

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The diaconate is experiencing a renewal in a number of Christian denominations around the world. The Roman Catholic Church instituted a renewal of the ordained “permanent” diaconate in 1967, the Episcopal Church in the United States in the 1970's, the Uniting Church of Australia in 1991, the British Methodists in 1993, the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas in 1995, and the United Methodist Church in 1996.<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran churches in the U.S. and abroad continue to build upon a tradition of a lay diaconate begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The U.S. Roman Catholic Church exhibits an average 5% growth every year in the number of new permanent deacons since 1976. There are currently over 11,000 deacons in the U.S. - by far the majority of Catholic deacons worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Episcopal diaconate in the U.S. has grown 175% since 1988. The Anglican diaconate in southern Africa has grown by 177% in the same amount of time.<sup>3</sup> The diaconates in the United Methodist Church and the British Methodist church are also growing in their overall numbers although the precise extent of this growth is unclear.

The worldwide diaconate movement is represented in the United States primarily in five denominations: Episcopal, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist. Ecumenical conversation among these five groups has prompted a discussion of ways they might collaborate in the education and vocational support of deacons.<sup>4</sup> Over the past two years, representatives from these denominations have formed a "task group" for the purposes of organizing an ecumenical resource center for the diaconate. Given the growing interest in an ecumenical center for the diaconate the next logical

step for research is clear: Is the establishment of such a resource center feasible given the differences in the diaconate among these five denominations? What are the areas of greatest similarity across denominations which the ecumenical center could build upon?

The purpose of this project is to identify the vocational similarities and differences among members of the diaconate in Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches.<sup>5</sup> This project builds on previous Catholic surveys (discussed below) while adding an ecumenical comparison of the diaconate in four denominations. The author is unaware of other comparative survey studies which have been performed on the diaconate among multiple denominations. Chapter Two describes the methodology and lists the specific research questions of this study.

Denominational leaders in the five denominations are generally aware of the differences in the official positions of the denominations *vis-à-vis* the diaconate. One of the most obvious differences in these denominations is their different understanding of the ordained or lay status of the diaconate. This difference can be seen, for example, in the recent ecumenical dialogues between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church USA.<sup>6</sup> Differences in educational curriculum and ways of determining educational standards in the five denominations are also discernible from denominational reports.

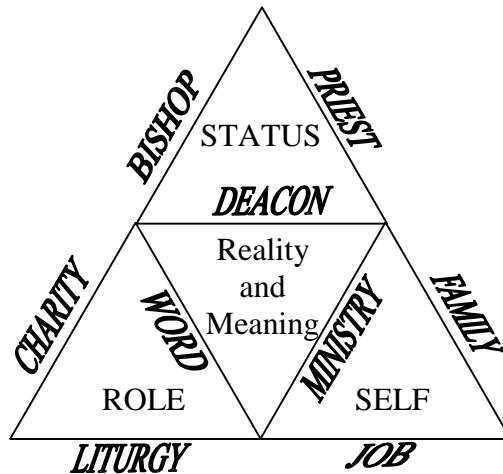
The purpose of this paper is not to further delineate the differences in official denominational administration of the diaconate. Rather, its focus is to understand the similar and different *perceptions* of individual members of the diaconate in the denominations. Of course, these often reveal structural differences among the denominations. These factors are noted when appropriate throughout this report.

In the U.S. context, the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church have published findings of survey projects on their diaconate.<sup>7</sup> The Episcopal Church study was conducted in 1996 which surveyed all one hundred dioceses on the nature of their diaconate formation programs. The survey showed considerable diversity among diocesan deacon formation programs and has resulted in current efforts toward a kind of “accrediting” system for the deacon formation programs.<sup>8</sup>

Also in 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops conducted a large, two-year, nation-wide study on the diaconate. Deacons, deacon wives, supervisors, and parish councils were surveyed on matters related to the diaconate. Among deacons alone, over 5,000 of the original 9,000 surveys were returned. A random sampling of the returned 3,073 questionnaires were chosen for statistical analysis. This survey of over 200 questions covered the following topics (among others): Quality of mutual understanding of a deacon's vocation by laity and the ordained, usefulness of educational experiences, personal devotional practices, and the level of satisfaction in deacons' family life.<sup>9</sup> A similar, nation-wide study in 1981 of Roman Catholic permanent deacons also included questions that measured what activities deacons spend the most time engaging in.<sup>10</sup>

Some independent researchers have also studied the Roman Catholic diaconate. James Barry's 1992 doctoral dissertation studied the permanent diaconate in Roman Catholicism by interviewing deacons in three broad areas: Identity, Service, and Competence. His dissertation investigated the interrelationships of three, three-part triads corresponding to the above areas of Identity, Service, and Competence. Deacons' self-identity in Family-Job-Ministry, their understanding of service as ordained to Word-Liturgy-Charity, and their Competence in relation to Bishop-Priest-Deacon were all examined through in-depth interviews and focus groups.

James Barry also categorized these three areas as role, status, and self. Barry's theoretical construct has heuristic value in its ability to prompt reflection on the diaconate which might be utilized by persons in the diaconate in other denominations.<sup>11</sup>



H. Richard McCord's 1985 University of Maryland doctoral dissertation focused on the Baltimore archdiocese and specifically analyzed the "expectations for the role definition" of permanent deacons. All of his questions began with the phrase, "It is realistic to expect a permanent deacon to..."<sup>12</sup> McCord found that in general the normative expectations from the U.S. bishops were consistent with the role expectations for deacons which laity, priests, and deacons themselves possessed. Still, he found that respondents "less strongly preferred that a deacon preach, teach, officiate at sacraments, and become involved in action for social justice."<sup>13</sup> A social justice emphasis was more pronounced among bishops' normative expectations of deacons' ministries.

The sociological reality of the diaconate's renewal corresponds with several ecumenical dialogues highlighting the diaconate's "ecumenical opportunity." The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC) published a joint statement entitled *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* in 1993. This document stated that "[t]he renewal of the church's diaconate at this time presents a unique opportunity for deepened unity and joint endeavour in the life and mission of the Anglican and Lutheran, as well as other churches."<sup>14</sup> This report also affirmed the common ground among members of the diaconate.

Regardless of differing practices and assumptions, deacons and diaconal ministers of all traditions are closely bound together by their common awareness of exercising servanthood with and beyond the church, wherever hope and suffering present opportunities for justice and healing.<sup>15</sup>

The Lima document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, similarly documents the growing ecumenical convergence in the diaconate. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* describes the deacon as follows:

Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the church's life. They exercise responsibilities in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community. They fulfill certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance.<sup>16</sup>

This document also discusses the uncertainties imbedded in multiple denominations' understanding of the status and functions of deacons in the church.

The "Windsor Statement on the Diaconate" is the product of ecumenical dialogue among the Roman Catholic Church in Britain, The Church of Scotland, The Scottish Episcopal Church, The British Methodist Church, and The Church of England. It is the result of previous 'Scottish Ecumenical Encounters on the Diaconate' which took place in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Cooperative work of sixteen regional groups in Britain and national conversations in 1996 and

1997 led to the publication of this statement. The Windsor Statement affirms the “ecumenical opportunity” of the diaconate.

Partnership in Christian mission is fundamental to the ministry of deacons. Formation and training of deacons is therefore best achieved alongside presbyters/minister/priests, laity and other deacons, with specific time for diaconal formation. Interaction with people inside and outside the church is essential for spirituality, liturgy, pastoral skills, group work and the formation of relational thinking and practice.

Ecumenical ways of formation and training for deacons need to be explored and experience shared. The nature of servant ministry offers the opportunity to work across denominational boundaries.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these formal ecumenical statements there have been a number of international venues where the ecumenical diaconate has gathered to fellowship and to mutually explore their vocation. Many of the fellowship gatherings have been under the auspices of the Diakonia World Federation and their regional member organizations. Founded in 1947, Diakonia World Federation is the largest ecumenical diaconate organization in the world. It is comprised of over 65 member organizations in more than 30 countries around the world. The Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC), Diakonia Region Africa-Europe (DRAE), and Diakonia Asia-Pacific (DAP) are the three regional organizations that hold conferences for member organizations in their region.

Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC) had its most recent meeting in October of 1999. At this meeting the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD) representing 2,100 American Episcopalians and Canadian Anglicans was inaugurated as a new member of DOTAC and Diakonia World Federation. The United Methodist deacons, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses as well as Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America deaconesses are members of this organization. The Roman Catholic permanent deacons are not a part of the Diakonia World Federation at the present time although their bi-monthly publication, *The Deacon Digest*, has recently begun featuring a

column on ecumenical issues in the diaconate. The *Distinctive Diaconate News*, an occasional newsletter edited by Rev. Sr. Teresa, also provides updates of the diaconate around the world.

These ecumenical gatherings have been matched by academic research on the diaconate from historical, biblical, and theological perspectives. German scholars have been among the most prolific writers in providing historical, biblical, and theological rationales for the diaconate. Protestant and Roman Catholic study centers and archives on the diaconate exist in Heidelberg, Rottenburg, Neuendettelsau, Berlin, and other locations. Generally speaking, discussions of the diaconate in Germany tend to be framed within the larger context of the social work of the churches to a greater extent than in the U.S.. The German word “diakonie,” for example, is widely used to refer to all of the social ministry of the churches. This linguistic difference has interesting ramifications for how the vocation of persons called deacons or deaconesses is understood. The U.S. laws surrounding the “separation of church and state” also contribute to a continental difference in discussions of the diaconate. Still, discussions about the vocational diaconate continue to take place in Germany and other European countries which are parallel to the discussions taking place in the U.S.. The Roman Catholic International Diaconate Center and the Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut at the University of Heidelberg are both very interested in ecumenical and international dialogue surrounding the diaconate.<sup>18</sup>

Among Protestants in Europe the renewal of the diaconate can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century renewal of the deaconess office in Germany which concentrated on doing acts of service among the poor. The deaconess institutions were very influential in sending missionaries around the world (including the United States) and in founding healthcare centers which are well-known to this day. Scholarship on the diaconate in the U.S. began among deaconesses who identified a great deal with the movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. The Methodist Episcopal Church alone

had 13 deaconess training schools and in existence in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Episcopal Church and the Lutheran churches in the U.S. also had deaconesses during this era. Several books on the Methodist deaconess movement are listed in the 1889 curriculum for the New England Deaconess Training School (one of the earlier Methodist Episcopal deaconess training schools to be founded in the U.S.) which trained deaconesses for the U.S. urban context and foreign mission fields.<sup>19</sup>

In the latter half of the twentieth century books and articles in the English language on the diaconate emerged in the wake of the Roman Catholic renewal of the permanent diaconate in 1967. The books and articles published in the past 35 years may be categorized in three areas: historical reviews with comprehensive intent, denominational perspectives on the diaconate, and miscellaneous contemporary essays on the diaconate. Categorizing the English language diaconate literature in this way is an inexact science but it nevertheless helps to illustrate the general tenor of the scholarship. This review of the literature is not intended to be a comprehensive list of the publications on the diaconate although it is fairly representative of what is available in the United States.

### **Historical Reviews with Comprehensive Intent**

The first widely recognized comprehensive denominational review of the diaconate in the English language was McCord and Parker's *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, published in 1966.<sup>20</sup> In addition to historical examinations of the diaconate in the early church, medieval period, and the Reformation, this book reviews the status of the diaconate in Methodist, Reformed, Anglican, and Roman Catholic denominations. One year after this book was published the Vatican II council inaugurated the Roman Catholic permanent

deacon. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops restored the permanent deacon in the U.S. in 1968.

The decade after McCord and Parker's review of the diaconate yielded very little in the way of comprehensive historical or theological treatments of the diaconate in most denominations. The literature that emerged at this time was far more denominationally specific as the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church struggled to give a practical shape to the Vatican II idea.

The next comprehensive historical treatment of the diaconate was not written until 1979 when James Barnett published *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*.<sup>21</sup> Barnett's Episcopalian perspective is evident in the later chapters but on the whole this is a general examination of the diaconate throughout the centuries. In 1995, Barnett's book had its third printing. It remains one of the most widely read books on the diaconate among members in several denominations.

The 1980's were a rather dry decade when it came to comprehensive reviews of the diaconate but in 1990 this changed a great deal. John Collins' *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* provided a critique to the way nearly everyone had thought about the early church's understanding of diakonia and its related cognates.<sup>22</sup> Collins argued that the translation of *diakonia* and its cognates as "service" is a 19<sup>th</sup> century limiting of the biblical term which had previously carried strong connotations meaning "emissary" or "go-between." In the past decade several scholars have grappled with Collins' findings - sometimes even in the midst of their own writing projects. This was the case with Episcopalian Ormonde Plater's *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*.<sup>23</sup> The North American Association for the Diaconate also sponsored a conference which grappled with Collins' findings.<sup>24</sup>

Collins' research has received qualified praise in reviews of his book. Sven-Erik Brodd, a Swedish scholar, predicts that Collins' research "will be the focus of future debates" on the diaconate.<sup>25</sup> John Reumann, a Lutheran scholar in the United States, acknowledges Collins' contributions in pointing out inaccuracies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century word studies which influenced the definition of *diakonia* in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Reumann is nevertheless cautious about Collins' conclusion which he argues tends to discount the christological context of *diakonia*. Reumann argues that *diakonia*, in the modern sense of the term, is rooted in Jesus' acts of love and mercy in the world.<sup>26</sup>

Collins' research has also impacted contemporary denominational and ecumenical gatherings on the diaconate although the result has been more a subtle nuancing than a widespread rejection of the 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretations of *diakonia* as charitable service. Prior to publication of his book, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledged Collins' dissertation work at a meeting of the Synod of Bishops on priestly formation in October, 1990. Ratzinger serves as the prefect for the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.<sup>27</sup> The Anglican/Lutheran International Commission's document, *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* (1996) also mentions Collins' work as having a shaping influence on the commission's work.<sup>28</sup>

Jeannine Olson's *One Ministry / Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries* provides one of the most detailed examinations of the diaconate in the modern period. Because of Olson's nineteenth century focus her main concern tends to be with deaconesses in that era. *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* by Aimé Georges Martimort is an excellent companion volume to Olson's because it provides a review of the literature on deaconesses in the early church.<sup>29</sup>

## **Denominational Perspectives**

### *Roman Catholic*

Even before McCord and Parker produced *Service in Christ*, the work was well under way to restore the permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. Essays written in the early 1960's by Karl Rahner, Josef Hornef, Hannes Kramer, Paul Winninger, Walter Croce, and Augustinus Kerkvoorde were translated and published in 1993 by the Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.<sup>30</sup> These essays were among the first serious theological essays on the diaconate written in the twentieth century. Hannes Kramer is credited with being one of the founders of the Deacon Circle in Freiburg in Breisgau. The work of this and other Deacon Circles was instrumental in bringing the issue of the permanent diaconate to the attention of the Second Vatican Council. The formal request to restore the permanent diaconate was made to the Second Vatican Council in 1962.<sup>31</sup>

There has been a great deal of literature from Roman Catholic scholars on the diaconate since its restoration. Most of this work is either in the form of short monographs on the diaconate or in official statements from the Vatican. The Roman Catholic periodical for U.S. deacons, *Deacon Digest*, provides updates from recent conferences and diocesan reports on diaconate training programs. One of the more lengthy treatments of the diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church is Patrick McCaslin and Michael G. Lawler's *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today* (1986). This text provides theological reflection on the diaconate nearly twenty years after its restoration in the United States. Its emphasis on the

sacramental quality of the diaconate and a chapter looking back on the preceding years of the diaconate in the U.S. are among its distinctive contributions.

Other texts on the Roman Catholic diaconate have tended to be more limited in scope although several of them provide excellent snapshots of the status of the Roman Catholic thinking on the diaconate at different points in its development. Robert Nowell's *The Ministry of Service: Deacons in the Contemporary Church*, (1968) for example was written in Great Britain just prior to the restoration of the diaconate in the British Isles or the U.S. It is essentially an argument for the diaconate's restoration in these places.<sup>32</sup> Edward Echlin's *The Deacon in the Church: Past and Future*, (1971) and Richard Rashke's *The Deacon in Search of Identity* (1975) illustrate some of the progress in thinking about the diaconate a number of years after its institution in the U.S.<sup>33</sup> *The Diaconal Reader: Selected Articles from the Diaconal Quarterly*, is also a compilation of writings on the permanent diaconate in the U.S., published in 1985.<sup>34</sup>

The most recent writings on the diaconate come from the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy in the Vatican. *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, and the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* were both published in 1998. The purpose of these two documents is to provide guidance to individual Episcopal Conferences regarding the diaconate's "clear need for greater uniformity in training so as to ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the Sacred Ministry in confronting the challenges which it faces on the eve of the Third Millennium."<sup>35</sup> The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States and the Bishops' Committee on the Diaconate has recently reviewed the fifth draft of the *National Directory* which will likely be released in the near future.<sup>36</sup>

*Reformed*

In contrast to the writings on the diaconate by Roman Catholic authors, the scholars on the diaconate in the Reformed tradition do not place as much emphasis on the ministerial practice of the diaconate. The diaconate in the reformed traditions in the U.S. (Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, and the Presbyterian Churches) is understood differently than in the Catholic, Episcopalian, United Methodist, or Lutheran denominations. In the Reformed tradition, deacons are ordained but they are considered laypersons. Each reformed church has a group of deacons which is involved in administrative work for the church much like one might find in a Congregationalist or Baptist church. In comparison to deacons in the churches which are the focus of this study, persons in Reformed traditions who are elected deacons rarely have much education about the history and identity of their church office which goes beyond a functional description of their responsibilities in church governance.

Elsie McKee and Jeannine Olson are the leading scholars of the history of the diaconate in the Reformed tradition. McKee has written two books on the diaconate which are largely historical analyses of the diaconate although *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* also provides suggestions for renewing the diaconate in Reformed churches. The appendix of this work includes a model Diaconal Training Program for the modern church. It is unclear what progress the Reformed churches have made in diaconal education since the publication of McKee's text in 1989. Perhaps the fact that it has been out of print for the past several years is evidence that her suggestions have not been widely accepted.<sup>37</sup>

McKee's *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* investigates sixteenth century Protestant worship in Geneva, the use of almsgiving in worship, and the place of social welfare in 16<sup>th</sup> century Geneva. A detailed analysis of key biblical texts which contributed to

Calvin's understanding of the diaconate is also a key aspect of this work which served as McKee's doctoral dissertation research.<sup>38</sup>

Jeannine Olson's *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse Francaise*, is a detailed historical analysis of the poor relief fund in Calvin's Geneva and the role which deacons played in that city. It is an excellent example of the kind of painstaking historical analysis of financial records and other materials which is required to uncover the traditions of the diaconate which existed in the Reformation period and earlier.

### *Episcopal*

The Episcopal Church in the United States has had several publications on the restored diaconate in the past 10 years. Ormonde Plater's *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* is one of the most widely read publication dealing with the diaconate in the Episcopal Church. Published in 1991, this book provides an in-depth look at the diaconate in the Episcopal Church and offers a helpful survey of diaconate history as well. The final chapter in this book provides a useful (and inspiring) glance at the occupations of current Episcopal deacons around the country. Plater has also published a helpful handbook entitled *Deacons in the Liturgy* which provides practical guidelines for deacons' roles in services of worship.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to these works by Plater, the North American Association of the Diaconate (NAAD) has published a number of monographs and serves the diaconate community in providing these and other publications for deacons. NAAD has also sponsored conferences on the diaconate. At a 1992 symposium on the diaconate the presenters' papers were compiled in a publication entitled *Diaconal Ministry: Past, Present, and Future*.<sup>40</sup>

### *Lutheran*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has a long history of the diaconate in the office of deaconess first brought to this country by German missionaries from Wilhelm Löhe's deaconess community in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. Jeannine Olson examines this history in *Deacons: One Ministry, Many Roles*. In 1993 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began a new chapter in its diaconate with the establishment of the consecrated lay office of diaconal minister.

The decision to establish a consecrated lay office of diaconal minister followed a five-year Task Force on the Study of Ministry (1988-1993) which had proposed that the diaconal minister be an ordained office. Ordination is described in this report as the "most appropriate rite" because:

- In behalf of the whole church, ordination affirms and authorizes a call to a public and accountable ministry of the word of God.
- Ordination makes clear to the church and the world that this is a ministry of the word of God.
- It affirms that persons with various kinds of gifts can be authorized for this ministry if they meet the standards of preparation and accountability.
- It clearly joins pastoral and diaconal ministers collegially.
- It will be the least hierarchical way to set apart persons for public ministry since ordination would be the rite for all in the office of the word of God.<sup>41</sup>

The 1993 Church-wide Assembly of the ELCA chose not to adopt the Task Force's proposal for an ordained diaconate. Instead, they established a lay office of consecrated diaconal minister.<sup>42</sup>

In 1999 Duane Larson edited a volume of essays which further clarifies the new office of diaconal minister. This volume is divided in three parts dealing with biblical, historical, and theological rationales for the diaconate, respectively.<sup>43</sup>

The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod also has an office of deaconess but it does not appear to be coordinated through official denominational structures. The Lutheran Deaconess

Association and its deaconess formation programs at Valparaiso University is one of the primary administrative and educational centers of the diaconate for the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Deaconess Association (LDA) is an independent nonprofit organization with ties to the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The director of the LDA, Louise Williams, is the president of Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC). A 1983 "Resolution to Classify Ministers of Religion in the LCMS" recognizes three categories of minister. Deaconesses, lay ministers, parish workers, parish assistants, and directors of evangelism are all in the third category of "lay ministers and others." Category two includes teachers and directors of Christian Education. Category one is for ordained pastors.<sup>44</sup>

### *United Methodist*

In 1996, the United Methodist Church General Conference initiated a number of changes in the way ministry is understood and practiced in the United Methodist Church. One of the most significant 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...<sup>45</sup>

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. The United Methodist Church was the first major denomination in the U.S. to eliminate what has become the traditional practice of

*cursus honorum* which stipulated that priests serve a probationary period as deacons before becoming priests.<sup>46</sup>

The ordained, distinctive deacon in United Methodism has been debated for a number of years. In 1968 the General Conference passed legislation creating 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, Associate General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 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].<sup>47</sup>

In preparation for the 1976 General Conference, a vote was taken in committee 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.<sup>48</sup> 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."<sup>49</sup> A recommendation for additional study accompanied the decision to adopt this new office. It took 20 years and five General Conferences before the church decided to create the Order of Deacon in Full Connection. During this time numerous study papers were written on the diaconate.<sup>50</sup>

Since the 1996 restoration of the diaconate in the United Methodist Church there have been two publications by the denomination. *The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love*, was intended to be a brief handbook on the diaconate for United Methodists which substantially utilized other books on the diaconate from Episcopal and Roman Catholic authors.<sup>51</sup> The *Quarterly Review*, a United Methodist journal, also devoted a volume to the diaconate in December, 1999. Articles by United Methodist seminary professors and others make this the most scholarly treatment of the United Methodist diaconate in over a decade.<sup>52</sup> An April, 2000 consultation on the diaconate also generated six unpublished papers on the diaconate in United Methodism. This consultation explored the role of the deacon in United Methodist worship.

In addition to the recent developments of an ordained, “permanent” diaconate, the United Methodist Church has also maintained the historic deaconess office. This deaconess office is administered under a separate organizational entity within the General Board of Global Ministries instead of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Currently, the number of United Methodist deaconesses in the United States is less than 100 women. There are approximately 900 United Methodist deacons or diaconal ministers. Mary Agnes Dougherty’s *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition*, is the most recent history of the deaconess movement in Methodism. It provides institutional histories of 13 schools which were influential in the deaconess movement.<sup>53</sup>

### **Contemporary Essays**

Contemporary essays on the diaconate still tend to be focused on the diaconate in a specific denomination’s tradition although there are some attempts at more ecumenically

oriented essays. McCord and Parker's *Service in Christ* was the first book in English analyzing the diaconate from an ecumenical perspective. An essay on "ecumenical diakonia" documents movements within the World Council of Churches including a history of the World Council's Department of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees. Another essay provides a "Christological understanding" of diakonia. Christine Hall's *The Deacon's Ministry* most closely resembles *Service in Christ* insofar as it is an edited volume with essays from authors representing a variety of denominations. Published in 1992, *The Deacon's Ministry* focuses on the development and theological understanding of the office of the diaconate to a greater extent than *Service in Christ*. Christine Hall's book has essays on the various aspects of deacons' ministries including educational ministry, pastoral care, and liturgical ministry. Other essays suggest possible future directions for theological reflection on the diaconate.

In 1986 the World Council of Churches sponsored the World Consultation on inter-church aid, refugee and world service in Larnaca, Cyprus. The proceedings have been published in a report entitled *Called to Be Neighbors*. This gathering emphasized a comprehensive understanding of diakonia and the importance of local church initiatives.

But being an expression of faith, diakonia is also holistic; service cannot be separated from witness, it cannot be separated from obedience and from the eucharist. Any separation leads to alienation and brokenness. Diakonia appeals to and involves the whole church, with all its charisma. Often we only see the façade before us, the bishops, the general secretaries, or the bureaucrats. But through the Holy Spirit God renews the church to witness through serving that God has come into the world to save it...<sup>54</sup>

In 1996 the World Federation of Sisterhoods and Diaconal Associations celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with the publication *Diakonia: Challenge and Response*.<sup>55</sup> This is a collection of essays describing the current situation of the organization as it relates to other ecumenical organizations and diaconal organizations which are not part of the World Federation. Essays from each of the regional member associations of Diakonia World Federation illustrate

the breadth of the organization and suggest ways the worldwide federation needs to change in the future. Changing emphases toward more justice-oriented ministries and greater gender balance within diaconal organizations are some of the issues mentioned by authors in this volume.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided a wide-ranging literature review of both scholarly analyses of the diaconate throughout history and contemporary handbooks providing guidance for the contemporary identity and function of the diaconate. The literature review would have been wider still if related subject areas including proposals for Roman Catholic female deacons and debates on ordained ministry in ecumenical dialogues had been included in the survey. This review demonstrates that since the late 1960s there has been a marked increase of interest in the diaconate in the United States and other English-speaking countries.

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## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> This list of churches which have a renewed ordained diaconate is not meant to be exhaustive. The United Methodist Church also continues a tradition of lay deaconesses.

<sup>2</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, *A National Study on the Permanent Diaconate of the Catholic Church in the United States, 1994-1995*, (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1996), Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Sr. Teresa, CSA, (ed.) *Distinctive Diaconate News*, September, 1998, Number 43, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is not officially involved in these conversations. The Lutheran Deaconess Association which is comprised of persons from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, has been quite active, however.

<sup>5</sup> Both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod denominations were included in this project.

<sup>6</sup> See Dick Pemble, “The Diaconate and “Called to Common Mission,” *Diakoneo*, Pentecost, 2000, p. 3, 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, 1996; The Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries of the United Methodist Church has conducted surveys of their diaconate as well but the author is unaware if the results have been published. The author is unaware of any surveys performed by any of the Lutheran denominations in the U.S.

<sup>8</sup> Keith W. McCoy, *Survey Report – Deacon Formation Programs*, (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, *National Study on the Permanent Diaconate*, (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> There are weaknesses to Barry's model for the ecumenical context. The differences, for example, between priest and deacon are different in Protestant denominations than they are in Roman Catholic denominations. The triad “Word-Liturgy-Service” is an official designation of the Roman Catholic deacon's vocation that is not shared by other denominations. The United Methodists, for example, understand deacons to be ordained to Word-Service.

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- <sup>12</sup> Richard H. McCord, *An Inquiry into Expectations for the Role Definition of Permanent Deacon and its Implications for Educating Permanent Deacons in the Archdiocese of Baltimore*, doctoral dissertation, (University of Maryland, 1985).
- <sup>13</sup> McCord, 1985, p. iii.
- <sup>14</sup> Hanover Report of The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, 1993, p. 24.
- <sup>15</sup> Hanover Report, 1993, p. 25.
- <sup>16</sup> World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 41.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Windsor Statement on the Diaconate*, St. George's House, Windsor, October 1-3, 1997. Published on the website of the Diaconal Association of the Church of England (<http://societies.anglican.org/dace/>).
- <sup>18</sup> The following are among the most important examples of the German scholarship: Ursula Röper and Carola Jüllig, *Die Macht der Nächstenliebe: Einhundertfünfzig Jahre Innere Mission und Diakonie 1848-1998*, (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro, 1998); Volker Herrmann, Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, and Theodor Strohm, (eds.), *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Diakonie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997; Reinhard Turrel, *Diakonie, Grundlegung und Gestaltung der Diakonie*, (Neukirchen-Vuyn: Neukirchner, 1991); Jürgen Albert, *Christentum und Handlungsform bei Johann Heinrich Wichern 1808-1881*, (Heidelberg: Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut, 1997); Theodor Strohm, (ed.) *Diakonie in Europa: Ein internationaler und ökumenischer Forschungsaustausch*, (Heidelberg: Diakoniewissenschaftliches Institut, 1997); A history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic experience of the diaconate can be found in Margret Morche, *Zur Erneuerung des Standigen Diakonats*, (Freiburg, Lambertus, 1996). One of the most recent texts on the question of a female diaconate for the Roman Catholic Church is Dorothea Reininger, *Diakonat der Frau in der Einen Kirche*, (Ostfildern, Schwabenverlag, 1999).
- <sup>19</sup> Henry Wheeler, *Deaconesses, Ancient and Modern*, (New York and Cincinnati, Hunt and Eaton, Cranston and Stowe, 1889); Meyer, Lucy Rider, *Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American with the story of the Chicago Training School, for City, Home and Foreign Missions, and the Chicago Deaconess Home*. Third Edition (Cincinnati, New York: Cranston & Stowe, Hunt & Eaton, 1889). Rider was the founder of the first Methodist Episcopal deaconess training school in Chicago; Jane M. Bancroft, *Deaconesses in Europe and Their Lessons for America*, (New York and Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, Hunt & Eaton: 1890); James Mills Thoburn, *The Deaconess and Her Vocation*, (New York and Cincinnati: Hunt and Eaton; Cranston and Curtis, 1893); Christine Golder, *The History of the Deaconess Movement in the Christian Church*, (New York and Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye; Eaton and Mains, 1903).
- <sup>20</sup> James I. McCord and T.H.L. Parker, (eds.), *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).
- <sup>21</sup> James M. 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*. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995).
- <sup>22</sup> John Collins, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- <sup>23</sup> Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1991).
- <sup>24</sup> Peyton Craighill, *Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present, & Future*, (Providence, RI: NAAD, 1992).
- <sup>25</sup> In a recent unpublished manuscript, John Collins cites Sven-Erik Brodd of Sweden as saying "this will be the focus of future debates." Collins, John, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New*, unpublished manuscript, February, 2000, p. 8.
- <sup>26</sup> John Reumann, "A New Review Revising Deacons and the "Servant Church" on the Basis of Greek and Early Christian Usages," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, Vol. 10(1-2), 1991, p. 65-70. Karl Paul Donfried also utilizes Collins' research extensively in arguing for the ELCA's adoption of a three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. "Ministry – Reality or Myth? Rethinking the Term 'Diakonia,'" *Dialog*, Vol. 31 (1992), 121-128. Collins' book has also been reviewed in the French journal, *Revue Biblique*.
- <sup>27</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> The following is a complete list of articles and books John Collins has published relating to ministry: *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); *Are All Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); "Once More on Ministry: Forcing a Turnover in the Linguistic Field," *One in Christ* 27(3) 1991, 234-245; "The Mediatorial Aspect of Paul's Role as *diakonos*," *Australian Biblical Review*, 40, 1992, 34-44; "Ministry as a distinct category among *charismata* (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)," *Neotestamentica* 27(1), 1993, 79-91; "God's gifts to Congregations," *Worship* 68(3), 1994, 242-249; "A Ministry for Tomorrow's Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 32(2), 1995, 159-178; "The Diakonia of Deacons: A Personal Encounter," *Diakonia Christi* 29, Sonderheft, June 1994, 100-115; "Many Ministries: An Unresolved Ecumenical Issue," in Philip Harvey and Lynn Pryor (eds.), *Festschrift Lawrence D. McIntosh, So Great a Cloud of Witnesses: Libraries and Theologies* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Theological Hall and the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association, 1995, 1-4; "Deacons considered within the nature of the Church," *Diakoneo: Deacons and their Ministry in North America*, 18(2), 1996, 3-6; "Learning about the Ministry from the Seven," *Deacon Digest* 15(3), 1998, 26-30; "Did Luke Intend a Disservice to Women in the Martha and Mary Story," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 28(3), 1998, 104-111; "Does Equality of Discipleship Add Up to Church? A Critique of Feminist *Ekklesia*-logy," *New Theology Review*, 12(3), 1999, 48-57.

<sup>29</sup> Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, trans. K.D. Whitehead, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> These essays and several more were originally published in German. The text was widely circulated during Vatican II. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler (eds.), *Diakonia in Christo: Über die Erneuerung des Diakonates*, (Freiburg: Herder Publishing Company, 1962). The English translation of some of these essays was produced by the Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Foundations for the Renewal of the Diaconate*, (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> This formal request has been reprinted in Appendix 2 of Patrick McCaslin and Michael G. Lawler, *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today*, (New York/Mahwah, 1986). The formal request was made at the same time that a full theological treatment of the diaconate was being prepared by key theologians in Europe. Margret Morche's *Zur Erneuerung des Standigen Diakonats* contains interviews of Hannes Kramer and other early leaders of the Roman Catholic diaconate.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Nowell, *The Ministry of Service: Deacons in the Contemporary Church*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). Another example of scholarship on the Catholic deacon before its official restoration is Wilhelm Schamoni, *Married Men as Ordained Deacons, Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on their Formation and Ministry* (London: Latimer, Trend and Co., 1955).

<sup>33</sup> Edward Echlin, *The Deacon in the Church: Past and Future*, (New York: Alba House, 1971); Richard Rashke *The Deacon in Search of Identity* (New York: Paulist, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, (ed.), *Diaconal Reader: Selected Articles from the Diaconal Quarterly*, (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1985).

<sup>35</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy, *Joint Declaration and Introduction*, (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Kraus, Theodore, "Q & A On the National Directory," *Deacon Digest*, vol. 16(6), November/December 1999, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Elsie McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Elsie McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Droz, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Ormonde Plater, *Deacons in the Liturgy*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> Craighill, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> Task Force on the Study of Ministry 1988-1993, *Together for Ministry*, approved by the task force on February 22, 1993, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

<sup>42</sup> ELCA, *Rooted in the Gospel for Witness and Service: Reports and Records, Volume 1, Part 2, Pre-Assembly Report*, (Kansas City, Missouri: 1993), p. 274.

<sup>43</sup> Duane H. Larson, (ed.) *From Word and Sacrament*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> Olson, 1990, p. 373.

<sup>45</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1996*, (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House), p. 186

<sup>46</sup> There is also a debate among Anglicans in the U.S. and Britain regarding the elimination of the *cursus honorum* in favor of direct ordination. This debate can be seen in Hallenbeck, Edwin F., (ed.) *The Orders of Ministry: Reflections on Direct Ordination, 1996*, (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> 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, p. 6-7.

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<sup>48</sup> 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*.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Skinner Keller, Gerald F. Moede, and Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Called to Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate*, (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1987), p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> Among the more important of these study papers are the following: Gerald F. Moede, *The Permanent Diaconate Revisited*, Occasional papers issued by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, No. 79, September 15, 1989; William B. Oden, *The Deacon in United Methodism*, presentation to the Council of Bishops Ministry Study Committee, June 27-29, 1994; General Board of Higher Education Study Committee, *A Reflection Paper On the Nature of Ordained Ministry in the United Methodist Church: A Consideration of the Order of Deacon and the Order of Elder*, (Nashville: United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry Occasional Papers, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Ben L. Hartley, and Paul E. Van Buren, *The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love*, (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> *Quarterly Review*, volume 19(4), Winter, 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition*, (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, 1997). Other key books and articles on the deaconess movement within Methodism include: Elizabeth Meredith Lee, *As Among the Methodists: Deaconesses Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, (New York: Woman's Division of Christian Service, Board of Missions, The Methodist Church, 1963); Virginia Lieson Brereton "Preparing Women for the Lord's Work: The Story of Three Methodist Training Schools, 1880-1940," in Thomas, Hilah F. and Rosemary S. Keller, *Women in New Worlds*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> Klaus Poser, *Diakonia 2000: Called to Be Neighbours: Official Report, WCC World Consultation, Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, Larnaca 1986* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), p. 82.

<sup>55</sup> Diakonia World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities, *Diakonia: Challenge and Response*, (Utrecht, 1996).