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The Role of the Diaconate
and the
Unity of the Church
by
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The Role of the Diaconate and the Unity of the Church

by Richard L. Jeske

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In the three-volume *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* published by Fortress Press in 1965, there is a six-line entry on the "Diaconate" that reads: "Today the reference is primarily to trained lay workers in the church, garbed or otherwise, who assist the clergy in promoting the work of the church in local parishes, charities, institutions of the church, etc." Besides the term "otherwise" in this description, I found that between the first word "today" and the last word "etc." the very brevity of this six-line entry was being utterly betrayed.

So I turned back to look up the word "deacon," an entry given a paragraph of 23 lines ending in the astonishing sentence, "A deacon ... is, as it were, a male deaconess." Of course, I thought of the then reigning English translation of Romans 16:2, in the RSV, which referred to Phoebe as a "deaconess," and I thought of how the Greek readers of that word, it being a masculine singular, were (in 1965) just about ready to reflect on why we call someone a "deaconess" who was, not as it were but in fact, a female diakonos!

That was the final sentence of this 23-line definition of "deacon." But no less felicitous for our topic today was the opening sentence of this entry which read: "In Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism (a deacon is) a member of the clergy one rank below that of a priest." And then the next sentence offered the interesting contrast: "In non-hierarchical churches, including English-speaking Lutherans, a deacon – like elder and trustee – is a layman elected or appointed to perform variously defined duties." And drawing upon the role of deacon in European Lutheran use, it defined these duties as "teaching, conducting old people's homes, hospices, and other institutions of mercy, conducting church choirs, taking care of a congregation's financial affairs, assisting the pastor in various areas of work, or serving the church at large, as in seamen's missions and the like." At least the article moved beyond rank to service, even though the opening bell of the first line still rang the shrill tone of pecking order in the church.

The six-line entry on "Diaconate" and the 23-line entry on "Deacon" stood in contrast to the lengthy five-page, nine-column entry on "Deaconess," written by Sister Mildred Winter, then of the Lutheran Deaconess House in Philadelphia. This article begins with a reference to Romans 16:1-2, noting the sole instance in the New Testament of the word *diakonos* explicitly used of a woman, continues with the early 2nd century reference in Pliny to Christian *ministrae*, and cites the documents of the Eastern church, which recognize deaconesses as part of the *cleros*, ordained by bishops by the "laying on of hands" (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8:19), attached to congregational ministries and numerous (about 40) in the church of Constantinople. For various reasons the office of deaconess did not take hold in the churches of the West until its restoration in the early

19th century, first among Protestant churches in Germany and then in the United States, culminating in the consecration of the first American deaconess in Pittsburgh in 1850 and the establishment of the first Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouse in 1890 in Philadelphia. Winter describes the rapid expansion of the office of deaconess throughout the American Lutheran Churches of the 20th century, to Brazil, India, Japan, Sumatra, with over 60,000 deaconesses serving worldwide Lutheranism by the year 1960. Understanding the history, the energy, the worldwide development, the vast mission and critically important ministry of the office of deaconess might move one, after all, to consider it a very high compliment, at least in Lutheran circles, to call a deacon, “as it were, a male deaconess.”

Of course, we have to remember that this was from a book published in 1965, four years before the first of the Lutheran/Episcopal dialogues began, five years before the ordination of women, 14 years before the *Lutheran Book of Worship* commended the Eucharist to its central place in American Lutheran worship, 17 years before the Interim Eucharist sharing agreement, 17 years before the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 22 years before the merger of three American Lutheran church bodies, 23 years before the ELCA’s adoption of its *Statement on Ecumenism*, 28 years before its *Study of Ministry* was completed, and 36 years before the inauguration of the full communion partnership now joyfully shared by our two church bodies. So a publication of 1965 could hardly have anticipated the rapid change, for the better, that has taken place just within the lifetime of most of us in this room.

Ecumenical partnerships, I am convinced, is one way in which the Spirit is reshaping the church. Since the gifts of the Spirit are always given, as we heard on Pentecost, “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7), ecumenical partners are able to look to each other for the gifts they bring to our common mission. Our ecumenical dialogues have left an indelible mark on the ELCA, as can be seen from the adoption – at the ELCA’s first Churchwide Assembly (1989) – of its *Statement on Ecumenism*, and from its adoption at its next Churchwide Assembly (1991) of its *Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment*. Sacramental sharing and the ordering of ministry were clearly placed at center stage for all the churches by the Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982), with its accent on historical continuity and common witness in the mission of the Body of Christ throughout the world. With *Called to Common Mission* our two church bodies have committed themselves to relating all our mutual conversations and actions to our mutual interest in identifying our common mission in the world. That mission is not first and foremost the ministries of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, but rather the ministry of the baptized, and any “ordering” of ministerial leadership is done so that the mission and ministry of the baptized might be carried out effectively, in harmony, with order, toward a united witness to the world, a world marked by the fragmentation caused by human sin.

And yet, when one turns to the venerable *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed, 1997), the entry on “deacon” is begun with the terse definition, the exact same definition given in the 1957 edition: “deacon ... the rank in the Christian ministry next below presbyter (priest) and bishop.” At least six paragraphs are given to soften that opening blow. But we have all begun to see that the notion of “rank” is not the most helpful place to begin, as our dictionaries have the habit of doing. Perhaps it is difficult, given the church’s history, to avoid being stuck there whenever we attach ministerial

service to the concept of “orders” in the church. After all, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* reminded us that the terms *ordo* and *ordinare* are terms we have inherited from Roman law, terms that convey the notion of a special status distinct from the proletariat, as the term *ordo clarissimus* (“most distinguished order”) was applied to the Roman senate. Roman law may be the source for the church’s language, but we like to say that the community of the Holy Spirit is there not to conform to but to transform the constructs of human society, a transformation made possible by the gospel. At Pentecost the Spirit was given to the church, but the Spirit, it must always be remembered, is a gift of the risen and ascended Christ, whose Lordship we proclaim, and whose sending is a sending of all the baptized, a sending to bear witness to the good news of the nearness of the reign of God. The sending of the Spirit is to enable the baptized to carry out their mission in the world.

The emphasis on the church’s mission in the world has dominated several recent studies on the diaconate. I mention James Barnett’s book *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (now in its 3rd ed, 1995), and the work of Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*, published in 1991. In 1996 the Hanover Report was published, the work of the Anglican Lutheran International Commission (ALIC), under the title *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*. From Lutheran circles have come two important symposia published in 1999: the first was published by the ELCA under the title *From Word and Sacrament: Renewed Vision for Diaconal Ministry*, edited by Duane H. Larson; the second is a two-volume work just published in Sweden by the Nordic Ecumenical Council, *The Ministry of the Deacon*, with one volume given to “Anglican-Lutheran Perspectives” and the other to broader “Ecclesiological Explorations.” This two-volume study was born out of the new partnership inaugurated by the *Porvoo Common Statement* of 1992. All these studies allow **what a deacon is** to be defined by **what a deacon does**, in order to enable the ministry of all the baptized.

All such studies of the office of deacon in the church begin with reference to the story in Acts 6, the appointment of the Seven. There is basic agreement that the narrative itself does not allow us historically to reconstruct the establishment of church polity in the first post-Easter generation, but it does reflect Luke’s ideal about the development of ministry to his own time. Ministry, according to Luke, developed out of need, the need to offer adequate service to the whole people of God. The rapid increase in numbers, Luke says, meant attention to the needs of the whole community. The basic need meant the affirmation of the apostolic role, that of the ministry of the word and its primary place for the whole community. It is this “whole community” in Jerusalem that the apostles address, asking the “whole community” to select from among them “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” for a specific service, so that the apostles might devote themselves “to prayer and to serving the word.” So the whole community selected men “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” and brought them before the apostles for their appointment and for the “laying on of hands.” Luke’s narrative accents the role of the apostles as eyewitnesses of the risen Lord and their proclamation of the gospel, and the support of that role by their appointment of people selected by the community, people whose gifts of faith and the Spirit were indisputable. The ministry of the Seven arose according to need, the need to uphold the ministry of the Twelve and the mission given them by the risen Christ, namely to devote themselves to prayer, i.e. the worship of the whole community, and to the word which shaped that community further. The Seven were consecrated, i.e. made

holy, i.e. set apart for that special service by the laying on of apostolic hands. They were set apart for ministry, diakonien, to serve, and in this case to preserve the unity of the whole community, to make sure that no one, whether Hellenists or Hebrews, would be neglected. The whole community, under the guidance of the Spirit, recognizes need, affirms a remedy, selects for ministry, prays together, and witnesses the setting apart, the laying on of hands.

In a powerful story of six short verses themes reminiscent from the Pauline letters are heard. "To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). To a church that had lost its unity Paul said that. Recognize the need: "as long as there is quarreling and strife among you, I can't address you as Spirit-filled" (*pneumatikoi* = 3:1). Affirm a remedy, i.e. quit triangulating us: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose.... We are God's servants (*sunergoi*), working together; you are God's field, God's building" (3:6-9). Appoint for ministry: "You know that members of the household of Stephanas ... have devoted themselves to the service (*diakonia*) of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them" (16:15-16). Focus on the prayer of your community and to what it has descended: "are you baptizing in my name?" (1:13); "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat, because each of you goes ahead with his own meal ... and you can't even recognize the body...." (1:20-21,29); "let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said" (14:29); "on the first day of the week set aside your gifts, and when Timothy comes see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord" (16:2, 10). Paul's admonitions are given in view of the fact that the ministry of the baptized is being threatened, that the church of Christ that is in Corinth cannot speak with one voice (not in worship and therefore not in mission), and that some order, i.e. harmony, must be reestablished. Interesting that at the end of the first century Clement of Rome, in his letter to Corinth, writes that the apostles found it necessary to appoint bishops and deacons, in order to bring harmony and order to a church with a history of division (42:3-45:1).

In another venue, that of Philippi, a church founded and beloved by Paul, the conflict comes attached with names. Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is the only one of his letters that explicitly mentions his greetings to "the bishops and deacons" there. In this letter, a composite of smaller letters, is included an intriguing side-note directed to the conflict that is attached to the names Euodia and Syntyche. The leadership of these two women is so prominent in the church that unity will exist only if their differences are resolved. And Paul makes the intriguing remark: "I also ask you, true yokefellow, to help these women, for they have struggled side by side with me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (4:2-3). To be mentioned in the same sentence with Paul and Clement indicates the significant stature of Euodia and Syntyche in the Pauline mission, now especially at Philippi. But speculation has always been high about who the "true yokefellow" might be that Paul engages to bring unity to their conflict. (For instance, Clement of Alexandria thought Suzuge should be seen as a proper name, and suggested Suzuge was none other than the wife of St. Paul!) But think of the possibilities here: are Euodia and Syntyche bishops in Philippi, and is Paul's "true yokefellow" one of the deacons whom Paul seeks to engage in the work of establishing unity in the church at Philippi? Again, it is speculation, but one that bears at least a

modicum of consideration in view of its consistency with the developing role of the deacon in the first century church.

In the practice of the diaconate, and in the studies on that subject, the common role of the deacon, of deaconesses, of diaconal ministers, has been identified as one of social outreach ministries, of service to the poor and the disadvantaged, of attention to the economic and health needs of the world. That appreciation of the role of the diaconate was echoed by Martin Luther, with reference to Acts 6: "The diaconate is the ministry ... of distributing the church's aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate...." (LW 36, 116). In practice and in our studies on the diaconate that is the common understanding of the role of this office in the church.

But I would like to challenge our thinking about the diaconate, that its restoration to our churches accent not only the eleemosynary ministries of the church, but also its role – on the basis of Acts 6 – in preserving the unity of the church, the unity of a congregation, in order to enable the ministry of the baptized to be carried out with order, with harmony, with "one voice," as Paul put it, "to the glory of God" (Rom 15:6). That is an accent that is missing from most studies on the diaconate, even ones that begin with Acts 6. We must remember that in Acts 6 the ministry of the Seven arose to solve the discord that resulted from complaints about neglect in the daily distribution practiced by the Jerusalem church. The ministry of the Seven was to make sure no one was neglected in the sharing of goods, and thereby to preserve the unity of the church of Christ in that place.

It is important here to underscore two major foundational points in our common ecclesiological heritage. First, as mentioned earlier, at Pentecost the Spirit was given to the church, a gift of the risen and ascended Lord, whose Lordship we proclaim. With St. Paul's profound statement that the manifestations of the Spirit are given for the common good, I understand that I avail myself of the Spirit's gifts as a member of the community, and my exercise of the Spirit's gifts are for the good of the whole community. That means that disunity in the church cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit. Second, the local congregation, in the language of the New Testament, is the church of Jesus Christ in that place. It is the "church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 1:1), "the church in (Philemon's) house" (v.2), etc. The local church is the church of Jesus Christ, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit in that place – not simply a part of the ecclesia, not simply one member of the Body of Christ, not only one stone in God's building. "You are God's building," the apostle said. Therefore all that the local church does proceeds from its assembling together, first of all in worship, in which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is present and gives himself. If the worship assembly is that point from which all other activity proceeds, then the task of church office is to provide for the following:

- a) the leadership of the worship service. This includes the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, especially Eucharistic worship, for the encouragement, consolation, and empowerment of the baptized in their ministry, i.e. in the use of their gifts from the Spirit;

- b) the leadership of overtures to and in the world, both inside and outside the church – which would include visitation, social outreach, evangelism (including the starting of new congregations), advocacy, the sending of the baptized for missionary work in the world;
- c) the sustaining and strengthening of the unity of the local congregation with other congregations including those of ecumenical partners.

These two presuppositions – the Spirit at work in the community under the Lordship of Christ and the local congregation in that place totally as the very church of God – are directly related to the role of the diaconate as a ministry of strengthening the unity of the church. What benefits can this role provide for the total ministry of the church?

First of all, we can rid ourselves of two archaic public personae that have for too long burdened the pastoral office. One fortunate opportunity is to wave goodbye to the Lone Ranger. It is not helpful to the ministry of the baptized to see the pastor as the singular hero dispensing silver bullets against all the evils of the world. The ministry of a given congregation is not the pastor's ministry alone, but the ministry of the whole congregation, a mutual ministry, within the parish and with the church at large. The concept of the parish pastor as the Lone Ranger is also not conducive to the unity of the wider church. It can often lead to a lack of collegiality among clergy, to a lack of connection to the greater church, a limited approach to ministry in the world, to an exclusive understanding of the authority of ministerial office, and to burnout. The ministry of the diaconate reasserts the importance of viewing the work of the church not as the work of the pastor alone, but as the ministry of all the baptized, the whole people of God.

The other public persona we can wave goodbye to is that of Professor Irwin Corey. Professor Irwin Corey was a standup comic popular in the 1970's, who billed himself as "The World's Foremost Authority." On what? On everything, of course. We get to wave goodbye to Professor Irwin Corey, the World's Foremost Authority. The ministry of the Seven in Acts 6 was to enable the apostles to concentrate on their responsibility for preaching the word and for prayer, i.e. the worship of the community. The message of the story is clear: it takes time to do that. It takes time to prepare for preaching with integrity, and to do it well takes more time. To teach, especially to teach the Scriptures, also takes time and a certain amount of expertise and constant follow-up even after seminary, and to do it well takes more time. Do our parishioners know it takes time? Do they respect the ministry of preaching? If not, why not? Have we, by our lack of attention to preaching, contributed to the desire for 5-minute sermons, with the accompanying boredom and non-engagement anyway, and the lack of participation in adult education – all things that cut off the baptized from one of the means used by the Spirit to effect the Lordship of Christ? The ministry of the Seven in Acts was to support the rightful place of preaching, for the benefit of the people of God, and to protect the time needed to prepare the community's worship, especially the Eucharistic assembly from which the daily distribution would proceed.

Let me ask an indelicate question: is the attrition in membership from our churches to others of the more dogmatic "non-denominational" right the result of our own lack of attention to preaching and teaching about the word and about communal prayer,

allowing people to fall prey to uncritical approaches to the Sacred Scriptures and the cavalier dismissal of the catholic liturgy of the church? Please pardon my indelicacy, but I think so.

Second, in terms of the benefits offered by a renewed diaconate as the instrument of unity in the church: the ordering of ministry has as its purpose to bring order, i.e. harmony, to the ministry of the baptized. Out of carefully prepared preaching, with integrity, i.e. the methodical application of the Word of God to the lives of the baptized as they live in the world, issues of social outreach arise that the deacon addresses for the benefit of the whole community. As a parish pastor I need a leadership voice other than my own to identify, advocate, organize, and galvanize the efforts of the baptized to fulfill their ministry to the disadvantaged and the oppressed, both inside and outside the church. For instance, I have seen it to be an extremely difficult task for the pastor to be the sole voice for addressing oppression in the world and our own complicity in it. Historically, this diaconal ministry of advocacy and service is given liturgical expression as the deacon leads the worshipping assembly in its prayers, in its confession of faith, its carrying the Lord's gifts from the Table, and in its gathering us around the Gospel, the Word of God in the midst of our meeting.

Third, the mutual recognition and exchange of ministries promised by *Called to Common Mission* presents our two churches with a historic opportunity for the renewal and reinstitution of a coordinated diaconate. Both our church bodies are all over the map on this issue: ordained or non-ordained, stipendiary or non-stipendiary, synodical/diocesan based or parish based, seminary or not seminary trained, etc. Does every Episcopal diocese have them? No. Every ELCA Synod? No. They are ordained in the Episcopal Church, but not presently in the ELCA, where they are "consecrated." In the ELCA they are not called "Deacons," but "Diaconal Ministers," "Parish Associates," even "Associates in Ministry." At this writing there are 48 Diaconal Ministers in the ELCA – thirty-nine women and nine men, most of them parish based; but there are also 130 candidates for diaconal ministry. There are seventy-one Deaconesses, with ten candidates in preparation. And there are 1,066 Associates in Ministry, with 306 candidates waiting in the wings. And by the way, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has now begun to enroll, train, and commission "Deacons." The people of the churches are giving ample signals of their readiness for diaconal ministry. So there is an opportunity to learn from each other how we can move ahead to meet the widely expressed desire for diaconal leadership, and it is a historic opportunity. Even as the CCM commits us to mutual recognition and exchange, the opportunity is to shape diaconal ministry together. That is a significant task, and is an expression of the unity that this office has as its first purpose: the unity of the Body of Christ in a given place, namely in this country. The ELCA's *Study of Ministry*, in its earlier stages, noted that the shaping of the diaconate will best be determined in mutual conversation with our ecumenical partners. While such sentiment did not make it into the final draft, that was before the CCM was adopted and it is now a new day. The opportunity that beckons is too good for us to pass up.

Please allow me to summarize. The ordaining, consecrating, setting aside of the Seven in Acts 6, we can all say, cannot be used historically to describe the polity of the 1st century church or the beginnings of the three-fold order, much less any clerical orders in the church. But once that is said, we are not simply done with this narrative.

Soon the Apostles, the eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, will leave the scene, and by Luke's time some already have. And even though we have commonly accented the role of the Seven as attending to the daily distribution, and have understood the role of the diaconate as one of outreach to the poor and disadvantaged of society, there is a significant facet of this story that we have tended to neglect: the role of the Seven in addressing disunity in the church. This disunity – the competition between Hebraists and Hellenists – Luke knows, by the time he writes, was the most divisive issue in the early church, and although Luke mutes all internal dispute within the Community of the Spirit (for apologetic reasons) he knows that this division was so disastrous that it led to the end of Paul's ministry (and probably to his death), to the demise of the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem, and to the exporting of the same division into the Hellenistic churches of the second generation. What he offers as a solution to it is the role of the Seven, to engage in a diakonia for the benefit of the unity of the church. It might be the daily distribution in Jerusalem and services to the neglected in Jerusalem. But in Antioch it might also be cultural theological issues such as Gentile circumcision and kosher observance (Acts 15; cf. Gal 2:11-21). In Gaza and Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40) it might also be the issue of the acceptance, yes, of the eunuchs of the world, an acceptance denied by the Temple (Deut 23:1, Lev 21:16-20), an acceptance in the Christian community based on a new reading of Isaiah 53, through the prism of the crucified and risen Lord, the one, Luke knows, who opens the Scriptures to all of us (Luke 24:32). From Caesarea to Ephesus (Acts 10:1-48, 19:1-20) it may mean recognition of the free movement of the Spirit even as preparatory for the sacramental life of the whole community, so that eventually the Spirit's work can be seen always for the common good.

The accent of the work of the Seven as a work to preserve the unity of the church has been overlooked in our treatments of this story. And I believe that recovering this accent is the best way toward recovering and restoring the work of the deacon throughout our churches. Belaboring the point whether the Seven presage the diaconate in its later development gets us to miss the potential here: a need in the church was identified, and a diakonia arose to address it.

Is there that need today? Well, 46% of clergy in this country today have resigned their calls under pressure, at least once in their careers, usually because of factions in the churches they served. How often does the prophetic voice we want to sound become muted because we allow that "the parish isn't there yet," or "the culture is too set in its ways," or "Matthew 18 is too controversial for its own good." Sometimes preaching is supposed to disturb the comfortable, supposed to offer the hard word, to get hearts burning within themselves. The ministry of the deacon as a partner in the prophetic task who places her- or himself under the Word can be a vivid and living example for the whole community, as it is articulated in the petitions of the people offered in communal worship.

As a parish pastor I would welcome the ministry of a deacon whose first and foremost role is to address issues of disunity in the parish and to move us all toward healing. I know a Diaconal Minister whose particular study emphasis is that of "conflict management." In the church he doesn't call it that, but instead likes to refer to it as "peace formation." Of course, that too can be a gift of the Spirit, one that can

encourage conscientious listening to the prophetic word, proclaimed and taught by those appointed to do.

To effect that unity in the church of God at a given place takes someone whose gifts are recognized by the whole community, gifts of faith and holiness, someone who can be set apart by them, consecrated, ordained. In an excellent article on “The Development of Diaconal Ministry in the ELCA” (in *From Word and Sacrament*, pp. 89-108) Madelaine Busse notes that a majority of the task force on the ELCA’s *Study of Ministry* voted in favor of the **ordination** of diaconal ministers. But some members of the task force published minority reports that were among the influences that caused the Board of the ELCA’s Division for Ministry to amend the recommendations of the *Study of Ministry* task force, deleting the recommendation to ordain; and the amended report was then adopted by the Conference of Bishops and the 1993 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

If, however, the ministry of Diaconal Ministers can be seen as that of a vital role in effecting and maintaining the unity of the church, then I believe the ongoing conversations with our ecumenical partners will cause us to revisit this issue – as the earlier drafts of the *Study of Ministry* suggested we do. In the meantime it is important to listen to our own voices in Diaconal Ministry on this issue, as Madelaine Busse herself writes: “Many of us who had served in lay ministries in the life of the church without the grace and blessing of a rite of entry yearned for the gift that ordination would bring to the exercise of ministry” (p. 101).

The ministry of the diaconate as an instrument of unity in the church will enable us to get past the issue of power, of seeing the pastor’s piece of the pie eroding, or of seeing the ministry of the deacon only as another rank in a hierarchy of offices. Lifting up the task of the unity of the church means that the accent falls on the whole people of God, the baptized, and on their service together in the world and their praise of God with one voice. As a parish pastor, I need that and I know my parish would welcome it, and I thank God that the Spirit is at work among us to help us envision the potential that is now before us.

Finally, it is interesting that the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (p. 46) includes among its intercessory petitions a prayer for “Deaconesses and Deacons” that even back in 1978 articulated the hopes of so many for the future of this office:

O God, through the ages you have called *women/men* to the diaconate in your Church. Let your blessing rest now on all who answer that call. Grant them understanding of the Gospel, sincerity of purpose, diligence in ministry, and the beauty of life in Christ, that many people will be served and your name be glorified; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

May it please God to continue to bring this hopeful request to fruition.

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