

Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate, Concerning the

(This report was received by the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney in October 1987.)

(The report which follows was produced for the Standing Committee, which resolved that the report be printed for the Synod without recommendation.)

Referral and Background

1. In 1983 the Synod passed the following resolution (8/83) –

"Synod requests the Standing Committee to arrange for a canon to amend or to initiate legislation to amend the Constitution to be presented at the next session of the General Synod to permit women to be ordained to the Diaconate and further requests Standing Committee to give consideration to the nature of a distinctive and permanent diaconate and to report its findings to the first session of the next Synod."

2. It is the second part of this resolution which is the concern of this Committee, namely that consideration be given to the "nature of a distinctive and permanent diaconate". Following this resolution in 1983, Standing Committee appointed a committee (herein called the 1983 Committee) which submitted a report to the Standing Committee in the year 1985, but we understand, that report was not proceeded with. Standing Committee resolved in December 1985, to appoint this Committee and its terms of reference are as follows –

"To report on the nature of a distinctive and permanent diaconate, as well as on the diaconate as defined in the Ordinal, having regard to such matters as salary, emoluments, accountability, terms of reference and the like."

Committee

3. The persons originally appointed to this new committee were as follows –

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr G R Christmas | The Rev J G Mason |
| The Rev D E Eastway | Deaconess E Mathieson |
| Mrs M Gabbott | Deaconess J Standfield |
| The Rev R E Heslehurst | The Rev P R Watson |
| Deaconess N Jarrett | |

4. Subsequently the Rev D E Eastway resigned in May 1986, and Deaconess N Jarrett resigned in February 1987. The Chairman of the Committee is Mr G R Christmas and the Secretary is the Rev P R Watson.

Meetings

5. The Committee met on 18 March, 22 April, 20 May, 1 July 1986, 17 February, 20 March, 13 April, and 22 May 1987.

6. The Committee invited Canon L F Bartlett to attend a meeting on 20 May 1986 and the Rev Dr P F Jensen on 22 May 1987, both of which contributions were appreciated.

Terms of Reference

7. The 1983 Committee was requested to report on "the nature of a distinctive and permanent diaconate". This present Committee has also been requested to report on the subject, but additionally it is to report on "the diaconate as defined in the Ordinal". We are also specifically requested to have regard to "such matters as salary, emoluments, accountability, terms of reference and the like".

Two Categories of Diaconate

8. The resolution contemplates two categories of Deacon.

9. The first category of Deacon is that "defined" in the 1662 Ordinal. We note at the outset that the Ordinal does not explicitly define a "Deacon". It refers, however, to the relevant qualifications for, and the functions of such office.

10. While a reading of the Ordinal might suggest that the Diaconate is a transitory order, nevertheless it is capable of providing for a permanent office. There are examples in history and in current practice within the Anglican Communion which clearly suggest that the Ordinal is not to be read in a restrictive manner, so as to apply only to the transitory order. The matter is arguable but it is the view of this Committee that deacons may currently be ordained who either -

- (a) do not intend to proceed to Priesthood, or
- (b) are not qualified for the Priesthood, or

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- (c) are legally incapable of being ordained to the Priesthood.

11. The second category of Deacon is a concept which exists in theory but is not universally practised in the Anglican Communion. It is a much discussed notion. The concept is differently described in various places. The Episcopal Church in the United States has for many years created "perpetual deacons". In other places there are references to "permanent" deacons (e.g. "The Origins of the Permanent Deacon" by Edward P Echlin in the "Churchman" volume 88 no. 4 October 1974.) The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner in his "Theological Investigations" refers to "absolute" or lifelong deacons (see James H Barnett "The Diaconate", Seabury page 146). Another writer refers to the "revised diaconate" (Jeffrey B Mickle in an article in the "Quarterly Review" issue 2 no. 1 Spring 1982), and there has been much discussion in various countries concerning the "recovery", "renewal", "reform" or "restoration" of the Diaconate. All of these discussions appear to have in common the following concerns –

- (a) The Diaconate should be "distinctive", that is, different from the Priesthood and the Episcopacy. This distinctiveness lies in the emphasis upon service. Every Christian ministry is diaconal: Jesus said this about his own ministry (Mark 10:45), and foreshadowed that this would be true of every disciple (Matthew 23:8-12). In the early Christian community there were persons called "deacons" (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13). There is, it seems, a distinctive ministry within, but to be distinguished from, the general diaconal nature of all Christian ministry.
- (b) The Diaconate should be "permanent", that is, not transitional, a "stepping stone" or "apprenticeship stage" pending ordination to the Priesthood.

Why A "Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate" is Desirable

12. For the past thirty years there has been substantial debate within the Anglican Communion on the future shape and nature of the Diaconate.

13. In England the 1958 Lambeth Conference resolved to recommend that "each province . . . shall consider whether the office of Deacon shall be restored to its primitive place as a distinct order of the Church, instead of being regarded as a probationary period for the priesthood". Ten years later the 1968 Lambeth Conference resolved to recommend –

- "(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."

14. In Australia the subject has been discussed within various reports of the General Synod Commission on Doctrine given in the years 1973, 1977 and 1981. In particular the 1981 Report ("Towards a Theology of Ordination" paragraph 97) included "six theological affirmations" concerning the Diaconate including the statement that it is "a distinct order of the church's ministry". Furthermore the Commission stated that "to be a Deacon ought not necessarily involve the assumption that every Deacon will become, or should expect to become a Priest . . . it is theologically unjustifiable and pastorally inappropriate, to limit admission to the diaconate to those who intend to serve Christ's people as priests" (page 39).

15. We endorse these statements of the Commission on Doctrine and affirm that it is desirable to widen the scope of the diaconate so that it be both "distinctive and permanent" in role and function.

16. We do so for the following reasons –

- (a) The dimension of service as typified by the Diaconate is not, and should not be seen to be inferior or transitory. The concept of service is at the basis of the threefold Ministry and it is a distinctive and valid dimension of the three orders. The emphasis on service in the Diaconate will be a stimulus to diaconal ministry within a congregation encouraging its members in their own respective ministries.
- (b) Increasingly parishes are becoming larger and more complex in their administration. Amalgamations of existing parishes are taking place in the diocese and, for various reasons, branch churches are closing, and more centralised structures are being formed. Team ministries are likely to be more effective in order to meet the more complex and specialised needs of these larger and more complex parishes. Such ministries could include Deacons who are engaged as

assistants to the incumbent or who function in a specialist ministry. Their functions could include liturgy, pastoral care, counselling teaching, administration, education and evangelism.

- (c) Deacons are not persons upon whom territorial responsibility is conferred (as in the case of incumbent or bishop). They can be effectively used within the diocese as a whole for the purpose of exercising specialist ministries where needed. Such Deacons could meet particular needs as they arise in the changing pattern of the diocese from time to time. Parish boundaries are continually subject to sociological change, and shifts in population. In such situations flexibility and ability to cope with change are essential. In developing areas of pioneer work, church planting and evangelism task forces including Deacons, could be an effective means of meeting ministry needs as they arise.
- (d) Traditionally an important feature of the Deacon's ministry is that of the administration of welfare within an imperfect world, so as to meet social needs and welfare demands. There have always been such needs, but the Church in our society is approaching a decade which is likely to experience a reduced standard of living. As social service structures are placed under greater strain, and at a time where broken relationships, divorce, separation, single-parent families, child abuse and a multitude of other problems become increasingly prevalent, then this social welfare ministry of the Church within society will be of increasing importance.
- (e) The structure of parish ministry has for some time been concentrated on a hierarchical pattern with the focus on one person. This has often led the incumbent into the position of trying to meet all ministry demands personally and to fulfil the impossible expectation of omni-competence. As churches seek to realise the concept of "every member ministry" a structure in which ministry is seen to be shared and delegated would be an advantage.
- (f) A Permanent Diaconate may be seen as an effective means of bringing recognition to women's ministry by means of ordination. Ordination to the Diaconate is not necessarily subject to the theological problems and controversy which relate to ordination to the Priesthood. It is also considered that the ordination of women Deacons could be in many cases an appropriate enrichment to the three orders of ordained ministry.

17. Reginald Fuller in his Foreword to J H Barnett's "The Diaconate" refers to the Rubric at the commencement of the Book of Common Prayer service for the making of Deacons which requires that a sermon be preached declaring "how necessary that Order is in the Church of Christ". He remarks -

"I have always longed to say, yes, so necessary that in many dioceses there are no deacons around to speak of between Christmas and Trinity!"

18. Fuller further comments that it is "sheer hypocrisy to claim that the diaconate is 'necessary' to the Church".

19. The Committee shares this view and sees therefore the proper exercise of the role and function of the Deacon as not only in keeping with the spirit of the Prayer Book rubric but as necessary and strategic in the diocese. We outline in items 25 to 34 in more detail how such a Diaconate will operate most effectively.

The Role and Function of the Diaconate As Described in the Ordinal

Is it Distinctive?

20. The Ordinal appears to give Deacons two "distinctive" roles.

21. First they are liturgical assistants to the Priest. They are to read the Scripture (especially the Gospel at the Lord's Supper). They are to catechise the young. They assist in the administration at the Lord's Supper and in the absence of a priest they may baptise. In the Bishop's charge a reference is made to Deacons preaching. They may, but, unlike the Priest, their licence must specifically state this. It is not, it seems, germane to their role. While punctuation is difficult to exegete, several of the editions of the Book of Common Prayer enclose both the preaching and the baptising within the limit of the Priest's absence. In discussing the difficulties raised by their suggestion the Diocesan report "The Meaning, Value and Theology of Ordination" (1981) commented -

"It would no doubt be a desirable corollary of such a role for all deacons to be permitted to administer the Holy Communion 'in the absence of the priest' (i.e. in emergency or practical necessity which is already the case in connection with the deacon administering baptism) and 'if he be licensed by the bishop himself' (i.e. with special permission, as at present with the deacon preaching)" (p. 14).

22. Their second role is to act as "scouts for the Priest" with regard to the social and spiritual needs of parishioners. The Priest is to organise the relief.

23. "Deacons" as described in the Ordinal may therefore be regarded as liturgical and pastoral assistants.

Is it Permanent?

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24. The diocesan committee report "The Meaning, Value and Theology of Ordination" said "the ordination of a Deacon is ordination to a ministry of assistance to the Priest who has the cure and charge of a congregation" (page 11). This does not in itself suggest that the office of Deacon is a transitory one. However, the situation is complicated by the Ordinal. In the Ordinal attached to the Book of Common Prayer it appears to be assumed and stated that the Order of Deacons is a step to the "higher ministries". At the end of the service the Bishop prays that those who have just been made Deacon "may so behave themselves in this inferior office, that they may be found worthy to be called unto the higher ministries of thy Church". Thus, it is argued by some, a person made Deacon must be qualified to proceed to the Office of Priest. In many revisions within the Anglican Communion including an Australian Prayer Book this explicit reference has however been removed. If therefore the Church should choose to confine itself to use of the Australian Prayer Book service for ordination to the Diaconate, then there would be little doubt that such Diaconate could be viewed as a permanent order. The removal of the prayer and rubric at the end of the BCP service would achieve the same result.

25. It would seem that under the present Ordinal the following would be possible within the Diocese –

- (a) To ordain Men who are suitably qualified.
- (b) If the Ordination of Women to the Office of Deacon Canon 1985 passed by General Synod is adopted in the Sydney Diocese then to ordain women who are also suitably qualified.
- (c) To appoint and license Deacons to assist in parishes.
- (d) To appoint and license Deacons directly to the bishop, or to grant them a general licence or authority to officiate and thus use them at diocesan level.

26. It is arguable whether it is possible to ordain a person who is not qualified to proceed to the Priesthood, but who wishes to be ordained as Deacon.

27. The role and function of the Deacon as described in the Ordinal envisages that a person will usually be appointed on a full-time basis, remunerated, parish based, licensed, sometimes to preach, but not to preside at Holy Communion, to read services and to carry out his duties pursuant to a licence to the parish priest granted to him by the Bishop.

Present Practice

28. It would seem that many of the functions of the Deacon are now performed by lay persons (for example under the Lay Readers, Deaconesses and Other Lay Persons Ordinance 1981 a person (male or female) can be authorised to exercise all the functions of a Deacon (except to officiate at a marriage).

29. A lay person, so authorised under this diocesan ordinance, is not required to have the same qualifications as those required for Deacons. It is not our intention to propose that all such persons should now be made Deacon.

30. There exists, however, a group of persons who, by training, commitment and experience, are qualified to be recognised by being made Deacon. The present practice of ordaining Curates to the Priesthood while they are performing only the functions of a Deacon as outlined in this Report is a matter which could be considered.

The Role and Function of the "Permanent and Distinctive" Deacon

31. What then are those features that distinguish Permanent and Distinctive Diaconate from the Deacon commonly described within the terms of the present Ordinal. These features are as follows -

- (a) Such a Deacon may hold office permanently and not just transitionally.
- (b) Ordination of those who exercise diaconal functions will in appropriate cases be an act of recognition of commitment to service as a vocation within the Church.
- (c) Such a Deacon may not only be an assistant to the Incumbent of a parish but may be licensed on a diocesan basis.

32. The Permanent and Distinctive Diaconate is at present a theoretical concept (a notion which is promoted as desirable, but not necessarily realised in practice). It is clearly capable of realisation within our present structures which permit more flexibility than has been perhaps recognised or permitted in the past. It is therefore recommended that within the Diocese men, and if legally possible, women, should be ordained Deacon as an encouragement to the implementation of concepts which are for the good of the Church and the extension of the Kingdom within the Diocese.

33. There are a number of practical issues which need to be addressed as to the functions to be performed by the Permanent and Distinctive Deacon. These issues are discussed in items 28 to 34.

Training

34. It is envisaged that anyone who is to be made "Deacon" should be a fit candidate for the Diaconate as prescribed by the Ordinal and have completed a required course of at least three years at Moore Theological College or equivalent. The course should include study of the Bible, doctrine, worship and the Prayer Book, together with subjects related to areas of interest or specialisation, including evangelism, pastoral care, youth work and administration.

Part-time or Full-time

35. It is considered that Deacons should be generally full-time, as a reflection of the commitment which is expected to be evidenced in relation to those who are ordained.

Remunerated or Honorary

36. It follows that Deacons will be generally remunerated for their services in accordance with Diocesan recommendations.

Parish Based or Diocesan Based

37. Deacons may be deployed within the Diocese in various ways, either working in parishes, or in team ministry situations within a group of parishes. Others may be based within diocesan organisations. It is envisaged that in a parish, a Deacon would be able to establish an identifiable and distinct area of ministry (after an appropriate period of training or apprenticeship) and function under a recognised title, e.g. "Pastoral Worker", "Youth Worker", "Evangelist", "Administrator".

To Preach or not to Preach

38. A majority of the Committee consider that within the structures available in Anglican parishes headed by a male incumbent it would not be inappropriate for any Deacon to preach, if licensed to do so. However, this view was not shared by one or two members of the Committee (see Appendix to Report).

Appointment and Licence

39. In situations where a Deacon is to become a member of a parish team the following matters arise.

- (a) It is thought by the Committee desirable that a Deacon be appointed jointly by the Incumbent and the Churchwardens; the Deacon would carry out the instruction of the Incumbent (desirably with the support of the Churchwardens); the Deacon would be licensed by the Archbishop to the present Incumbent of the parish.
- (b) At present a Deacon's position within a Parish normally terminates with the cessation of an incumbency. It is envisaged that better provision should be made for the job security of a Deacon. While it is recognised that secretarial staff have different functions from pastoral staff within the parish there is a degree of inconsistency that secretarial staff employed by the Churchwardens are not required to relinquish their position when the Incumbent leaves the parish; this only occurs in circumstances where the new Incumbent or secretary (or both) perceives that the new arrangements are unworkable. It is envisaged that in the final analysis, an Incumbent would have the right of dismissal of a Deacon; this right could also be exercised by the Churchwardens with the agreement of the Incumbent.
- (c) In the event that a Deacon needs to secure another appointment, an Archdeacon (or say the present Deaconess Institution) could act as an intermediary in introducing other parishes or specialist organisations to the Deacon.

Recommendations

40. The Report be received by Standing Committee.

41. That the Report be submitted to Synod for its consideration.

42. That Standing Committee consider the promotion to General Synod of a Canon whereby the Australian Prayer Book service for the making of Deacons be prescribed and whereby the collect and rubric at the conclusion of the Book of Common Prayer order of service be deleted for the reason that it suggests to some persons that the present Order of Deacons is transitory and not permanent.

43. That Standing Committee consider the promotion of a further General Synod Canon whereby a Deacon may be permitted to administer the Service of Holy Communion.

44. That Standing Committee make recommendations to the Synod for the implementation of this Report.

For and on behalf of the Committee

G R CHRISTMAS
Chairman

July 1987

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Appendix: A non-preaching diaconate

1. While agreeing in substance with the rest of the committee I do not agree with their conclusion on the issue of preaching. Preaching is not a central function of a Deacon. It is exercised under special instruction according to the Ordinal. It is quite proper to have a Deacon who, while performing the other liturgical functions inherent in the office, does not preach.
2. This issue becomes more critical because of the intention of the report to encourage the admission of women into the Order of Deacons.
3. In their report, received by Synod in 1985, the Sydney Doctrine Commission said –
"Women are not to assume the authoritative teaching office that properly belongs to men in the Christian congregation. In our own context this would not appear to exclude absolutely women preaching or teaching in church. It nevertheless appears to exclude the possibility of women exercising the role of teaching elder or 'priest' as that term is defined by the Anglican Ordinal (para. 4.7). There is considerable and persuasive evidence for ruling elders within the various strands of New Testament traditions . . . This leadership was related to their functions as pastors and teachers." (para. 4.8) (my emphasis)
4. Yet I do not think that full and proper attention was paid to the status of the sermon in Anglican Liturgy. There are a limited number of services for which a sermon is prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer. They are the Holy Communion, marriage, the making of Deacons and the Ordering of Priests. In the latter three cases the content of the sermon is prescribed. In each service the sermon is to be a definitive statement of the Christian faith and practice as this Church has received it. They are thus not personal opinions or statements of general interest but authoritative declarations of the faith. From the fact that the Homilies are the only alternative to a sermon in the Holy Communion it would seem right to say that in this service also the sermon is intended to be a definitive statement of the faith. If this is the case, as I believe it to be, then the Doctrine Commission's conclusion, quoted above, would exclude women preaching in church.
5. The fact of women prophets in the New Testament has been used as a basis for allowing women to preach. This action will not stand the test of analysis. What we describe as preaching falls within the New Testament category of teaching, a function which the Apostle forbids to women. Prophecy is of a different order, C E B Cranfield, commenting on Romans 12:6, says –
"The prophet was distinguished from the teacher by the immediacy of his inspiration: his utterance was the result of a particular revelation (90)."
6. Thus while being happy for a restoration of a true diaconal office I would feel that such an office, rightly open to women, should not for them include the authority to preach.

The Rev R E Heslehurst