

Chapter Two

METHODOLOGY

This research project has a qualitative and quantitative dimension. The qualitative aspects of this project included informal conversations with leaders in the diaconate, semi-structured interviews, informal group discussions, and participation at an international conference on the diaconate (Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean). I conducted semi-structured interviews with two United Methodist deacons, four Episcopal deacons, and four Roman Catholic deacons. Notes were either taken during these interviews or immediately afterwards. The interview was tape recorded in six of the ten occasions. Informal conversations with leaders of the diaconate in several denominations and a type of “focus group” (approximately twelve participants) conversation about the challenges for the order of deacon in United Methodism provided additional information which guided the formation of the survey questionnaire.

Due to time constraints, this report has been written without the explicit analysis of the qualitative interview data. The notes and half of the tape recordings have been transcribed but their comments have not been directly utilized in this project. Rather, the qualitative data (particularly from the interviews) has helped the researcher to have a deeper appreciation of the status of the diaconate in traditions other than his own. In the future, the qualitative part of this research could be expanded and the data which has already been collected could be analyzed in greater depth to provide a thicker description of some of the quantitative dimensions of the research.

Quantitative

The survey instrument (see Appendix A) attempts to answer the following research questions among respondent deacons in four denominations (independent variable = denominational affiliation):

- 1) What are the differences and similarities among respondents' denominations in their primary place of work (church, non-church agency, etc.)?
- 2) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their education/formation experiences?
- 3) What educational resources have been most helpful for respondents in each denomination and what continuing education opportunities would respondents like to have?
- 4) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in the way they spend their time in ministry and the degree to which they value various ministerial tasks?
- 5) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their assessment of what types of ministry they are most/least effective in?
- 6) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their feelings of "job satisfaction?"
- 7) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their feelings of being appreciated by other persons' (ordained and lay) in their denomination?
- 8) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their assessment of other persons' (ordained and lay) vision for the diaconate?
- 9) What are the differences and similarities among respondents in their degree of hopefulness regarding the diaconate?

The validity of this survey instrument was tested in a variety of ways. Denominational leaders in the diaconate from all five denominations examined the survey instrument and offered "face validity" feedback prior to the mailing of the instrument. I also received feedback on the survey instrument from three United Methodist deacons and professors Peter Berger and Claire Wolfeich of Boston University School of Theology. Permission was also obtained from Deacon

John Pistone, the National Diaconate Director for the Roman Catholic Church, to modify some survey questions from previous Catholic surveys performed under the auspices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The mailing lists for members of the diaconate were obtained from the following organizations: The Secretariat for the Diaconate (Roman Catholic), the Lutheran Deaconess Association (Lutheran – both Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and ELCA members of the diaconate were on this mailing list), the Board of the Division for Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the National Association for the Diaconate (Episcopal Church), and the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Letters of support from each of these organizations were received and enclosed in the respective denominations' survey questionnaires. The purpose of these letters of support from respondents' particular denominational office was to encourage respondents to complete the questionnaires.

Of the 1,542 questionnaires distributed, a total of 549 were returned, giving an overall response rate of 35.6%. 33 questionnaires were omitted from the data set due to incompleteness, leaving a total of 516 respondents. These were distributed across the different denominations as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Survey response rates by denomination

Denomination	# of surveys used in data set	Total # of surveys distributed	Survey Response Rate
Episcopalian	93	319	29.1%
Lutheran (ELCA and MO Synod combined)	103 (69 ELCA, 34 MS)	334	30.8%
Roman Catholic	112	451	24.8%
United Methodist	209	438	47.7%
TOTAL	517	1,542	33.5%

The relatively low response rate of the Roman Catholic deacons may be attributed to “survey fatigue,” since this population has been surveyed in the recent past (including the 1996 survey cited in the previous chapter). The comparably high response rate by the United Methodist deacons may be explained by identification of the author as a member of that denomination. This is also one of the first opportunities many of these individuals have had to express their thoughts and feelings about the diaconate in their denomination in a formal way since the establishment of the distinctive order of Deacon in the United Methodist Church in 1996.

The sampling size and the method of sampling for each denomination varied to some extent. In the case of the Episcopalians, the sampling was random among a population of deacons in the United States. Canadian Anglican deacons who are also members of NAAD were excluded from sampling completely. All active, non-retired, members of the diaconate in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod were mailed a survey. The Roman Catholic permanent deacons surveyed in this project were from a slightly less randomized sampling. Rather than being randomly selected across the United States, the survey questionnaires were sent to deacons from a selection of random states including New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, Texas, Hawaii, Oregon, and California. The United Methodist deacons were randomly selected from those persons who have been ordained deacons since 1996. Those persons who have chosen to remain diaconal ministers rather than to become ordained deacon were not included in the sampling. Nearly all of the persons in the sampling would have been previously consecrated as diaconal ministers prior to becoming ordained deacons some time since 1996.

A mailing list has been obtained from the Deaconess Office of the United Methodist Church as well but the surveys have not yet been sent out and are therefore not part of this study. There are less than one hundred deaconesses in the United Methodist Church and the deaconess office has not expressed interest in the proposed ecumenical center for the diaconate. The researcher also made an effort to get survey respondents from the New York synod of the ELCA because this synod has a special "Diakonia" program where persons can receive a certificate in a special program and then subsequently be named "synodical deacons." At the time of writing, not enough survey responses were received from these persons in the New York synod to perform adequate statistical analyses.