

**'The Already But Not Yet':  
The Restoration of a Distinctive and Equal Diaconate  
in the Anglican Church of Canada**

**A Keynote Address to the Association of  
Anglican Deacons in Canada  
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I thank the organizers of this Conference for inviting me to give the keynote address. Keynote addresses are intended to set the tone for a gathering. In setting the tone for this national gathering of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada, I have decided to begin with some history and then turn to the substance of my title.

I begin with the history because I have yet to find a good treatment of the history of the diaconate in Canada. True, James Barnett and Ormonde Plater have provided us with admirable studies.<sup>1</sup> John Collins has challenged us with new understandings of the term *diakonia* in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In two essays written in the last ten years, Maylanne Maybee has given us a Canadian perspective on the history, theology and praxis of diaconal ministry.<sup>3</sup> All of these works contribute to our understanding of where we are and helps us plot our course to where we envision our journey continuing. But there is still much work to be done.

Let me begin by tracking diaconal spoor through fifty years of Anglican history. In doing so I acknowledge that this is an initial foray into the topic and I am confident that there are gaps and even mistakes. After this historical romp I will then turn to my central task: what do I see as the work ahead of us.

*Lambeth 1958*

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<sup>1</sup> James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1979, 1981, 1995) and Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections Between Old and New* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002) and *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Maylanne Maybee, "Bringing the Light of Christ into Places of Darkness: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada," in *All Who Minister: New Ways of Serving God's People*, ed. Maylanne Maybee (Toronto, ON: ABC Publishing, 2001), 186-203 and "The State of the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada," in *A Companion to the Waterloo Declaration: Commentary and Essays on Lutheran-Anglican Relations in Canada*, ed. Richard G. Leggett (Toronto, ON: Anglican Book Centre, 1999), 96-109.

Fifty years ago the Lambeth Conference directed its attention to the question of the restoration of the diaconate in the Anglican Communion. In preparation for the Conference the Bishop of Bath and Wells edited a preliminary paper on ministry in order to prepare the bishops for their upcoming discussions. In this working paper the Bishop identified four patterns of the diaconate existing in the Communion at that time:

- the transitional diaconate leading almost invariably to the presbyterate;
- the so-called ‘perpetual’ diaconate of men who remained engaged in so-called ‘secular’ occupations and who assisted presbyters in urban areas and provided clerical leadership in more isolated areas;
- an extended diaconate as a probationary period of testing and training which, if completed successfully, led to ordination to the presbyterate and
- the ordination of candidates for the presbyterate to the diaconate while they were still in their final year of theological formation.<sup>4</sup>

He ended his treatment of the diaconate by asking the following questions:

1. Is the present limited use of the Order of deacon as an apprenticeship for the Order of priesthood in accordance with apostolic tradition, and related to the needs of the Church in our day and generation?
2. Is there a place for a permanent Order of deacon in the life of the Church, on the assumption that the holder of such an office continued in his own secular employment or profession?
3. If so, does such ordination confer “character”, and is such an order indelible?
4. What is the function of such a restored and extended diaconate in the life of the Church at home and overseas?
5. To what extent should such deacons be subject to the discipline normally imposed upon the ministry either by statute or law or by canon?
6. What should be the relationship between such deacons and those who are admitted to the office of reader? Should the function of a deacon ever be exercised by a reader (e.g. administration of the Chalice and preaching)?
7. What training and preparation should be provided for those who are to receive a permanent Order of deacon?
8. Should such an Order preclude any possibility of a subsequent ordination to the priesthood after an extended period? Or should such an Order be regarded as affording an opportunity for latent vocations to be realised and fostered?
9. When the Order of deacon is conferred prior to ordination to the priesthood, is it desirable for such order to be given during his theological college course?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Development of Ministry: A Working Paper by the Bishop of Bath and Wells* (London, UK: SPCK, 1958), 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> *The Development of Ministry*, 24.

When the bishops gathered for the Conference, the views of the Bishop of Bath and Wells were, for the most part, entirely adopted. The section report on ministry was clear in its commitment to the restoration of the diaconate as a ‘full and equal’ order.

There has been a tendency in recent years to depreciate the place of the Order of deacon in the Ministry of the Church and exalt the offices of reader and catechist. . . . As a result of this development the fact must be faced that in most areas of the Anglican Communion the traditional functions of a deacon may all, under episcopal authority, be fulfilled by a reader or by a catechist. . . . As a result of the development of responsibilities of readers and catechists, we have arrived at a position where we must either say that there is no place for a deacon in the life of the Church of to-day, or, alternatively, we must set to work to give the office and function of a deacon its distinctive place, not only in the worship, but in the witness of the Church. This is more fundamental than any request for the setting up of a “permanent diaconate”. The Committee realizes, of course, that there can be no drastic or even immediate change in the present situation, but is of opinion that each province in the Anglican Communion should be invited to consider whether it will be wise to recover the diaconate as a distinctive Order [2.107] in the Church.<sup>6</sup>

Among the resolutions passed by the bishops was the following.

88. The Conference recommends that each province of the Anglican Communion shall consider whether the office of Deacon shall be restored to its primitive place as a distinctive order in the Church, instead of being regarded as a probationary period for the priesthood.<sup>7</sup>

Canadian bishops were not slow off the starting blocks in acting on the Lambeth resolution. In September 1961 the House of Bishops received a report from the Committee on Deacons and Supplementary Ministries and requested that ‘the Committee . . . continue their study (and receive) reports from Dioceses in Canada and elsewhere in which men have been ordered Deacons who remain in secular work and assist a Parish Priest on Sundays, with reference to the conditions of their preparation and selection’.<sup>8</sup>

Four years later the House of Bishops received a report from the Bishop of Nova Scotia as well as a study paper on ‘The Diaconate in the Church Today’ and the canons of the American Episcopal Church on the diaconate. The House then directed the Committee on

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<sup>6</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1958: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with the Resolutions and Reports* (London, UK: SPCK, 1958; Greenwich, CT: The Seabury Press, 1958), 2.106-2.107.

<sup>7</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1958*, 1.50.

<sup>8</sup> House of Bishops, 28 to 30 September 1961.

Deacons and Supplementary Ministries to prepare a canon on deacons.<sup>9</sup> The Archives of Church House indicate that by 1966 the House of Bishops had authorized ‘experiments with the Perpetual Diaconate’ and encouraged diocesan bishops to establish ‘small Diocesan Committees’ to help them ‘establish standards, supervision and proper evaluation of (the diaconate and supplementary ministries)’.<sup>10</sup> In 1967 a formal resolution of the House of Bishops directed the Committee on Deacons and Supplementary Ministries to prepare a canon and then gave specific guidelines to the Committee:

1) To prepare a Canon on the Diaconate in two sections:

- a) The Diaconate as a probationary period for the priesthood
- b) The Perpetual Diaconate

2) In the section on the Perpetual Diaconate to give special attention to:

- a) The age at which candidates may be admitted and
- b) The course of study for candidates with additional provision for study of the use of the Prayer Book in the Church’s teaching.

3) To consider whether the provision for the Perpetual Diaconate should include the possibility of subsequent ordination to the Priesthood.<sup>11</sup>

At the same meeting of the House of Bishops a resolution was passed to the effect

That this House is willing that any Bishop may permit a Deacon or other authorized person in his Diocese to take the Holy Communion to sick persons in homes, hospitals or other institutions where the Bishop considers such ministry is necessary.<sup>12</sup>

My research to date has not indicated where the canonical proposals went, but my quick review of the Canons and Constitution of the General Synod did not reveal any such canon or guidelines.

*Lambeth 1968*

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<sup>9</sup> House of Bishops, 18 to 21 August 1965.

<sup>10</sup> House of Bishops, 18 to 21 August 1967.

<sup>11</sup> House of Bishops, 15 to 18 August 1967.

<sup>12</sup> House of Bishops, 15 to 18 August 1967.

In preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1968, three volumes of preparatory essays were prepared, one entitled *Lambeth Essays on Ministry*.<sup>13</sup> A Scottish bishop, J. W. A. Howe, wrote a brief essay on the diaconate which, in my opinion, did not break much new ground.<sup>14</sup> He reviewed the history of the diaconate, as then conceived, and then pointed to the questions to be addressed by the Conference.

The Conference, however, in my opinion, did break new ground. In the committee report on ministry, a vision of service in the image and likeness of Jesus was upheld clearly.

The role of the Church in the world is the role of her Lord: that of the suffering servant. To this theme of the servant Church we found [24] ourselves returning again and again. The impatient protests of young men and women drove home to us that the Church will be renewed only in so far as she pursues that role. We have to confess that all too often we have failed to serve as our Lord served. Consequently, to many men and women inside and outside, the Church too often appears as a self-centred or inward-looking sheltered and privileged institution. The test of every penny we spend, of every meeting we attend, and of every service we hold, is whether it makes it easier for Jesus to be seen as Lord and the Church as his servant.<sup>15</sup>

When the committee turned its attention specifically to the diaconate, the members envisioned a new role for the diaconate in the Communion.

Three courses of action are open to the Church: to continue as at present; to allow the order to lapse; or to promote a new image of the diaconate more closely related to the serving office portrayed in the early Church.<sup>16</sup>

We recommend that our practice as it is at present requires reform. We do not in fact accord to the third order the importance which we attribute to it in our formularies. Our custom is a source of bewilderment to those of other Churches with whom we negotiate in the realm of larger Christian unity. If the Anglican Communion means what it says about the diaconate, it ought to give it a more significant place within its life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A. M. Ramsey, ed., *Lambeth Essays on Ministry: Essays written for the Lambeth Conference 1968* (London, UK: SPCK, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> J. W. A. Howe, "The Diaconate," in *Lambeth Essays on Ministry: Essays written for the Lambeth Conference 1968*, ed. A. M. Ramsey (London, UK: SPCK, 1969), 62-74.

<sup>15</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 104.

<sup>17</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 104.

We do not recommend that the diaconate should be allowed to lapse. To do so would be to reject our firmly established tradition; it would produce stresses in our relationships with those Churches which retain the threefold order of ministry; and it would deprive the Church of the witness of service which was an essential element in the ministry of Christ, and which is reflected in the overall ministry of his Church to the world. This *diakonia* is laid upon the whole people of God, and must be embodied and reflected in the ministry and witness of every Christian. Renewal in service thus demands a response from every member of the Church.<sup>18</sup>

In the sacred ministry this universal Christian characteristic of service is specially represented. Just as every Christian must imitate Christ the Servant, so in the sacred ministry the *diakonia* of Christ is set before the Church as a quality which typifies the life of the Christian. To deprive the ordained ministry of the witness of the diaconate would be to impoverish its symbolism at the point where the greatest emphasis needs to be laid.<sup>19</sup>

Resolution 32 of the Conference set an agenda for the next decade.

32. The Conference recommends:

(a) That the diaconate, combining service of others with liturgical functions, be open to

- (i) men and women remaining in secular occupations;
- (ii) full-time church workers;
- (iii) those selected for the priesthood.

(b) That Ordinals should, where necessary, be revised:

- (i) to take account of the new role envisaged for the diaconate;
- (ii) by the removal of reference to the diaconate as “an inferior office”;
- (iii) by emphasis upon the continuing element of *diakonia* in the ministry of bishops and priests.

(c) That those made deaconesses by laying on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the diaconate. (*For*, 221. *Against*, 183)

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<sup>18</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 104.

(d) That appropriate canonical legislation be enacted by provinces and regional Churches to provide for those already ordained deaconesses.<sup>20</sup>

And, to my surprise, the Conference, in establishing the constitution of the newly-conceived Anglican Consultative Council, included deacons as eligible candidates for election as provincial clerical representatives to the Council.<sup>21</sup> To my knowledge, no deacon has served as a member of this ‘instrument of communion’. But the vision awaits its time.

Once again the Canadian bishops responded quickly to the Lambeth resolution. Proposed revisions of the Canon on deaconesses were brought and passed by the House.<sup>22</sup> The bishops discharged the old ‘Committee on Deacons and Supplementary Ministry’ and established a new one entitled ‘Committee on the Wider Ordained Ministry’ with a charge to work with various General Synod task forces and committee on tasks arising from Lambeth.<sup>23</sup> In 1970 the House declared deaconesses to be within the diaconate.<sup>24</sup> The Bishop of Kootenay brought before the House the following resolution:

That this House approves the use of the regular service for the Ordering of deacons contained in the Book of Common Prayer (1962 Canada) as suitable for the ordaining to the Diaconate of women with the same qualifications and commitments as required of men being so ordained.<sup>25</sup>

The motion passed.

Developments in the diaconate continued in North America, but the ordination of women to the presbyterate in several Provinces of the Communion in 1974 and 1976 became a greater focus of ecclesial energy.

### *Lambeth 1978*

The Lambeth Conference of 1978 did not devote much time to the discussion of the diaconate. Its attention was focused on the ordination of women to the presbyterate and, as we know, the signs that an ordained woman presbyter might reasonably be expected to

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<sup>20</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 38-39.

<sup>21</sup> See Resolution 69 in *The Lambeth Conference 1968*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> House of Bishops, 3 to 7 November 1969.

<sup>23</sup> House of Bishops, 3 to 7 November 1969.

<sup>24</sup> House of Bishops, 3 to 5 October 1970.

<sup>25</sup> House of Bishops, 3 to 5 October 1970.

be elected bishop at some point in the future. The Conference did, however, pass one more resolution on women in the diaconate.

## 20. Women in the diaconate

The Conference recommends, in accordance with Resolution 32(c) of the Lambeth Conference of 1968, those member Churches which do not at present ordain women as deacons now to consider making the necessary legal and liturgical changes to enable them to do so, instead of admitting them to a separate order of deaconesses.<sup>26</sup>

In 1982 the Doctrine and Worship Committee released *An Alternative Ordinal* for trial use in the Canadian church. This ordinal was based upon the American ordinal of 1979 which had in its fundamental DNA a restoration of the diaconate as a full and equal order. No doubt the release and use of this ordinal, even when used for the ordination of transitional deacons, began to influence our community's understanding of the diaconate. In addition to the alternative ordinal, the World Council of Churches *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was released in 1982 and signalled a return to the consideration of the diaconate as a personal expression of the *diakonia* shared by all the faithful.

31. Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life.<sup>27</sup>

In the House of Bishops the diaconate remained a matter of discussion. In 1983 the House of Bishops requested that the Committee on Ministry of the General Synod "... carry out further study of the Diaconate and . . . encourage this throughout the Church by such means as: regional conferences; brochures and other material to stimulate discussion; the focussing of questions about the Diaconate (such as its relationship to the priesthood) in appropriate places in the Church, and the development of other appropriate modes of study".<sup>28</sup> In 1984, in the midst of a conversation regarding what then seemed to be a crisis regarding the possibility of too many candidates for the presbyterate given retirement rates, the House of Bishops directed its Continuing Education Committee to "gather information on the Diaconate from the four Provinces and other sources and make that information available to the House prior to the next meeting".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978* (London, UK: CIO Publishing, 1978), 44-45.

<sup>27</sup> § 31 of 'Ministry' in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 111 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> House of Bishops, June 1983.

<sup>29</sup> House of Bishops, October to November 1984.



By 1985 the alternative ordinal formed the basis for the ordinal of *The Book of Alternative Services* and began to replace the ordination rite of *The Book of Common Prayer* as the *de facto* ordinal of the Canadian church.

By 1986 all the work of the House of Bishops and others culminated in Act 78 of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada.

That this General Synod commend to the dioceses and provinces the statements and guidelines regarding the Diaconate contained in the Report of the Committee on Ministry, with the recommendation that: a) priority be given to encouraging and supporting the baptismal ministry of the whole People of God; b) the renewal of the diaconate as an Order with an integrity of its own be considered in the context of this baptismal ministry; c) the Resources for Ministry Cluster of the national Program Division be requested to develop and prepare further materials for parish and diocesan use in raising awareness and increasing understanding of baptismal ministry; and d) the Committee on Ministry be requested to continue its study of the diaconate and to propose to the next General Synod a plan to restore to our Church a vocational Diaconate.<sup>30</sup>

With this Act, the stage was set for what has become an increasingly vital movement within the Anglican Church of Canada.

### *Lambeth 1988*

Even as the work in the Canadian church continued, the bishops at the Lambeth Conference of 1988 turned their attention to the diaconate. In a lengthy section report on 'Mission and Ministry', the members of that Section reflected on the emerging influence of how the ministry of a deacon is described in the recently-revised ordination rites of several Provinces of the Communion.

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

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<sup>30</sup> General Synod 1986, 14 to June 1986.

hopes of the world to the Church, thus informing the Church's intercession, helping its understanding of the world in the light of the Gospel and making more effective its participation in God's transforming work in the world.<sup>31</sup>

The members of the Section furthermore stated

We are confident that there is a need for a more credible expression of the diaconate. We need to rediscover the diaconate as an order complementary to the order of priesthood rather than as a merely transitional order which it is at present. We should ensure that such a diaconate does not threaten the ministry of the laity but seeks to equip and further it. Such a diaconate, furthermore, would serve to renew the *diakonia* of the whole Church; laity, deacons, priests and bishops.<sup>32</sup>

No formal resolution regarding the diaconate, however, flowed from this Section.

By 1989 the Task Force on the Diaconate presented 'A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada' to the General Synod as mandated by the General Synod of 1986.<sup>33</sup> At this juncture I will not go into great detail regarding Section V of the Report, "From Theory to Practice --- Guidelines for Restoring the Diaconate". Throughout the Anglican Church of Canada the Report became the foundation for the various diocesan programmes for the restoration of the diaconate. The Report, however, merits re-visiting as we continue the work of solidifying the place of the diaconate in the life of our church.

What is of particular interest to me is the action of General Synod in receiving this Report in June of 1989. The Committee on Ministry brought the following resolution to the floor of the Synod:

That this General Synod:

- a) adopt the report "A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada" and commend to all dioceses the restoration of the diaconate based on the principles contained in this Report;
- b) request the Committee on Ministry to provide guidance and resources to dioceses and parishes to assist them in the restoration of the diaconate;

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<sup>31</sup> *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988: The Reports, Resolutions and Pastoral Letters from the Bishops* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 1988), 55-56.

<sup>32</sup> *The Lambeth Conference 1988*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Committee on Ministry of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto, ON: The Anglican Church of Canada, 1989).

c) request the Committee on Ministry to monitor developments related to the restoration of the diaconate in the dioceses, in order that their experiences, discoveries, and insights may be shared with the whole Church.<sup>34</sup>

The resolution was then amended to read as follows:

That this General Synod:

a) commend the report “A Plan to Restore the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada” for study and analysis in the Church;

b) commend to all dioceses the restoration of the vocational diaconate; and

c) request the Committee on Ministry to provide guidance and resources to dioceses and parishes to assist them in the restoration of the vocational diaconate;

d) request the Committee on Ministry to monitor developments related to the restoration of the vocational diaconate in the dioceses, in order that their experiences, discoveries, and insights may be shared with the whole Church.<sup>35</sup>

At the request of six members of the General Synod, the amendment was put to a vote by orders, i.e., by the bishops, clergy and laity voting in three orders, and approved. The amended resolution was then put to a vote by orders as well and approved.

It does not take a lot of political acumen to realize the import of changing the verb from ‘adopt’ to ‘commend’ and the addition of ‘vocational’ as an adjective. General Synod was nervous about this Report. Perhaps a future historian will delve into the record to determine the source of the unease. I have my suspicions, but responsible scholarship and good manners requires some reticence to express them.

1996 saw the publication of *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*.<sup>36</sup> In this short document a number of strands were pulled together in what may be consider at this date to be the best and most concise description of diaconal ministry: “Diaconal ministers are called to be agents of the church in interpreting and meeting needs, hopes, and concerns within church and soci-

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<sup>34</sup> Proposed Act 87 of the General Synod, 15 to 23 June 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Act 87 of the General Synod, 15 to 23 June 1989.

<sup>36</sup> The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission* (London, UK: Anglican Communion Publications for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, 1996).

ety.”<sup>37</sup> This one sentence summarizes one hundred years of reflection on the restored diaconate in the life of the Christian church.

### *Lambeth 1998*

In short, the Lambeth Conference of 1998 dealt with a number of issues but not with the question of the diaconate in the life of the Church. Would that it had done so rather than focus on sexuality and the Virginia Report!

When a drafting group of the Anglican-Lutheran Joint Working Group met to prepare the working draft of what was to become the Waterloo Declaration of Full Communion, the question of diaconal ministry figured in the minds of Anglicans and Lutherans alike. Commitment 4 of the Waterloo Declaration commits the two churches “to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry”. In its Commentary on the Declaration, the Joint Working Group stated that “(both) our churches acknowledge diakonia has a place within the ministerial office and are therefore committed to the continuing study and reform which will ensure a common understanding of diaconal ministry. Such study will include its place within the ministerial office and its relationship with other ministries.”<sup>38</sup>

In 2003 the Joint Commission undertook a survey of diaconal ministers in both churches and a preliminary report was presented to the joint meeting of Anglican and Lutheran bishops in October 2006. In 2007 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada appointed a diaconal minister as one of its members of the Joint Commission. The Anglican Church of Canada has not followed suit as of this date.

I hope that your patience in bearing with this narrative will be rewarded by what I say about the remaining challenges, the already but not yet reality of the restored diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada. I have chosen three headings: Doctrine, Discipline and Worship.

### *Doctrine*

Doctrine is best defined as teaching. What does the Anglican Church of Canada teach about ministry in general and about the diaconate in particular? To be perfectly frank, I think that we are all over the map. It is no accident that several of the Anglicans working on full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada wanted one of our commitments to be working ‘towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry’. We did so not because we thought Lutherans had no diaconal ministry but because we were not sure Anglicans knew that they did.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Hanover Report* 1996, § 48.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www2.anglican.ca/primate/communications/waterloo.htm> accessed on 6 August 2008.

From time to time in my capacity as Coordinator of Diaconal Formation in the Diocese of New Westminster I am asked to give a presentation on the history and theology of the diaconate to members of parish councils, support teams and other interested members of the congregation. As part of that presentation I offer the following reflections concerning ministry. These reflections are based upon my own thoughts and arise from having taught a course entitled 'Mission, Church and Ministry' at Vancouver School of Theology to a multi-denominational student community.

These thoughts are also motivated by the warm associations that most Anglican bishops and presbyters have regarding their period of serving as deacons in the church. These associations can contribute to a motivation to preserve the cumulative tradition of ordination rather than explore patterns that enhance a more collegial and collaborative understanding of ministry.

Christians have frequently been divided by their understandings of how the ministry of the church should be structured. These divisions are sometimes made more difficult by our struggles to understand the relationship between the ministry that is shared by all the baptized and the specific ministry of the ordained. One way to overcome some of those obstacles may be, I suggest, to understand ministry in the light of our understanding of mission and church.

In his 1967 book *Worship and Mission* J. G. Davies examines the biblical witness and comes to the following conclusion regarding mission.

From our brief survey of the New Testament understanding of the basis of mission, it is evident that the Church is not to be regarded as the author of mission. . . . Hence the Church is involved in mission, although mission remains the mission of God --- it is never the Church's own mission. This anchoring of missionary work in the divine action is further made plain in II Cor. 5.20: 'We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us.' This simple phrase 'as though' indicates that the mission is God's; it is not the Church's possession. This can be made even clearer by posing two questions: Does the Church *perform* a mission? or, Does the Church *participate* in mission? In view of all that has been said so far, we are bound to answer the first question in the negative, while returning a positive reply to the second.<sup>39</sup>

If, then, the church participates in mission, then it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves the question: What is God's mission? Kathleen Henderson Staudt, an American lay theologian, suggests that each one of us should begin by asking this question of ourselves: First, and of central concern, what seems to me to be the most urgent work God is trying to do in the

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<sup>39</sup> J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1967), 32.

world, and what is my part in this work?<sup>40</sup> This reflection leads us to ask a related question: What kind of church does God need to participate in this mission? Finally, one might ask the question: What shape should the ministry of the church take in order to facilitate our participation in God's mission?

Let me suggest that we require a three-dimensional ministry in order to participate more fully in God's mission. This three-dimensional ministry is one of *episkopē*, *koinōnia* and *diakonia*.

- *Episkopē* is “a ministry of pastoral oversight . . . , exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways” and “. . . is necessary to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the Church”.<sup>41</sup>
- *Koinōnia* is a ministry of “. . . building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”.<sup>42</sup>
- *Diakonia* is a ministry of service, outreach, humility and concern for human needs that finds its source in Jesus “. . . the agent and image of the one who sent him, acting and forgiving with his Father's own power, mediating the Father's will to the world”.<sup>43</sup>

Each of these dimensions is exercised in three modes: communal, collegial and personal.

The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be *personal* because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be *collegial*, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Taken from Kathleen Henderson Staudt, “‘Annunciation in Most Lives’: Vocational Discernment and the Work of the Church,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 43 (Easter 2000): 130-143.

<sup>41</sup> *The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate 1987* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 1987), paragraph 69.

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 4.12b-13.

<sup>43</sup> *The Hanover Report: The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* (London, UK: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996), paragraph 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 111 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), Ministry paragraph 26.

Although the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document speaks only of ordained ministry, it should be stated that lay persons may also find themselves exercising one or more dimensions of the church's ministry in personal, collegial and communal ways.

Our discussions regarding diaconal ministry might be best served by our focusing on two questions.

- What seems to you to be the most urgent work God is trying to do in the world?
- What role might a common understanding of diaconal ministry play in this urgent work?

By focussing on these questions we might begin to discern an understanding of diaconal ministry that transcended old debates about whether there is a little deacon in every presbyter and bishop, whether ordained diaconal ministry is a threat to the ministry of the laity. We might begin to focus on what is the role of the ordained, whether bishop, presbyter or deacon, in leading, nurturing and engaging the *ekklēsia* in the mission of God.

### *Discipline*

By discipline I mean the structures and processes by means of which we live out our doctrine, our teaching.

Although the House of Bishops has guidelines regarding the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, it is generally agreed that the present ACPO process is not suited for the discernment of diaconal vocations. Too few assessors have any knowledge or experience of deacons and we have done little, as a church, to provide clear guidelines to assist assessors in distinguishing between a diaconal and a presbyteral call. This is a significant piece of work that needs to be done.

It is a matter of curiosity to me that the Anglican Church of Canada has a canon on continuing education but no canon on ordained ministry. Theological colleges, training centres and dioceses are left to prepare programmes on the basis of 'tradition'. There are signs of a renewed interest in developing standards or, dare I say, competency expectations for the preparation of persons for episcopal, presbyteral, diaconal and lay ministry. One such effort is 'Theological Education in the Anglican Communion', an initiative of the present Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>45</sup> This working group has created a number of 'grids' which bear our scrutiny as tools in shaping our own national expectations for the preparation of deacons.

At the present time a working group of the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee of the General Synod is working on paving the way towards a consultation on standards for the

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/teac/index.cfm>.

formation of ordained ministers in the Anglican Church of Canada. The working group, chaired by the Bishop of Ottawa, John Chapman, is charged with reporting to the General Synod in 2010. We shall see how it undertakes its task *vis à vis* the diaconate.

But I shall dip my paddle into this lake of activity. First, we must ask ourselves the question, “What qualities do we wish a prospective deacon to demonstrate even before he or she embarks on a programme of formation?”

- We need candidates who know how to be *anam chara*, ‘soul friends’. Any one who seeks ordination to the diaconate needs to be a person of prayer who is willing and able to be a *companion*, ‘one who breaks bread’, with other Christians and, I believe, other people of faith.
- We need candidates who know how to support the ministry of other Christians, an *animateur*, one who breathes the Spirit into an activity, a group, an individual.
- We need candidates who know how to create networks, who can become a *nexus* where the interests, concerns and energies of others find a crossroad.

Second, what competencies do we wish a candidate for the diaconate to demonstrate before he or she is ordained?

- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful understand the tension between what the Scriptures *say* and what the Scriptures *mean*.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful articulate their faith in the triune God, who can express themselves in full sentences rather than mottos or slogans.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful acknowledge that history matters, that our present has been shaped by a past, that our future is, in part, dependent upon an understanding of how we have arrived at this moment in human experience.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful distinguish between ethics and morals, who can ask the right questions rather than give answers.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful distinguish between *leitourgia*, ‘our public work voluntarily undertaken for the common good of all’, and worship, the ritual activity which enables us to be faithful participants in *leitourgia*.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in helping the faithful navigate the challenges of the present in a credal rather than confessional, experiential or magisterial community, who know how to live with faithful ambiguity.
- We want a deacon to demonstrate her or his competency in that area of ministry to which he or she is called.



One of the more pressing tasks for the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada is to undertake a project of reviewing our national, provincial and diocesan canons in order to set forth an agenda for reform that reflects the reality of a restored diaconate. In some dioceses of this country deacons are not necessarily members of the diocesan synod, a practice which is contrary to Anglican practice and catholic history. In many dioceses of this country the term ‘priest’ or ‘presbyter’ are used in such a restrictive canonical sense that qualified deacons are excluded. Too few deacons have been members of the General Synod. I know of one deacon, perhaps, who has served on one of the standing committees of the General Synod but as a consequence of her staff position rather than by direct appointment or election. It is time for the Association to move towards advocacy of the diaconate as a full and equal order by applying pressure to the bishops and standing committees of the Anglican Church of Canada to honour the liturgical rhetoric of our ordinals and the theological rhetoric of ‘baptismal ministry’. If by ‘baptismal ministry’ we mean the full and active participation of all the orders of the Christian community, laity, bishops, presbyters and deacons, in the decision-making bodies and public activity of the Anglican Church of Canada, then deacons are at present on the short end of the stick.

### *Worship*

By worship I mean the way in which we celebrate in Word and sacrament the teaching of the faith we have come to embody.

While it is tempting to go through the rites of *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The Book of Alternative Services* in order to list all the changes that could or should be made, let me say that what we need are deacons who are more concerned about the *quality* of worship than with questions of liturgical roles.<sup>46</sup> Deacons need to become what Robert Hovda, a Roman Catholic liturgist whose life and teaching embodied wisdom and a passion for justice, called ‘strong, loving and wise.’<sup>47</sup> Although these phrase became a watchword for presbyteral liturgical leadership, I believe that it is equally applicable to deacons.

*Being ‘strong’ means knowing the whole story:* One way in which deacons can become strong is by knowing the tradition thoroughly. Not only knowing one’s own tradition, but knowing the broader catholic and ecumenical tradition frees the deacon from the prison of uncompromising particularity. The catholic and ecumenical tradition teaches us to be wary of the comment, “We’ve never done it that way.” There may be reasons why we have chosen a particular course of action, but we need to be aware that it was a choice, based on reasons that may or may not be applicable to our present context.

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<sup>46</sup> The importance of ‘quality’ was one that my *Doktorvater*, the late James White, emphasized in his writing and teaching.

<sup>47</sup> Robert W. Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy* (Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1976).

*Being 'loving' means knowing how to lead the pilgrim people:* Each one of us has a vision of what he or she believes the church can be and the church's liturgy can become the ritual expression of that ideal. But we are daily confronted with the church as it is. If the clergy have hopes of leading a congregation from one expression of worship into another, then they will need to know how to do this in a way which builds up the community rather than becomes the exercise of ministerial prerogative. Genuine change, genuine transformation, requires trust, trust between the ordained leadership and the community.

*Being 'wise' means engaging in theological discourse rather than religious slogans:* In a world fascinated with technique rather than meaning, with data rather than knowledge, with slogans rather than genuine discourse, Christian congregations need to become houses of wisdom. Wisdom comes from exposure to as many theological voices as possible and requires the willingness to go beneath the surface of our day-to-day lives to discover what God may be up to in them. Discussions about trinitarian language, about language that is faithful and fair to all God's people and about who may participate in which sacraments and why are not academic questions. Clergy need opportunities to engage in discussions rather than debates so that they can enable similar discussions among the people they serve.

It is not enough, however, to focus solely on the performance of the clergy. Recent reforms in our understanding of ministry and in the role of the community in the liturgical celebration require us to consider how deacons can assist the presider as he or she serves as the conductor of the assembly's symphony.

*11. The liturgical assembly is less a gathering of individuals than a dynamic coordination of orders.*

These orders are catechumens, servers, penitents, deacons, the baptized faithful, presbyters, and bishops. Each of these groups, in transacting their own business both in and out of the liturgy, contributes to the consummation of the business of the whole assembly both in and out of the liturgy. . . . Thus their shared witness, charisms, obligations, and styles all contribute in rich diversity to the Church's ministry of reconciliation. It is a central part of the pastoral art to be able to discern, respect, and coordinate the rich gifts of these orders both in and out of the liturgy for the good of the Church and the world to which the Church is corporate minister by God's grace.<sup>48</sup>

In too many congregations the actual celebration of the liturgy and its planning are conducted by the presider who may simply need some encouragement and additional knowledge to move into a more corporate and authentic spirit of liturgical celebration.

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<sup>48</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 45.

The liturgical minister is not the poet but only the reciter of the poet's poem --- the poet in this case being the Christian assembly past and present.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

So, my friends and colleagues in ministry, we come to the end of this keynote address at a conference that marks a point in a fifty-year-long story of the restoration of the diaconate as a distinct ministry within the ordained ministry of the Anglican Church of Canada. I believe that we have reached that point in our journey when we can say that the diaconate is not *being restored* but *has been restored* in our church. To say this, however, does not mean that there are not significant challenges ahead. But it does recognize that there is a new reality on the ground, a reality embodied in real people serving in real congregations exercising a real diaconate.

Are there bishops, presbyters and laity who do not want a restored diaconate? Yes, there are, but they are too late. The diaconate as a distinctive ministry with the Anglican Church exists and the genie cannot be put back into the bottle. Bishop John Robinson was once asked if he believed in the ordination of women, "Believe in it?," he said, "I've seen it!" The same can be said of the diaconate.

Are there differences in how deacons are identified, formed and deployed in the dioceses of this country? Certainly there are. Some of those difference are healthy responses to differing contexts. But some of those differences are not. If this Association seeks relevance in today's Anglican context, then it is your corporate task to assert your role in helping the entire church regularize what should be regularized and identify what should remain distinctive.

My friends, I have more to say but you could not bear it now. Suffice it that I close with one of my favourite prayers, composed more than twelve hundred years ago. Originally composed for the Easter Vigil, it has come to be used in contemporary Anglican ordination rites as well. It is a prayer that reminds me of 'the already but not yet' of the reign of God, a reality that is ever new even as it is ever eternal.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favourably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery. By the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation. Let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>49</sup> Kavanagh 1982, 94-95.

