

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER ON STANDARDS FOR DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

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Introduction

The following document was prepared at the request of OPCOTE as background for discussion on developing common standards for diaconal training in the province of Ontario for the Anglican Church. It is not intended to be comprehensive, merely to serve as a starting point for discussion. Much of the information was derived from: a) The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, 1996; b) a Draft Discussion Paper regarding competencies for Deacons in the Anglican Church of Canada; December, 2009 and c) The Diocese of Ontario, Information on the Diaconate, January 2007.

Since the last OPCOTE meeting, a National Gathering on Theological Education for the Anglican Church of Canada was held at the Manoir D'Youville, Quebec in January 2010 to wrestle with the challenges inherent in raising up, discerning, forming and educating future clergy of the Church. Proceedings were published in "The D'Youville Report"¹. Several ideas and recommendations resulted from this Gathering; however, none were considered in preparing this document.

This document deals with the following important issues:

1. Present forms of diaconal ministry
2. Status of diaconal ministry in the province of Ontario
3. Training programs for diaconal ministry
4. Frequently asked questions on the diaconate
5. Learning outcomes and assessment of deacons

Present forms of diaconal ministry

Information in this section was obtained from The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, 1996².

The social services so central to the diaconal communities and ministries founded in the 19th century were and continue to be a vital aspect of the church's witness and ministry. These services are rooted in rich worship and community life. Diaconal ministries are

¹ The d'Youville Report, National Gathering on Theological Education, January 2010, The Anglican Church of Canada, prepared by Theological Education Working Group of Faith Worship and Ministry, The Right Reverend John Chapman, Chair.

² The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Commission, "The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity". Editors David Tustin and Ambrose Moyo, publ: Anglican Communion Publications, London, England, 1996.

not only ministries of service (*diakonia*), but also of witness (*martyria*) and worship (*leitourgia*).

The Anglican tradition has preserved an ordained diaconate, whether transitional or permanent, and ‘deacon’ in an Anglican context usually refers to someone in this office. But Anglican churches also have deaconesses and other especially designated persons who carry out lay ministry, e.g. licensed lay workers and communities of religious.

Deacons assist the bishops and priests in ministry, and have a particular responsibility to minister in Christ’s name to the poor, the sick, the suffering and the helpless. The Diaconate is an order of ordained ministry dedicated to serving and enabling others to serve the needy, the weak, the sick, and the lonely and holding before the Church the needs of the world, interpreting those needs to the Church, and enabling baptized persons to bring the ministry of Christ to the world. Anglicans view deacons as symbols of servant-hood. They are servants of the world, charged with taking the church’s vision to the world and alerting the church to the needs of the world and pushing it to act.

[. . .]

By comparison, Lutheran churches do not consider the diaconate as an order. Thus, ‘Deacon’ in most Lutheran traditions refers to a person consecrated or commissioned to a ministry focused on parish work or social service, but not ordained, that is, their ministry is generally not seen as a form of the single ordained ministry, usually understood by Lutherans to be the office of the Word and sacrament.

Status of Diaconal Ministry in the Province of Ontario

The general guideline for the Province and the National Church is that ordained deacons will have successfully completed a programme of theological study acceptable to the Bishop of the candidate’s Diocese (see footnote 2). Each diocese is expected to be responsible to provide a course of study in appropriate areas. The nature of the course of study would be at the discretion of the Diocese and might, for example, be, in one case a weekend, and in another case a series of 2-3 hour sessions over a period of 4-6 weeks, or some other construct.

Competencies and Training Programs for Diaconal Ministry

Expectations within the National Church are discussed in footnote 2. Discussions regarding the need for a National evaluative process that will decide if a candidate for ordination has met the below-listed criteria are on-going as well as whether Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is required by every deacon or only those working in specific fields associated with its use.

Following training and prior to ordination to the diaconate candidates are expected to:

- Manifest a personal spirituality, which demonstrates an integration of body, mind, and spirit working towards wholeness. This spiritual maturity is not only demonstrated in regular participation in the liturgical life of the community, but also in an explicit commitment to spiritual growth, and a disciplined life of prayer.

- Have a healthy attitude towards his/her own personal care, as well as a commitment to forming a support system, which meets regularly with the candidate for prayer, reflection and discussion of ministry, and self care.
- Have an ability to reflect critically and creatively on his/her spiritual, theological and behavioural assumptions, as well as her/his own ministry practice.
- Demonstrate competency in the scriptures and church history.
- Demonstrate a competency in Christian worship with a special focus on the deacon in the liturgy.
- Demonstrate one or more identifiable area(s) of diaconal ministry, (e.g. workplace ministries, outreach ministries, social advocacy ministries, environmental advocacy ministries etc.), with defined skill-sets.

Most of all, these studies are expected to help a deacon learn how to balance his/her secular vocation, ministry, and family in a spiritually healthy manner.

The discussion paper regarding competencies of deacons in the Anglican Church of Canada also listed the following programs that candidates might follow in developing the necessary core competencies (footnote 2).

1. The Education For Ministry Course,
2. The Montreal Diocesan College Reading and Tutorial Course in Theology,
3. The Thorneloe Associate in Theology Diploma,
4. The Renison Institute of Ministry Licentiate in Discipleship Studies,
5. The Canterbury College courses for the Community of Deacons,
6. The Atlantic School of Theology's Certificate Program in Theological Studies,
7. The Queen's College Diploma in Ministry,
8. The Centre for Christian Studies
9. The introductory year for the Bachelor or Masters degree in theology at an approved theological school, such as VST, Wycliffe, Trinity or Emmanuel St. Chad.
10. An equivalent certification in theological studies.

A historical perspective and the process followed in the Diocese of Ontario is presented in the following case study.

CASE STUDY – The Diocese of Ontario

The vocational diaconate in the Diocese of Ontario was formally restored in 2000, following consultation between Bishop Mason and the clergy and various stakeholders that resulted in the publication of a document entitled: “Deacons in the Diocese of Ontario”. As part of the process, Bishop Mason also forwarded a letter to the parishes of a group of Enquirers that had been identified as potential candidates to a restored diaconate. Five persons were interviewed by the Diocesan Training & Development Committee and recommended to the Bishop as suitable for ordination. These five enquirers were ordained in 2001 and Bishop Bruce subsequently announced at the 2006 Diocesan Synod that he intended to proceed to ordain more deacons.

The diaconal formation process in the Diocese of Ontario is as follows³:

- Formation begins with those individuals that have been nominated by their Parish Council, affirmed by the T&D Committee and approved by the Bishop. Over many months and under the guidance of the Adviser for Deacons, these individuals explore what it means to be a deacon, build necessary skills and learn what pitfalls they might encounter through prayer and reflection.
- There are 8 compulsory courses for individuals in their education leading to ordination. These are: Introduction to the Old Testament (2 courses); Introduction to the New Testament; Before and Beyond the Gospels; Introduction to Theology; Introduction to Homilectics; History of Anglicanism; and Reflective Paper integrating Academic Learning with Practical Aspects of Ministry⁴. It should be noted that to obtain a Diploma in Diaconal Ministry at either Wycliffe or Trinity Colleges, 10 courses that include 6 core subjects must be successfully completed⁵.
- Two additional electives are also required in the education leading to ordination that relate to the particular ministry in which the Deacon will be engaged. For example, the Deacon may choose to enrol in Gerontology, Restorative Justice, Palliative Care, Youth Ministry.

Learning Outcomes and Assessments

The definition of the appropriate tools for assessing a postulant’s competency under ‘Education’ is the responsibility of the T&D Committee on behalf of the Bishop, in consultation with the Adviser of Deacons.

³ The Diocese of Ontario, Information on the Diaconate, January 2007

⁴ Each individual case is regarded as being unique. For example, a candidate may apply to the Bishop to reduce course requirements based on previous higher education and/or relevant experience.

⁵ The 6 core subjects for graduation are: Old Testament Studies, New Testament Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, Homilectics and the Practice of Diaconal Ministry.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) by the Committed Lay Person wishing to follow Diaconal Studies

The following is a list of sample FAQs compiled for the Diocese of Ontario (footnote 3).

a) *Is there a specific 'Job Description' for all Deacons?*

All deacons share a core responsibility, made explicit during the examination part of their ordination (BAS p.655), namely, that at all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless, they are serving Christ himself. However, there is a great variety in the specific ministries of deacons. For example, they may work in prisons, in soup kitchens, in street ministries to youths and the homeless, in health clinics, and as chaplains and counsellors in shelters. They also work in refugee camps abroad and at home, they run AIDS clinics, they work with the aged, and they advocate on behalf of the vulnerable, the poor, the abandoned, sick and dying. Each situation is unique, hence the need for careful discernment and appropriate formation.

b) *What are the differences between committed lay persons and ordained deacons?*

Deacons are called by the Church to fulfil a particular role and function, defined by Christian tradition and doctrine. Such individuals that are chosen to make the sacred vows of ordination have given their lives over to God and the Church after a long period of discernment and formation.

[Patricia Bays: what about the professional lay worker – chaplains, etc.? George Sumner: in the recovery of the diaconate, some are looking at the roles of the evangelist and the catechist. And how is this related to the diaconate? Bill Danaher: St Stephen begins by waiting tables, but then is martyred because of his sermon.]

The committed lay person is a volunteer, an absolutely free agent who chooses where, in what way and for how long they serve the Church and in what capacity. Their responsibility and accountability are through the committee chairs to the incumbent, but anything and everything they do is a free will offering of their time and talent.

c) *Will having a Deacon weaken lay ministries in our community life and the world beyond our boundaries?*

No. The deacon's role is to challenge the laity to fully live out their baptismal call to ministry and where appropriate, to provide teaching to assist in the performance of that ministry. Additionally, the deacon's involvement in liturgy should be restricted to those elements related to servanthood, e.g. reading the Gospel, setting the table, doing the ablutions and offering the dismissal, and only complement active lay involvement in the community worship.

d) *What is the role of the diocese in the discernment process at the parish level?*

Diocesan authorities play an important role by providing the necessary tools and information to the incumbent and the Parish Discernment Group and to facilitate and enable their work. The Advisor of Deacons provides the support, assistance and information to the Parish Discernment Group that will enable this group to carry out a full exploration of the servant ministry inherent in the diaconate with the candidate.

e) *Are there differences in the work of a deacon in the city and rural parishes?*

Since the calling of the deacon is to the poor and needy and for the marginalized in society, the short answer is no. However, the needs of every parish are different so although the issues may be the same whether in a rural or an urban setting, the methods of identifying and addressing them will differ, depending on size and location.

f) *Who makes the final decision about ordination?*

The decision whether to ordain individuals to Holy Orders is the sole prerogative of the Diocesan Bishop.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment of Deacons

After completing the required theological training program, it is expected that candidates in diaconal formation will meet the following standards (footnote 2):

- A comprehensive knowledge of the Holy Scriptures;
- The ability to outline the history of the biblical record, and identify the historical, social, and geographic context of the Bible;
- Awareness of the process of canonization of scripture, including the reasons for the development of the Canon;
- Familiarity with various approaches to scriptural interpretation, and an ability to identify and defend his/her approach in the context of his/her tradition;
- An ability to identify and use exegetical tools, and knowledge about Biblical scholarship;
- An ability to identify prophetic and servanthood themes in scripture, and relate those themes, in preaching and daily ministry, to the needs of the world and the church's response to those needs;
- Awareness of significant differences in the themes and approaches in the four Gospels, and knowledge of how to model the message of the Gospels in his/her servant and liturgical ministries;
- An ability to articulate basic historical periods of the Christian faith, from its origins through to today;
- Be well grounded in the development of the Anglican ethos;
- Clearly understand and appreciate the traditions of other Christian communions and world religions, since ministry to the poor and the oppressed is inherently ecumenical, and indeed interfaith; and
- An awareness of liberation, feminist, aboriginal, environmental and other expressions of theology being explored by contemporary theologians.

Once deacons and diaconal ministers are ordained, they are regarded as agents of the church and do not have the authority to pursue a simply self-initiated and self-accountable ministry. While traditionally deacons were understood to be agents of the bishop, diaconal ministers today are often agents of congregations and their work is always carried out in the name of the church. In other words, diaconal ministers must account to the church for their ministries and, at the same time, the church is also accountable for providing adequate support and preparation for diaconal ministries carried out in its name.