in appropriate geographical locations, to serve it. There would also need to be additional administrative support for the Warden and Deputy Wardens. A much closer bond would need to be forged between the MDO and District Chairs.

There is no reason to think that the responsibilities of the MDO's Leadership Group, in relation to the support and accountability of the Warden and Deputy Warden(s), need change a great deal.

10.2 Changes in diaconal gatherings outside Convocation

To assist with bonding, oversight and administration, it would be valuable for an expanded Order to hold an annual regional 'convocation', sometime between annual national Convocations, for deacons serving in the south or the north of the country. Such regional gatherings have happened in the past.

In an expanded Order, the function and agenda of area groups would be even more important than at present. Thus groups might need to take on a more structured form with area group leaders, though being nominated by area groups, appointed at and answerable to Convocation. Area groups might also be given more structured pastoral and training responsibilities.¹

11. Engaging lay people in supporting new diaconal and presbyteral orders

It would be immensely supportive for the new orders of deacons and presbyters if Methodism were to initiate the formation of two 'Third Orders' of lay people. These would be similar to those associated with the historic religious orders, such as the Franciscans. One Third Order would be associated with the MDO as an order of mission and the other with presbyters as an order of continuity. Each Third Order would be seen as an integral part of the life and work of the orders of mission and continuity respectively, though less formally and fully involved than their ordained members.

12. Ecumenical issues

12.1 What Methodism and the MDO could learn from other churches and Christian communities

A good deal about the way in which having a rule of life can underpin and inform the apostolate of Christian associations can be gained from what has been called 'the Christian Community Movement'² active over the last few decades of the past century, as well as from

¹ Clark, D. (2015) *The Methodist Diaconal Order as a learning community*, MDO (unpublished)

² See Clark, D. (1977) *Basic Communities- Towards an Alternative Society*. London: SPCK; Clark, D. (1984) *The Liberation of the Church - The role of basic Christian groups in a new re-formation*, Westhill College, Birmingham: NACCCAN; Clark, D. (2005; second printing 2014) 'The Christian

the much smaller number of similar initiatives commenced since then. Typical communities which have much to offer are the Mennonites, Iona, Movement for a Better World, Taizé, Corrymeela and l'Arche. A number of older religious orders, such as the Franciscans, Little Sisters of Jesus, Sisters of Notre Dame and certain lay Roman Catholic apostolates, offer important guidelines for the future of Methodist orders. There is also a good deal to be learnt from a number of evangelical associations seeking to engage with different occupational spheres of British society.¹

12.2 What the development of new orders of mission and continuity within Methodism could offer other churches

As an order of ministry and a religious order the MDO is *already* blazing a trail concerning the potential of a renewed diaconate for a number of other churches. For example, members of DACE (the Diaconal Association of the Church of England) have on several occasions expressed their 'envy' of this feature of the Methodist diaconate. There is also considerable interest within the United Methodist Church in the States relating to the way in which the diaconal order has developed within British Methodism, as well as to the suggestion that it could develop further into an order of mission.

Pragmatically, however, the proposals in this paper have most immediate ecumenical relevance to the Church of England. For historical, organizational and economic reasons, it is the Church of England that will continue to take the main responsibility for the continuity of a church rooted in community of place. The parish system, for all its weaknesses, still has a vital role to play in this context, and Anglican priests (presbyters) remain in pole position to continue to be responsible for maintaining that apostolate. I believe that Methodism's contribution to the sustainability of the gathered (or parish) church is to work with the Church of England to explore how the combined resources of both denominations, especially that of presbyters as an order of continuity, can be most effectively deployed. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that the most important offering Methodism could make to the Church of England is a model of how to develop and expand its own diaconate as an order of mission.

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February 2017

Community Movement' in *Breaking the Mould of Christendom: Kingdom community, diaconal church and the liberation of the laity*, pp. 150-169. Peterborough: Upfront Publishing

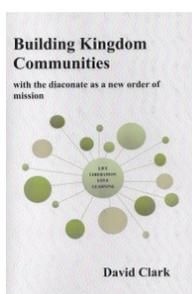
¹ See Clark, *Breaking the Mould of Christendom*, pp. 254-264

The key resource for this paper is:

***‘Building Kingdom Communities
- with the diaconate as a new order of mission’***

Peterborough: Upfront Publishing
(2016)

David Clark



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

David Clark is a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order. He worked as a Methodist prebyter in Sheffield and London, and as a senior lecturer in community education at Westhill College, Birmingham. He played a leading role in the emergence of the Christian Community Movement, set up the Christians in Public Life Programme and founded the Human City Institute, Birmingham. He is co-ordinator of the Kingdom at Work Project.



From *Breaking the Mould of Christendom* which lays the foundations for this book -

‘In times of crisis, prophets appear in the church. David Clark is such a prophet. His book brilliantly analyses the mission of the church in contemporary life...’

John Hull - then Honorary Professor of Practical Theology in the Queens Foundation, Birmingham

‘David Clark challenges all Christians, not least deacons, to make a Copernican shift in their understanding of diaconal mission... It is a must-read for deacons worldwide.’

Sue Jackson - then Warden of the Diaconal Order, Methodist Church in Great Britain

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