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The Provincial Executive Officer  
The Revd Dr Makhosi Nzimande  
Bishopscourt  
Claremont

Dear Dr Nzimande,

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I am not quite sure what was expected from me with regards to Deacon Gwynne's letter to the Archbishop. The ensuing response is my own conviction that we need the permanent diaconate. Unfortunately, when I did my presentation to the Synod of Bishops arguing a case for the permanent diaconate, the Archbishop was not present. One bishop shot it down immediately and others were, at best, nonplussed and non-committal. If truth be told, I am not persuaded that as ACSA we hold a firm conviction of the threefold ministry and maybe it is time we nailed our proverbial colours to the mast.

So, here follows my measly offering.

### **THE PERMANENT/DISTINCTIVE DIACONATE**

The distinctive Diaconate, for too long, has merely been a transitional stage that wrongly defines its role in our church. Clergy are ordained as priests after serving an internship as a Deacon. The expectation is that they must move on to higher things. Thus, the diaconate is regarded as a stepping-stone to the priesthood. The Deacon is, for all intents and purposes, a below par priest.

Being a Deacon is a lifelong office. Ignatius of Antioch, towards the end of the 1st century regarded the office of a Deacon essential part of church polity and structure. Together with the Bishop and Presbyters, Deacons form an essential part of the unity of the church.

It is my contention that there can be no proper appreciation for the offices of Bishop and Priest without an appreciation of the Deacon. In the early 7th century Isidore of Seville suggested that without the ministry of the diaconate, the Priest has the name but not the office. Why? Because the Priest consecrates but the Deacon dispenses. The Bishop guards doctrine (orthodoxy) and the office is symbolic of unity. So, whereas the priest celebrates/presides over the Eucharist, the Deacon fulfils the role of servant thereby complementing the cycle of unity in the local congregation.

The call to service extends beyond the liturgy and its trappings and infiltrates the world with administration, education, pastoral care, and spiritual guidance. The office of the Deacon incarnates these virtues in the world first and in the church if needs be otherwise it remains the prerogative of the Priest in the church.

Currently, the ordained ministry is best depicted as a pyramid scheme:

- Top Tier - Bishops
- Middle Tier - Priests
- Bottom Tier - Deacons

This is the image we project to the world we need to infiltrate. The Jesus model requires us to turn this silo upside down if we are to move closer to his example of being the servant-leader rather than the servant-lord.

The inverted model speaks to humility not power; simplicity not ceremony; and transforming the church from hierarchy to service moving ever closer and onward to a ministry of service toward the kingdom of God. It is a downward mobility for that is the nature of service and servanthood. Compare Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

If we are to properly comprehend the roles of priest and bishop, then it can only be done from an appreciation of what the office of the distinctive diaconate means. Therefore, it is vital for the distinctive diaconate to be revitalised in ACSA to re-orientate itself in terms of ordination and the ordained ministry. Besides, this may even lead to a re-invigoration of pastoral ministry in the church.

The role of the deacon is primarily to the world. Without deacons the church runs the risk of becoming increasingly insular – an extreme form of parochialism – and consequently isolated from the world it needs to impact with its mission and message.

Deacons ensure the catholicity of the church which seeks to abolish the increasing dichotomy of sacred and secular and in turn, the kingdom of God and the world.

## **CONCLUSION**

A revival of the distinctive diaconate, I believe, can be the catalyst for a "resurrection" of the ordained ministry; for the heart of such renewal takes us back to basics where ministry is incarnational! In turn, it would impact the broader mission of the church. Therefore, restoring the distinctive diaconate to its rightful place may prove to be not only timely but vital.

*+ Edward Port Elizabeth*

**THE RIGHT REVD DR EDWARD DANIELS**