



the
D e a c o n

Ministry Through Words of Faith and Acts of Love

by Ben L. Hartley and Paul E. Van Buren

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Call of Deacons in the World and Church	3
The Needs in the World	6
The Mission of the Church	8
Conclusion	10
Chapter 2: The Vision for the Order of Deacon:	
Interrelating Worship and Service	13
The Vision for the Order of Deacon in Scripture	16
Hebrew Scriptures	17
Gospels	19
Acts 6	21
The Apostle Paul and the Theology of the Cross	23
The Vision of the Order of Deacon in the Sacraments	25
Baptism	25
The Lord's Supper	27
The Vision of the Order of Deacon in Church Tradition	31
Conclusion	33
Chapter 3: The Vision of the Order of Deacon	
in the Lives of Deacons Today	35
Deacons with a Primary Appointment to a Local Church	36
Deacons with a Second Appointment to a Local Church	44
Conclusion	51
Chapter 4: The Order of Deacon and Local Church Relations	53
The Deacon and the Ministry of all Believers	53
Deacons and Elders: Similarities and Differences	57
Deacons and Elders in the Service of Worship	64
Administrative Guidelines for Deacons and the SPRC	67
Salaried Deacons in the Local Church	68
Accountability	69
Nonsalaried Deacons in the Local Church	69
Initiating the Nonsalaried Relationship	70
Accountability	72
Conclusion	73
Endnotes	75
Appendix	83

Acknowledgments

Deacons are not meant to do ministry alone. We did not write this book alone either.

We are amazed at the twists and turns this book has gone through from its original conception in 1996 to its final form. We began working together to write during the summer of 1998. Although it was difficult to write such a book separated by a thousand miles and different working environments, (Paul in Nashville with the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries and Ben at Boston University School of Theology) our conversations and e-mails back and forth were always mutually encouraging.

We express appreciation for the members of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the editorial staff who reviewed drafts of this work from the perspective of the pastor, the deacon, the staff parish relations committee, the lay person, the district superintendent, and the bishop. A work group on emerging ministries in the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries was instrumental in guiding and supporting this project.

Ben thanks the Boston University School of Theology faculty, staff, and students, who in classes, times of corporate worship, and personal conversation have provided the fertile ground of reflection out of which this book emerges. For those who took particular care in reviewing earlier drafts of this book we are especially grateful. Their comments and ecumenical perspective have certainly made this a better expression of the Order of Deacon and our church's mission to the world. Professors Horace Allen, Carter Lindberg, Paul Sampley, Robert Thornburg, and Margaret Wiborg have all offered helpful guidance in thinking about the diaconate. Professor Mary Elizabeth Moore at Claremont School of Theology was also generous in giving us a careful review of the book.

Finally, we are grateful for the presence of our wives, Laura and Corinne, as thoughtful listeners and soul mates. In so many ways they exemplify the spirit of *diaconia* that we both strive for.

— Ben L. Hartley

— Paul E. Van Buren

Introduction

From the moment the 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church reordered its ministry and adopted the new Order of Deacon, there has been much speculation on the meaning of the new Order, how it should be developed, and what difference it should make. (Some saw no reason for the new Order or could not grasp the reason for such an Order, and others thought they knew all the answers and have judged the establishment of the deacon on their understandings.)

The Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries in the Division of Ordained Ministry has the responsibility of resourcing the church in the establishment of the deacon and was very conscious of these varied responses to the new Order. They decided that an appropriate way to assist the church would be to develop a vision statement and then lead toward that vision. After much study and struggle, the following vision statement was adopted as a work in progress.

The ministry of the deacon (diaconate) distinctively embodies and gives leadership to servant ministry of compassion, mercy, and justice. Laity and clergy are transformed through worship which connects faith and daily life so that the people of God serve a hurting world as faithful disciples.

The section was aware that if the new Order of Deacon was to develop appropriately, enhanced understandings of how the Order connected to church traditions were needed. Much study, work, and reflection on the purpose and work of the deacon must take place.

It was realized that one of the most important groups of teachers would be the present ordained deacons in full connection. Their work and the fact that each one is appointed to a local church makes them crucial as interpreters and teachers on the new order.

The Deacon: Ministry Through Words of Faith and Acts of Love, is a resource for the deacon and for the church. It will assist with the dialogue and reflection on the Order and help the church be more effective as a lay-centered, lay-led body that is missional at its very core.

Carefully studied, the work will help the reader reflect on biblical images related to the ministry of the deacon. The relationship of worship and service, so distinctly linked to this new Order, is prominent in the scripture study. In addition, the authors have amplified the images with models from the lives and ministries of deacons at work today.

Paul Van Buren and Ben Hartley have produced a superb work by

providing insights on how the United Methodist deacon can relate to a world in need and provide a needed flexibility in ministry similar to that of the early days of Methodism on the frontier of the United States.

I believe one of the most significant elements of this booklet is the scriptural visions of the deacon. The writers have effectively enhanced the church's dialogue by sharing scriptures that reflect servant leadership.

This book will be useful if deacons, elders, and all church leaders will study it for understandings that will shape the day-to-day work and relationships of the deacon. That study and dialogue will assist the church in solidifying a paradigm of leadership.

—*Jimmy L. Carr*
Associate General Secretary
Division of Ordained Ministry
Section of Deacons and Diaconal
Ministries

The Call of Deacons in the World and Church

The 1996 General Conference initiated changes in the way ministry is understood and practiced in The United Methodist Church. One of the most talked about changes is the Order of Deacon.

From among the baptized, deacons are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop. Deacons fulfill servant ministry in the world and lead the Church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world.¹

United Methodist understanding of ordained deacons has gone through a great deal of change and development over the years. Prior to 1996, clergy were first ordained deacons while on probation for ordination as an elder. The deacon was sometimes perceived as simply a “stepping-stone” toward the eventual goal of being ordained an elder. Now, in the *1996 Book of Discipline*, the Order of Deacon is described as a permanent Order of persons ordained to the ministry of Word and Service with a unique identity and function. Deacons serve the church by focusing on the interrelationship

**(Name), take authority as a deacon to proclaim the Word of God, and to lead God’s people to serve in the world.
(Words spoken by the bishop at the ordination of a person in the Order of Deacon)**

*—Services for the Ordering of Ministry
in the United Methodist Church:
1999 Provisional Texts*

of worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world. Elders are now ordained to the ministry of Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order. We will elaborate on the differences between deacons and elders in a later chapter.

The history behind our denomination's understanding of the diaconate is important for today's deacons to know. The ordained, distinctive deacon has been talked about for a number of years. The 1968 General Conference passed legislation that created the role of "lay worker." Conversation about creating a kind of permanent diaconate became somewhat more common in the years following this legislation. In 1973, Robert W. Thornburg made the following statement to a gathering of deaconesses and home missionaries:

Have we not come to the point in time when a separate and distinctive diaconate would go far toward meeting an urgent, felt need and would generate a significant and exciting response? Is there not a real "gap" — in our thinking and in fact — between the general ministry of the laos and the specialized ministries of the cleros, a gap that might best be filled by a properly conceived diakonos? . . . [T]here are other specialized ministries of serving, teaching, reconciling — in the Name of Christ — that need to be encouraged, guided and, above all, **ordained** by the church, not in competition with the pastoral ministries of the elderate but as their genuine complement [emphases in the original manuscript].²

Prior to the 1976 General Conference, a vote was taken by the Committee to Study the Ministry to establish an ordained, permanent Order of Deacon that was parallel to and distinctive from the Order of Elder. This proposal failed by one vote.³ Instead, The United Methodist Church created the office of diaconal minister and those previously designated as lay workers were invited to join the new office. The office of diaconal minister was conceived as a permanent diaconate that was "not to be an umbrella for previously existing roles but a form of ministry focused in servanthood."⁴ A recommendation for additional study accompanied the decision to adopt this new office. It took 20 years and five General Conferences before the church created the Order of Deacon in Full Connection.

Because the Order of Deacon is new for United Methodists, many deacons are struggling to understand their ministerial identity.⁵ This book provides biblical, theological, and historical resources to help deacons understand their identity as ordained persons. It also gives guid-

ance in fleshing out the practical aspects of their service in the context of the ministry of all believers. The book can also be used to help deacons answer many of the questions being raised by people in local churches about the work of deacons. What were the needs The United Methodist Church discerned in the world and church that gave rise to this new ordering of ministry? What is the theological and historical basis for the work of deacons? How does the work of deacons relate to the work of all Christians' ministries? How are deacons and elders similar and how are they different? How does a church go about employing a deacon? What responsibilities are deacons expected to fulfill? These are just a few of the questions many people in our local congregations are asking.

This book intends to address the above questions and encourage dialogue about the future of the Order of Deacon in The United Methodist Church. After all, the Order of Deacon was just begun a few years ago. In the process of writing this book, we have been careful to balance deacons' current need for clarity in their new roles with the need to emphasize the flexibility, creativity, and vision for ministry we pray this new Order will continue to exemplify in the coming years. We hope that this book provides for both needs.

Ormonde Plater, an Episcopal deacon, reminds us that we are not alone in our ambiguity in regards to the nature of ministry in today's (and tomorrow's) church.

All ministry in the church—not just the ordained—is undergoing drastic change and appears to be heading for an unpredictable future. This is especially true of the diaconate, which tends to avoid not only a fixed definition but also a fixed place in the church. Deacons continually explore their origins, try new directions, and test the limits of their ministry. They like to speak of themselves as occupying some vague space between church and world, or between clergy and laity, as a bridge or as dancers on a razor's edge. . . .⁶

We begin by examining the role of the Order of Deacon in the context of the world's needs and the mission of the church. Deacons are called to serve, equip, and lead the laity in ministries of service in the world. This is the deacon's focus as an ordained clergy in the church. Chapter 2 discusses the identity and role for deacons as found in scripture, sacraments, and church tradition. Reflections from current deacons' experiences in Chapter 3 give us a vivid picture of how deacons are living out their vocations in the intersection of the ministry of the church and needs of the world. Chapter 4 offers helpful ways of understanding the relation-

ship between deacons, laity, and elders in the local church. Staff-Parish Relations Committees (SPRC's) may find the administrative guidelines in the second part of Chapter 4 particularly helpful. The Appendix provides a listing of available resources for deacons' professional development.

The new Order of Deacon in Full Connection combines two core values of Methodism: pragmatism and mission.

—Bishop William W. Dew,
"Itineracy is a Formidable Survivor,"
in *The Circuit Rider*, November, 1997, p. 11.

The Needs in the World

The modern diaconate traces its renewal from the rubble and horror of the Dachau concentration camp in World War II Germany.⁷ At the end of the war, in cellblock 26, a Roman Catholic priest named Wilhelm Schamoni quietly gathered with other Christian clergy to discuss how the church could be reborn out of the nightmares of World War II. The church had failed in so many ways during this time of suffering and in the years leading up to the war. How could the gospel of Jesus Christ be communicated in the hurting world after the Holocaust? The notes from this small group of clergy in Dachau were saved and the conversation continued after the war. These early conversations eventually led the Roman Catholic Church to restore the permanent diaconate in 1967.⁸ This small group of clergy looked to the restoration of the diaconate as their response to the overwhelming need for repentance, forgiveness, and renewal. Out of Dachau's suffering and hopelessness, this group of clergy proclaimed the centrality of Christ's vocation — as one who came to serve and not to be served — as the response to renew the church. Today, the diaconate is a growing and vital presence in the church across denominational boundaries.

Since these first meetings in Dachau, the ecumenical church has continued to seek ways of reforming and recreating itself in the face of fragmentation in the society and church. The World Council of Churches document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, emphasizes the calling of the whole people of God as the beginning point for ministry. This document describes the ordained ministry as fulfilling the functions of the ministry

of all Christians “in a representative way, providing the focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community.”⁹ The role of the deacon is to encourage and bring to focus the diaconal responsibility of the whole church and its calling of people to be servants in the world. The theology in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* has been one of the shaping forces in the development of the new Order of Deacon in The United Methodist Church.¹⁰

A variety of needs confront United Methodists as we seek to be faithful to the gospel of Christ. People search for ways to heal lives fragmented by addictions, depression, and loneliness. Large corporations and special interests too often dominate the political arena instead of healthy democratic process in our cities and towns. Environmental degradation of God’s creation is widespread. The Good News of Jesus Christ is still unknown to neighbors close to home and in distant countries. Children around the world suffer profound poverty.¹¹ Idolatries of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and class too often raise barriers with our neighbors whom we are called to love and serve through our God-given ministries of reconciliation. Rural and urban poor lack the organized power to influence the corridors of the elite. Prison populations increase while those released from prison need more support to rebuild their lives. Poor countries are unjustly strapped with debt loads to the benefit of the industrialized countries.

The whole world is my parish. —John Wesley

As Christians, we are called to share the gospel of Christ in its totality. Whether this Gospel is expressed through evangelistic efforts or through social justice ministries, the gospel speaks to each of these particular needs and many more. The gospel invites us to participate in God’s work to bring about the Reign of God in the world around us. The church is called to transform people’s lives within the church and outside the church. The quiet but prophetic group of clergy in Dachau recognized the need to go beyond the church walls in transforming the world around them. A half-century later our need remains the same.

The Order of Deacon draws people who have a passion for a specific ministry or ministries and a desire to equip and enhance the ministry of all believers in the local church. People are discerning a call to the Order of Deacon in ministries of spiritual direction, urban ministry, community

organizing, missions, environmental education, evangelism, youth, hospice care, education, music, and many other areas. All deacons are called to a ministry of leadership in their local church. The deacon's role is to encourage all baptized Christians to claim the power that is theirs as children of God to minister in the name of God to those who are most in need.

As ordained clergy, deacons play an active role in services of worship and raise awareness before the entire congregation of our common call to service. Deacons highlight all Christians' common call to service in their teaching and preaching ministries in the local church. Equipping the laity is a vital part of the deacon's ministry of Word and Service. One deacon shares that saying the benediction is one of his favorite roles in worship services. He boldly proclaims, "the service of worship has ended but our serving in the world has just begun. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord with gladness!"

The Mission of the Church

Our denomination's strength has been the ability to creatively and selectively adapt the forms of ordained and lay ministry to the changing needs of the world around us. In frontier Methodism, John Wesley's flexibility took the form of new church offices of society stewards, poor stewards, and deaconesses. These new positions met the needs of a rapidly growing frontier church. Poor stewards were perhaps the closest to the historic understanding of deacons. Poor stewards "prepared for the Lord's Supper, and ensured that a collection for the poor was taken at the sacrament, and saw to it that the funds collected were made available to needy persons."¹² In 1888 our denomination established the office of deaconess which was an important aspect of the church's ministry among the poor in our rapidly industrializing cities. Deaconesses continue to serve in today's church in a variety of ways. In the 1960's and 70's, our denomination responded to the crises in American cities by developing functional ministries in community development and street ministries which often were based in institutions separate from local churches.¹³ Specialty ministries for youth, industry chaplaincies, home missionaries, and lay workers became more common during this era.

Today, we have the opportunity to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of these previous developments as we shape the Order of Deacon for the next century. We must draw on our Christian and United

Methodist identity to discern the best way to adapt to the changing needs for ministry in the world around us. A valuable lesson we learn from our previous experience is the importance of local church connection in all our ministries.

The new ministry of deacon the 1996 General Conference set in motion is not foreign to the spirit of Methodism, nor have the marks of its envisioned ministry been absent in our tradition. The 1996 Discipline rightly notes that the new ministry of deacons “grows out of the Wesleyan passion for social holiness and ministry among the poor (¶ 319).

—Kenneth Rowe,
*“The Ministry of Deacons in Methodism
from Wesley to Today (1998)”*

Today, we face a different kind of frontier than Wesley did but we can still look to Wesley for the style of flexibility in ministry. **Cooperative parishes** where churches band together to accomplish things they could not do on their own are an exciting arrangement in rural and urban areas where deacons can work to strengthen the links among churches and with the surrounding communities. The new ministry strategy, **shalom communities** is another creative initiative where deacons can flourish. Emerging out of the tragic Los Angeles riots in 1992, the “shalom program shows churches how to work with their communities to stimulate economic development, improve race and class relationships, address health issues, and develop congregations.”¹⁴ It is a grass-roots effort that resonates powerfully with deacons’ vocations to serve in the world and the church.

The United Methodist Church’s continued focus on evangelistic efforts and new church starts are another potential growth area for deacons’ ministries. First, as clergy ordained to both Word and Service, many deacons are trained in proclamation, teaching, and worship. Stephen, in Acts 6, is a powerful example of preaching combined with service. Deacons in the early church also played key roles as educators in local congregations. Today’s deacons trained in Christian education are a vital resource for evangelistic efforts. Second, a deacon’s potential dual employment in a community agency and a church enables a deacon

to make links with the community in ways that an ordained elder may not. Such tentmaking vocations illustrate the potential flexibility inherent in the Order of Deacon that could be utilized in evangelistic efforts.

The American churches have nurtured themselves so long and so well that the Spirit got bored and left. The only hope is for the churches to forget themselves a little and reach out to the multitude of cultures and subcultures that languish in spiritual sleep or pain. So the day of the deacon has come. We need an advanced guard of messengers professionally trained to enter into the communities of the sick and secular and be lightning rods for grace. Pastors (elders) are for the faithful. Emissaries from the bishop (deacons) are for those whom Jesus sought.

**—Robert C. Neville
Dean, Boston University School of Theology**

The Order of Deacon, comprised of persons ordained to Word and Service, is an exciting, hope-filled, development in The United Methodist Church. Deacons are called to encourage the laity in their ministries of service rather than do it all by themselves. One deacon expresses it this way:

It seems that we have, for the most part, attracted people to the diaconate who have some active lay ministry—i.e., doers. But where we live out our diaconate is in a leadership capacity, enabling the ministries of others. This is not to say that we don't actually do some ministry (like hospital visiting, etc.) but most of our time and energy is spent in trying to lead others. And what that means is endless committee meetings and trying to nudge people along, a very different form of ministry than what we experienced as lay people. Coming to that realization and making that transition is very difficult . . . but it is also characteristic of life on the boundary of church and world.¹⁵

Conclusion

The United Methodist Church is in a new era of Christian ministry.

All deacons are called to lead local churches in “interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world.”¹⁶ Persons ordained to the new Order of Deacon help reaffirm all Christians’ privilege to serve God in meeting the needs of the world and the church. Deacons’ work requires a frontier approach to ministry. Shalom communities, cooperative parishes, local churches, and community agencies are all possible contexts where deacons may fulfill their vocation. Deacons may teach, preach, and do other activities in keeping with their gifts for ministry in local churches. The possibilities for deacons’ ministries are as wide as the needs before us. In the next chapter we take a closer look at the deacon’s identity as portrayed in scripture, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and church tradition.

The Vision for the Order of Deacon: Interrelating Worship and Service

The needs in the world and church are not as neatly divided according to needs in the world and mission of the church as the previous chapter suggests. The church and the world are interrelated. The growing interest in systems thinking promoted by business consultants and the awareness of environmental problems point to the fact that our world is not neatly divided into categories.

The Order of Deacon requires a similar recognition of the interrelationship between the church and the world and between worship and service. The *1996 Book of Discipline* states that deacons are charged with “interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world.” As Jesus’ disciples, we are invited to always examine our relationship to God and our relationship with our neighbor — together. John Wesley put it this way:

Those renewed by God ‘love him, because he first loved us,’ and withheld not from us his Son, his only Son. And this love constrains them to love all mankind, all the children of the Father of heaven and earth. ¹⁷

In the following pages we trace out the vision of the deacon’s identity as one who interrelates worship and service in the world and church. This requires movement in two directions. Deacons are called to: (1) lead the laity in bringing an attitude of **worship** to our daily service and (2) to remind us of our **call to service** in our weekly worship.

Deacons’ work in helping to plan the worship service and their active participation in the worship service reminds all Christians that our daily service is an extension of our worship experience. There are a variety of ways deacons can help congregations make this connection. For

example, Doris Rudy suggests “placing the tools or symbols of people’s daily lives on the altar every Sunday” to make the link between work and worship more concrete.

Worship and the everyday life of Christians . . . are not two departments which are separate, although they belong together, but two concentric circles of which worship is the inner which gives to the outer its content and character.

—Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*,
vol 4, part 2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*,
tr. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 639.

Jesus often used parables to make his teaching clear and to provoke thought among his followers. We will do the same to facilitate creative thinking about the Order of Deacon’s calling to link worship and work.

The following parable by Langston Hughes is a powerful portrayal of the challenge of interrelating worship and service.¹⁸ The setting of the story is in the depression era of the United States. In this story, a homeless black man named Sargeant enters a town looking for a place to rest for the night. The snow is gently falling in a dream-like way. He knocks on the door of the parsonage and is told, “No!” He tries to get into a church but the door is locked. Frustrated, he begins pulling at the door. Alarmed citizens call the police and a struggle begins between the police and townspeople and Sargeant. Sargeant grabs for a stone pillar beside the door in a desperate attempt to get into the church. After a struggle, Sargeant succeeds in pulling the church down—“the walls and the rafters, the crucifix and the Christ.” I quote at length from Hughes’ *On the Road*.

“Sargeant thought he was alone, but listening to the *crunch, crunch, crunch*, on the snow of his own footsteps, he heard other footsteps, too, doubling his own. He looked around, and there was Christ walking along beside him, the same Christ that had been on the cross on the church—still stone with a rough stone surface, walking along beside him just like he was broken off the cross when the church fell down.

“Well, I’ll be dogged,” said Sargeant. “This here’s the first time I ever seed you off the cross.”

“Yes,” said Christ. Crunching his feet in the snow. “You had to pull the church down to get me off the cross.”

“You glad?” said Sargeant.

“I sure am,” said Christ.

They both laughed.

“I’m a hell of a fellow, ain’t I?” said Sargeant. “Done pulled the church down!”

“You did a good job,” said Christ. “They have kept me nailed on a cross for nearly two thousand years.”

“Wheeeeeee! “ said Sargeant. “I know you are glad to get off.”

“I sure am,” said Christ.

They walked on in the snow. Sargeant looked at the man of stone.

“And you have been up there two thousand years?”

“I sure have,” said Christ.

“Well, if I had a little cash,” said Sargeant, “I’d show you around a bit.”

“I been around,” said Christ.

“Yeah, but that was a long time ago.”

“All the same,” said Christ, “I’ve been around.”

They walked on in the snow until they came to the railroad yards. Sargeant was tired, sweating and tired.

“Where you goin’?” Sargeant said, stopping by the tracks. He looked at Christ. Sargeant said, “I’m just a bum on the road. How about you? Where you goin’?”

“God knows,” Christ said, “but I’m leavin’ here.”

In this dramatic parable, the walls of the church do not just expand to include more of the world that surrounds the parish. The walls are torn down. The author challenges us to reconsider what it means to be Christian and the nature of Christ’s ministry. We can imagine what the members of that torn down church might have done in the following weeks and months as they rebuilt their church. Do they learn from this experience? Do they notice the suffering around them and rediscover their call to serve the poor? Do they use some of the stones from their church to set up a homeless shelter? This also brings to mind stories from churches that have been forced to rebuild after a fire or natural disaster. Often, the rebuilding process prompts church members to think about their church in a new way. Their liturgy of worship becomes closely related to their liturgy of service in the world.



© Fritz Eichenberg Trust/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Church renewal must be rooted in a dual focus on worship and service. Don Saliers, a United Methodist seminary professor, states:

The ordering of our common life of worship and its renewal must therefore go hand in hand with the risk of a common life of service. This requires persons of deep biblical memory to be engaged in ministry to those who suffer and to those who hope. The task before us is to translate these experiences into the ongoing prayer and praise of the church, and to liberate the tradition's prophetic and priestly power for this work.¹⁹

Deacons are called to be such persons of “deep biblical memory.” In the next section, we explore what the Bible has to say about the Order of Deacon’s vision of interrelating worship and service.

The Vision for the Order of Deacon in Scripture

The following portions of scripture offer deacons a valuable starting point for their own reflections on their diaconal identity.²⁰ At the beginning of a deacon’s ministry in a local church they may choose to offer a special class or some other event in order to clarify the deacon’s role in the ministry of the church. The Order of Deacon in a particular annual conference may also choose to set aside retreat events for corporate reflection on these or other passages from scripture which help give their

order a clearer focus. This is one way of living out what it means to be an Order in The United Methodist Church.

An order is a covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church. These orders, separately or together, seek to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers during this stressful time of change in the Church, and for a deepening relationship with God.²¹

... [O]ur communal life as deacons is an essential part of our identity as deacons.

—Ormonde Plater,
“The Search for Diaconal Identity” in Peyton Craighill, (ed.),
Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present & Future:
Essays from the Philadelphia Symposium, 1992,
(Providence, RI: North American Association
for the Diaconate), p. 63.

Hebrew Scriptures

While there is no precise equivalent to deacons in Hebrew scripture, the Hebrew scriptures are full of examples where the chosen people of God are reminded of the interrelationship of worship and service. Prophets, for example, rose up and said some very uncomfortable things. In Micah 6:6,8 the prophet condemns the people’s preoccupation with worship formalities and tells them, simply and clearly, that worship and service are connected.

*With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?*

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

What starts conflicts and persecutions, what marks the genuine church, is the word that, burning like the word of the prophets, proclaims and accuses: proclaims to the people God's wonders to be believed and venerated, and accuses of sin those who oppose God's reign, so that they may tear that sin out of their hearts, out of their societies, out of their laws—out of the structures that oppress, that imprison, that violate the rights of God and of humanity. This is the hard service of the word.

—Oscar Romero, in James R. Brockman,
(compiler and translator), *The Violence of Love*,
(Farmington, Pennsylvania:
Plough Publishing House, 1998) p. 18

The “Servant Song” of Isaiah 42:1-4 provides another helpful model for understanding the role of deacons and servanthood in today’s church. United Methodist seminary professor, Simon Parker, highlights this passage in *The Call to Servant Leadership*, a recent publication for deacons.²²

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.*

*He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;*

*he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

Isaiah 42:1-4 is an example of a “compassionate prophet.” The servant boldly proclaims and brings forth justice. The servant is also gentle, quiet, and compassionate toward those who are suffering and just barely holding on—as a “dimly burning wick.” The breadth of the

servant's ministry extends beyond the local community. The servant establishes "justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching." Persons who are called to the Order of Deacon are invited to be "compassionate prophets." They are called to work within the walls and move beyond the walls of the church to interrelate worship and service in the ministries to which God has called them.

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love of God begins with listening to [God's] Word, so the beginning of love for the [community of believers] is learning to listen to them . . . Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But [the one] who can no longer listen to his brother [and sister] will soon be no longer listening to God either; they will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in Geoffrey B. Kelly,
(English edition editor) *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*,
Volume 5: *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*,
(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) p. 98

Gospels

Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13: 3-16 is one of the most powerful scriptural images for the Order of Deacon. Before we begin drawing conclusions about this well-known story, let's first take a closer look at how Jesus interpreted his own action to the disciples:

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."²³

There are at least two aspects of the foot-washing scene crucial for our reflection on the Order of Deacon. First, Jesus establishes his identity as his disciples know it. Jesus is Teacher and Lord. Jesus' disciples understand him without any difficulty on this point. Maybe they are even reassuring themselves that, in fact, they have been following the right person even though this foot-washing experience was a bit strange. The second aspect of this scene is more confusing to the disciples. Jesus throws a curve ball. He, as their Teacher and Lord, has washed their feet and they should do the same for each other.

The act of washing feet is a radical act on Jesus' part. It is an act that only slaves are supposed to do. Jesus took on this identity while at the same time acknowledging his own authority as Teacher and Lord. We do not find a timid Jesus who quietly says, "I'm just a lowly servant." Jesus confidently highlights his authority by interpreting it in a radically new way—the way of service. This is mirrored in Mark 10:45 as well.²⁴ "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus came to serve but as the Son of Man he also claimed the power that enabled him to give his life.

These stories from Jesus' ministry reflect what servant-leadership is all about. The United Methodist Church uses the phrase *servant leader* to refer to all leadership in the church, lay and ordained, deacon and elder.²⁵ At first glance, the term *servant leader* seems to be a contradiction. When seen in the light of Jesus' ministry, we realize that Jesus' leadership was marked by servanthood. Peter (at first) refused to have Jesus wash his feet because Peter thought that Jesus should lead in a different way. The leadership that Jesus demonstrated acknowledged the way of the towel, basin, and cross. It is through the towel, basin, and cross that deacons also witness to the transformation of the Reign of God.



These gospel passages have a great deal of meaning for contemporary deacons across denominations. Deacons in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and United Methodist churches portray Christ's example in the foot-washing story in their outward vestments. A deacon's vestment in worship services includes a stole going across the left shoulder and tied near the waist to remind them of the towel Christ used in washing the disciples' feet. The stole reminds the contemporary deacon of his or her "God-giftedness" to live a life of service to others. The deacon's stole also reminds all believers present that their lives of service in the world are in fact holy and should be recognized as such.

Acts 6

Acts 6 is perhaps the most well-known passage for guidance on the role of deacons in churches. Acts 6:1-4 reads:

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word."

The apostles choose seven individuals to take care of the Hellenist (Greek-speaking Jews) and Hebrew widows in Jerusalem. In Acts 6:9-10 we learn that Stephen, one of the seven, has a ministry that is much broader than "waiting on tables" and includes teaching and evangelistic preaching. In Acts 7 Stephen is martyred for his faith.

Early church tradition looked to Acts 6 for guidance in its understanding of the deacon's ministry. The service that the chosen seven perform is identified as *diakonia* (usually translated ministry or service) but the term "*diakonos*" (depending on the context, this is translated either as deacon, servant, or minister) never appears. At this point, the formal office of deacon was most likely not yet established in the Jerusalem church.²⁶ Even though the term *diakonos* does not appear in this passage, the early church still used Acts 6 as a model for deacons once it became a church office. The example of Stephen and the seven remain a powerful testimony to the identity of deacons today. The United Methodist deacon's ordination to **Word and Service** reflects both

Stephen's proclamation of the **Word** and his **service** to the poor in Jerusalem.

In Acts 6 we also learn about the complexities of service and the ministry of reconciliation that the chosen seven carried out. Luke tells his readers in Acts 6:1 that there was strife between the Hellenists and the Hebrews in Jerusalem.²⁷ The seven who were chosen to wait on tables were most likely leaders of the Hellenist community in Jerusalem. By choosing the seven, the apostles also proclaimed the equality of the Hellenist and Hebrew communities in the Jerusalem church. A verse most likely associated with baptism for early Christians reminds us of the apostles' point: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."²⁸ The apostles' choosing of the seven was a demonstration of the apostles' desire for unity among the community of believers.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry [diakonia] of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

—2 Corinthians 5:18

The Order of Deacon takes the ministry of reconciliation seriously. Such a ministry may come in a variety of forms. Pastoral care with families in conflict, the work of racial reconciliation, evangelism, and the healing of church communities that have suffered painful division are all places where our Christian ministry of reconciliation is needed. Persons called to the Order of Deacon are called to embrace the ministry of reconciliation that was so emphasized in Jesus' ministry and the early church.

The Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry embraces the ministry of reconciliation as a central aspect of the deacon's service in a society plagued by violence. The section offers a training program in conflict mediation and resolution for members of the Office of Diaconal Minister and the Order of Deacon. Many deacons are being trained in conflict mediation and are being made available to churches and communities to help bring about reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul and the Theology of the Cross

Paul is referred to as a *diakonos* (usually translated deacon, servant, or minister) of God a number of times in the New Testament.²⁹ Paul's identification of himself as a *diakonos* stands in stark contrast to attempts that limit the role of deacons to acts of social service. Social service has been and continues to be an important and valid aspect of many deacons' ministries but scripture illustrates that it is not necessarily limited to that. Deacons in The United Methodist Church are invited to explore the verses in scripture which use the *diakon*-words in order to gain better perspective on their own ministry as deacons.³⁰ Recent exhaustive research on the terms related to *diakonia* and *diakonos* suggests that a better translation for the terms would be entrusted emissary or agent for God.³¹ Such a translation appears closer to what the apostle Paul had in mind in many places in his letters. Paul, for example, called himself a *diakonos* of God to affirm that he was sent by God as God's emissary to the Gentiles.

Diakonia is comprehensive. Too long has it been identified with the charitable service of the church only, with the perhaps wrongly understood good Samaritan who binds up the wounds of the man beaten up. But we saw the liberating diakonia in the Philippines, the empowering diakonia in the United States, the enabling diakonia in the West Bank, the communal diakonia in the Solomons, and the social diakonia in Jamaica. These are only a fraction of those diakonias which have been mentioned which people fulfill with their lives and bring to fruition with their witness. We will find as many kinds of diakonia as there are reactions of Christians who incarnate the love of our Lord in the situations in which they are.

— Klaus Poser in *Diakonia 2000: Called to be Neighbors: Official Report, WCC World Consultation Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), p. 82*

In the “Christ Hymn” of Philippians 2:5-11, Paul provides a profound theological example of Christ’s emissarial identity as one who “emptied himself” but who is eventually exalted and “given the name that is above every other name.” Paul uses Jesus’ example of having “humility with authority” to help the Philippians understand his own ministry and how they should strive to imitate his own and Jesus’ example.

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
in heaven and on earth and
under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

This hymn proclaims Christ’s example of humility and eventual exaltation in a very powerful way. This hymn also reveals the centrality of the cross for Paul and the congregations of the first urban Christians. The cross is literally in the center stanza of this hymn. The cross was Jesus’ ultimate act of *diakonein*.

Paul’s theology of the cross is one of the deep wells of theological reflection which members of the Order of Deacon are invited to explore.³² It is through the cross that we are able to understand what lies on both sides of this hymn. Through the cross we can understand the nature of humility. Through the cross we can also understand the privilege that is ours as disciples of the One for whom “every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

... the cultive division between the religious and the profane is potentially abolished in faith in the Christ who was profaned by crucifixion. Thus the Eucharist, like the meals held by Jesus with 'sinners and publicans,' must also be celebrated with the unrighteous. . . .

—*Jürgen Moltmann, in The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 44*

When Christians are bold enough to identify with the crucified Christ, we touch a very radical core of the Christian faith. Jesus on the cross identifies himself with lost, abandoned, and marginalized persons. If we are daring enough to allow God to move us toward a similar kind of compassion (which literally means to suffer with) then perhaps we too can learn the amazing love portrayed in the life of Christ. This theology of the cross provides one of the touchstones for ministries of deacons and **all** Christians. This is also part of what was so powerfully portrayed in the Langston Hughes parable. Christ came off the cross to walk alongside the poor and to save the lost.

The Vision of the Order of Deacon in the Sacraments

As further described in Chapter 4, though deacons are not primarily responsible for presiding over the celebration of the sacraments, deacons have vital roles to play in the celebrations of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Deacons and elders, together, are invited to explore how they can work together in the celebration of the sacraments in order to best communicate the unity and particularities of their respective ministries.

Baptism

In the early church, the baptismal liturgy provided one of the key ways deacons participated in the worship services. As teachers of baptismal candidates, ancient deacons led the person to be baptized to the baptismal font, joined them in the water, and handed the newly baptized person milk and honey.³³ The deacon rarely was the only person presiding at a baptism but the deacon was often closest to the people about to be baptized—both literally (in the water!) and emotionally—having helped prepare the people for baptism.

Baptism, then, is not so much event as it is process. Like the Christian life for which it is both empowerment and metaphor, baptism is dynamic, not static; a journey, not a destination; a quest, not an acquisition. Baptism is promise, the fulfilling of which requires a lifetime and beyond.

—Gayle Carlton Felton, in *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 178.

Today, the United Methodist *1996 Book of Discipline* (page 109) places baptism at the center of all Christian ministry. The description of the Order of Deacon in the *1996 Book of Discipline* begins with the phrase, “From among the baptized, deacons are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership. . . .” Through baptism we are reminded of our call to serve one another. In the Gospels, the beginning of Jesus’ formal ministry followed his baptism. Likewise, in The United Methodist Church, the pastor lays hands on the person’s head following the baptism and says,

*The Holy Spirit work within you,
that being born through water and the Spirit
you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.*³⁴

Baptism is the first symbolic reminder of Christian discipleship. In some churches (including a few United Methodist churches) the meaning of baptism is further emphasized by anointing the candidate with oil. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the pastor anoints with oil and makes the sign of the cross on the brow, eyes, nostrils, lips, ears, breast, hands, and feet of the child to be baptized. The pastor then says, “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” whenever he makes the sign of the cross.³⁵ This act reminds all present that they too, as whole persons and as baptized Christians, are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit to be used for the common good. Through this act, the baptized child and all baptized believers are invited to become what God has gifted them to become for all eternity.

The Sacrament of Baptism provides the deacon with opportunities to remind the congregation about the interrelationship between worship and service. In the “Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant” (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #50) the whole congregation is invited to “remember your baptism and be thankful.” The deacon in a

local church could proclaim this reminder as one part of his or her worship service privileges and responsibilities. Chapter 4 examines the deacon's role in worship services and the celebration of sacraments in greater detail.

Now there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services (diakonia) but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

—1 Corinthians 12:4-11

The Lord's Supper

In the early church the celebration of the Lord's Supper in congregational worship was intricately connected with service to the poor of the community. Paul strongly criticizes the congregation in Corinth for not seeing this connection: "[D]o you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" Paul even declares the Lord's Supper in Corinth void because the poor are mistreated in the midst of their celebration.³⁶ The connection between service among the poor and the Lord's Supper took practical form in the Agape meal. The Agape meal was a time for the whole community to gather in fellowship and to help the poorer members of the community. Deacons gathered the food the church members brought with them as part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper and distributed it to the members of the community who were most in need. This practice disappeared in the fourth century when charity to the poor became more centralized. The unfortunate result was that the Christian community became more detached from the poor who lived around them. Wealthier Christians no longer knew the names of their poorer brothers and sisters.

Knowing about the Agape meal practiced in the early church, John Wesley began Love Feasts in his own churches in England when he returned from Georgia. Like the early church Agape meals, Methodist Love Feasts strengthened the bonds of fellowship and provided financial help for the poorer members of the churches. A collection was taken at each Love Feast and in the early years of Methodism, this collection was specifically allotted for distribution to the poorer members of the fellowship.³⁷

This call to interrelate worship and service remains in today's celebration of the Lord's Supper. Deacons are invited to take leadership in assisting the elder in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and to reinvigorate Wesley's tradition of collecting an offering for the poor at this time.

Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this [sacrament of the Lord's Supper] is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given to you, you must in turn render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his Holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy.

—Martin Luther in “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ,” p. 9.

The interrelationship of worship and service is an important part of the liturgy for the Lord's Supper. In the confession and pardon the congregation prays, “We have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray.” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 8). The final prayer after all have partaken of the sacrament reminds us again of our call to service:

*Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen. (emphasis by the authors)*

There are a number of hymns that bring forth the relationship between service and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. “Draw us in the Spirit's Tether” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #632) makes this connection most explicit in its prayer to make “all our meals and all our living as sacraments of thee.”³⁸

Would a new deacon enhance the mission of The United Methodist Church? . . . Yes, if it is closely related to the Table as a sign, symbol, and function of serving the bread of life to a hungry and hurting world.

**— William B. Oden in “The Deacon in United Methodism.”
Unpublished manuscript presented to The Council of Bishops
Ministry Study Committee, June 27-29, 1994, p. 20.**

The following reading (“Bread and Justice,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #639) also emphasizes our call to service and its relationship to the sacrament of Holy Communion. This reflection illustrates the sacred nature of our daily lives as we offer our whole selves as “living sacrifices” unto God.

O God, just as the disciples heard Christ’s words of promise and began to eat the bread and drink the wine in the suffering of a long remembrance and in the joy of a hope, grant that we may hear your words, spoken in each thing of everyday affairs:

*Coffee, on our table in the morning;
the simple gesture of opening a door to go out, free;
the shouts of children in the parks;
a familiar song, sung by an unfamiliar face;
a friendly tree that has not yet been cut down.*

May simple things speak to us of your mercy, and tell us that life can be good. And may these sacramental gifts make us remember those who do not receive them:

*who have their lives cut every day, in the bread absent from the table;
in the door of the hospital, the prison, the welfare home that does not open;
in sad children, feet without shoes, eyes without hope;
in war hymns that glorify death;
in deserts where once there was life.*

Christ was also sacrificed; and may we learn that we participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ when we participate in the suffering of his little ones. Amen.³⁹



© Fritz Eichenberg Trust/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

The Vision of the Order of Deacon in Church Tradition

The stories of deacons throughout history are valuable resources of inspiration and identity formation. As deacons, these stories represent a recollection of our “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12)—of deacons in ministry who have gone before us.

The story of St. Laurence, a deacon in Rome during the middle of the third century, may be the greatest deacon story in church tradition. Under the persecution of Valerian, Laurence’s bishop and close friend was martyred. Laurence narrowly escaped capture by Valerian and even appears at his bishop’s beheading—risking his own capture. Laurence is eventually arrested and the tyrannical king demands that Laurence gather up the riches of the church. Laurence successfully negotiates for a few extra days to fulfill the king’s wishes.

Laurence goes out to the street corners and countryside and organizes the poor whom he knows so well as their trustworthy deacon. He asks them to come to a certain warehouse for a meeting with the king. Although no doubt fearful of this encounter, since they trust Laurence, they go. On the agreed-upon day, the king demands to see the riches of the church. Laurence then walks to the warehouse doors and flings them open proclaiming, “The poor are the riches of the church!” Needless to say, the king is rather upset at this defiant act and promptly orders Laurence to be executed. Martyred for his faith in 258 C.E., St. Laurence is sometimes referred to as the patron saint of deacons around the world.⁴⁰

There are a few things that stand out from this story of St. Laurence that are valuable lessons for deacons in The United Methodist Church. First, St. Laurence viewed the poor people of his parish as assets of his church not as clients in need of servicing. He brought the members of his parish together to demonstrate their unity in the face of opposition. In our own day, there is growing recognition that sometimes services are bad for people because they can cause a kind of dependency to emerge between those providing the services and those asking for them.⁴¹ Laurence does not encourage dependency but instead sees the potential power of his local church in making a lasting statement to the king. The popularity of this story in the centuries following Laurence’s death attests to the lasting impact of the peasants’ actions.

Second, one must notice that St. Laurence did not gather the poor based on a raw use of power. He had the power to gather the poor because of the strong relationships he built with the poor in his parish.

The people trusted St. Laurence because he had taught them prior to their baptism. They also knew that he dealt with them honestly in distributing food and resources to those who needed it the most. Modern day deacons must similarly locate their power in the relationships they build with the people in the church and in the world.

As a sign of true conversion to neighbor deacons not only minister to the poor; they are also called to represent the poor. The diaconal office reminds us that the viewpoint of the poor cannot be ignored and, indeed, that it is accounted as a priority in the Kingdom of God. We cannot just perceive their needs and respond to them, we also have to recognize the authority of their voice.

**—Robert Hannaford
“Towards a Theology of the Diaconate” in
The Deacon’s Ministry,
(Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 1992), p. 41**

Members of the Order of Deacons in The United Methodist Church also draw upon a rich history of deaconesses. In Georgia, Wesley appointed deaconesses to assist him in pastoral care duties. Wesley was also attracted to the work of some Lutheran leaders who were the fore-runners of deaconess training institutions in Germany. In 1888 the Methodist Episcopal Church (a precursor to today’s United Methodist Church) established the office of deaconess. Hundreds of deaconesses were trained at such places as the Chicago Training School and other institutions. These devoted women had a profound impact on urban America during the industrial age. Lucy Rider Meyer was a key leader of the deaconess movement in the U.S. She visited the Lutheran deaconess training institutions in Germany and received a great deal of inspiration from their example. Lucy Rider Meyer’s meeting with Florence Nightingale was particularly meaningful.

Florence Nightingale had been trained as a deaconess nurse in Germany.⁴² The above two examples of deacons in church tradition illustrate the variety of vocations members of the Order of Deacon may pursue. St. Laurence worked for social justice through what today we might label a community organizing approach. Lucy Rider Meyer trained

hundreds of women to provide ministries of mercy and pastoral care with the poor. Both Lucy Rider Meyer and St. Laurence were strong examples of compassionate prophets. Direct service with the poor and work that addresses structural injustices and root causes of poverty are both elements of the deacon's call to Word and Service.

There are countless other examples of deacons throughout church history which illustrate still other vocational directions. St. Francis of Assisi, a deacon in the thirteenth century, organized an Order in the Roman Catholic Church devoted to ministry among the poor. Gregory the Great desired to remain a deacon instead of becoming a bishop, but was eventually consecrated a bishop anyway. Gregory the Great's book, *Pastoral Care* may be the most widely read book on pastoral care in church history.⁴³ Athanasius, a deacon during the first ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325, played a leading intellectual role in guiding the church's formation of the Nicene creed. These examples proclaim the vitality of deacons who have led the church in its discipleship of the servant. They also nurture hope for tomorrow's deacons as they seek to be disciples in new places and times.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the deacon's vocation to interrelate worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world. scripture testifies to the compassionate, prophetic, humble, and powerful vocation for deacons and all Christian believers. The Sacrament of Baptism reminds us of the beginning of Christ's ministry and calls us today to "remember our baptism and be thankful" for the gifts of ministry that are given to us as Christ's disciples. In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper we confront Christ's call to remember him in his life, death, and resurrection. Through our participation in Christ's sufferings we also remember the suffering of those around us. We are reminded to love and serve our neighbor and to know them by name. Deacons throughout the history of the church have illustrated this love and service.

In the next chapter, we turn to the church tradition in the making! We highlight the testimonies of today's deacons in order to provide concrete examples of what being a deacon entails.

The Vision of the Deacon In The Lives of Deacons Today

These reflections from deacons in the church represent a wide array of ministries. As the Order of Deacon grows in upcoming years, the breadth and depth of the ministries will also grow. Ranging from ministries with cross-country truck drivers to hospice care, today's deacons answer God's call to proclaim and teach and incarnate the Good News of Jesus Christ through ministries of Word and Service. These deacons and the deacons that follow them continue to answer Christ's call to serve "the least of these."

These reflections from deacons' experiences complement the biblical, sacramental, and church tradition resources outlined in Chapter 2. They provide landmarks for the developing identity of the Order of Deacon. As landmarks, these resources can help point the way for deacons but do not restrict deacons' creativity to blaze new paths. As the number of persons ordained to the Order of Deacon grows, our understanding of the deacon's call in the world and church will develop in new ways.

In many of these reflections the reader will notice the tension that arises from the deacon's call to ministry between altar and marketplace and church and world. This is a creative tension that has proven to be the lifeblood of deacons around the world and across denominational boundaries.

We've divided the following reflections into two broad groups. The first group of reflections are from deacons with a primary appointment in a local church who are usually not additionally employed in another organization (school, hospital, etc.). The second group is from deacons who have their primary appointment outside the local church and have a second appointment to a local church.

Both kinds of arrangements involve leadership in the church but in the second case the deacon may be employed by another organization besides the church. This is what gives rise to the tremendous diversity in deacons' vocations. Chapter 4, part 2, reviews some of the administrative differences in these arrangements that deacons in annual conferences have experienced.

The following reflections are offered here with only a brief conclusion. We prefer to let the deacons speak for themselves. May these reflections be sources of inspiration and encouragement to other deacons, elders, and lay people as we seek together to serve God as faithful disciples.

Deacons with a Primary Appointment to a Local Church

Karen Appleby, Overland Park, Kansas

- *Saint John United Methodist Church*
- *Christian Educator*

I am one of those deacons who really struggled with the changes from being a diaconal minister to an ordained permanent deacon in full connection. For two years I did extensive research, reading, and prayer. Even after a deacon's formation event, I felt strongly that I would remain a diaconal minister. So, when I finally did respond to the call to the Order, I "jumped in faith" into the hands of God.

My ministry setting is the local church where I am primarily responsible for Christian education. After my ordination I was very intentional about my responsibility to serve where my church needed me. Along with Christian education, I serve as liturgist, do visitation, and assist with the sacraments. I continually lift up my plumb line which is to ask myself how I am to respond to Christ's Word. How do I relate the Word at the Eucharist table to the Word in my everyday life? How can I model ministry to the congregation so they see themselves as ministers too? To me, being a clergy person means I am a minister like everyone else; but that I have responded to the call in the professional, specialized ministry of the church. As a clergy person, I look for ways to warmly welcome people into the church on Sunday but it is just as important to prepare them to leave the church—to leave the church and serve in our world.

Doors, bridges, and gatekeepers—these are descriptions I have heard as I have discerned my call. I have come to realize that my place is at the door—the place where people go forth and return. The gatekeeper can serve as a bridge from the altar to the world.

Certainly the *Didascalia* [a third century church document] states: 'Let (a deacon) stand without by the door and observe them that come in'. Deacons may not physically stand by the doors today, but metaphorically the doorway of the Church is where they find themselves. In obeying their charge to 'search out the careless and indifferent,' they must cross the threshold times without number, going out to find and bring them home.

—Antonia Lynn "Finding Images" in
The Deacon's Ministry, Christine Hall (ed.),
(Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 1992), p. 115.

Randy Lewis, Port Charlotte, Florida

- Englewood United Methodist Church
- Missions/Outreach Coordinator

My story goes back a ways. I was ordained probationary deacon in 1990. I graduated from Methodist Theological School in Ohio in 1992 with a master of divinity and masters of the arts in Christian education after serving as a US-2 missionary at the Wesley Community Center in Houston, Texas.

After serving five years in the Florida Conference as an associate pastor for three years and then as pastor for two years I stepped out of the regular itinerant system to be able to focus on my passion for missions and outreach.

The decision to step out of the itinerant system was partially due to some difficulty with our conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM). For years I have been drawn to missions in various settings. In addition to being a US-2 I have been on the board of directors for three different Habitat for Humanity affiliates. I was privileged to be a part of the formation of two of these affiliates. I have also been very active with Volunteers in Missions on both ends—having both sent and received work teams. The BOM identified me as a mission worker rather than a pastor. My move from being an associate pastor to pastor was a direct result of a 1994 interview with the BOM. The BOM had not seen me as a pastor so I asked for my own church.

Into my second year as pastor I was feeling like I had an awkward fit. I felt like my mission activity was taking energy away from the church instead of leading the church in that direction. As I looked into the future

I saw more of the same tensions. I feel I have to be the person God created me to be and that includes using my gifts and passion for missions.

That's why I kept my eye on the new Order of Deacon in Full Connection through the 1996 General Conference. Instead of interviewing again for elder with the BOM, I decided to go with the deacon in full connection. I would then find the kind of appointment that would let me live out my calling "to be a bridge builder between the church and the hurting world that needs many faith expressions of love in action." The BOM was very accommodating and appreciated my articulation of my specialized calling.

In the spring of 1997 I did a nation-wide search for a ministry position that would enable me to live out this specialized calling. Since most of my ministry has been from local congregations of The United Methodist Church the first choice was to be in a local church setting. I also looked into conference or agency positions in our larger UMC and para-church positions with organizations like Habitat for Humanity. The Englewood UMC was doing some creative staffing and it seemed like a good match. It has been a good match!

Although I value my vocation as an elder in The United Methodist Church, I sometimes think I should give up my elder's orders in order to demonstrate the creativity that can be found in something like the diaconate.

**—Professor Albert C. Outler as paraphrased by
Robert W. Thornburg from a
personal conversation**

Rae Frank, Lansing, Michigan

- *Trinity United Methodist Church*
- *Minister of Congregational and Community Care*

I am the clergy connection to several ministries—the Missions Committee, Stephen Ministry, and the Benevolence Committee. As a Stephen Leader, I relate to a group of about 25 Stephen Ministers. Along with three other Stephen Leaders, I help in training and supervision. As the person in charge of clergy and lay visitation to the ill and shut-ins, I developed and currently supervise a pager sharing system for the clergy. I train and assign persons to visit shut-ins one-on-one. As persons are on hospice from our church family, I interact as a part of the hospice

team. As a result, I have been asked to do other services for the various hospice groups in the area. This is a labor of love as I never know who I will meet from the community, what their needs may be, or how God might fill those needs through me.

I also work directly with a service agency in Lansing that is a part of Love Inc. Through that agency our church recycles used furniture, clothing, and household items to needy families throughout the Lansing area. This service is performed by a volunteer program in our church that I resource called Love in Action, which also redistributes food provided by the regional Red Cross food reclamation program using our volunteers to help sort and deliver food to the needy. Love in Action participates in the SHARE food program and has a food cupboard project. We also work with the Lansing area churches in a project called Harvest House which has programs for at-risk children and their families. That group has just begun a teen maternity home for at-risk teen moms or moms to be. I serve on its board of directors. Our church has adopted one apartment in that maternity home by furnishing it and providing mentor moms.

This is not all I do by far! It doesn't include the prayers I offer during Sunday worship, the hugs and encouragement I give to church family members as they pop into my office during the week, the many funerals and a few weddings, or my work with the Lansing Metro Union of the UMC. The funeral services are a very special way I am able to listen and care for all the family members, some who are not part of our church and many times not part of any church.

How did I get here? It has been a lifelong road and I was ordained in the fifty-sixth year of that trip. All along the road God was teaching me, testing me, and giving me more and more skills and more and more tasks to do. It's almost a parable of the talents story. Even my being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 15 years ago has been a blessing and has resulted in my starting a church-based support group for persons with MS and related nerve problems. It is also within the weakness of that illness that God reminds me of my own inadequacies and how much it is God that does the work. I am blessed with a non-progressive form of MS that doesn't show many outward signs.

All of my life experiences have given me skills, tools, experiences, and gifts that I had to examine carefully and prayerfully before I decided to become an ordained deacon. As deacons, we need to see Jesus as our model in who he was and how he functioned all his life. God is the giver of our life and our resource. Jesus' life on earth is the model and the Holy Spirit is our guide.

The vestments I have created and wear are symbols of the order and work of the deacon. My ordination stole (going diagonally from shoulder to hip) is made of red fabrics given to me by people in my home church where I was born and raised and the rest are pieces given by friends, family and the church I serve. There are many stories in those fabric pieces. One important piece is the blue water fabric that flows forward and back over my left shoulder symbolizing my baptism as the beginning of ministry. Baptism is the beginning of ministry for all persons.

Sacramental imagination is, therefore, a key resource for prophetic action in our world. As baptized Christians, we not only have the responsibility but also the authority to view the world in this way. Growing in our awareness of, and ability to name, God's gift of Self to all the world will be accompanied by a new confidence that we are indeed loved by God; a new freedom to live in that love with more and more abandon; and a new delight in our common priesthood.

—Elizabeth A. Dreyer, in *Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life*, (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1994), p. 82.

Leslie Van Blarcom, Shawnee, Kansas

- *Shawnee United Methodist Church*
- *Christian Educator*

Moving from being a diaconal minister to a member of the Order of Deacon has given me an increased awareness of the obligation or call to connect the altar with the marketplace. I have a friend who said, "I don't think it means that at the end of the year we are to report that we have placed additional number of persons from our congregations in soup kitchens." As I have reflected on that over the past year, I have decided it may mean that exactly. If ordained elders are asked how many times they have done communion and how many baptisms they have performed, might it be fair to ask deacons how many persons they have facilitated to serve in some concrete way in the world? I am a Christian educator and the definition I like best of Christian education is that it is a dialogue between the gospel and our lives for the purpose of transforma-

tion. I believe it is my charge as a deacon to help persons make connections between the gospel message and their lives that result in action and service in the world.

One deacon friend used an analogy from our communion liturgy which says, “Make this be for us the body and blood of Christ so that we may be the body of Christ in the world.” The elder is one charged with keeping God’s house in order and serving the meal. The deacon is charged with facilitating the “so we can be” part; specifically, aiding persons in ways they can be the body of Christ in the world.

The nicest compliment any parishioner ever gave me was the one who said, “You have helped me find my place in the church and therefore in the world.” It is not mine to do ministry for people, but to help people identify their gifts and help them find ways to use them in Christian service. One of the best vehicles I have found for doing what I am called to do is Disciple Bible Study. I am in my fourth year of teaching Disciple I. It is the best Bible study I have ever used. “THE MARK OF DISCIPLESHIP” piece really facilitates the integrative process. Persons completing the study have truly found meaningful ways to serve: Five Disciple grads have taught children’s Sunday school for three years (they were new to teaching); one 70-year old woman who called herself homophobic now coordinates our congregation’s AIDS Care Team and one client calls her “grandma.” Two other Disciple grads have initiated a Kids in Mission program in our congregation whose purpose is “to train children to be service-minded through action in the community.” They plan six mission projects a year for elementary school children; another teaches Spanish to children in the congregation and community here at our church. One is going to Guatemala on a mission trip. The list could go on. I LOVE THIS PROGRAM.

I am in charge of Confirmation in my congregation. Ordination has not really changed the way in which I do it, but it has strengthened my resolve that in Confirmation we do not just talk about fellowship, worship, evangelism, mission, and service—we do them!

I am chairperson of my conference Order of Deacon. I have found that to be a valuable addition to my own ministry. It has deepened my call by requiring me to explain that call in a variety of settings and demonstrate what it means to different groups. I believe it has made me more accountable. I am now presiding at weddings. I had done many funerals before ordination, but I have become more aware in doing weddings and funerals of the connecting aspect that these worship settings provide and have taken that “connecting to the world” part more seriously.

My ordination has helped to define my identity within the congregation. I have been in the same congregation for nine years, and although this congregation has been always been very supportive of my ministry, it seems clearer to them now. It has been an affirmation and a recognition of the ministry I was already doing. It helps to name it and declare its equality to that of elder.

My six-year-old son, Westin, said it best. One Sunday, at a worship service in which I was the visiting preacher, Westin was sitting down front. He and another six or seven year old sat together. I had on my white alb with a brightly colored stole. I overheard Westin and the other little boy whispering. The little boy said “your mom’s not a real minister, she’s in white and minister’s wear black.” Westin didn’t miss a beat and responded: “She is so. She’s a minister of the world.”

**—Annette Vanzant Williams, Associate Council Director and
deacon in the Central Texas Conference**

Jay Fowler, Kansas City, Missouri

- *Hillside Christian Church / Church of the Holy Spirit Episcopal*
- *Minister of Music*

In the previous year I served on the worship team part-time at one church leading the Saturday evening praise and contemporary worship with music leadership, as well as preaching in rotation with the senior co-pastors of the church. At the same time I served and still serve at another church as assistant to the senior pastor. My Sundays are filled with a 10 a.m. contemporary praise service, and an 11 a.m. traditional Eucharist service.

As a teen in 1960, I answered God’s call to serve having then understood God’s call in my life to share in a special ministry. Through discernment, I recognize that God’s call for me is as apparent today as in 1960. God has given me distinct and special gifts to share in Word and song. I have responded to God’s call for these years in ministry. In the fourth century, Augustine described a hymn as follows: “Do you know what a hymn is? It is singing to the praise of God. If you praise God and do not sing, you utter no hymn. If you sing, and praise not God, you utter no hymn. If you praise anything which does not pertain to the

praise of God, though in singing you praise, you utter no hymn.” Answering God’s call to ministry and living out that call is, for me, facilitating people to sing their hymn and to help them understand how their talents and graces can be shared with others. It is my conviction that God’s identity and purpose is revealed to us through the Word. God’s Spirit is revealed through song (music) as we have seen the incredible power of the language of music affect people’s lives. Music is God’s Word in the heart and soul of humankind. It is the universal language that transcends all spoken and unspoken languages. I am but the instrument of God in providing the tool through which God is revealed to persons in need of hearing the music. Worship is both a spiritual (spirit-music) experience and an intellectual (truth-word) experience: (John 4:24, NRSV) “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I am called to serve. I enjoy making music, sharing music and Word in worship, and I embrace a heartfelt sincerity to share the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and to glorify God through music and Word. God offered me the gift of music and music leadership and gave me the tools on which to build my talent. I have for many years felt motivated by God and encouraged by people to reach for excellence in my talent. Thus, I have continued to practice a professional career in music for many years. I believe God has called me to offer something just a little different in the worship experience. To identify this offers a unique style of worship, style, and sound of music which is a blending of a traditional and contemporary design. This blend seems to appeal to all ages and tastes in music. My desire is to continue to share music which people enjoy, music which encourages, uplifts the spirit, and empowers people through the worship experience.

In *Wishful Thinking, A Theological ABC* (Harper & Row, ©1973, p. 21) Frederick Buechner writes: “To sacrifice something is to make it holy by giving it away for love.” If I can help people experience their daily work—their jobs, as well as the service they give in the church and in the community—as opportunity for embodying the love of God, then they will know more about the sacramental nature of all of life. This is how I see my vocation as a deacon.

**—Kathleen Jones, First United Methodist Church,
Austin, Texas**

My vision of service to the church and to God includes the concept of empowering people of the congregation to participate in service as individuals of the congregation and, if one so desires, to “share their gifts” and share one’s God-given talent in an uplifting way. Thus, it is vital to me to continue to encourage persons of all ages and styles to share their talents in offerings to God’s service. I believe in the resonating power of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s promised presence, alive and wonderfully present.

Deacons with a Second Appointment to a Local Church

Cathy Burnett, Kansas City, Missouri

- *Trinity, United Methodist Church*
- *Sociology professor, University of Missouri*

Having been a diaconal minister at Trinity UMC I was hopeful that I could continue to relate to Trinity UMC once I was ordained. I spoke to the pastor and we discussed it with the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. We decided that I would be listed as clergy staff but without pay—since my primary appointment is to the sociology department of the University of Missouri. Trinity was very glad to have me. Because my primary appointment is a full-time job, it was up to me to be sure that I didn’t take on too much at Trinity. We discussed ways I might complement what was already happening at Trinity. The first year, I was asked by the worship committee to organize and train the acolytes and crucifers. This I enjoyed. I also enjoyed participating with the other clergy in leading the Eucharist once a month. I was also instrumental in Advent planning for materials focusing on simplified—family oriented—Advent traditions. This year, with the loss of our associate pastor, I am always part of the worship service, most usually serving as liturgist when the designated layperson is not present. I meet quarterly with the pastor and basically check in with him about how and what I am doing. This year, we decided that I could use my gift for administration to be sure that we keep on top of our mission deadlines, such as CROP walk and the Festival of Sharing, etc.

Last year, the nominations committee was not able to find someone to chair the Missions/Social Concerns committee (we call it the SEND TEAM), so I agreed reluctantly to convene it. Now that it is established, I am hopeful that I can step back and assist the TEAM in its work. Actually the SEND TEAM is a perfect place for me to be of service. Its task is to plan for ways to send Trinity UMC members out to live the Christian life. That means facilitating awareness of opportunities to

serve, providing skill development and leadership training, and assisting in identifying skills, talents, and interests for ministry, providing programmatic vehicles for advocacy, and follow-up response.

Through my connections with various agencies, I am able to bring resources to the congregation, such as holding a poverty simulation for the congregation. I host meetings of the many outside groups in which I participate. It also means that church folk are invited to attend these meetings: Murder Victims for Reconciliation and death penalty abolition meetings are the main ones in which I am active. I always make sure the congregation is aware of pending executions. As a clergy staff member, I represented Trinity UMC at a meeting of apartment managers and community police to talk about needs on the boulevard (which is our church address). This will help us serve our neighbors.

There is a spiritual emergency in the church today. “Whenever there is a crisis in the church, it is always here: a crisis in contemplation,” wrote Carlo Carretto. Contemplation looks in two directions: You can contemplate the beauty of a rosebud or the pain of an accident. Failure to contemplate the hurt of others manifests itself in acts that never connect with the real needs of the people we serve; failure to contemplate the deep Mystery of God’s love manifests itself in irrelevant theology and boring worship.

—Kent Ira Groff in *Active Spirituality: A Guide for Seekers and Ministers*, An Alban Institute Publication, p. x.

Jan F. Durham, Marietta, Georgia

- *Bethany United Methodist Church*
- *Program Director at Simpsonwood Conference Center*

In my current appointment as director of program at our conference and retreat center, I am charged with designing and facilitating programs that seek to raise the level of awareness of the churches in our conference regarding some of the difficult issues of compassion and justice, especially as they pertain to the elderly. We have focused on ministry with families coping with Alzheimer’s disease and grandparenting blended families and are planning seminars on enriching retirement years and addressing end of life issues. It is my hope that we will

continue to provide opportunities for clergy and laity, especially from smaller congregations with limited resources, to take a closer look at these concerns. This is how I see myself relating the world and the church.

In cooperation with the Atlanta Alzheimer's Association and the Georgia Division of Aging, I lead workshops on models for congregational respite ministries. We have also published a manual for churches to help them in their respite ministries. I hope to complete a more spiritually reflective piece on the subject in the future. I am continuing my education in an effort to become a certified grief counselor, focusing on end of life issues, the church's role as policy decisions are made regarding euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, and ways to assist both those who grieve and those who minister to them. I am committed to challenging the church to be proactive as our society begins to struggle with the changing demographics of a rapidly increasing elderly population, the potential for restricted allocation of medical resources due to rising costs and increasing demand, and the ongoing debate on quality of life issues.

Jesus still comes to us in the distressing disguise of the poor.

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Bruce B. Maxwell, Pennsylvania

- *Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church*
- *Chaplain, Breezewood Trucker-Traveler Chaplaincy*

The Breezewood Trucker-Traveler Chaplaincy in Pennsylvania is one of four Trucker-Traveler Chaplaincies across Pennsylvania sponsored by the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. As a deacon in The United Methodist Church I am employed by this council full time. This ministry builds a bridge of partnership between regional churches and the business community to provide a ministry of prayer, presence, counsel, and hospitality at an interstate highway workplace. Ongoing Bible studies, holiday hospitality tables, distribution of faith literature and Bibles, providing meals, gas, lodging, transportation, and care packages are a few examples of the pastoral care we provide thanks to the resources of local churches.

Truck drivers and their families are my primary focus of chaplaincy. Truck driving is a difficult occupation, full of stress, conversation on the

CB can be pathetic, and there are many temptations to face. William, for example, is a 41-year-old driver from St. Louis who admits he has wasted 30 years of his life in booze, women, and drugs with a bunch of friends who do the same when he is home. Where do truck drivers go to unload a heart full of hurt? I try to help by offering encouragement and awareness of seeing God on the highway, in the beauty of creation that reflects the glory of God, in the handiwork of the rig, and in the encouragement of fellowship and prayers. I think of it as spiritual fuel. I personally relate to a local United Methodist congregation when I am not preaching or presenting a mission message at a partner church or conference. I thank God for the opportunity to share God's love in Christ in this ministry to which I have been called.

Carole Wells Mehl, Kansas City, Missouri

- *Country Club (in Kansas City's Country Club District) United Methodist Church*
- *Vocal and General Music Teacher at an Elementary School*

I serve in an appointment setting where ministry is not expected. What? Should not the ministry of building Christ's realm be everywhere? Of course, but you might be amazed at how many puzzle that a music teacher in a public school setting is in an appointment by the church as ordained deacon! What about the separation of church and state? Can one teach religion in a public school? The answer is, no, but when teachers shape their curriculums, they reveal their values. That's good! The values that shape us and the fire that ignites our spirit should glow in our work.

Music is a potent influence. Recently, a child in my show choir so impressed a guest who was visiting our extended day program, by the concepts he knew, that he gave our choir \$500 to help defray cost of our choir trip to sing for a convention in St. Louis. Dejuan was spouting knowledge gained from song lyrics. He had something he was proud to show. Many of the concepts we all know and believe were formed by music lyrics. My theology has been very informed by hymnody that I have loved all my life.

I center my curricula around songs of peace, justice, community, equity, loyalty, friends, and cultures. Songs of many cultures and languages broaden our worldview. A favorite area for me is singing songs about ecology and the environment. In preparing the lessons, background is set for stewardship and respect of the earth and its peoples. Preparing children for performance gives the performing arts teacher a

means of building confidence, self-esteem, and self-control that will remain with individuals all their lives. The call to edify and educate through Christ's love is the work of the church in the world.

The school understood my job at church and wanted me anyway. The church understood the teaching job and agreed to the arrangement. I very prayerfully started down the bi-vocational path. During the school year, I usually leave the high school at 3 p.m. and go to the church which is less than fifteen minutes away. I work weekends for the church. I also relate in the summer to the church playground program. At the conference level, I am on the Task Force for Ministry to Persons with Disabilities. The at-risk and special students at the high school seem to like the idea that the neighborhood kids can come to the church and get free help with their homework. The kids at church seem to like the idea that I actually teach at the high school and know what is going on in their world and also work as a minister.

—Linda B. Evans, East Ohio Conference

Helen Byholt Lovelace

- Kerch, Ukraine/Norway
- Kerch United Methodist Church

To share and assist with communion with my congregation is one of the most important parts of my ministry as a deacon with The United Methodist Church in Norway. I am working in Kiev, Ukraine, with my husband Bill who is a missionary with The United Methodist Church.

The altar and communion is the center of my life and ministry. I meet God in a special way at the altar and when I receive and assist with communion. I received my call to serve and to do ministry at the altar. Here God gives me strength to do ministry among all people.

To the communion table comes Olga, one of the poorest women in the congregation. She has had and still has a quite difficult life. Her husband died some years ago. She has worked in road construction. Her son who is close to 50 and a heavy drinker is still living in the same apartment as his mother. Her son is without work, and Olga's pension is too small to feed them both. She told me again and again that she has no

value. She feels like she is “nothing.” She has asked me if she can go to church, if the church can accept her—an old and sinful person.

To the communion table Nadia is also coming, she is 8 years old. She is coming by herself to church every Sunday. Her father has left the family, and her mother has a lot of problems she can’t handle in a positive way because she is a drug abuser. This little girl is responsible for herself, her two-year-old brother, and for her mother.

Everyone coming to the table has a story to tell. Their stories are sad. They are telling about abuse, no money, no food, no heat, no hot water, no pension. And yet, everyone can hear the good news: “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God’s love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!”

When my congregation is coming to the table I sense the meaning of my call to ministry. Here I can be a tool for God’s love. Here I can give each of them a sign of God’s love. From the altar I get strength to bring God’s love to them who can’t come to church or don’t want to come to church or never have heard about Jesus and His love.

Twice a week I go to the soup kitchen my congregation operates. Here we give a free lunch to 25-30 retired persons. Here we have fellowship together through a nice meal. We talk, hug, smile, and laugh. God shows his love through the practical and small things.

We have women’s meeting where we share Gods word through Bible studies, prayer time, and testimony. We share our problems and our happiness and we help each other.

God shows the people in my city that God takes care of them also with sending humanitarian aid—clothes, food, medicine. The congregation has started a small business project—knitting various traditional crafts to sell in churches abroad. We are starting a program so members can be grandparents for newborn children at an orphanage. As a deacon I can lead my congregation in their and my call to serve our neighbor.

Thus, to intercede for the world is to be attentive to God’s hidden ways of mercy. The community of the people of God, Barth insists, “speaks by the very fact of its existence in the world; by its characteristic attitude to world problems; and, moreover and especially, by its silent service to all the handicapped, weak, and needy in the world.

—Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 134.

Kay Barckley, Seattle, Washington

- *University Temple United Methodist Church*
- *Consultant, Children and Family Ministry*

Prior to my ordination, I was a lay member of a multi-staff congregation. I requested a time prior to my ordination to sit down and talk with the senior pastor of that congregation for the purpose of educating her on the Order of Deacon as well as telling her about the need for me to find a second appointment in addition to my work as a consultant to other churches. I asked her if my gifts could be utilized in that congregation. The senior pastor felt that there was a good match between my gifts and the needs of the congregation. The next step was to brainstorm a job description of sorts. Out of that process emerged a focusing of my ministry in the area of worship development, including a weekly liturgical role in one of the worship services and in special seasonal worship such as Advent and Lenten vespers.

One way I am finding to interrelate church and world is through my liturgical role in worship. Each week I write a blessing and sending forth (benediction) which connects our biblical story as reflected in the lections for the week to our call to service in the world. In other words, the congregation is sent out with a call to be, and a call to do.

My congregation (in an urban setting) has an urban minister on staff, whose job description includes our call to service in the world—specifically in our urban neighborhood and city. In light of this, I have kept the connection between church and world before them, in both modeling and through proclamation. I have a specific connection to the Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty and other children's advocacy issues, as well as the voices of other marginalized persons, both in our neighborhood and community. Two stories which I have shared in a number of settings follow:

Helen, a homeless woman with a mental illness, came into the church narthex on Saturday before Christmas as the children were concluding their Christmas pageant rehearsal. Helen was admiring a flower arrangement sent for a memorial service—that led to a discussion about what would be appropriate for someone to give to the family of the deceased. Abruptly, that conversation ended; Helen turned her body 180 degrees and looking at the Christmas tree said "That's what it's all about—God is with us . . . and God didn't mean for us to be alone, but in community."

Mike's home is a garden of blackberry vines. Mike was encountered when a member of our congregation walked, unintentionally into Mike's

home. He later invited Mike to our church. Mike's dream is to help kids stay off drugs; but he knows that he needs to be clean and sober first. On the Sunday Mike came to church he sat in the front pew like an eager child wanting to be known, loved, and welcomed. He loved to sing lustily. When the time for young disciples came—all children were invited to come forward. Mike stood up and said excitedly and boldly "I am a child of God"—and he joined the other children in the front.

My deepened roots in God, my trust in being shown the path of life and my increasing ease in abiding in Christ's love have led me out into the world transformed—with the eyes and ears to see and hear the Helens and Mikes and to see within them the seed of Holiness and through them the glory of the Divine.

There is an old story of a young Christian convert in the fourth century, a soldier whose name was Martin. It is said that one cold winter day, as Martin was entering the city of Amiens, he saw a beggar shivering with cold and asking for alms. Since Martin had not money, he took his cape, tore it in two, and gave half to the beggar. His companions laughed and chided him, but, as the story goes, Martin was more than compensated when he had a vision in which his Lord came to him, wrapped in half a soldier's cloak, and said to him, "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me." The story may be true or not, but the point that it makes leaves no room for doubt: when Martin gave part of his cape to the beggar, the two were not alone. There was a Third Person with them: the one who had promised, "inasmuch . . ." In the beggar, Martin met Christ.

—Justo Gonzalez, in *Mentors as Instruments of God's Call*, (Nashville: Division of Diaconal Ministry, 1992), pp. 43-44.

Conclusion

These stories are a beautiful snapshot of the Order of Deacon. There is already a great variety of creative imagination taking place even in these first few years of experience with the new Order. But these exam-

ples are only the beginning. Future deacons too are called to discern the creative movements of the Spirit as we look for ways the Order of Deacon may change and develop even more fully in the church. Deacons are invited to seek ways of understanding the common threads that together form the identity of the new Order. People ordained to the Order of Deacon in individual annual conferences may choose to reflect together on the stories represented in their own conference in order to best discern the key elements of deacons' work.

The following excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison* illustrates a conviction that many deacons seem to be echoing in their own words. Bonhoeffer penned these words from his cell on July 21, 1944, the day after the news of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler (in which Bonhoeffer was involved).

I remember talking to a young French pastor at A. thirteen years ago. We were discussing what our real purpose was in life. He said he would like to become a saint. I think it is quite likely he did become one. At the time I was very much impressed, though I disagreed with him, and said I should prefer to have faith, or words to that effect. For a long time I did not realize how far we were apart. . . . Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this very moment that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. . . . This is what I mean by worldliness—taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly in the arms of God and participate in [God's] sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in Gethsemane. That is faith, that is metanoia and that is what makes a [person] and a Christian (c.f. Jeremiah 45). How can success make us arrogant or failure lead us astray, when we participate in the sufferings of God by living in this world?⁴⁴

The Order of Deacon and Local Church Relations

In this chapter, we examine the deacon's connective leadership among laity and other clergy in the local church. The first part begins by focusing on the laity and the nature of deacons' leadership in the worship and service of the local church. Next we look at a deacon's relationship to elders or senior pastors. We explain how the identity and function of deacons and elders are similar and different. We also discuss the deacon's relationship to the annual conference. In part two we provide detailed guidelines on administrative processes for Staff Parish Relations Committees (SPRC). The employment process, accountability, and other matters related to the deacon and the SPRC are spelled out in this section.

The Deacon and the Ministry of all Believers

As disciples of Christ, the baptized are **all** called to ministry in the world and church. We have to look beyond ordained clergy in our churches and realize that in the story of the Pentecost, the focus of the Spirit's fire, is upon **all Christians!**

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:41-42, NRSV).

The fire of our origins as United Methodists was not in clergy persons as much as it was in a powerful lay ministry (although clergy persons were vital to the movement). John Wesley was heavily criticized

by the churchmen of his day for allowing laypersons to teach and preach.

The ministry of all the baptized must not be forgotten in this book's necessary focus on a new clergy order. The centrality of lay ministry will and must challenge members of the Order of Deacon to think seriously about how their work equips laity in their ministry in the world and church. This is a key test of deacons' leadership.

In a communal dimension, deacons bring their sign of ministry into the *koinonia* of the church. Through activity, word, and example, deacons encourage, enable, enlist, engage, entice, model, lead, animate, stimulate, inspire, inform, educate, permit, organize, equip, empower, and support Christian people in service in the world, and they point to the presence of Christ in the needy. They are signs of service who uncover and explain signs of service.

—Ormonde Plater in *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*, (Boston: Cowley, 1991), p. 122

The new Order of Deacon provides a rich opportunity to reflect upon the nature of leadership—for both elders and deacons—in the local congregation. The term servant leader is often used by The United Methodist Church to describe what leadership should look like in the church. Our understanding of servant leaders and servant ministry is set forth on page 110-11 in *The 1996 Book of Discipline*. The purpose of leadership is not only to serve—although this is a vital part of the process. Servant leadership must **lead to something**. A deacon's ministry must strengthen the ministry of all believers.

James MacGregor Burns uses the term “transformational leadership” to describe the purpose of leadership.⁴⁵ Transformational leadership is a mutual process involving leaders and followers in mobilizing people's resources and motivations. Transformational leadership for Christians has the purpose of transforming people working toward mutual goals and the end-values of justice, mercy, equality, and a love for God and neighbor.⁴⁶

The Bible uses the term *metanoia* to communicate this idea of transformation. The English term, “metamorphosis,” is derived from this

word. A true servant leader must be about the business of seeking the transformation of everyone involved. This is what happened, after all, in Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet (see Chapter 2). The disciples were transformed in their understanding **and** their actions. Being a follower of Jesus meant something different after that transformational event in the upper room.

Those who serve in God's Kingdom must never simply do good to others, they must rather offer their very selves in humble service to those in need. The teaching on diakonia enshrines the heart of the Christian view of our duty towards others and forms the basis of a new authentic human community of caring and love. To speak of diakonia is to speak of the Christ-like heart of Christian service and ministry and of the dawning of the new age of God's Kingdom.

—Robert Hannaford, in *“Towards a Theology of the Diaconate” The Deacon's Ministry, (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 1992), p. 35*

The story of the prophet Deborah in Judges 4-5 is another interesting example of transformational leadership.⁴⁷ In the midst of crisis, Deborah tells Barak that God has called him to mount an attack on the Canaanites. Deborah is a prophetic visionary sensitive to God's leading into new frontiers. Her sensitivity to God's calling, political insight, and “view from the trenches” all contribute to her effective leadership. She understands the forces that she is up against and has the faith to see how those forces can be overcome with God's help. But Deborah's leadership is not a solo operation.

Deborah mobilizes resources and people (Barak) to accomplish God's purposes. Deacons who are transformational leaders need to prioritize time talking one-on-one with people in this mobilizing process. In this story, we learn that Barak was not completely convinced with the idea but Deborah remains patient. She understands that the process of transformation may take a while. Barak agrees to fight the Canaanites on one condition: “If you [Deborah] will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go” (Judges 4:8). Deborah agrees to this condition. Deborah understands that transformational leadership is a **mutual**

process and that sometimes the goal is more mutually held by one person than the other!

Barak and Deborah's forces succeed in conquering the Canaanites. After succeeding in this task, Deborah and Barak join together in singing a song of praise to God. This is a helpful reminder for deacons' leadership. The success and the transformation are not complete when the particular act of service is over. The deacon is responsible for bringing the people's service and transformation into the worshiping community for the benefit of the whole community. The extended song in Judges 5 reminds everyone of God's faithfulness when we serve. The celebration and worship of God led to the transformation of the entire community.

This transformation culminating in worship in Judges 5 reminds us of the transformation after Pentecost. Newly baptized followers of Jesus "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42). Acts of worship follow the transformative miracle of Pentecostal fire.

Henri Nouwen expresses the idea of a transformative and lay-centered ministry in his story of Philippe Petit, a high-wire performer in a traveling circus. One day, after a dazzling and seemingly effortless performance, Philippe descends on the wire connecting the top of the tower to the sandy floor below. The audience sits on the edge of their seats in awe, totally focused on his every step. The audience is so entranced that they do not notice that the artist is no longer on the wire but is now walking gingerly on the floor. Finally, the artist looks up with a grin of puzzlement on his face. One by one, the eyes of people in the audience light up. They realize that he is just walking on the floor! The crowd explodes in applause and laughter. Nouwen reminds us that the "great talent of this high-wire artist was not so much that he could evoke admiration for an act nobody could imitate, but that he could make us look with amazement at something we can all do together." Nouwen calls this the "miracle of walking on the floor."⁴⁸

All Christians need to recognize the sacred nature of their "walk on the floor." Deacons are called to be aware of the ways many people in their congregation are already serving and witnessing through their daily work. All too often people go about their daily work and recognize it as just my job rather than seeing that, in fact, it is where God has uniquely called them to serve at this time. The Roman Catholic Church uses the biblical imagery of leaven (yeast) in bread to communicate the importance of lay ministry. The work many lay people do in the world is often invisible—just like leaven. But it is the invisible yeast that causes the bread to rise.⁴⁹

You are the seed that will grow a new sprout; you're a star that will shine in the night; you are the yeast and a small grain of salt, a beacon to glow in the dark. You are the dawn that will bring a new day; you're the wheat that will bear golden grain; you are a sting and a soft, gentle touch, my witnesses where'er you go. You are the life that will nurture the plant; you're the waves in a turbulent sea; yesterday's yeast is beginning to rise, a new loaf of bread it will yield. There is no place for a city to hide, nor a mountain can cover its might; may your good deeds show a world in despair a path that will lead all to God.

—*Cesareo Gabarain, translated by Raquel Gutiérrez-Achon, "Sois la Semilla" (You are the Seed), verses 1 and 3, United Methodist Hymnal, #583 © OCP Publications*

Deacons in The United Methodist Church are called, first and foremost, to lead by exemplary service and encourage lay ministry in the world and church. Like Deborah, this kind of leadership requires patience, perseverance, and the willingness to take risks in ministry. The goal of this servant leadership is ultimately to transform the people involved and to bring about change in the particular situation so that it more closely reflects the values of the Kingdom of God. Deacons are called to a transformative leadership that strikes fire in Christians' hearts as we work together as Christ's witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Deacons are invited to help all persons in the church to recognize the sacred nature of their daily work. Like the disciples who began in Jerusalem, deacons need to begin where they are. Deacons are to lead laity in their respective local churches in recognizing their daily lives of service as the vocation that God has called them to. From there, new forms of ministry—and the simultaneous recognition of the church's ministry in worship services—can arise as the Spirit leads.

Deacons and Elders: Similarities and Differences

Deacons and elders are both members of orders for ministry. Unfortunately, few people understand the origin and meaning of an order. United Methodist seminary professor, Diedra Kriewald, aids our understanding of an order:

The probable origin of the term ordo and its assignment to church leadership begin in biblical tradition. Two places in the New Testament use the terms that translate 'order' in reference to priestly functions. Zechariah, the spouse of Elizabeth, and soon-to-be father of John the Baptist, (Luke 1:8) functions as a priest 'in the order' of the Temple. The Book of Hebrews describes Jesus as having been designated by God a high priest according to the 'order' of Melchizedek. An 'order' was the designation that differentiated the various types of representative ministry.⁵⁰

Our denomination restores the ecumenical understanding of *Ordo* for ordained persons with the Order of Elders and the Order of Deacons.

Deacons and elders must demonstrate that their ministries are a partnership with one another and integrally related to the one ministry that all Christians share. Ordination does not set people apart for their own independent service. Ordained clergy provide leadership through which all believers find their own vocational calling to serve God. Our individual acts of service do not even really make sense unless seen in the context of the wholeness of Christ's Body, the Church. The community of Christians is an instrument of God's mission to the world. The ministry of the **Christian community** unifies the ministry of deacons and elders and is the primary standard by which the ordained ministers are to be evaluated. The ministry of deacons and elders is to **bring into focus** the ministry of all Christians.

Every other [person] is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of [human]kind. Every Christian is part of my own body, because we are members of Christ. What I do is also done for them and with them and by them. What they do is done in me and by me and for me. But each one of us remains responsible for his own share in the life of the whole body. Charity cannot be what it is supposed to be as long as I do not see that my life represents my own allotment in the life of a whole supernatural organism to which I belong. Only when this truth is absolutely central do other doctrines fit into their proper context.

—Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1955), p. xxiii.

The vocation of deacons and elders is similar. They share a common care for the ordained ministry and have a common accountability for their ministry to the whole church. Both deacons and elders take similar vows at their ordinations, both are members of Orders, both are full-members of an annual conference, and both have similar educational requirements for ordination. Both deacons and elders may do pastoral care, lead Disciple Bible Study, preach, and work with church committees. James Barnett, one of the leaders in providing an ecumenical understanding of deacons, refers to deacons as a “full and equal order.”⁵¹ Neither Order is to be viewed as higher or lower than the other as both make the same covenant to give their life in full-time ministry. Deacons and elders are separate Orders but they share a common covenant of commitment in ministry. They are both clergy, equal in integrity, and equal in their conference membership.

The vocation of deacons and elders is also different. Elders are ordained to the ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order. In the service of ordination the bishop explains the ministry of elders as follows:

As elders, you are to be coworkers with the bishops, deacons, diaconal ministers, commissioned ministers, and other elders. Remember that you are called to serve rather than to be served, to proclaim the faith of the church and no other, to look after the concerns of God above all. An elder is called to share in the ministry of Christ and of the whole church: to preach and teach the Word of God and faithfully administer the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; to lead the people of God in worship and prayer; to lead the persons to faith in Jesus Christ; to exercise pastoral supervision, order the life of the congregation, counsel the troubled, and declare the forgiveness of sin; to lead the people of God in obedience to mission in the world; to seek justice, peace, and freedom for all people; and to take a responsible place in the government of the Church and in service in and to the community. These are the duties of an elder.⁵²

The above words of examination illustrate that the responsibilities of being the pastor in charge of a local church requires that the majority of their energies be focused on the care, building up, and equipping of laity in the local congregation.

Since deacons are not the pastor in charge of a congregation they can focus their energies in different ways. Deacons are ordained to the ministry of Word and Service. In the service of ordination, the bishop

explains the ministry of the deacon as follows:

*A deacon is called to share in Christ's ministry of servanthood, to relate the life of the community to its service in the world, to lead others into Christian discipleship, to teach and proclaim God's Word, to lead in worship, to assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, to nurture disciples for witness and service, to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, to interpret to the church the world's hurts and hopes, and to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion and justice, liberation and reconciliation even in the face of hardship and personal sacrifice. These are the duties of a deacon. Do you believe that God has called you to the life and work of a deacon? Will you, for the sake of the Church's life and mission covenant to participate in the order of deacons? Will you give yourself to God through the order of deacons in order to sustain and build each other up in prayer, study, worship, and service?*⁵³

These selections from the services for ordination illustrate the similarities and differences of elders and deacons. Both vocations are strongly related to the local church but the focus of the two Orders' ministerial identities is different in the church. Deacons are more focused on inter-relating the altar and the marketplace and the *diaconia* function of the church whereas elders are more focused on the *kerygma* and the apostolic function of the church.

The life and faith of all Christians is brought into focus by the work of deacons and elders. However, deacons and elders refract the light of all Christians in a different way. The language of refracting light that comes from God through all the baptized is a way of understanding the different ministerial identities of deacons and elders. The lenses of deacons and the lenses of elders have different focal points. The exact nature of their difference will vary from church to church and is something that deacons and elders need to clarify for their given context.⁵⁴

The terms focal point and focus provide a helpful analogy to help us think about the vocation of deacons and elders. The focal point of a lens refers to a point where the lens directs the light. When lenses in the eye or in a pair of binoculars focus on something they cause rays of light to converge on a single point and to highlight that point. The term "focus" is also a verb meaning "to make clear." To "bring something into focus" requires action.

The 1996 *Book of Discipline*, paragraphs 323 and 319, further illustrates the differences in focus and the directions of movement for

deacons and elders.

¶319: *From among the baptized, deacons are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop. Deacons fulfill servant ministry in the world and lead the Church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world. Deacons give leadership in the Church's life: in the teaching and proclamation of the Word; in worship, and in assisting the elders in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; in forming and nurturing disciples; in conducting marriages and burying the dead; in the congregation's mission to the world; and in leading the congregation in interpreting the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. It is the deacons, in both person and function, whose distinctive ministry is to embody, articulate, and lead the whole people of God in its servant ministry. From 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. This ministry grows out of the Wesleyan passion for social holiness and ministry among the poor.*

¶323: *Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament and Order. They are authorized to preach and teach the Word of God, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the Church for mission and ministry. The servant leadership of the elder is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer, by leading persons to faith in Jesus Christ, by exercising pastoral supervision in the congregation, and by leading the Church in obedience to mission in the world. As members of the Order of Elder, all elders are in covenant with all other elders in the annual conference and shall participate in the life of their Order.*

In our discussion of the differences between deacons and elders we have not addressed the differences in **function** as much as we have addressed the differences in **identity**. There is a reason for this. Because the Order of Deacon is new to The United Methodist Church, there is a temptation to only define the deacon's ministry in terms of what the deacon can or cannot do in comparison with the elder. The differences in function are important differences and need to be acknowledged but

defining the deacon's ministry in this manner to the exclusion of anything else is limiting because it fails to help us think anew about the nature of ordained ministry. The fact is, the Order of Deacon reflects an emerging new understanding of ordained ministry. We need to recognize this in the early years of the Order of Deacon's development and think creatively about the deacon's vocation in the world and church.

[A]im to do everything in godly agreement. Let the bishop preside in God's place, and the presbyters [elders] take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ

*—Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 6. quoted from Robert Hannaford, in **The Deacon's Ministry**, p. 25.*

[This is the first record we have of an early church leader clearly describing how he thought the three orders of ministry fit together in the Church. It was likely written in the first century.]

Deacons and elders must have a deep understanding of their vocational identity to discern the respective priorities of their ministries. For example, the congregation may view the deacon as an assistant or associate pastor who takes over when the pastor in charge is not available. In fact, on some occasions the deacon may function very similarly to an associate pastor and may rightly be thought of as such by the congregation.⁵⁵ After all, the demands of the local church will require creative flexibility in times of crisis. Deacons and elders may adapt in these situations so that their functions in the local church overlap. For the sake of their own ministerial identity, deacons must resist the temptation of reducing their calling to whatever is needed at the moment in the congregation. The deacon's identity and focus for ministry is different than the pastor in charge. The deacon's ordination to Word and Service does not simply mean the deacon is to assist the pastor in serving the needs of the church.⁵⁶ The deacon has an additional responsibility to model and equip the servant dimensions of the church to the world. This change in understanding is difficult since, in the past, deacons in The United Methodist Church **have been** essentially probationary members of the conference working to become ordained elders.

In the following excerpt, one district superintendent in the United Kingdom reflects upon the choice of a deacon to meet the needs in his circuit (the equivalent of what Americans refer to as districts). This district superintendent's decision reflects a mature understanding of the Order of Deacon. It is an instructive example of how important it is for deacons and other ordained clergy to understand a deacon's distinctiveness so that a deacon's gifts for ministry can be most effectively used for the common good of all.

We had to think about ministry. What sorts of ministry do we already have amongst us? What sorts of ministry do we need to enable our work and our mission? The answer was a deacon, coming not to fill the gap, or run round picking up the pieces when the presbyters didn't have time, but to be out there on the edge. A deacon in contact with non-church folk, not responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the institution, not even responsible for the pastoral care of members, would be able to give priority to service and mission "outside the walls."⁵⁷

Deacons and elders will have to continue to discuss their identity and function as they work as a team in the parish. We strongly encourage deacons and elders working in a local church to be candid about their vocational differences and similarities as they appear in the local context and in conference relationships.

For the purposes of administrative functions, the ordained elder is the pastor in charge and participates in the historic covenant of itineracy that provides congregations with continuity and accountability in pastoral leadership. Deacons also covenant with the church to serve faithfully but they do not share in the same covenant of itineracy that elders do. Thus, deacons do not have the same degree of assurance of an appointment that the elder enjoys. At the same time, deacons have a degree of independence that the elder does not have. Deacons are encouraged to play leadership roles in the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper but they are not to preside over these sacraments unless licensed and granted permission to do so.⁵⁸ Deacons can, however, bring the Eucharist to those not able to attend the service of worship with the entire gathered community. Deacons are not the same as elders in the administrative structuring of the church although educational and ordination requirements are similar.⁵⁹ For example, deacons may not become district superintendents or bishops. These differences, however, should be seen as differences in calling and ought not get in the way of elder, deacon, and lay service "for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12).

In multiple-staff churches the elder, deacon, diaconal minister⁶⁰, and laity on staff are partners in providing leadership to the congregation. These different roles allow for creative, complementary differences in foci for ministry. The deacon is called to bring to the church staff a thorough awareness of the needs of people in the church, local community, and the world. Deacons' identity as clergy called to interrelate worship and service can be creatively introduced in staff meetings. For example, their responsibility in church staff meetings may be to highlight their awareness of social justice issues in times of intercessory prayer. The deacon will likely be the primary person who acts as a liaison between the church and other community agencies, schools, and other churches.

To be a valid image both for the deacon's contemplation and for the edification of the people, what is done in the Liturgy should reflect what is really present in the ministerial relationship between deacon and priest. The way in which pastoral care is shared between them should be reflected in the liturgical action. For example, their common involvement in preparation, nurture and welcome of new members of the church will find its expression in their shared involvement in the baptismal liturgy.

**—Antonia Lynn, "Finding Images"
The Deacon's Ministry, p. 110.**

Deacons and Elders in the Service of Worship

Deacons and elders need to model and educate the local church congregation about their similarities and differences. One of the best places where this modeling and education can take place is in the service of worship. This is where the rest of the congregation will most see the two clergy persons working as a team and as representatives of our common ministry as baptized believers.

Mutual respect for the office and work of each order within the ministry of all Christians enables each order to sacramentalize (mirror) the nature and mystery of the Church: Christ as priest and Christ as servant. The leadership of elders and deacon is for the sake of the whole church so that it may offer worship to God through Jesus Christ

by the power of the Holy Spirit. Orders have no separate existence apart from the community of the baptized from which the ordained are called to serve.⁶¹

When persons respond to their call as a deacon it is “received in the community of faith, for the community of faith, and affirmed and recognized by the same community.”⁶² Deacons must participate along with elders and laity in the leadership of the service to reflect the deacon’s identity and function. If the deacon lacks a clear role in worship services then the congregation will likely misunderstand the deacon’s identity.

... to lead in worship, to assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, to nurture disciples for witness and service, to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed....

—a selection from the “Examination of Deacons” in the Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church: 1999 Provisional Texts, p. 22.

Daniel Benedict offers several excellent suggestions as to how to model the differences and similarities between deacons and elders in the service of worship. We quote Benedict at length:

1. The elder’s liturgical function is to *preside* and *unify* at the assembly’s celebration of Word and Sacrament. Elders lead to preserve the catholicity of the church in its baptismal and eucharistic life. Elders express Christ’s royal priesthood that all Christians enter at baptism and oversee the life of the congregation so that persons are reconciled and united to Christ throughout their lives. An encompassing circle might symbolize their work and office.
2. The deacon’s liturgical function is to *link* and *extend* the assembly’s celebration of Word and Sacrament to its service (*diaconia*) in daily life. The deacon lives, looks, and listens on the margins of human life and human need. They live on the axis of the good news celebrated at liturgy and the tragic news of the poor and oppressed. A connecting line can symbolize their work and office.
3. Since *elders* are ordained to Service, as well as Word, Sacrament, and Order, they are not exempt from linking liturgy and life in their presiding and proclaiming. For the foreseeable future, until there are

many more deacons, most elders will have to lead as both elder and deacon in the majority of United Methodist congregations.

4. Since they are ordained to Word, as well as Service, *deacons* are charged with faithful proclamation of the Word of God in worship as well as in daily life. Deacons should preach from time to time in the assembly.
5. Elders most appropriately preside at the community's worship by greeting the assembly in the name of God, proclaiming and interpreting the Word of God in preaching, announcing God's forgiveness to the people (and receiving God's forgiveness from the people), presiding at the Eucharist, and *blessing* the people as they go forth into the world.
6. Deacons most appropriately lead in linking and extending Christ's service in the community's worship by reading the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel reading; preaching to interpret the hurts and hopes of the world; leading the people in prayers for the world and the church; receiving the elements and preparing the table for the eucharist; assisting in serving the communion; and setting the table in order after all have been served; and *sending* the people forth to serve, following the blessing of the people by the elder. Deacons may train and guide others to do these tasks or to assist in doing them.
7. Deacons should assist or lead in weddings, funerals, morning and evening praise and prayer, and other pastoral liturgies. In some cases because of the close servant relationship of the deacon to the people involved, it may be more appropriate for the deacon to preside in particular services. According to their gifts, deacons should preach from time to time in the regular weekly services.
8. In circumstances where there is no ordained elder, the deacon may serve the assembly by presiding in worship without the Lord's Supper. Presiding at the Table is not appropriate unless authorized under the provisions of *The Book of Discipline*.
9. Where there is baptism, the elder should preside and pray the prayer of "Thanksgiving Over the Water" (*United Methodist Hymnal*, 36) and either the elder or the deacons may baptize the candidate. The reasoning for this follows the parallel practice of the Lord's Supper. If in the Holy Communion, the elder leads the people in praying "The Great Thanksgiving" following which the elder and the deacon give the bread and cup, then in baptism the elder presides by leading the "Thanksgiving Over the Water" and the elder or the deacon baptize the candidate.⁶³

10. In circumstances where there is no ordained deacon, the elder may appropriately serve the assembly by linking the assembly's worship to its work in daily life. However, it is strongly encouraged that one or more members of the assembly serve as assisting ministers in reading the Scriptures, leading the people in prayer for the world and the church, preparing the table for Holy Communion and sending the people forth in service.
11. The vesting of elders and deacons is problematic due to the variety of regional practices and local church customs. In light of ecumenical practice and current liturgical reform, the alb is generally seen as appropriate basic garb for liturgical leadership of both ordained and non-ordained persons. The alb is simple and as a baptismal garment it carries no hierarchical symbolism other than reminding all of our common servanthood in baptism. The stole for elders drapes around the back of the neck and hangs in equal lengths down the front. The stole for the deacon lays over the left shoulder (front and back) and fastens at the hip on the right. Cinctures in the form of a cord or fabric belt are useful in gathering the loose fitting alb, though many prefer the more flowing appearance of the alb without cincture.⁶⁴

Both deacons and elders *build up* and *unify* the church in Christ and *link* and *extend* its life in service to the poor and marginalized. The ground of deacons' and elders' ministry is charity (love) guided by each orders' respective focus of ministry. Again, the apostle Paul reminds us that "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . All these [gifts] are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). The main focus of their leadership is the transformation of the world and the making of disciples who claim their own *diakonia* as found in the life of Jesus Christ. The act of claiming our *diakonia* takes place in worship where deacons and elders both participate to remind the congregation of the interrelationship between worship and service.

Administrative Guidelines for Deacons and the SPRC

All deacons are related to a local congregation but they may or may not be employed by a congregation. As a result, local church Staff-Parish Relations Committee, (SPRC) needs different guidelines for understanding their relationship to deacons who are either salaried or nonsalaried in the local church. First, we will look at the SPRC-deacon relationship for deacons who are employed (either part-time or full-time) by the local

church. Then we will take a look at the situation where the deacon is employed in a community setting (school, hospital, nonprofit agency, business, etc.) beyond the local church.⁶⁵ In the latter case, the deacon may be considered as nonsalaried volunteer staff or leader of a local church. Both arrangements require that the deacon have leadership roles in the church and community in keeping with the deacon's ordination vows to Word and Service.

Salaried Deacons in the Local Church

Since deacons do not itinerate, they relate to the local church in a manner different from elders. Prior to hiring a deacon, a local church SPRC should consult paragraphs 319 and 320 in the *1996 Book of Discipline* to make sure the kind of leadership they are looking for is consistent with the identity and mission of the new Order of Deacon. By definition, deacons have an in the world focus for their ministry even when they serve in a local church.

Typically, the deacon seeking to be employed by a local church, charge conference, or cooperative parish initiates the relationship with a local church advertising a position. The deacon is encouraged to consult the bishop, district superintendent, and pastor in charge as part of the employment application process. A local church, district superintendent, or a bishop may also make the initial invitation. The deacon applies for the position through the (SPRC) as would any other church employee and is interviewed for the position. This is the time to clarify expectations regarding job descriptions, benefits, and the nature of the contract. The *1996 Book of Discipline*, ¶262.f10 provides additional guidelines on hiring practices.

Since deacons are clergy, their salaries and benefits are equivalent to the conference standards for the elders. Paragraph 322.10 in the *1996 Book of Discipline* provides guidelines for the compensation package. This paragraph does not mandate pension allowances or provide for housing but the integrity of the Order of Deacon as a clergy Order suggests that elders and deacons receive similar benefits compensation. Housing is not considered to be a benefit but rather compensation for itineration. When a deacon is about to be employed by a local church he or she notifies the bishop and district superintendent by letter or through the forms, "Appointment Request Form for a Local Church Appointment" and a "Statement of Servant Leadership." These forms are available from the bishop's office in those annual conferences that use these forms. (The source of these forms are explained in the Appendix of this booklet.) The

bishop may then decide whether or not to officially appoint the deacon to that particular parish.

The deacon can also negotiate with the SPRC, the bishop and cabinet, a part-time position in the local church based on quarterly increments of the salary from one-fourth time to three-fourths time. The guidelines on these appointments, the interim appointments, and the appointments across conferences and to other denominations should be consulted in *The 1996 Book of Discipline*, ¶322.5 to .8.

Accountability

Deacons who are employed by a local church are accountable to the bishop, the SPRC, and the pastor in charge. Unlike the appointment of an elder, a local church can terminate the employment of a deacon by giving 90 days notice. The bishop may also intervene and terminate the deacon's appointment in a local church should this be deemed necessary. If the bishop terminates the appointment, and the local church continues employment of the deacon, the deacon would need to take a leave of absence until the differing views of the local church and the bishop are resolved. The deacon in such a situation may also seek another acceptable place for an appointment.⁶⁶

Paragraph 262 in the *1996 Book of Discipline* requires the SPRC to relate to the entire staff—both clergy and lay. Any member of the professional staff can call the committee to meet but no staff member may serve on the committee. While all deacons are related to a local congregation, they are not a member of the congregation. Deacons employed by the local church and elders are subject to an annual review of performance by the SPRC no later than 90 days before the annual conference. The “Deacon Appraisal Form” developed by the Iowa Annual Conference is a good model. It provides for an annual SPRC appraisal within the context of the local church's mission to the community and the congregation's unique needs and strengths. The same form is used by both the deacon and the SPRC and then brought to the appraisal meeting. A summary copy of this appraisal is sent to the district superintendent. If the deacon is employed outside the local church the evaluation from the employing agency or supervisor is sent to the district superintendent along with a letter from the local church pastor or SPRC of the second appointment commenting on the deacon's missional responsibility for leading other Christians into ministries of service. A copy of this is available from the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, GBHEM.

Nonsalaried Deacons in the Local Church

Deacons whose paid employment and primary appointment is completely in the community (schools, hospitals, community organizations, businesses, etc.) or in conference church agencies must still be actively involved and accountable to the local church. This is sometimes referred to as a corollary or second appointment. The term “second” does not refer to second in importance. It is a way of describing the fact that the deacon’s accountability is two-fold—to the community and to the church.⁶⁷ This is also a different situation from an elder who is appointed beyond the local church. An elder in this situation receives approval of the setting from the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, the conference cabinet, and bishop. A deacon with a primary and secondary appointment receives approval of the setting from the cabinet and bishop.

The *1996 Book of Discipline* provides for tentmaking ministries of Deacons in Full Connection who do not need a salary or may earn their salary from sources other than their appointment. These deacons “at their request or with their consent may be appointed to a nonsalaried position. Such missional appointments will serve to express the church’s concern for social holiness, for ministry among the poor, and for advancing emerging needs of the future.”⁶⁸

Initiating the Nonsalaried Relationship

Deacons seeking nonsalaried appointment to a local church initiate the relationship by first consulting with the area bishop and/or the district superintendent about his or her desire to seek a second appointment at a local church. After consulting with these persons, the deacon begins having conversations with the pastor(s) in charge of a local church(es). The pastor, SPRC, district superintendent, community agency, bishop and cabinet may initiate this consultation as well. After consultations, the pastor in charge of a local congregation must write a letter to the bishop stating her or his desire to have the deacon appointed to a particular local church. The deacon’s nonsalaried relationship and role of the deacon in the local church are to be explained in this letter.

The deacon meets with the SPRC along with the pastor at an early stage in the process. The meeting with the SPRC is a time to look at the needs of the congregation, the gifts of the deacon, how much time the deacon can give, and how the deacon will be accountable to the pastor in charge. The following is one deacon’s account of negotiating the appointment.

I have been doing contract work for several years in a general agency of our denomination as a diaconal minister. When I was ordained as a deacon in full connection, it seemed natural that my second appointment would be in the church where I had been attending. In the process of setting up my second appointment, I consulted with the pastor in charge who enthusiastically anticipated the appointment and I notified the bishop. The pastor, however, decided to convene the Staff Parish Relations Committee to interview me and for them to vote on this appointment to their church. For various reasons, such as lack of a job description and misunderstandings, the SPRC was not sure this would be a good arrangement. The split vote of this committee left the district superintendent with the difficult decision of whether or not to recommend this appointment.

The following year I was approached by the office of the bishop regarding my interest in staying in this second appointment or being open to a missional appointment. I indicated that I was willing to continue in my present setting or accept another second appointment. At the initiation of the bishop this led to an invitation to meet with the pastor of a nearby small but growing church who had requested the assistance of a deacon. This time, when I met with the Staff Parish Relations Committee it was made clear they were not voting on my acceptance but rather it was a meeting to get acquainted with my gifts and graces. The pastor stated that this was not an interview for a position in the church, and indicated that a time was needed to let this ministry evolve from the needs of the church, the community and the gifts of my calling to serve. The pastor then notified the bishop of the acceptance of my appointment. On the Sunday following annual conference, the SPRC chairperson led the congregation in a brief liturgy of acceptance of my new appointment and the reappointment of the pastor to that congregation for another year. The chairperson also appointed a member of the SPRC to be a liaison person with me.

In the following weeks humor about not knowing what this new appointment entailed kept everyone relaxed, but it has been very clear that we were all engaged in an intentional process of discovering that ministry. I have been able to participate in shaping my ministry through a series of meetings with the pastor and church leaders to hear their needs, to get acquainted with the various outreach ministries of the church and their educational programs, and to participate in worship

which has included preaching on the interrelationship of worship and service in the church and the world. There is a deep sense the Holy Spirit is guiding this process and it is affirmed by the church.

In those instances where the deacon is a member of another annual conference the bishop responds with a signed copy of the “Official Record of Appointment of an Ordained Deacon” (#251958, United Methodist Publishing House) to the bishop in the deacon’s home conference for confirmation. Deacons with second appointments may be listed in the home conference journal with dual appointments. The guidelines on interim appointments and the appointments across conferences and to other denominations should be consulted in the *1996 Book of Discipline*, ¶322.5 to .8.

Accountability

Like the employed deacon in the local church, the nonsalaried deacon is also accountable to the bishop, SPRC, and pastor in charge. However, the nature of that accountability may be somewhat different since the deacon is nonsalaried. The intent of this kind of assignment is to keep every deacon connected to the worshiping life of the congregation and to challenge the congregation to be a church that serves the world.

There are inevitable variations in the ways employed deacons and nonsalaried deacons of the local church relate to the Staff Parish Relations Committee. Although deacons in both situations are accountable to the SPRC, the nonsalaried deacon’s relationship to the SPRC may be less formal than the salaried deacon. Deacons in both situations may have direct personal and professional access to the SPRC but the SPRC may not have the same supervisory responsibilities for the nonsalaried deacon. Still, the nonsalaried deacon is a clergy person and may be viewed as a voluntary staff member within the local church who is to take on responsibilities that are consistent with the deacon’s ordination vows and personal gifts for ministry. Although not technically required, the SPRC is encouraged to provide a covenant agreement (or job description) and an annual review of the nonsalaried deacon’s work in the local congregation. The nonsalaried deacon also uses the same form as those employed by local churches to make an annual report to the charge conference.

The SPRC’s annual review of the deacon and the covenant agreement are important channels of accountability. These actions affirm the

ministry of the ordained deacon in the local church. This ministerial identity is also affirmed by deacons' required attendance at the annual conference, regardless of salaried status within a local church.

Conclusion

This chapter has spent a great deal of time outlining deacons' relationship with the local church, laity, elders, and the annual conference. Admittedly, the administrative details of these relationships are still in process. Other denominations have experienced similar ambiguity during the recent decades of recovering the historic diaconate. We must take time to understand how each other's ministerial vocations' are different and complementary. Most importantly, this includes understanding the ministerial vocation of all the baptized. The Order of Deacon and the Order of Elder are both called to minister with the laity, encouraging servanthood and transformation among all disciples. Deacons and elders are invited to reflect upon how they nurture, equip, and work with a lay-oriented leadership style both in the church and in the world.

The deacon's work is a hope-full work—anticipating the Reign of God. There is a great deal of potential in this new Order of Deacon. We have tried to express this throughout the book. We have only seen the beginning years of this new Order. The deacon proclaims the not-yet-ness and the present reality of God's reign in our lives of *diakonia*. The Order of Deacon in The United Methodist Church is similarly, a present reality and also not-yet what it will be in the years to come. We look forward with anxious anticipation to today's and tomorrow's deacons as they help lead the church in new directions of service in the name of the Servant.

The diaconate is a growing, worldwide movement. Deacons in The United Methodist Church are invited to become involved in these worldwide movements. We have a great deal to learn from our brothers and sisters around the world who are discovering their vocations as deacons. Several addresses of deacon associations are provided in the Appendix.

In the first few pages of this book we mentioned that one of the historic roles for deacons was to give the benediction in the service of worship. The benediction is one way of reminding the church that it does not only exist for itself but for the task of witnessing to the coming Reign of God. The church lives with this hope. The people of God are blessed with the gifts of the Spirit and are sent expectantly into the world in

service. Together we go forth to love and serve the Lord with gladness.

ENDNOTES

Chapter 1

1. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House), p. 186
2. Robert W. Thornburg, *The Permanent Diaconate: A Challenge to The United Methodist Church*, unpublished manuscript. An address given to the United Methodist deaconesses and home missionaries, 1973, pp. 6-7.
3. Robert W. Thornburg who was then the associate general secretary of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry recalls the activities surrounding this vote in an unpublished paper entitled, *The Story of the Challenge*.
4. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Gerald F. Moede, Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Called to Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate* (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1987), p. 57.
5. Rather than emphasizing the “newness” of the Order of Deacon, it may be more appropriate to refer to the United Methodists’ **restoration** of the historic diaconate. In the early church, deacons played a more prominent role than they had between the medieval period and the Reformation. James Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order: A Comprehensive and Critical Study of the Origin, Development, and Decline of the Diaconate in the Context of the church’s Total Ministry and the Renewal of the Diaconate Today with Reflections for the Twenty-first Century*, revised edition, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995).
6. Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (Boston: Cowley Press, 1991), pp. 3-4.
7. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the diaconate was also restored among German Lutherans and had an important role in the newly industrializing cities of Europe.
8. Patrick McCaslin, and Michael G. Lawler, *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) provide one of the more thorough recountings of the journey from Dachau to Vatican II that led to the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. Today, the Roman

Catholic Church has approximately 15,000 deacons worldwide.

9. World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 33.
10. The diaconate has been a valuable “ecumenical opportunity” in conversations between the Anglican and the Lutheran churches around the world. See *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity: The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission*, published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation in 1996.
11. The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church has focused special concern for children in poverty.
12. Kenneth Rowe, “The Ministry of Deacons in Methodism from Wesley to Today (1998),” unpublished paper presented to the NEJ Conference on Effectiveness in Ministry, Hershey, Pa., Feb. 2-4, 1998.
13. Loyde Hartley, William Ramsden, and Kinmoth Jefferson, “Urban United Methodism: Structures and Strategies, 1945-1990,” in Clifford Green (ed.), *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945-1985* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 246.
14. Linda Green, “General Conference Delegates Celebrate Success of Shalom” (United Methodist News Service, Release #047, April 24, 1996).
15. Karen Whallon, unpublished letter. In Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1991), p. 198
16. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996*, p. 186.

Chapter 2

17. Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 107.
18. Excerpt from “On the Road” from SHORT STORIES by Langston Hughes. Copyright © 1996 by Roman Bass and Arnold Rampersad. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.
19. Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 185.
20. For a more comprehensive biblical and theological review of this

subject, the reader is encouraged to consult William H. Willimon, *The Service of God: Christian Work and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

21. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 1996, p. 179.
22. Simon Parker, *The Call to Servant Leadership: Biblical Reflections for Inquirers and Candidates for Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 1998). The exact identity of the servant in Isaiah is debated among biblical scholars but that is not crucial for our purposes. What is crucial is that the earliest Christians viewed the “Servant Songs” as a powerful model for their own understanding of Jesus.
23. John 13:12-17
24. This passage is also shared in Matthew 20:28 and Luke 22: 26-27.
25. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 1996 addresses the topic of servant leadership in paragraphs 110-116.
26. Even though Luke does not use the term *diakonos* to refer to the seven, the author of Acts may have known about the position of deacon in the Pauline churches as it is mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.
27. The Hellenists tended to interpret the Mosaic laws somewhat more loosely than the Hebrews.
28. Galatians 3:28
29. The terms *diakonos* or *diakonoi* (plural form of *diakonos*) directly refer to Paul in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 3:6-9, 2 Corinthians 6:3-4, 2 Corinthians 11:23, Ephesians 3:7, Colossians 1:23, Colossians 1:25. The related terms like *diakonias* and *diakonian* are used to refer to Paul’s ministry in several more places.
30. Scriptural resources to aid deacons in understanding the Order of Deacon are not limited to verses which use *diakon*-words but these are an interesting place to start.
31. John N Collins, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The profound impact of Collins’ research on the meaning of *diakonia* and *diakonos* is evident in recent symposiums on the theology and ministry of deacons. Peyton Craighill, (ed.), *Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present, & Future: Essays from the Philadelphia Symposium, 1992* (Providence, Rhode Island:

North American Association for the Diaconate).

32. Jürgen Moltmann provides an excellent introduction to this subject in *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
33. Walter Croce, "From the History of the Diaconate" in *Foundations for the Renewal of the Diaconate*, translated by David Bourke, Karl H. Kruger, and William F. Schmitz (Bishop's Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993), p. 73.
34. *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 42.
35. A similar anointing with oil of the baptismal candidate is sometimes practiced by United Methodists and is described on page 91 in the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992).
36. I Corinthians 11:17-33
37. Frank Baker, *Methodism and the Love-Feast* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).
38. Other hymns which highlight the relationship between the Lord's Supper and service are "Now Let Us from This Table Rise" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #634), "You Satisfy the Hungry Heart" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #629), "I Come with Joy" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #617), and "For the Bread which You Have Broken" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #614).
39. Reprinted from I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY by Rubem Alves, ©1986 Fortress Press. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress.
40. This story has been retold a countless number of times and there are many different versions to the story. St. Laurence is remembered on August 10 each year by Episcopal and United Methodist Churches. See Clifton F. Guthrie, (ed.), *For All the Saints: A Calendar of Commemorations for United Methodists* (Akron, Ohio: Order of Saint Luke Publications, 1995), p. 166.
41. John McKnight, "Services are Bad for People," *Organizing*, Spring/Summer, 1991, pp. 41-44.
42. Isabelle Horton, *High Adventure: Life of Lucy Rider Meyer* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1987).

43. Henry Davis, (translated and editor), *St. Gregory the Great: Pastoral Care*, (Regula Pastoralis) (New York: Newman Press, 1978).

Chapter 3

44. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, Eberhard Bethge (Ed.), Reginald H. Fuller (trans.) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954). pp.168-69.

Chapter 4

45. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
46. This is a modification of Burns' transformational leadership definitions. For an extended definition of Burns' understanding of leadership, see pages 19-20 and 425 in *Leadership*.
47. United Methodist seminary professor, Simon Parker, has commented on Deborah as an example of servant leadership in *The Call to Servant Leadership: Biblical Reflections for Inquirers and Candidates for Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 1998).
48. Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill, and Douglas Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 75-77.
49. This image of leaven was used in Vatican II documents pertaining to the role of laity.
50. Diedra Kriewald, "Ministerial Formation, *Laos* and *Diaconia*," unpublished paper presented to the Consultation of United Methodist Seminaries and Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, DOM, GBHEM on "Preparing Deacons for the Ministry of Word and Service" (Nashville, September 11, 1998.)
51. James Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order: A Comprehensive and Critical Study of the Origin, Development, and Decline of the Diaconate in the Context of the Church's Total Ministry and the Renewal of the Diaconate Today with Reflections for the Twenty-first Century*, revised edition, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995).
52. *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church: 1999 Provisional Texts* (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship and

- the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry), p. 24. These words are part of the “Examination of Elders” and are spoken by the bishop to the persons to be ordained elder.
53. *Revised Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church: 1999 Provisional Texts* (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry), pp. 21-22. These words are part of the “Examination of Deacons” and are spoken by the bishop to the person to be ordained deacon.
 54. Robert Hannaford, “Towards a Theology of the Diaconate,” in Christine Hall (ed.) *The Deacon’s Ministry* (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing Publications, 1992).
 55. Paragraph 330 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996* defines the meaning of “pastor” that is consistent with the deacon’s vocation. However, for purposes of emphasizing the deacon’s vocational identity, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry encourages local churches to use the title “deacon” instead of “associate pastor.”
 56. In *The Call to Service: Pastoral Statement on the Permanent Diaconate*, (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, 1993), Joseph Cardinal Bernardin states “Deacons are not “mini-priests,” but they must exercise their ministry in communion with priests, complementing priestly ministry with diaconal service” (p. 5). After a quarter-century of experience, the Roman Catholic Church is changing their understanding of deacons to embrace their distinctive contribution. As United Methodists begin our own journey with the Order of Deacon perhaps we can learn a few things from other traditions that have more experience with something similar to our Order of Deacon.
 57. From “Stop and Think: A Superintendent Minister Writes about a Decision to Appoint a Deacon in the Circuit,” in *In Action*, (Birmingham, England: Methodist Diaconal Order). The British Methodist Church has had the Order of Deacon as the American church now understands it since 1993.
 58. This should be done only in exceptional circumstances. The historical integrity of the vocation of deacons requires that deacons come to understand their role as *assistants* in celebrations of the sacraments rather than *presiders*. See paragraphs 350 and 351 for guidelines on the temporary licensing of deacons as local pastors.
 59. The Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, General Board of

Higher Education and Ministry has determined that 26 percent of the deacon candidates currently in seminary who responded to a survey are receiving the M.Div. degree, the identical degree to elders. Another 26 percent are receiving a two-year theological degree. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996* requires that deacons complete “a minimum of twenty-four semester hours of the basic graduate theological studies of the Christian faith including the areas of: Old Testament; New Testament; theology; church history; mission of the church in the world; worship/liturgy; and United Methodist doctrine, polity, and history” (§315.5c).

60. The 1996 General Conference voted to continue the office of diaconal minister but not to admit new diaconal minister candidates after the year 1996. The new Order of Deacon builds on the previous office of diaconal minister and the current office of deaconess and replaces the prior understanding of deacons who were ordained as deacons but were still in preparation to be elders. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1992* spells out the previous understandings of ministry offices and Orders.
61. Daniel Benedict, *Elders and Deacons: Renewed Orders and Partnerships in Leading Worship* (General Board of Discipleship, 1998), forthcoming in *Quarterly Review*, p. 13.
62. Joseph Bernadin, *The Call to Service: Pastoral Statement on the Permanent Diaconate* (Chicago: Chicago Archdiocese, 1993).
63. The current *Discipline* is not clear on this matter and its use of the word “administer” is not defined. (See §§ 302, 331.1b, 335.3a, 352.1.) If “administer” means to preside at the celebration of the sacraments, then the above interpretation would seem to be allowed. If “administer” means to act as the immediate agent of the giving of water, bread or cup, then the interpretation above would seem to be disallowed. Our practice in Holy Communion is characterized by the former usage. In both Episcopal and Roman Catholic practice deacons are allowed to baptize candidates.
64. Daniel T. Benedict, *Elders and Deacons: Renewed Orders and Partnerships in Leading Worship* (General Board of Discipleship, 1998), forthcoming in *Quarterly Review*, pp. 13-14.
65. There are other combinations for deacons’ employment that are not dealt with at length in this chapter. For example, a deacon who is hired by an annual conference as a bishop’s assistant, Wesley Foundation director, or metro urban minister is employed full-time

by the annual conference but not by a particular local church. In these situations, a deacon still needs to be actively involved in a local church.

66. The accountability between the bishop and the deacon is an important part of the historical heritage of the Order of Deacon. In the early church, deacons were highly esteemed assistants to bishops.
67. Employed deacons in the local church also have a two-fold responsibility in the community and the church. However, since the salary is completely paid by the church, the exact nature of the accountability is different from the deacon who is a nonsalaried staff member in the local church and fully salaried by a community agency.
68. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996*, p. 192, ¶322.4d.

Appendix

References and Resources for the Work of the Deacon

1. For a firsthand experience in hearing “the cries of the poor” as a team member of Volunteers in Mission, e-mail SCJUMC@mind-spring.com to request a national list of UMVIM projects or FAX 214-692-9083, or check the Web site www.gb-gm-umc.org/volunteers.
2. For opportunities to involve local churches in responding to natural disasters that includes opportunities to work with Church World Service and United Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief, contact www.disasternews.net.
3. For training opportunities in conflict management and mediation contact the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, 1263 S. Highland Ave., Suite 1N, Lombard, IL 60148-4527. Phone 630-627-9507, FAX 630-627-0519, e-mail 103627.3505@compuserve.com. The Alban Institute, 7315 Wisconsin Ave., Suite 1250 West, Bethesda, MD 20814-3211, also provides training in conflict management in congregational life for church leaders.
4. To establish a ministry with the homeless, see *Room in the Inn, Ways Your Congregation Can Help Homeless People*, by Charles F. Strobel, Abington Press, Nashville, 1992 or consult your conference office for local information.
5. To join a peace network and to receive publications such as the “Peace With Justice” newsletter or “Environmental Justice” newsletter contact the General Board of Church and Society at 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002, 202-488-5647 or FAX 202-488-5639, or contact the web site www.umc.gb-gsc.org/network/html.
6. For positions available in The United Methodist Church listed by the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries call 615 340-7335, or check the web site at gbhem.org/ordmin.html and link to Job Listings.
7. For job openings listed in Interchange at The United Methodist Church official web site: www.umc.org/interchange/jobs/education.html. For additional sites substitute the word music for education, or other for education in this address.
8. To establish ecumenical contact with other deacons in your area contact the North American Association for the Diaconate, Center for the Diaconate, 271 N. Main St., Providence, RI 02903, 401-455-0521, FAX 401-331-9430, or e-mail -naad_bod.topic@ecunet.org.

The Internet address for news on diaconia is <http://societies.anglican.org/dace/diakonia.htm>. The NCCB Secretariat for the Diaconate may be contacted at 3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017, 202-541-3038, FAX 202-541-3222 or e-mail jpistone@nccbuscc.org. Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Deaconesses at Gladwyne, PA, the e-mail address is deacom@juno.com. Diakonia United Church of Canada News, e-mail dhewitt@auracom.com. United Methodist Deaconesses and Missionaries, e-mail BPurkey@gbgmmail.gbgm-usc.org.

9. For international news subscribe to DIAKONIA NEWS, Foundation Diakonia World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities, editor: Rev. Dr. Sister Teresa, CSA, St. Andrew's House, 2 Tavistock Road, London, W11 1BA, United Kingdom. The e-mail address for Worldwide *diakonia* is diakonia.news@religious.com.
10. For the regional office of DOTAC, (DIAKONIA of the Americas and the Caribbean), contact President Louise Williams, Center for Diaconal Ministry, 1304 LaPorte Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383, 219-464-4651, FAX 219-464-6928, e-mail LWILLIAMS@EXODUS.Valpo.EDU. The internet address is www.valp.edu/lda/diakonen.htm.
11. Forthcoming references on worship and liturgy: "The Role of Deacons and Assisting Ministers," by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr., worship resources director, and M. Anne Burnette Hook, music resources director, the General Board of Discipleship, e-mail aburnett@gbod.org.
12. A new resource of liturgies for worship services that connect worship to daily life will be published in February 1999 as "Worship and Daily Life: A Resource for Worship Planners, by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr., General Board of Discipleship with an introduction by Doris Rudy. The General Board of Discipleship will publish *Worship Matters: Perspective*, by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr. in July, 1999.
13. "Back to the Bible: God's Call to Partnership with the Poor," is an eight-session bible study developed by the Tennessee Conference Task Force on Ministry with the Poor and Marginalized, 1996, P.O. Box 120607, Nashville, TN 37212-0607, phone 615-329-1177, FAX 615-329-0884. Contact your annual conference office for similar resources on working with the marginalized and poor.
14. For current news on social justice issues, Dovetail is published quarterly by the ecumenical Iowa Peace Network, 4211 Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50312-2496, Phone 515-255-7114, e-mail ipnet@earthlink.net. The Web site is www.earthlink.net/~ipnet/.

15. "Guidelines for the Professional Staff Person and Pastor/Parish Relations Committee." HE4050, "Guidelines for Developing Church Personnel Policies" HE4055. Available from the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries, 515-340-7335 or e-mail pvburen@gbhem.org.