

Connected and Sent Out: Implications of New Biblical Research for the United Methodist Diaconate

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Some articles take seven years to write. In the Fall of 1997, my second semester of seminary, I was privileged to participate in a doctoral seminar entitled "*Diakonia* in Modern Church History" with Professor Carter Lindberg at Boston University School of Theology. I was just beginning to discern a call to the new United Methodist diaconate and was anxious to gain clarity on what appeared to be a potentially creative restoration of deacons' historic place in the church at the 1996 General Conference. One of the first books we discussed was John N. Collins's *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*.¹ Collins provided a radical critique of what has been the traditional meaning of *diakonia* as "loving and caring service." This critique was simultaneously unsettling and intriguing. Collins's book stood in odd juxtaposition for me to other scholarship we examined in the remainder of the course.

The class went on to explore the Lutheran deaconess movement of the mid-nineteenth century and subsequent developments in Episcopalian, Methodist, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic circles. The Methodist Episcopal deaconess movement was North America's largest deaconess community at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. We ended the course with a look at the then recently concluded 1995 gathering of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, held in Hanover, Germany, in which Lindberg had been a Lutheran participant.

The Hanover Report, *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, praised Collins's "historical-philological corrective to earlier understandings of the *diakon*-words" but was cautious in considering the implications of his research.² My own thoughts about this new research on the meaning of *diakonia* remained similarly inconclusive as I waited for biblical scholars to engage Collins's research and possibly reveal its flaws.³ Over the past seven years, scholars in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and

North America have done so; and few have countered his findings. The most ringing endorsement of his research came in 2000, when a respected Greek-English lexicon largely adopted Collins's views published earlier in *Diakonia*.⁴

In his *Serve the Community of the Church*, biblical scholar Andrew D. Clarke has recently provided one of the few criticisms of Collins's work.⁵ Clarke argues that Paul's use of *diakon*-terms and of *doulos* in his metaphor of slavery (1 Cor. 9:19 and 2 Cor. 4:5) illustrates that Paul had a servile understanding of his own ministry. Such a reading, however, can be contested by biblical scholarship done by Dale B. Martin and Murray J. Harris, who have both maintained that Paul's use of the slavery metaphor was a way of affirming his "authority derived from status by association" with Christ.⁶ Collins's main point of contention with Clarke is Clarke's portrayal of *diakon*-terms in Paul as having "slavish connotations." Collins argues that Clarke inappropriately transfers the meaning of the *diakon*-terms in the Gospels to the entirely different context of Pauline literature.⁷

The purpose of this article is to explore the implications of Collins's research for the United Methodist Order of Deacons. Before proceeding to that discussion, however, let me say a few words about its relevance for United Methodist thinking regarding the broader issue of the nature of ministry itself. A single biblical passage serves to illustrate the potentially far-reaching implications of Collins's research for United Methodists' understanding of ministry. The use of the *diakon*-terms in Mark 10:45 was the exegetical problem that initially launched Collins's linguistic research: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Based on his research, Collins conveys the underlying meaning to be closer to the following: "The Son of Man came to carry out his mission and give his life as a ransom for many." The contrast is clear: The *diakon*-term does not denote acts of loving, caring service but rather points to Jesus' relationship to the Father, in order to stress to his bickering disciples that they are being called to live under a wholly different set of values in the kingdom of God. "The service of Jesus consists in giving his life as a ransom. It is not service of any other kind."⁸ Our understanding of the *diakon*-terms and the biblical passages that contain them must be more kerygmatic than caritative. Jesus is not calling his disciples to adopt an attitude of lowly service under a worldly paradigm of social relations but is pointing to a completely different set of Kingdom values that drastically reconfigure traditional notions of status.

In his 1990 text, Collins exhaustively demonstrates that every instance of the verb form of *diakonia* stresses the *relationship* of the minister to the church community that has given him or her authority and not the particular *nature* of the activity. Although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article, Collins's research has radical implications for general Protestant assertions about the "ministry of all Christians," particularly in relation to the nature of the episcopacy and an understanding of ordination.⁹

It should be noted at the outset that, as a linguistic study, Collins's work does not claim that the meaning of the *diakon*-words in the New Testament should exclusively define the meaning of ministry or the diaconate today. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the church in new directions for ministry. Since Scripture is our primary source for theological reflection, however, it is essential that the meaning of the *diakon*-words in Scripture be accurately understood if we are going to be faithful to the biblical meaning of ministry in our contemporary reflections on the nature of ministry.

This article will illustrate the fresh possibilities that Collins's research affords a United Methodist theology of the diaconate. In some respects, the focus upon the diaconate is an act of "putting the cart before the horse," since a theology of the diaconate should follow from and be incorporated into a reappraisal of United Methodist ecclesiology in light of Collins's research on the *diakon*-terms. Accordingly, I have not illuminated in this paper the various aspects of United Methodist polity that would have to change in order to accommodate these ideas. I do hope, however, that such a discussion will be generated from the thoughts put forward here.

Collins's research into the ancient church's understanding of the *diakon*-words has three principal components that are important for United Methodists to consider in our contemporary reflections on the diaconate.

Deacons' Work Is *Not* Identified with Social Welfare Work

The first important insight with regard to the *diakon*-words is best framed in the negative, as a critique of current belief and practice. It may also be the most disturbing to current United Methodist deacons and, as such, must be addressed in a forthright manner. Collins and a growing consensus of other scholars contend that the *diakon*-word group never conveyed the idea of loving and caring service. This now-accepted meaning of *diakonia* was made popular in the nineteenth-century deaconess move-

ment in Germany and received academic support from German theologian Wilhelm Brandt in the 1930s.¹⁰ The rudiments of Brandt's understanding of *diakonia* can be traced back easily to the Reformation period.

It is important to stress that Collins's interpretation of the *diakon-* words by no means suggests an abandoning by anyone—deacons in particular—of ministries for the poor. Jesus' love for the "least of these" and the work with the poor on the part of deacons, elders, local pastors, and laypersons must continue if the church is to be faithful to the gospel message. Rather, it is the understanding of one-to-one correspondence between a deacon's identity and social welfare ministries that must change. We must be honest in admitting that work among the poor was not constitutive of diaconal or presbyteral identity in the biblical period, even though it has become a cherished part of contemporary deacons' heritage.

The implications of this aspect of Collins's research for United Methodist deacons are significant. The *Book of Discipline* asserts that "[f]rom the earliest days of the church, deacons were called and set apart for the ministry of love, justice, and service; of connecting the church with the most needy, neglected, and marginalized among the children of God."¹¹ This assertion of the biblical basis for deacons' ministry is called into question by Collins's research. Additionally, critics of deacons' ministries have noted that, if deacons' identity is constituted wholly by their work among the poor, then there is nothing unique about their ministry. After all, *all* Christians are called to care for their neighbors, with special attention given to the "least of these." While contemporary deacons may, in many circumstances, be persons who seek to focus a congregation's attention on the poor, the foundation for a theology of the diaconate is better constructed on other grounds.¹²

The 2000 *Book of Discipline*'s ubiquitous use of "servant leadership" terminology (§§131-136), first employed in 1996, also must be revisited, since the new biblical research calls into question the meaning of *diakonia* as "servant leadership." In employing this terminology, United Methodists were, in many ways, following the example of the World Council of Churches in its use of the term *diakonia* in a theology of service throughout its publications.

Instead of "servant leader" terminology, our denomination might choose to return to the language of "representative ministry," utilized in the *Book of Discipline* from 1976 to 1992. This description of ordained ministry has been shown to be useful in ecumenical dialogues where a theology of ordained ministry has been discussed.¹³ Such a move would be consistent

with Collins's research on *diakonia*, which similarly affirms an emissarial, or representative, relationship between the minister (deacon or presbyter) and the community or bishop.

Deacons Are Given a "Connectional Mandate"

If the foundation for a theology of the diaconate is best built on something other than the deacon's role in social welfare activities, what then ought this foundation be? Collins's research suggests that in the early church deacons were defined first and foremost by a close relationship with their bishop and, by extension, with the corporate body of believers, rather than by any particular function they may have performed. Such a relationship necessarily flows from the ecclesial nature of ministry itself. Deacons' functions in the early church were wide ranging and included distributing Communion to members not present for the community's corporate worship, care for the poor, financial administration, and preaching the Word. Of these many functions, only the distribution of the Eucharist and preaching constituted the "field of meaning" of the *diakon*-words in the ancient church.¹⁴ This does not mean that contemporary deacons should have such limited responsibilities but rather that biblical reflection upon the *diakon*-words must begin with the relationality of the terms. The intense relational and interdependent nature of all the church's ministers (presbyters, bishops, and deacons) recalls the unambiguous sense of Jesus' mandate or mission from the Father in Mark 10:45, discussed above. *Diakonia*, or ministry, *by definition*, was imposed on a person.

Thus, Methodist understandings and practice of the itinerancy are faithful responses to a key element of the New Testament conception of *ministry*. Add to this the "brotherly love" of the clergy connection expressed in Charles Wesley's hymn "And Are We Yet Alive," and the richness of the New Testament models of ministry find faithful expression in Methodism indeed. The challenge for the contemporary United Methodist diaconate in this regard is to embody ways that deacons are also under a kind of "connectional mandate." That is, United Methodist deacons must be connected vitally to the worshiping congregation *and* also be clear about the bishop's mandate they have been given by virtue of their ordination. **There can be no such thing as a "free agent" deacon.**

United Methodists ought to consider how deacons might live out their mandate of accountability with the bishop or, more practically, with district

superintendents who have also been given the ministry of *episkopé*, or “oversight.” This need not necessarily be the same kind of itinerancy as that of elders; but the “spirit of the itinerancy” should find some practical expression in our polity for deacons. Some deacons already embody such a spirit as they have begun new ministries with a mandate from the bishop. Much education needs to take place among bishops and district superintendents—as well as among laity, elders, and even deacons themselves—to explicate the nature of the diaconate, so that deacons can be appointed to places that help define their unique ministry and make their connectional mandate clear. This educational task is made more complex by the simultaneous existence of two different forms of the diaconate in United Methodism, the lay office of deaconess and the ordained office of deacon.

Deacons must also continue to struggle to find a place for themselves in the liturgy. The *Discipline’s* explanation of deacons’ calling to “interrelate worship and service” is a fruitful line of theological reflection. Much work in this regard has already been done by Daniel Benedict and others.¹⁵ United Methodists might also consider an additional vital use for deacons in the “liturgy” of the local church that occurs outside of Sunday morning worship. The Methodist “class leader” is a church office within our Methodist heritage that could be reclaimed by contemporary deacons.¹⁶ Throughout our history there have been various attempts to use this vital office in ministries that incorporate many of the historic roles taken by deacons. These include visiting the sick, promoting serious discipleship among the faithful, and collecting offerings from class members to be used for the common good. Like class leaders, United Methodist deacons in the future may increasingly serve as non-stipendiary ordained persons in the church, much like their counterparts in other denominations.¹⁷

Many deacons, no doubt, are already serving as small-group ministry coordinators or Bible study leaders in their churches, given that so many of them have considerable training in Christian education. Deacons as leaders of small-group Bible studies, much like Methodist class leaders of the past, could work in close connection with pastors to assist the congregation in receiving the proclaimed Word of God. Such a role for deacons has also been proposed by Reformed theologian T. F. Torrance and was cited by Collins as a helpful practical response to his research findings.¹⁸ As deacons are ordained to Word and Service, they could play an important part in revitalizing the historic role of class leaders in the contemporary church.

Relating the Methodist office of class leader and the contemporary diaconate has implications for determining the desired number of deacons for The United Methodist Church. In the past, there was typically more than one class leader in a particular Methodist society. One of the first early examples in a church document describing the activities of deacons, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, shows that there were at least two deacons working to keep order in a small but crowded worship setting. In The United Methodist Church in the United States, at present there are fewer than 1,200 deacons, compared to approximately 33,000 elders.

There are many reasons for this relatively low number of deacons, but a prime reason is most certainly the rather high requirements for formal, seminary-level education. There seems to be an unfortunate belief in the minds of many United Methodists (also expressed in the *Discipline*) that to be ordained as a deacon, the candidate must have a level of education virtually equivalent to that of an elder. The mandate for ministry embodied in ordination is given not because of a person's educational level but rather because the church believes God has given her or him gifts for fruitful ministry. United Methodist deacons have far more formal theological education than deacons in other denominations in North America.¹⁹ It is worth considering whether, in the tradition of many Methodist deaconess training institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, instituting deacons' training schools at the annual conference level might not be a better way to prepare deacons for ministry. This is the contemporary training model for Episcopalian and Roman Catholic ordained deacons. Competence for ministering the Word of God need not require seminary-level education.

The need for such training schools has been suggested at other times in our church's history, including in the pages of a predecessor of this very journal in 1886. Holiness theologian and Methodist Episcopal clergyman Daniel Steele argued that our denomination's seminaries were valuable for the excellent theological education they provided but that there were many people needing to be equipped for ministry for whom seminary-level education was not the right preparation.²⁰ Many of these people possessed gifts for ministry but were poor; and because they could not afford or did not want a classical theological education, they were not being used effectively by the Methodist Episcopal denomination. Notwithstanding current sources of funding that might partially address the financial barriers to

seminary, additional constraints such as time, location, or academic ability similarly might limit persons today who could otherwise be very gifted members of the United Methodist diaconate.

In carrying out their role in maintaining the cohesiveness of the church community, deacons should be utilized as agents from the local church community in distributing the Lord's Supper to people who, due to illness or other reasons, are unable to be present at the community's weekly worship service. This would be a powerful representation of the extension of the church's ministry, which has deep roots in the tradition of the diaconate. Recent proposals at General Conference to give deacons the ability to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper in particular localities would have the effect of severing a relationship between a gathered community and an absent member or members—a relationship the deacon is called to keep vibrant. What better way to address the needs that precipitated these General Conference proposals than to bring the previously consecrated Communion elements from a local church worship service to persons unable to attend as an expression of their inclusion? Such arrangements will take planning and coordination, but the barriers to such action in most circumstances do not seem insurmountable.

At the annual conference level, the fellowship of the Order of Deacons currently in place may serve as a model for a cohesive community that, in turn, can be expressed in local church contexts. The experience of chapters of the Order of Deacons in annual conferences suggests that deacons (in part due to their smaller numbers) have had a much easier time developing a sense of community amongst themselves than have their colleagues in the Order of Elders. The Orders of Deacons can also be the context for strengthening the relationship between deacons and the bishops and district superintendents who serve in the annual conference's ministry of oversight. Annual conference chapters of the Orders of Deacons have helped their members to reflect theologically on the nature of their ministry, which has, in turn, illuminated for other United Methodists the deacon's historic place in the church.

What has been most surprising is that most deacons in The United Methodist Church have not followed their counterparts in the Episcopal or Roman Catholic traditions in adopting the title *Deacon*, choosing instead the general title for ordained persons, *Reverend*. This has unfortunately blurred their distinct identity for many persons in local churches. Although

minor in some respects, the choice to name one's own place in the church should be symbolically very important for deacons and the church at large. Referring to deacons as "Reverend" has served to confuse rather than to clarify the deacon's role in the church, even though its use has most likely emerged out of a desire rightfully to assert deacons' important place as ordained leaders in the church.

Deacons Are "Go-between" Missionaries

Considered along with the emphasis on the integral importance of the deacon's "connectional mandate," understanding the deacon as "go-between" has the most potential to revitalize a vision for the diaconate in The United Methodist Church that is true to the biblical meaning of *diakonia*. Of those scholars and church leaders who have been aware of Collins's contributions, the image they have most frequently utilized to describe the role of the deacon has been that of a "go-between." A reinterpretation of Acts 6 best exemplifies this idea.²¹

More than any other passage in Scripture, Acts 6 has long been believed to represent the Christian movement's selection of its first deacons. While most scholars agree that this was probably not the case—the office of deacon most clearly developed only years later—the passage has been influential from very early times in relation to the diaconate. When one applies the new research on the *diakon*-words to this passage, it greatly alters and expands the older (and erroneous) understanding, in which the "seven" were seen as "table waiters" in charge of providing for the material needs of Greek-speaking widows.

As in earlier chapters, in Acts 6 Luke utilizes the *diakon*-words to describe the sacred mandate given by God to Paul and other ministers, or *diakonoi*, to preach the gospel. The fact that, in the next chapter, Stephen, one of the seven, does precisely this is just one of the many indications that the work the seven were assigned to do was to be ministers of the Word to linguistically different and socially marginalized Greek widows. The other disciples continued to preach in Aramaic in the local temple, where these Greek widows could not enter. In a wonderful example of the early church's responsiveness to the leading of God's Spirit, a new cadre of Greek-speaking ministers was formed to meet the spiritual needs of a previously neglected part of the community. The new ministers served as vital go-betweens, or emissaries, for different groups within the church.

Later in Luke's account of the spread of the gospel, the idea of go-between or emissary is even more clearly expressed in the delegation sent from the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem to provide assistance needed because of the threatening famine in Jerusalem. The NRSV fails to convey the power of the *diakon*-word used here by translating it as "relief to the believers." When the *diakon*-word is used in its full meaning, the passage can be read to say, "Without exception the community of disciples determined to send *representatives on a mission* to the brothers and sisters living in Judea."²² Great importance was placed on maintaining the fellowship in the church across geographical distance, and the delegation of "go-betweens" served that role.

Read in light of the new insights on the *diakon*-words, these passages yield many fresh possibilities for United Methodist deacons. Norwegian theologian Kjell Nordstokke has written most powerfully on the transformative potential that a reinterpretation of these biblical words could have for contemporary deacons. The ministry of deacons, Nordstokke contends, "should not primarily be interpreted as self-humiliation and servility, but as conscious mission with divine authority and with the mandate to be a go-between in contexts of conflict and suffering."²³ Just as Jesus described his own mission in Mark 10:45 not as lowly service but as deriving from a wholly (and holy!) other Source, so also are deacons given a mandate from God under the values of God's kingdom. There is no need to appeal to a weaker "theology of service." Love and humility *are* a part of the deacon's ministry—as they are constitutive of *all* Christian discipleship shaped by the Cross. However, these traits are not best understood as constitutive of deacon's ministry *per se*. A corrective to the abuses of ecclesiastical hubris of Christendom is not found in a ministry that follows secular trends where "the world provides the agenda"; rather, as Jesus taught, it is found by operating under a radically different set of values in the Kingdom.²⁴

What would happen in United Methodism if even just one hundred deacons in the United States followed the example of the disciples in Acts 6 and worked as go-betweens to build bridges of interpersonal relationships between immigrant and nonimmigrant communities, or Native and Anglo-American communities, for the sake of the gospel? On a more global scale, how can United Methodists better follow the example of Acts 11:29 in sending delegations of missionaries between the global North and global South to better be partners in mission around the world? The changing real-

ities of global Christianity and the demographic changes in North America require a similarly bold stance as that taken by the disciples in Acts 6.²⁵

The closing words from a recent sermon by the Episcopal bishop of Bethlehem on the occasion of a deacon's ordination seem fitting for this challenge to rethink our understanding of deacons in United Methodism. As we too turn our attention to Bethlehem in this season, may we deacons in particular seek to reinterpret our ministry, our *diakonia*, in a fresh, bold way that is worthy of the connectional mandate we have been given.

Jesus' faithfulness, Jesus' bold compassion, Jesus' plain speaking of the truth, got him killed. It is the faithful, compassionate, truthful one whom God raised from the dead, illuminating forever the question of whether faithfulness, compassion, and truthfulness are worth it. Results we may not see in proportion to our dreams and ambitions, and maybe we will see them, but either way, we are part of something that moves from resurrection to resurrection, part of a process that is infinitely bigger than ourselves. By the grace of God you are what you are, and that grace *must not* be received in vain. Be bold, be powerful, be confident: dare to *be* deacons.²⁶

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Endnotes

1. John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
2. *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission* (London: Anglican Communion Publications, 1996), 20. Online at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/lutheran/hanover.html>.
3. My cautious approach to Collins's work is evident in both the book I co-authored with Paul Van Buren, *The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1999) and in my article "Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology," *Quarterly Review* 19/4 (Winter 1999): 372-86. This article is available on my website (<http://www.deaconpages.org>), along with other diaconate articles, a bibliography, and ecumenical links to websites on the diaconate.

4. For a review of much of the scholarly and ecclesial reaction to his work, see John Collins's most recent book, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing; Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002). See also Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000). For a brief, otherwise unpublished, essay by Collins on this lexicon's use of his research, see my website. The first German publication seriously to incorporate Collins's work was Hans-Jürgen Benedict, "Beruht der Anspruch der evangelischen Diakonie auf einer Mißinterpretation der antiken Quellen? John N. Collins Untersuchung 'Diakonia'" *Pastoraltheologie* 89/9 (September 2000): 349-64. The most recent treatment of Collins's work is another German publication; Volker Herrmann, Rainer Merz, Heinz Schmidt, Hrsg., *Diakonische Konturen: Theologie im Kontext sozialer Arbeit*, vol. 18 in a series by the Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Instituts of the University of Heidelberg (Heidelberg, Germany: Universitätsverlag, 2003). The president of the Evangelical Church in Germany's diaconal work, Jürgen Gohde, has also delivered an address noting the implications of Collins's research for the traditional German understanding of diaconal work. See his "Die Aufgabe der Diakonie im zukünftigen Europa," found online at <http://www.diakonie.de/downloads/Gohde-Promotion2003.pdf>. The Church of England's report *For Such a Time as This: A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001) utilizes Collins's contributions considerably in its reflections upon the diaconate.
5. Andrew D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000), 233-45.
6. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 134; Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1999), 138.
7. John N. Collins, personal correspondence, July 29, 2004. For further detail on the nature of Paul's use of *diakon*-terms, see Collins's *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*.
8. John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church*, 30. Here Collins provides a lengthier interpretation of this and other scriptural passages.
9. *Ibid.*, 194. John N. Collins, "Deacons among the Baptized," *Diakoneo* (Pentecost 2002); online at <http://www.deaconpages.org>. See also John N. Collins, *Are All Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1992).

10. Wilhelm Brandt, *Dienst und Dienen im Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931). Brandt's research was adopted in an article by H.W. Beyer on the *diakon*-words in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 2.
11. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church—2000* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), ¶319.
12. In *The Deacon*, I utilized this language of *focus* to describe the differences between the ministries of deacons and elders, relying on an essay by Robert Hannaford, "Towards a Theology of the Diaconate," in Christine Hall, ed., *The Deacon's Ministry* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1992).
13. For a United Methodist review of this material, see Gerald F. Moede, "The Permanent Diaconate Revisited," *Occasional Papers* 79 (Nashville: United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1989).
14. Collins, *Diakonia*, 244.
15. The ordained diaconate and its predecessor, the lay office of diaconal minister, has been seeking for some time to build a more ecclesial identity for the diaconate, with a place in the local church's liturgy. See Rosemary Skinner Keller, Gerald F. Moede, and Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Called to Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate* (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1987), 73. See also Daniel Benedict, "Elders and Deacons: Renewed Orders and Partnerships in Leading Worship," *Quarterly Review* 19/4 (Winter 1999-2000): 387-403; Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, "The Liturgical Ministries of the United Methodist Deacon: Continuity and Change," *Methodist History* 39/2 (January 2000): 82-98.
16. For an excellent contemporary treatment of class meetings and class leaders and how they fit in Wesley's connection, see D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel, 1997).
17. In 1999–2000, I surveyed 516 deacons in five denominations in the United States. Over 90 percent of United Methodist deacons stated that they were paid for the work they do as a deacon, compared to 35 percent of Roman Catholic deacons and 15 percent of Episcopalian deacons. Approximately 70 percent of Lutheran deaconesses and diaconal ministers were paid for their work. The results are available on my website as well as in a monograph series published by the North American Association for the Diaconate (Episcopal), Benjamin L. Hartley, *An Empirical Look at the Ecumenical Diaconate in the United States*, Monograph Series No. 16 (Providence, Rhode Island: North American

Association for the Diaconate, 2003).

18. T. F. Torrance, "The Eldership in the Reformed Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37/4 (1984): 512.

19. United Methodist deacons are twice as likely to have graduate degrees than their counterparts in the Episcopal or Roman Catholic churches and 20 percent more likely than diaconal ministers and deaconesses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. See Hartley, *An Empirical Look at the Ecumenical Diaconate*, 7.

20. Daniel Steele, "Non-classical Methodist Theological Schools," *Methodist Review* (May 1886): 455-58.

21. The Epistle of Clement to James in the Pseudo-Clementine's document is an example from early church literature that portrays the idea of deacon as "go-between" directly. See James Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 57.

22. Collins, *Deacons and the Church*, 67.

23. Kjell Nordstokke, "The Diaconate: Ministry of Prophecy and Transformation," in Gunnel Borgegård, Olav Fanuelsen, and Christine Hall, eds., *The Ministry of the Deacon 2: Ecclesiological Explorations* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Ecumenical Council, 2000), 118.

24. See Department on Studies in Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, *The Church for Others and The Church for the World: A Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), 20. The phrase *the world provides the agenda* was first used in this publication.

25. See Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 80. Some deacons in North America have also raised the potential of the diaconate as "the ecumenical office" as they strive to fulfill their calling to be "go-betweens" in a church that remains divided. Richard Pemble, "Is Diaconate 'the' Ecumenical Office?" *Deacon Digest* (September/October 1998): 8.

26. Paul Marshall, "Servant or Servile? A Sermon on the Diaconate," *Diakoneo* 25/4 (Pentecost, 2003): 7.