



# ***Introduction to Diaconal Studies***

**ACSA Fellowship of Deacons**

# Introduction to Diaconal Studies

© 2025 Fellowship of Deacons (of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa)

Cover illustration: Michael the deacon, who travelled from Ethiopia to Europe and in 1534 met and influenced Luther

# Contents

Welcome to the course <i>Introduction to Diaconal Studies</i> .....	v
1. What are deacons and how are they equipped? .....	1
2. A history of the diaconate .....	11
3. The meaning of <i>diakonia</i> .....	25
4. A theology of the diaconate .....	33
5. What do deacons do? .....	45
6. Deacons, liturgy and prayer .....	61
7. The deacon as an educator .....	73
8. The deacon as guide and counsellor .....	83
9. The deacon as truth sayer and activist .....	97
10. Doing social analysis .....	107
11. Working with people in organizations .....	119
12. Organizing for <i>diakonia</i> .....	129
Answers to self tests .....	137



# Welcome to the course

## *Introduction to Diaconal Studies*

---

The course is a basic introduction to diaconal studies for use by potential and actual candidates for the ordained ministry in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and for those in the early stages of any prescribed pre- or post-ordination education and training.

The course covers the development of the diaconate from the early church onward, the diaconate's relationship to the concept of *diakonia*, and the calling, typical roles and ministries of the ordained deacon.

The course will normally be part of the programme of a theological college or diocesan clergy training, which will usually include various accompanying practical exercises and assessments.

Though this is an Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) course and it was specifically designed for Anglicans, most of the content would be suitable for other Christian denominations.

The course was prepared by a team of permanent deacons from the ACSA Fellowship of Deacons.

## The contents of the course

The text of this course is designed as a self study one, with twelve units of about ten pages each.

1. What is a deacon and how equipped?
2. A history of the diaconate
3. The meaning of *diakonia*
4. A theology of the diaconate
5. What do deacons do?
6. Deacons, liturgy and prayer
7. The deacon as an educator
8. The deacon as guide and counsellor
9. The deacon as truth sayer and activist
10. Doing social analysis
11. Working with people in organizations
12. Organizing for *diakonia*

## Practical work

Ideally this course material would be accompanied by practical exercises within a theological education programme.

## Assessment

Though there are some self-test questions at the end of each unit, no assessment material is provided in this text. Any assessments, assignments or examinations are the responsibility of the institution or programme using this course.

## Academic level

The course is pitched at Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework, that is, at Higher Certificate or first year Diploma or Degree level.

If this course is included in any accredited South African Higher Certificate, Diploma or Degree programme, its credit value should be 12 to 15 credits or 120 to 150 notional study hours.

These notional study hours cover reading the course material, attending tutorials and practice sessions, doing any assignments related to it, and any formal assessment. In a traditional full-time face-to-face institution, this course would normally be taught over a semester (half year), alongside three other similar 15 credit courses.

## Textbooks and readings

All the information needed to complete the study of this course material is provided here. No textbooks or other readings are prescribed for this course.

Some texts are referred to and many of them available on the website of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa Fellowship of Deacons:

[www.acsafod.org.za](http://www.acsafod.org.za)

## Outcomes of this course

In looking at how persons studying this course might be assessed it is helpful to look at what the writers of this course saw as desirable **outcomes** from such study and what **criteria** could be used in assessing the achievement of these outcomes.

Specific outcomes and Assessment criteria		
#	Specific outcomes	Assessment criteria
1	Explains the rationales for the ordination of deacons and their training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How the diaconate is understood, practically and liturgically, within (their local expression of) Anglicanism, is discussed.</li> <li>The nature of a call to the diaconal ministry is discussed.</li> <li>The normal practices in the formation of a deacon in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa are described and discussed.</li> </ul>
2	Demonstrates understanding of the role of the deacon as it has developed in Christian history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A brief history of the diaconate is outlined from the early Church up to modern times.</li> <li>Reasons for the period of the decline in the diaconate in the Western Church are explained.</li> <li>The role of the deacon is distinguished from that of the presbyter.</li> <li>The different roles of, and the relationship between, bishop, priests, deacons and lay ministers in the history of the Church and the Anglican communion are outlined.</li> </ul>
3	Demonstrates understanding of the concept of <i>diakonia</i> and the role of the ordained deacon in supporting the diaconal ministry of all the baptised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of knowledge of the meaning of <i>diakonia</i> is provided.</li> <li>The newer understanding of the meaning of <i>diakonia</i> is described.</li> <li>How the diaconal ministry reflects the diaconal character of the whole church is described.</li> </ul>

### Specific outcomes:

clearly defined and measurable statements that spell out what learners are expected to know, do, or value by the end of a learning programme. These outcomes serve as basis for the curriculum goals, instructional strategies, and assessment methods.

### Assessment criteria:

descriptive statements that make it clear to learners what they are expected to do to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes

Both terms are commonly used in course descriptions in South African Higher Education

4	Describes basic elements of a theology of the diaconate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A theological understanding of the diaconate is described and discussed that takes into account: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* the baptismal vocation of all,</li> <li>* the diaconate's relationship to the orders of presbyter and bishop and to the so-called lay-ministries,</li> <li>* the revised understanding of the meaning of diakonia as the activities of mandated, commissioned persons who are operatives of the kingdom who call all people to be servants of the kingdom community, and</li> <li>* the contextual nature of the ministry.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The distinction between an order of continuity and an order of transformation is outlined.</li> </ul>
5	Describes significant functions of the deacon and their practical applications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The church-facing and world facing work of the diaconate is distinguished.</li> <li>• The diaconal functions of being Proclaimer, Ikon, Worship leader, Interpreter of needs and situations, Administrator, Educator and equipper, Outreach, Threshold/ Bridge, Collaborator and team worker, Networker, and Prophet and social justice activist are defined and explained.</li> </ul>
6	Describes the liturgical role of the deacon and the theological rationale for the various tasks in the liturgy and prayers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A basic understanding of the diaconal role in the liturgy, and how it relates to missional engagement in the community is demonstrated.</li> <li>• The types and practice of prayer is described and discussed.</li> </ul>
7	Demonstrates a basic knowledge of effective and efficient Christian education practices in relation to children, young people and adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The differences between child, youth and adult learning and corresponding appropriate Christian educational practice are described.</li> <li>• Characteristics of effective teaching are outlined.</li> <li>• Typical types of Christian education are listed.</li> <li>• The practical choice of appropriate teaching methods is discussed.</li> </ul>
8	Demonstrates basic knowledge of guidance and counselling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concepts of guidance and counselling are defined.</li> <li>• Awareness of legal issue around "counselling" is discussed.</li> <li>• The place of empathy, listening, reflection, questioning in counselling activities is described.</li> </ul>

9	Discuss the prophetic role of the deacon in truth saying and acting against injustice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their own diaconal stance on issues facing society and the church and how a deacon relates to those issues today and in the future are discussed.</li> <li>• An understanding of the unique prophetic voice of the deacon is articulated and discussed.</li> <li>• Some of the current social justice issues facing the church and how a deacon relates to those issues today and in the future are discussed.</li> <li>• Means of fact checking social media information can be outlined and their use demonstrated.</li> </ul>
10	Demonstrate capacity to conduct social analysis of a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elements of doing a social analysis of a community are described.</li> <li>• The capability of gaining a basic understanding of the nature of a situation or place – its history, demography, structures and forces (economic, political, social cultural, religious) influencing it, and future trends – is demonstrated.</li> </ul>
11	Demonstrates basic knowledge of the nature of organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic knowledge of the purpose and nature of organizations is provided.</li> <li>• The distinction between the management and administration of organizations is explained.</li> <li>• Evidence of some engagement with groups and organizations is provided.</li> <li>• Evidence of some engagement with and learning from denominational, regional and international diaconal networks (such as ACSA Fellowship of Deacons and Diakonia Region Africa and Europe) is provided.</li> </ul>
12	Demonstrates practical knowledge of the elements of planning and organizing for diaconal action.	<p>Knowledge of the common expectations and experiences of the deacon within parish and diocese is demonstrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The legal, canonical and administrative responsibilities of a deacon are outlined.</li> <li>• The need for a deacon to exercise appropriate accountability, responsibility and acceptance of rightful authority is justified.</li> <li>• A simple plan for organizing <i>diakonia</i> in a church congregation or other situation has been developed.</li> </ul>



# Unit 1

## What are deacons and how are they equipped?

---

### Introduction – what is a deacon?

It would be difficult for anyone to give an account of what it means to be a distinctive or permanent deacon without first addressing the issue of why the Anglican Church has three orders of ordained clergy – **deacons**, **presbyters** (priests), and **bishops**.

The beginnings of a Christian ministry had its beginnings when Jesus commissioned the Twelve (Matthew 10:1-5, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-18) and the Seventy (Luke 10:1) to the work of the Kingdom of God. At Pentecost the Twelve assumed direction of the new community (Acts 2:14, 3:1-10, 4:23-31, etc.) and over time various forms of commissioned or ordained leadership were developed (Acts 6:1-7, 11:30, 13:1-3, 14:23, 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2, 3:8, 4:14,, 5:12; 5:17, 2 Timothy 1:6).

By the 3rd century (200 - 299) the three orders we are familiar with had become established, though with many adjustments to the relationships between them. In particular, the ministry of deacons has a long and complex history. The deacon in the early church was a permanent order. It is only since the Middle Ages in Western Europe that the diaconate became mainly a transitional order, that is, a period of training or preparation for being ordained to the priesthood.

Now, in relatively recent times, the Anglican (and a number of other Churches, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed) has begun to restore the diaconate to a distinctive and permanent order without the assumption that the minister who is a deacon will ever be ordained to the priesthood.

Further, even for those ordained deacons who will transition to the priesthood, there has been a move to ensure that they should receive genuine training and experience of being a deacon rather than just be seen as an apprentice priest.

An examination of the liturgies for ordination (the ordinals) in *An Anglican Prayer book 1989* (pages 571-604) shows the differences in emphasis between the ministry of a deacon, that of a priest, and that of a bishop. These differences help answer the question of 'Why have deacons at all?'

Though there are strong similarities between bishop and priest, the deacon has a different reason for being. Bishops oversee and delegate to priests their episcopal authority to gather, teach and nurture the community of Christ, whereas the bishop authorises the deacon to assist the bishop to focus the church and the world alike on issues of justice, mercy and compassion. Deacons, therefore, are not apprentice clergy. They are emissaries of the bishop and servant leaders in the

The Greek words used in the New Testament are *diakonos* (minister), *presbuteros* (elder) and *episkopos* (overseer).

The English word 'priest' is a corruption of the Greek word *presbuteros*.

Unit 2 provides a history of the developments in the diaconate.

The existing theological understanding of ordination is that it is lifelong - it has an indelible character (it cannot be erased). So a deacon who is ordained as a priest is still a deacon and a bishop is still a deacon and priest.

'*diakonia*' (ministry of service) of Christ. They carry out a distinctive ministry to the world and to the church. They work in many different fields and may often be found outside the mainstream of the church, at the boundaries and on the margins of society. Rethinking the role of the diaconate in the contemporary church has meant rethinking and re-framing the roles of everyone who is baptised into the church of God, for baptism is the primary calling to ministry.

## So! Why renew the diaconate?

In summary, the reasons are:

- to recover the '*diakonia*', the ministry of the whole body of Christ;
- to clarify what it means to be a member of God's church today;
- to bring about change in the culture of the church, refocusing it towards Christ's mission;
- to bring into sharp focus our current ways of doing and being;
- to recommit to the Fundamental Declarations section in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa that affirms a threefold order of ordained ministry, where each order is understood with reference to the other for indeed a strong priesthood and episcopate needs a strong diaconate;
- by recovering the distinctive role of the deacon on a permanent basis, this presents opportunities to:
  - \* imaginatively explore new possibilities for ministry;
  - \* develop a clearer vision for the ministry of all believers; and
  - \* use deacons as signposts for a renewed outward focussing church.

## What should the renewed diaconate look like?

There are many terms that are used to give some idea of the role and being of a deacon, a servant minister of *diakonia*:

Proclaimer: a herald of Christ's kingdom
Model of servant ministry
Interpreter of needs and situations
Worship and intercession leader
Administrator
Teacher and equipper
Reacher out
Bridgebuilder to the world
Team worker and advisor
Networker, messenger, and go-between
Prophet and social justice activist

All of these descriptions can be included in the overall role of the deacon. These ways of being and doing are not exclusive to the deacon; they are shared with everyone else in the church. However, the deacon can demonstrate, organize and lead the outworking of these ministries for the benefit of the whole church.

Of course, priests also do many of these things as well. So, what makes a deacon's vocation and the understanding of ministry different from that of priests, and bishops? To do their diaconal work well deacons need to be free to focus on their distinctive transformational ministry. They should be free to devote time and energy to diaconal ministry because they do not have the additional responsibilities entrusted to priests to lead the church in its inner worship and life and to preside over the Eucharist.

## The deacon as proclaimer: a herald of Christ's kingdom

The deacon is an agent of the kingdom of God, invested with authority from Christ at ordination. The deacon's ministry is a visible sign that draws attention to the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ. Deacons remind the church of why it is here: to carry the good news of Christ and his kingdom to those who do not yet know his love. As agents of God's kingdom, deacons are a sign that the kingdom or reign of God has dawned upon the world in the mission of Jesus Christ, but remains to be fulfilled, and it points to the role of the Church in the coming of God's reign.

## The deacon as a model of servant ministry

Deacons embody the Servanthood of Christ. The mere fact that they wear a stole over one shoulder, tied at the waist on the opposite hip, is a visual reminder of the servanthood of a deacon, as is the Maundy Thursday service, where a deacon should be washing the feet of the faithful (yes even of the Priest in charge). This reinforces for the whole congregation what the role of the deacon is - humble service, emulating the servant ministry of Christ.

To be able to do this deacons need a firm understanding of the Gospels and the New Testament, with an overview of the Old Testament – specifically where it connects with the Gospels. Alongside this scriptural knowledge must be a strong and evolving spirituality (every deacon should be growing in faith, hope and love through ongoing spiritual direction).

## The deacon as interpreter of needs and situations

The deacon needs to understand people and social context they live in and the developmental needs they have. A deacon needs to be focussed on working with the whole of the community who are resident within the boundaries of the parish. In understanding the social circumstances in our parishes or work areas the deacon has to have some insight into how people interact with each other (understanding of developmental issues, conflict resolution, skills in communication and networking, as well as collaborating, connections with health and police services in the parish and community in our own areas), as well as being able to work together with other faith-based institutions and denominations.

Units 9, 10 and 11 all deal in different ways with this task of informing the Church about the needs of the world.

Unit 6 looks in detail at liturgy and prayer.

## The deacon as a worship and intercession leader

It is precisely because the deacon at ordination is instructed to “interpret to the Church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world”, that the deacon plays a crucial role in bringing this into the worship of the Church and especially in the intercessions - the prayer of the Church.

All these aspects of diaconal ministry are represented in the role of the deacon in the services of the church. For the Eucharist and other sacramental services, Deacons wear a stole across the body, distinct from the way of priests. In some instances deacons wear a dalmatic robe which again distinguishes from other ministries.

As ministers of the Gospel, it is the deacon’s role to read the gospel, reminding the whole church that it is meant to be shared, not kept within the confines of the faithful. Deacons encourage the church’s intercession, bringing the needs of others outside across the church boundary into the liturgy. Deacons prepare the holy table for the Eucharist, reminding the whole church that we are called to prepare for Christ’s coming. Deacons embody the nature and purpose of the church as we proclaim the mystery of Christ in the Eucharistic prayer: ‘Christ has died: Christ is risen: Christ will come again!’

Deacons lift the chalice alongside the priest with the paten, affirming the collaborative nature of their ministry with others. Deacons clear up after the Eucharist, reminding the church of the humble tasks to which Christ calls us all: and to dismiss the congregation at the end, sending them out to live the gospel in everyday life.

Note however that although the deacon should play a prominent role in the Sunday services, the deacon’s ministry should not be overwhelmed by liturgical duties, taking services, funerals, etc. inside the church building - the deacon’s ministry of servanthood is to the scattered community. Leading reserved sacrament services should only be done when a priest is legitimately unavailable to preside over the Eucharist.

## The deacon as administrator

Historically deacons have played an essential role as an executive agent of the bishop in the administration of the Church and its charitable work in the wider community.

## The deacon as teacher and equipper

A deacon needs to be able to teach the Gospel and the (Anglican) Faith with conviction and sound knowledge. He or she also needs to know how to preach, so as to awaken (or activate) the servant ministry residing in every believer and to give fresh expressions to the biblical text and how this relates to faith in action today.

The deacon, as the commissioned organizer of *diakonia*, has the formidable task of equipping the people of the Church, a ministry that is essential to the establishing and sustaining of the life of a church.

Unit 11 looks at the deacon the deacon as an administrator and manager.

## The deacon as reacher out and as a bridgebuilder

Deacons reach out across boundaries. They look ‘out’ from the church, asking how the church and the Christian faith can cross the boundary with the gospel to those who do not yet know Christ, and to those who are in need. This generally means that people with a diaconal calling should not spend most of their ministry inside the church building. The distinctive diaconate is for those who are strongly drawn to the go-between ministry, seeking out the lost sheep and bringing both the message of the gospel and the practical care that goes with it to the unchurched. As a Deacon one is constantly encouraging the church to look outwards and share the gospel with our communities - heading up the church’s response to human need.

A deacon is a person on a mission, a messenger or ambassador – making connections between liturgy and pastoral need, building bridges between the life of the Church and the community. As those who cross boundaries, make connections and bring people together, deacons are well-placed to move into challenging new contexts but work collaboratively. Deacons are able to build networks of relationships with community agencies and individuals, working with others to build healthy neighbourhoods.

For example, some deacons may work with the homeless, with addicts, the aged and with food banks. Others are ‘embedded’ in their community or at their workplace, starting new projects, supporting current ones, looking for fresh ways to connect with people, developing servant leadership at work. Yet other deacons are involved in reconciliation, or inter-faith work or mission and evangelism, often with pioneer ministers.

In general, deacons all have one thing in common: a preference to be out and about in the community.

## The deacon as team worker, messenger and go-between

The deacon needs organizational skills and develop inclusive leadership skills. These organizational skills are important, because the deacon is not expected to do all the outreach work in a parish, or diocese, but should be able to organize the faithful to do so. This involves both management and administrative skills as well as the communication skills to carry messages and negotiate between groups.

Often the deacon is asked to “fill the gap” in the ministry within a parish (because of the non-availability of the priest, but this should not be a regular occurrence (e.g., stepping in for the priest when they are on vacation or sick leave – by celebrating a communion service with the pre-consecrated elements).

## The deacon as prophet and social justice activist

The *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, ordination rite says that the deacon is called:

“to a special ministry of humble service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, and to seek out particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.

Note that this is a ministry to all people and may involve not only discovering and reporting to the Church about injustice, exploitation and human need but also speaking out about it and organizing action against it. In this way the deacon also serves as information gatherer, intelligence agent, truth-teller and prophet.

## The deacon as an Anglican

With all of this goes the necessity that the Anglican deacon has a sound grounding on how the Anglican Church operates and understands its diversity.

## To sum up – a deacon is ...

A 'distinctive' deacon is someone who demonstrates these characteristics:

- A passion for sharing Christ with others
- A desire to meet the needs of others
- A desire to focus on opportunities for mission and service
- A longing to be out and about in the community rather than based inside the church building
- A commitment to helping the church look outwards to their neighbourhood and to the world
- An interest in justice and reconciliation issues
- Enjoyment in working collaboratively
- A creative and practical approach to ministry and the courage to take risks wisely.

The deacon's functions correspond very directly with the Anglican Church's *Five Marks of Mission*.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The deacon, ordained, commissioned, sent, is an agent and organizer for the Church of its diaconal mission.

# How does the deacon get equipped to function as a deacon?

The usual assumption about how a person becomes an ordained minister in the Anglican Church is that they go through a triple process of **call, discernment** and **formation**. First they receive some kind of call from God to be a minister, then, they join a programme through which the diocesan authorities try to discern whether this call is authentic, and finally, accepted as an ordinand, the candidate goes through various formation programmes to gain appropriate education and training, before being ordained by the bishop of the diocese.

There are a number of points to make about this triple process, particularly in relation to the factors that influence whether a person who receives what they think is a call by God actually gets to end up being ordained.

## The Call

A call from God to be one of his ordained ministers of the Gospel can take many forms. For some it may come within a direct spiritual experience, for others it may be the result of a long period of thought and prayer. However, the form the call takes will usually be influenced by what you think God sends an ordained minister to do.

Perhaps for a majority of people called, they have a general idea that they are called to be a servant of the Gospel, “a minister”, and what experience they have had of ministers will usually have been of parish priests. Most will have little or no experience or knowledge of deacons (except perhaps of so-called **transitional** deacons, people ordained as deacons but who after a year will be ordained as priests and who in reality are simply apprentice priests).

It is vital that (not only in respect of deacons but also for people called to the priesthood) that there is information (and visible role models) available on the ministry options open to those who are called. Are they called to be a deacon or priest? Will they be self-supporting (non-stipendiary) or Church-supported (stipendiary)?

People called need to examine whether the call they have received is directing them to ministry as a deacon or a priest. In many cases it is only after they have been through a process of theological education and church training that they will come to a definite conclusion about this. Indeed in many cases it is only after they had been ordained as deacon that some people understand that it is to this particular ministry that they have been truly called.

The person called also has to make a realistic judgement on whether they have the capabilities that are currently required of all seeking ordination in the Anglican Church in Southern Africa. Some of these capabilities relate to a person’s physical and mental health, their level of education, the likelihood that they can engage in theological studies at a post-school level (which in practice also assumes fluency in English) over a long period.

An authentic call should normally be accompanied by, or soon develop, some evidence of the following:

The title “transitional deacon” is an unfortunate one and theologically incorrect as it suggests that the deacon is changing or mutating into something different (caterpillar to butterfly?), whereas the deacon remains a lifelong deacon but is now **also** a priest.

The title “permanent deacon” has similar problems as all priests and bishops are also ‘permanent deacons’.

Sadly both terms are now in common usage. The title “distinctive deacon” is perhaps better but not as well known.

- a strong commitment to and deep love for Jesus Christ and the Church
- an ability to speak about one's faith
- a confirmed adult member in good standing with the understanding of one's already existing duties to minister as a baptized person
- a spiritual life marked by the habits of worship, prayer, the study of the Bible
- a desire to serve and enable others to serve
- empathy for the powerless, marginalised and oppressed
- a history of satisfactory employment (if applicable) and interpersonal relationships
- a willingness to undertake extensive preparation, including theological education, spiritual formation, and practice of ministry
- a clear understanding of the ministry of a deacon
- an awareness of Anglican tradition and practice and a willingness to work within this framework and process.

It certainly helps that the inner sense of call has persisted for some time and has been affirmed by others who have recognised a potential vocation to the diaconate and can give grounds for their support. There should be support of the local church, and perhaps wider community, for the vocation.

In some dioceses there will be an expectation that a candidate for the ordained ministry will first have served as a lay minister.

## Discernment

The person called will usually approach the priest at their parish church and, after consulting the Parish Council, be directed to a guild for prospective ministers, usually called The Fellowship of Vocation. In some dioceses the candidate will also have to register with a Ministry and Theological Education office. Usually at this stage various evidences will have to be provided such as certificates of birth, baptism, confirmation, and educational qualifications, etc.

The Fellowship of Vocation (FOV), led by a senior minister as Warden, will meet on a regular basis, often monthly or at least quarterly, and the candidate will also be expected to attend an annual weekend workshop. In the Fellowship of Vocation candidates for ordination will be given talks and other instruction related to the work of ordained ministers.

The engagement with the Fellowship of Vocation is meant to enlarge a candidate's knowledge of what a minister is, and hence also strengthen his or her reflection on their own call, and also give the person in charge of the Fellowship of Vocation time to assess, through observation and interviews, the suitability of the candidate. A programme of study may also be prescribed as well as being linked to a spiritual director.

The discernment process will take some time and it will only be after engagement with the Fellowship of Vocation, for at least a year, and a series of interviews, at least one of which will be with the Bishop, that a decision will be made that the

candidate is now officially an ordinand and directed to engage in studies to be completed before they are ordained (the candidate may of course already have started such studies). These studies can be at a university, theological college or a diocesan programme. Currently the theological colleges mainly used by the Anglican Church are the College of the Transfiguration (COTT) in Makhanda (Grahamstown) for full-time face-to-face study, and the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) in Alberton, for part-time distance education study.

What does the discernment, the process of gaining insight into and making a good judgement on the candidate's suitability, involve? What is looked at? Usually at least the following aspects are looked for in deciding whether persons should be ordained as a deacon:

<b>Character</b>	What character do they have, are they a mature and stable personality of integrity? Will they be resilient and persistent?
<b>Commitment</b>	Commitment to a spiritual life of faith
<b>Family support</b>	Spouse/Family - Do the spouse or family support them? Are there complications here?
<b>Communication skills</b>	Do they have adequate communication skills for conversation, preaching, and teaching?
<b>Academic knowledge</b>	Are they intellectually capable of theological study, ministerial preparation and the demands of ministry? Is their educational background adequate for theological study at a post-school level? Can they demonstrate what they have gained so far from theological study?
<b>Anglicanism</b>	Are they truly embedded in the Anglican Church? Do they have sufficient knowledge about, and engagement with, the Anglican Church and its diversity?
<b>Understanding of ministry</b>	Do they have an adequate sense of what ministry involves?
<b>Understanding of the diaconate</b>	If they are to be a distinctive (permanent) deacon, do they know what being a deacon involves and its distinction from being a priest?
<b>Discipleship</b>	What are they doing as a disciple of Christ?
<b>Human relationships</b>	Is there evidence of a sound human awareness and understanding? Is there the capacity to build healthy personal, professional, and pastoral relationships?
<b>Leadership and collaboration</b>	Do they have the potential to lead in an effective way and collaborate with others?
<b>Societal awareness</b>	Do they have a basic understanding of society and how it works (and does not work)?
<b>Social justice</b>	Do they have a passion for social justice?
<b>Mission and evangelism</b>	What is their experience of and commitment to these?
<b>Practical competence</b>	Do they have specific required competencies?

## Formation

A major component of the ongoing formation of the candidate for ordination as a deacon will be theological education. Currently a potential deacon will study for from four to seven years, usually to gain a Diploma or Degree in theology, and usually at a university or the College of the Transfiguration (COTT) in Makhanda (Grahamstown) for full-time face-to-face study, and the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) in Alberton, for part-time distance education study.

In addition there will be ongoing support from the Fellowship of Vocation of the Diocese and often the candidates will be assigned mentors or spiritual directors.

Formation continues after ordination with various forms of post-ordination training, usually delivered by the diocese, and usually for a period of three to four years via occasional workshops and meetings.

In the longer term, deacons are expected to be a lifelong learners, constantly upgrading their knowledge and skills.

### Unit 1: Self test questions

1. What do you think are the differences between a deacon and a priest (presbyter)?
2. Look at the list on page 6 of the characteristics of deacons.
  - (a) Which characteristic or characteristics are closest to your sense of call to the ministry?
  - (b) Which one or ones would you have difficulty with?
3. Have you had an experience of observing a deacon in the church or churches you attend? If Yes, did the deacon play a prominent role in the Eucharist?
4. If you have experienced some kind of call to ministry, was it to a general role of minister or specifically to that of deacon or priest (presbyter)?
5. Looking at the list on page 9 off aspects of a person to be ordained, which one or ones would you want to develop greater capacity or strength in?

## Unit 2

# A history of the diaconate

---

### A historical question: What is a deacon?

In trying to get to know a person it is often helpful to ask: 'What is your background, where do you come from, what is your history?'. The same questions can be applied to the understanding what a deacon is and does (or should do).

The Anglican Church has, since its inception as the Reformation period Church of England, had, as its ordained ministers, Bishops, Priests and Deacons. This tradition of the threefold form of ordained ministry is accepted as a given and so it has remained. But why is it a given and why is it that the main current practice is for the diaconate to be simply an apprentice year for a person to be ordained priest? To answer those two questions we have to look at the history of deacons, starting with the New Testament.

### The deacons in the New Testament

Before looking at the historical evidence in the New Testament and ancient writings to see what deacons were, we need to warn ourselves against assuming that whatever shape and function the ordained ministry has today can be seen directly or implicitly in the New Testament (or in the New Testament and the **Patristic** writers). Renewing the ordained ministry is not simply a matter of copying what we think was its original primitive shape and function.

It has to be stated upfront that, if we restrict ourselves to the New Testament writers and to the reported words of Jesus on 'ministry', there is no simple answer to the question of what a 'minister' is.

Of what the Gospels record of Jesus' words we can say little more than that he saw his followers as a "flock" (that is, a group of people, not just isolated individuals) guided, protected and overseen by a shepherd, a kinship band who were the new temple, a true worshipping community, whose members have the authority to forgive sins and who are "sent" to bring the good news to all. Ministers are those who are the servants to this community. Commissioned-by-God-service (*diakonia*) is the principle of this ministry and the authority and esteem of the minister depends on this humble service (Luke 22:24-27 expresses this particularly well). In sum, service, leadership and mission are all expressed in what Jesus says about ministry, and leadership is seen as arising out of this *diakonia*. The New Testament writers also concur that *diakonia* is the qualification for ministry (1 Corinthians 16:15-16).

Unfortunately the terms used for actual 'ministers' are confusing and one can sum up by saying that in the New Testament church there was not yet a fixed order of ministries. Nor is the New Testament particularly clear about what these ministers actually did.

The **Patristic writers** were leaders and teachers of the Christian Church between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Well known ones include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory the Great.

In Unit 3 we look in more detail at the meaning of this word ***diakonia***.

So what kinds of ‘ministers’ seem to have been in operation? There were:

- those who received direct and different **gifts** of grace to minister as apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, administrators, ecstasies, interpreters, evangelists, pastors, etc. and those who do **commissioned service or ministry** (that is, *diakonia*) (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28; Ephesians 4:11-12).
- **bishops and deacons** (the latter certainly including women (Romans 16:1-2), with the bishops exercising responsibility, oversight and shepherding (Philippians 1:1) and the deacons exercising ministry. The bishops came to exercise a particularly important role in being responsible not only to the local congregation but to the wider church as the church was never considered as a loose federation of autonomous congregations but as a single body.
- **elders** (presbyters) who appear to have been a group of the leading older people in the local congregation and who clearly had some authority. Paul, for example, appointed leaders in the congregations he founded (Acts 14:20-23) and he described them as his fellow workers (1 Corinthians 16:5, 2 Corinthians 8:23, Ephesians 6:21, Philippians 2:25, Colossians 1:7, 4:7). They had a governance and advisory role.

There continue to be debates by scholars as to whether bishops were the same thing as elders, or a select group within the elders, or (maybe in a later development) a special person selected out of the elders to be their president, and as to how the final arrangement of the three orders of ordained ministers, bishops, presbyters and deacons, developed.

The problem is that the New Testament names these ministerial offices but never tells us what they do. One assumes that the readers of that time would of course have known. Nowhere in the New Testament are the terms bishops (overseers/supervisors), presbyters (elders), and deacons (ministers) used together in one string of words. All we know is that in this first century the deacons played an important role in leading the *diakonia*, the ministry of Christian community. They were given important tasks. It is implied that deacons were subservient to the bishop, but their ministry was not an inferior one, as there is no rigid hierarchical church order in these times.

## The early Church evidence

The fourth Bishop of Rome, Clement, writing about AD 96, said that bishops and deacons had been appointed by the Apostles. He does not clearly distinguish between bishops and presbyters and it may be that the bishop was a presbyter elected by fellow presbyters to preside over the Eucharist and that deacons related to the bishop in this liturgical role.

A very early document, *The Lord’s teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations* (the *Didache*), written sometime between AD 70 and AD 100, speaks of bishops and deacons also doing the ministry of the prophets and teachers. They ensured the regular celebration of the Eucharist.

Polycarp, martyred in AD 155, says that presbyters have to take care of widows, orphans, and the destitute. Deacons, are “of God and not of men” (*Letter to the*

When looking at the history of the ordained clergy it is helpful to note the original terms used in the New Testament and their meaning. A bishop (episkopos) was an ‘overseer’, a presbyter (presbyteros) was an ‘elder’, meaning a senior person who has some governing or advisory authority.

It needs to be noted that the English word ‘priest’, now applied to the regular Anglican clergy, is in fact an English language corruption of the word ‘presbyter’ (that is, ‘elder’). No ministers in the New Testament are described as priests (*hierios*). Only the Jewish temple priests are described as such and Jesus is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16).

*Philippians* 5:1) and are to “walk according to the truth of the Lord, who became *diakonos* of all”. Justin, martyred in AD 165, said that deacons distributed the Eucharistic bread and wine.

Hippolytus, a conservative contender for the bishopric of Rome, states in his *Apostolic Tradition* of about AD 228 that:

“The deacon is not ordained to the presbyterate but to the *hypēresia* [*the work of a public official, functionary, or executive officer*] of the bishop, that he may do only what the bishop commands him. For he is not appointed to be the fellow-counsellor of the whole clergy but to take charge of property and report to the bishop whatever is necessary. He does not receive the Spirit which is common to all the presbyterate, in which the presbyters share, but that which is entrusted to him under the bishop’s authority.”

Another early church document, the *Teaching of the Apostles (Didascalia Apostolorum)*, a manual on Church order and practice written in Syria about AD 230, describes the deacon as being in the service of the bishop, acting as a manager and reporting to the bishop what is necessary. The deacon is first of all the bishop’s servant. The bishop is an overseer and the deacon his executive officer. In fact, according to the *Didascalia*, the bishop is so supreme that the laity have no access to him save through the deacon, who acts as a liaison officer.

Deacons would report to the bishop on the needs of all so that decisions could be made and action planned (iii: 13):

“And be you [bishop and deacon] of one counsel and of one purpose, and one soul dwelling in two bodies. ... It is required of you deacons therefore that you visit all who are in need, and inform the bishop of those who are in distress; and you shall be his soul and his mind; and in all things you shall be taking trouble and be obedient to him.”

“But let them have very free access to the deacons, and let them not be troubling the head at all times, but making known what they require through the ministers, that is through the deacons. For neither can any man approach the Lord God Almighty except through Christ. All things therefore that they desire to do, let them make known to the bishop through the deacons, and then do them.”

“Let the bishops and the deacons, then, be of one mind; and do you shepherd the people diligently with one accord. For you ought both to be one body, father and son; for you are in the likeness of the Lordship. And let the deacon make known all things to the bishop, even as Christ to His Father. But what things he can, let the deacon order, and all the rest let the bishop judge. Yet let the deacon be the hearing of the bishop, and his mouth and his heart and his soul; for when you are both of one mind, through your agreement there will be peace also in the Church.”

The deacons were a distinctive ministry of service and agency, working to inspire, equip and mobilise the congregation in their ministries of service, healing, care and justice. They were the agents of the bishop who presided over the church’s liturgical and spiritual life. They presented the offerings of the community at the gathering, saw that they were shared, and ensured that those who could not get to the gathering (the sick, the imprisoned, women unable to leave the confines of the homes, and slaves) were served. They also checked out the authenticity of Christians who came from another congregation before admitting them into the local assembly.

The number of deacons should be proportionate to the size of the congregation to enable them to know and to minister to all (iii.13). (One known example from a court record of AD 303 had a bishop, three presbyters, two deacons and four sub-deacons serving a congregation of little over a hundred.)

Liturgically, the deacons handled the offerings and kept order in the assembly, including finding places for the old and infirm to sit (even if the bishop had to give up his seat and sit on the ground!)

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* also notes the important role of female deacons here (iii. 12) :

“For there are houses where you cannot send a deacon to the women, on account of the heathen, but you may be able to send a deacon [female].”

Deacons could be materially supported by the congregation with food and clothing and other things needed, but they also had to use gifts from the congregation to meet the needs of widows, orphans and strangers.

## The move towards the threefold order

At the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century we witness a gradual transformation into a stable and accepted order of the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons (1 Timothy 4:6). There are various scholarly theories about a merging of a Jewish model of synagogue elders (with a president) and a Greek model of bishop(s) and deacons.

The first time we have a crystal clear statement of the Church having a threefold ministry comes from the letters of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch who was martyred in about AD 110 – probably less than fifty years after the deaths of Peter and Paul.

In these letters we find some of the earliest references to things we now take for granted – such as the centrality of the Eucharist, Sunday as a replacement of the Sabbath, and the term “catholic” applied to the Church.

Ignatius’s letters serve to record the rapid development of a stable threefold church hierarchy (though we must not impose our modern and somewhat authoritarian ideas of what ‘hierarchy’ means onto those times). Ignatius is the earliest known Christian writer to emphasize loyalty to a single bishop in each city (or diocese), assisted by both presbyters and deacons. Indeed for Ignatius, having this threefold ministry was an essential sign of the Church:

“Apart from these, there is no Church”.

From what Ignatius tells us we can get a sense of the powerful independent role of deacons in the early church. Ignatius placed enormous value on their work. In his *Letter to the Trallians* (3) he says “let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ.” This is what he says about the bishops, presbyters and deacons (*Letter to the Magnesians* 6):

“Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the diakonia of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest.”



3<sup>rd</sup> Century fresco of a female deacon praying



Bishop Ignatius of Antioch martyred in Rome

So there we have a very clearly delineated threefold ministry and we can get a sense of what function each of the three roles involved:

- The bishop was the presider over the church in a particular place, the “spiritual crown of your presbytery”.
- The presbyters, the elders, were the council of senior people in the church who governed and advised.
- The deacons who are “entrusted with the diakonia of Jesus Christ” ministered and served.

The deacons were the people who most directly heard the concerns of the people of the Church and community and could inform the Bishop of what was needed – relief for the poor, taking the sacrament to the sick and imprisoned, raising money to pay for relief, handling communications during times of persecution and, even at times, acting as the bodyguards of the Bishop in danger from pagan mobs. There were both male and female deacons and the latter had a particular ministry to women who might never be allowed to leave their homesteads.

Deacons also had an important liturgical role in the Eucharist and in Baptism and Ignatius (*Letter to the Trallians* 2:1-3) says:

“It is fitting also that the deacons, as being dispensers of the mysteries [*sacraments*] of Jesus Christ, should in every respect be pleasing to all.”

It is clear from Ignatius that the deacon, like the bishop and presbyter, belongs to the altar. The deacon still combined liturgical and welfare functions. He cared for widows and orphans and visited the faithful, reporting their needs to the bishop. The requirement to inform the bishop shows that the deacon was subordinate to him. Ignatius insisted that the deacon was “subject to the bishop as to the grace of God and to the presbyterium as to the law of Christ”. In other words he was not a lesser official serving human superiors, but God. The deacon is still seen as someone who in his own right carries out an important function in Christ’s redemptive work.

Ignatius speaks of two deacons, Burrhus and Sotio, as being his fellow-servants and of another, Philo of Cilicia, “a man of reputation, who still ministers to me in the word of God”.

In his *Letter to the Magnesians* (Section 2) he talks: “of my fellow slave, the deacon Zotion. I am delighted with him, because he submits to the bishop as to God’s grace, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ” and continues (10) with the suggestion that the church in Antioch (where Ignatius had been Bishop) “elect a deacon to act as an ambassador of God” to the church in Philadelphia and says “Blessed is he in Jesus Christ, who shall be deemed worthy of such a ministry.”

To sum up in more modern language, the deacons are the information gatherers, the intelligence agents of the local Christian community and the information they gather is to be used to galvanize the diaconal action of the congregation. The *diakonia* of the disciples also needs leadership and when it comes to people who are ordained to be deacons, they are those who have been authorised by the Church to lead and guide these diaconal activities – and these activities are far more expansive than simply distributing food to the poor. As Ignatius also put it:

“They are not deacons of food and drink but are officers of the Church of God.”



Phoebe, deacon and helper of St Paul (Romans 16:1-2)

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the picture changes and the fluidity of ministries found in the New Testament had fully hardened into the threefold hierarchy of bishops, presbyters and deacons.

So far as the diaconate was concerned, emphasis now came to be laid not on the deacons' work but on the deacon's status. The deacon now was a subordinate member of a fixed threefold order. We read in Hippolytus' *The Apostolic Tradition* that when a deacon is ordained "the bishop alone lays on hands, for the deacon is not ordained to the presbyterate but to the bishop's service, to do what the latter tells him". His ministry is to be the bishop's helper.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century the environment changed radically. After AD 313 Christianity was no longer prohibited by the Roman Emperor and eventually became the state religion with access to state resources for welfare. Bishops no longer presided over congregations of a hundred or a couple of hundred but now of thousands, and more ministers were required.

A set of documents, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, probably from Syria about AD 375, provides further details of the status of deacons in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

"For as Christ does nothing without His Father, so neither does the deacon do anything without his bishop; and as the Son without His Father is nothing, so is the deacon nothing without his bishop; and as the Son is subject to His Father, so is every deacon subject to his bishop; and as the Son is the messenger and prophet of the Father, so is the deacon the messenger and prophet of his bishop. Wherefore let all things that he is to do with any one be made known to the bishop, and be finally ordered by him." (Book 1, xxx)

The deacon has to report everything to the bishop "as Christ does to the Father" but can deal alone with the delegated work, reducing the burden on the bishop::

"But let him order such things as he is able by himself, receiving power from the bishop, as the Lord did from His Father the power of creation and of providence. But the weighty matters let the bishop judge ; but let the deacon be the bishop's ear, and eye, and mouth, and 'heart, and soul, that the bishop may not be distracted with many cares, but with such only as are more considerable, as Jethro did appoint for Moses, and his counsel was received." (Book 2, xliv).

In the liturgical assemblies the deacons are the managers:

"When thou callest an assembly of the Church as one that is the commander of a great ship, appoint the assemblies to be made with all possible skill, charging the deacons as mariners to prepare places for the brethren as for passengers, with all due care and decency ... for they are like the mariners and managers of the ship ... But if any one be found sitting out of his place, let him be rebuked by the deacon, as a manager of the foreship, and be removed into the place proper for him; for the Church is not only like a ship, but also like a sheepfold."

Another account, from about AD 384, by the nun, Egeria, of the Church in Jerusalem, tells us that the deacons lead prayers and intercessions and psalms but does not mention them reading lessons or preaching. When the bishop takes his seat, they remain standing round him like bodyguards. They make announcements. Egeria shows that the recently introduced title of "archdeacon" was applied to the leading deacon in Jerusalem, and that it was this deacon who gave out the special notices during the pre-Easter ceremonies (Willkinson, 1971, pp. 31-33).

Jackson (2015, p. 10) summarises the overall situation in these early times thus:

“Deacons have a major liturgical role and administrative and charitable duties. They act as administrative assistants to the bishop. They baptize. They have clear functions in the Eucharist. They are even known – though rarely – to have presided at eucharistic celebrations. They are ministers of charity, ministers to the sick and the aged. They may reconcile penitents. But, though ministers of the “Word”, they do not normally preach. They are sometimes placed in charge of small congregations. Some are elected bishops. ‘The 3<sup>rd</sup> century was a period in which the dignity and importance of the deacon increased at the expense of the presbyter.’”

## The fall of the diaconate

As is clear from the *Didascalia* and the letters of Ignatius, deacons had a powerful position as the executives of the bishop. As the Church grew in size and persecution waned, their position began to be contested by the presbyters, who were growing in numbers as the Church expanded.

The desire to subordinate the deacons to the presbyters was brought into sharp focus by the Synod of Arles in Gaul in AD 314. This Synod ruled that the deacon was subordinate not only to the bishop but to the presbyter as well: “the deacon should not be arrogant, he should honour the presbyter and do nothing without his knowledge”. It also ordered that the practice of delegating a deacon to preside over the Eucharist should cease.

This negative attitude to the deacons was particularly prevalent among the presbyters of Rome and in AD 375 a pamphlet was published there *On the arrogance of deacons*.

There were various reasons for this, but one thing seems clear, it is the importance and high status of the diaconate that contributed to this state of affairs. Both bishops and especially the presbyters, might have felt threatened by the deacon’s significant role.

In Rome the situation was made worse by the what had now become the established misreading of Acts 6:1-7 as being about the establishment of a diaconate to do welfare work. It was assumed that there could only be seven deacons per bishop! So Rome had a maximum of seven deacons, who, in effect became the executive heads of the seven ecclesiastical districts of Rome and managers of all the Church assets.

Of all Bishops of Rome elected between 432 and 684, only three were previously ordained presbyters – the others were all deacons (who, like the bishop, were elected by the whole body of the church). Indeed being ordained as a presbyter was the kiss of death to your chances of becoming Pope! It was usually the deacons who had the requisite experience to lead the Church.

But the downside was that seven deacons were simply insufficient in the huge city like Rome – yet hundreds of presbyters were available. Over time they took over. As Collins (2002, p. 124) sums up:

“the church did nothing to support or expand the pastoral relevance of the deacons.”

In Unit 3 we will take a detailed look at the text of Acts 6:1-7.



St Laurence and the Seven Deacons of Rome

Enright (2006, p. 17) puts this change in wider perspective:

“Increasingly, from the late third century into the fifth century and thereafter, the importance of an individual order called “deacon” became less and less important. There is, if you will, a reduction from a threefold ministry to a twofold ministry... As Christianity increased in size and began to move out into the countryside, however, the bishop, who remained in the city, needed to provide for the celebration of the Eucharist; he therefore began to assign presbyters to take over the priestly role that once was solely his in the small city congregations. The deacon, by his very ordination, being assigned to the bishop, did not accompany the presbyters out into the countryside. Thus, eventually the diaconate ceased to be a distinct permanent ministry and became a step to the priesthood.”

In the Western church this conflict ended badly for the diaconate and by AD 700 the ordination of permanent deacons fell away completely, and only **transitional deacons**, en route to the presbyterate, remained. From then on until the 20th century Second Vatican Council of 1962-65, the diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church was regarded as simply a stage on the way to the presbyterate and Canon Law only allowed bishops to ordain deacons who were to go on to the presbyterate.

So, although the deacons were the first full-time and professional ministers at a time when the presbyters were hardly more than a small parish council, over a few centuries the presbyter gained the position as the normal minister in charge of a congregation. The diaconate lost many of its real functions in the West (though they remained a distinctive order in the Eastern churches).

Collins puts it bluntly (2002, p. 9):

“the kind of deacons who functioned in its first few centuries ... were lost to it for over a thousand years largely as a result of the church’s unworthy ways.”

## From the Middle Ages to Modern times

By the time of the Middle Ages in the West the influence of the deacons declined and their functions were restricted to the liturgy, though as Collins (2002, p. 10) states, “they almost disappear except for performers dressed in dalmatics at high liturgical festivals, who are actually priests disguised as deacons.” There were of course exceptions – St Francis was a deacon who refused to go further and get priested.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church the diaconal ministry remained but tended to become increasingly liturgical (with prescribed functions which would not be done by a priest), with the social welfare ministry falling away. In Africa, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, originally an offshoot of the Coptic Church in Egypt, has numerous presbyters (typically five presbyters concelebrate the liturgy) and a group of deacons assisting the rector of a church. Three deacons are required for any Eucharist. Each church has its own Archdeacon as leader among the deacons.

The Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation leaders aimed at rediscovering the New Testament ministries and thus were willing to restore the diaconate but, following the traditional misinterpretation of Acts 6, the diaconate as reformed only had a social welfare brief and totally neglected the ancient liturgical functions of the deacon. Calvin for example had two types of deacons, elected by the elders, those

Though the term **transitional deacon** is unfortunate, for it suggests that the deacon is changing into a priest rather than remaining a deacon and now also being a priest, it is now an often used term.

who administered the alms and those who cared for the poor and the sick. Elders were usually senior men; deacons junior men. In the Dutch Reformed Churches deacons are also members of the local church council. A special feature of the Dutch Reformed Churches is that the diaconate of each local church is its own legal entity with its own financial means, separated from the church itself, and governed by the deacons.

In the Lutheran Church there was a revival of a religious order of deaconesses in the 1800s as part of a social welfare movement in Germany. It was not engaged liturgically and operated in schools, hospitals, orphanages and general care for the poor and distressed. This deaconess movement spread to the Scandinavian and other European countries and also influenced other denominations, including Calvinist and Methodist.

In Methodism, the Wesleyan Deaconess Order was formed in 1890 and then in 1986 reopened the order to both men and women. Then in 1996, in the United States of America, the Church ended the transitional deacon and a new Order of Deacons established to be equal in status with the Order of Elders. In the United Kingdom deacons are stipendiary and trained together with presbyters at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theology in Birmingham. They are members of a religious order with a rule of life (Methodist Church, 2004). Deacons also serve in a variety of specialized ministries including, but not limited to, Christian education, music, communications and ministries of justice and advocacy.

The Church of England kept the three orders, but restricted what the deacon could do liturgically and largely deprived him of social welfare duties though these duties were noted in the ordination rites. Then in the later part of the twentieth century there were some gradual attempts at restoring a living diaconate.

The Roman Catholic Church's counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563) recommended re-institution of permanent diaconate and declared that those who consider the diaconate "useless" to be heretics and that diaconal functions should not be exercised except by deacons (Session 23, Chapter 17). The proposals were not followed through and not much happened until Vatican II (1962-1965) which reaffirmed the diaconate in accordance with tradition, widened the range of liturgical functions of the deacon, and restored the diaconate as a separate and permanent rank in the hierarchy of the Church. Enacted in 1967 through the document *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, single or married men could be ordained to the permanent diaconate. Some 10 percent of ordained clergy are now deacons.

## The diaconate in the Anglican Church

In the Church of England reformation the number of orders was reduced to three (bishop, priest and deacon), and as it had been before, the diaconate remained mainly a transitional one on the way to the higher order of the priesthood.

However, a significant minority did not transition but remained as deacons. Those who were considered less educated or those lacking the social connections to obtain a 'title' to be ordained as a priest (that is, the candidate needed to have access to a guaranteed income or living from a parish or other entity). "These deacons formed a clerical underclass of chaplains, perpetual curates, schoolmasters and other functionaries until well into the eighteenth century." (Young, 2015).

By the beginning of the 1800s such lifelong deacons had all but disappeared, but in the mid-1880s the educator and historian Thomas Arnold began a movement to restore a meaningful diaconate. He saw this as a way of allowing less educated men to participate in mission and receive ordination. Arnold was concerned at the widening gap between the clergy and the working class in industrial towns as well as between the clergy and laity in general. A Parliamentary bill to allow for non-stipendiary clergy failed largely because most clergy were unwilling to compromise their recently won professional status, as Church of England clergy were, as a group, now considered to be 'gentlemen' (Wilson, No date).

The work of Roland Allen, in China, Kenya and South Africa in the early 1900s on non-stipendiary clergy was also beset by the class snobbery of both clergy and laity who resisted the idea of less well educated clergy from the working class.

It was only later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that there was the beginnings of a restoration of a true diaconal order. This was after centuries of neglect in which the diaconate that was used as a training year of apprenticeship for young priests, a custom which was often dysfunctional because deacons were habitually treated as inferiors and they were, anyway, not allowed to do many of the things that the presbyters claimed as their sole prerogative.

The renewal was partly a response to the increasing marginalization of the churches in the Western post-Christian, secularized society, and a rediscovery of their historical and biblical mission to the poor and needy and thus their call to *diakonia*.

Since the late 1950s there have been various recommendations and resolutions on the restoration of the diaconate in the Anglican Church worldwide.

Calls were made at the **Lambeth Conference** of 1958 for the recovery of the diaconate and worries expressed that the commissioning and licensing of lay ministers would damage the traditional order of deacons. They defined deacons, as distinct from lay ministers, as persons who are required to devote the whole of their lives to this calling and who have a distinctive place within the threefold ministry of the church.

Though the Conference recognised practical difficulties in a restoration, it recommended (in Resolution 88) that:

“each Province of the Anglican Communion shall consider whether the office of deacon shall be restored to its primitive place as a distinctive order in the church, instead of being regarded as a probationary period for the priesthood.”

The Lambeth Conference of 1968 noted the calls since the Lambeth Conference of 1958 for the recovery of the diaconate and said that the the Anglican Communion should move towards a recovery of the diaconate as a significant and operative order within the sacred ministry. It also argued that the recovery of the diaconate would lead to a “re-establishment of the relationship of the secular world to the will of God through the liturgical action of the deacon.”

Then the Anglican Consultative Council held in Trinidad in 1973 advised (in Resolution Ten) that:

“the churches, and particularly the laity, be invited to examine the concept of the diaconate as an Order to which lay people serving the Church, or serving in the

**Lambeth Conference:**  
A conference of all Anglican Bishops in the world held every ten years since 1867 at the Bishop's Palace in London and more recently at Canterbury.

name of the Church, could also be admitted, to express and convey the authority of the Church in their service ...“

In 1974 a Church of England committee report, *Deacons in the Church*, dominated by a 1960s ‘ministry as social service’ ethos, argued for the abolition of the diaconate stating that “there was no functional task that belonged exclusively to deacons” and that “deacons take away from, and indeed clericalize, ministry which properly belonged to lay people”.

The Lambeth conference 1978 (in Resolution 20) endorsed the Trinidad position of 1968.

In Southern Africa the first notable move was the setting up of a Commission on the Diaconate, prompted by the issue of lay ministers, which reported in 1981, This lengthy report concluded that:

“the diaconate of the Church is that of Jesus Christ its Lord. This diaconate is to be exercised by all the members. The ordained order of deacons exemplifies and enables the total diaconal ministry of the church.”

and that:

“A restoration of the diaconate, therefore, would be a recognition that social concern is a proper part of the ministry of the Church, and that certain persons, with the grace of Holy Orders, are especially set aside to stimulate, co-ordinate and encourage such work.”

However, the Provincial Synod of 1982 voted not to even consider the report, and few if any of its recommendations were subsequently addressed, possibly because much of the attention of church leadership in the 1980s was devoted to the then controversial issue of the ordination of women to the presbyterate. But this led to permanent deacons being considered again as a first step in the now growingly successful movement to ordain women and between 1987 and 1994, women began to be ordained as deacons. But the general trend to restore the diaconate in both the Anglican Church worldwide and in other denominations largely passed by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA).

Lambeth 1989 and 1998 re-echoed the call for the restoration of the permanent diaconate, but in such a way as not to threaten the ministry of the laity.

In a 2001 report by a working party of the Church of England’s House of Bishops, *For Such a Time as This: A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England*, provided a comprehensive analysis of the pastoral potential of deacons but it was rejected by the General Synod because of pressure from the theologically and liturgically trained Lay Readers (of which there were over 10 000 in England, a greater number than the stipendiary clergy).

This was followed up in 2007 by another Church of England study, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, which urged that the diaconate be taken more seriously and noted that though its theological framework already existed it had remained unrecognised. The distinctive diaconate should be encouraged and the transitional diaconate should take longer than a year. In the same year the Church of England changed the **ordinal** for the deacon, which reflected an enhanced understanding of the concept of *diakonia* for which there was a paramount need and for which the diaconate has a signal role in contributing towards meeting.

**ordinal:** the text of the ordination service of clergy

Since the 1990s a number of permanent self-supporting deacons were ordained in South Africa but only in some dioceses and this impetus soon dwindled, mired as it was in continuing controversy over the status of self-supporting clergy.

In 2012 the Highveld Deacons' Fellowship was established and the first provincial conference of the ACSA Fellowship of Deacons held in 2015 with the blessing of the Archbishop. Connections were also made with the international organisation Diakonia World Federation and its African and Europe region (DRAE). Further provincial conferences were held in 2016 and 2018.

In 2017 representation was granted to the Fellowship on the Provincial Standing Committee. Dioceses were encouraged to adopt a Resolution of Permanent Force for the Diaconate (as the Highveld diocese had done).

In September 2018 a Provincial Standing Committee resolution called on the Archbishop to set up a commission to investigate the ministry of the distinctive and permanent diaconate and to report to Provincial Synod in 2019. A commission was finally appointed in 2022 and reported in April 2024.

The report was tabled at Provincial Synod in September 2024 where the following resolution was passed:

#### THE DIACONATE

Whereas:

The Provincial Standing Committee's in 2022 called on all dioceses to nurture and promote the ministry of distinctive deacons within ACSA.

This Synod is thankful to the Archbishop for the report of the Archbishop's Commission on the Ministry of the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate which has clarified the distinctiveness of the ministry of deacons, in relation to the other two orders, and in relation to the crisis-ridden context of our times.

This Synod believes God is calling upon us to revitalize the diaconal order.

Synod resolves to endorse the following based on recommendations of the Commission:

1. There should be a concerted effort to remove any prejudice and discrimination against the diaconate at various levels, and this also applies to how transitional deacons are treated.
2. Ordination services of deacons and priests should be separated as far as possible.
3. Consideration should be given to lengthening the period of the transitional diaconate so that transitional deacons can be trained for, and have a genuine experience of, the diaconate, rather than only be treated as apprentice priests.
4. Information and study materials about the nature of diakonia and the distinctive diaconate should be produced.
5. Relevant vocational discernment and training information, processes and resources that take the distinctive diaconate into account should be created.
6. Representatives from theological training institutions and diocesan training programmes should be asked to take forward the report's suggestions on a curriculum and programme for the education and training of deacons.
7. ACSA should endeavour to deal with the inevitable changes that a true restoration of the distinctive diaconate would require: canonical, liturgical, and synodal, and the support needed to develop an effective network for the diaconate (the Fellowship of Deacons).

## References

- Church of England. 1974. *Deacons in the Church: the report of a working party set up by the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry*. London: Church Information Office
- Church of England. 2001. *For a time such as this. A renewed diaconate in the Church of England. A report to the General Synod of the Church of England of a Working party of the House of Bishops*. London: Church Publishing House
- Church of England. 2007. *The mission and ministry of the whole Church: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives*. London: Church of England General Synod
- Church of the Province of Southern Africa. 1981. *Report of the Provincial Commission on the Diaconate 1981*. Cape Town: Church of the Province of Southern Africa
- Collins, J.N. 2002. *Deacons and the Church: making connections between old and new*. Leominster: Gracewing
- Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*.  
[https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07/Page\\_385.html](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07/Page_385.html)
- Dix, G. (Ed.) 1968. *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome*. London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge
- Enright, E.J. 2006. *The History of the Diaconate*. In: Keating, J. *The Deacon Reader*. New York: Paulist Press
- Ignatius. *The Seven Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch*.  
<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3836>
- Jackson, D.M. 2015. *The Diaconate renewed: service, word and worship*. Regina, Saskatchewan
- Methodist Church. 2004. *What is a deacon?*  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-deacon-2004.pdf>
- Polycarp. *Letter to the Philippians*  
[https://bibletranslation.ws/down/Polycarp\\_Epistle\\_To\\_The\\_Philippians.pdf](https://bibletranslation.ws/down/Polycarp_Epistle_To_The_Philippians.pdf)
- Teaching of the Apostles* (Didascalia Apostolorum)  
<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didascalia.html>
- Holy See. 1967. *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem: General norms for restoring the permanent diaconate in the Latin church*. Vatican: The Holy See  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu\\_proprio\\_19670618\\_sacrum-diaconatus.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu_proprio_19670618_sacrum-diaconatus.pdf)
- The Lord's teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations* (Didache)  
<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>
- Wilkinson, J. (Trans.) 1971. *Egeria's travels*. London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
- Wilson, B. No date. *Non-stipendiary ministry: from radical idea to new beginning*.
- Young, F. 2015. *Inferior office*. Cambridge: James Clark and Co.

## Unit 2: Self test questions

1. What does the *Didache* describe as the ministry of bishops and deacons?
2. Several early Church documents describe the deacon as being what kind of officer?
3. Who said of the three orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon, "Apart from these, there is no Church!"?
4. Did the deacons in the early Church combine liturgical and welfare functions?
5. Where did the idea that there could only be seven deacons per bishop come from?
6. The account of the diminishing of the role of the deacon when the Church rapidly expanded its membership when persecution stopped in the Roman Empire, suggests that Church ministerial structures did not respond adequately or quickly enough to the changes. What do you think are the challenges at our present time that might benefit from a renewed diaconate?
7. In your opinion, how visible are deacons currently in the ministry of the Anglican Church?
8. Given what you knew of the diaconate before studying this unit, what is new or has changed in your knowledge and appreciation of the deacon?

## Unit 3

# The meaning of *diakonia*

---

### Introduction – re-reading Acts 6:1-7

It is commonly supposed that the account in Acts 6:1-7 is about the appointment by the Twelve disciples of the first deacons to deal with the distribution of food to some poor Greek speaking widows. If you follow the account in most of the common English translations, you are told that in the young church in Jerusalem, the Greek-speaking widows were not getting their fair share of the daily distribution of food. The apostles did not want to neglect their preaching of the word of God, so they appointed seven men to handle this welfare task. Here is a recent translation text (*New Revised Standard Version*):

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** at tables. Therefore, brothers, 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 **servicing** the word.'

Most translations used in Southern Africa are very similar.

As was pointed out even in ancient times, this interpretation is rather confusing because two of these appointed seven were soon out preaching and converting with such enthusiasm that Stephen gets martyred (Acts 6:8-7:60) and Philip converts the first African, an Ethiopian (Act 8:26-40) and is described as “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8). Clearly not in a food distribution or being a waiter at a table job description! Something odd here, surely?

Yes, there is an oddity. The original Greek word in all three highlighted words in the text above is the same one - *diakonia*. The seven have to do the daily *diakonia*. There is no mention of distributing food. Then it says the seven have to “**wait** at tables”. The Greek text says “*diakonein* of tables”. And lastly, the Twelve by appointing these men, are said to have been freed to engage in “**servicing** the word”. But the Greek says they do the “*diakonia* of the word”.

So the single Greek word *diakonia* has been translated (or rather interpreted) as if referring to the distribution of food, being a waiter, and being a minister preaching the word. So the word *diakonia* cannot be restricted to only soup-kitchen type activities.

Jesus said that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (*diakoneō*)” (Mark 10:45). So clearly the meaning of this *diakonia* has to have a much richer and broader meaning than any single one of these interpretations, one that covers many forms of God-commissioned ministry.

See **1 Corinthians** 12:4-7:

Now there are varieties of **gifts**, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of **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.



So what then does this word *diakonia* mean?

In 1990 a Roman Catholic scholar, John Collins, published a ground-breaking book, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, a linguistic study of the use of the *diakon-* words in the New Testament and the Greek-speaking society of the time. The study thoroughly revised how we are to interpret (and translate) *diakonia*.

But before looking at the meanings of the *diakon-* words, it is instructive to look at Collins's illumination of the meaning of the Acts 6 story of the commissioning of the seven.

The writer of Acts has already told us that the Christian community was a sharing community and all the believers shared and were cared for in their community. It is highly improbable that some widows would not be given any food at a communal meal. But the disciples were growing in number and complaints arose from the Greek-speaking disciples that their widows were being neglected in the "daily *diakonia*". This first mention of *diakonia* probably refers to administrative responsibility, one of whose aspects is concern for widows, without specifying the kind of assistance required.

The Twelve, who were all Aramaic speaking, were constantly engaged in preaching and evangelising in the Temple (doing the *diakonia* of the word). They probably did not have the language or cultural capacity to serve the needs of the Greek speakers. Indeed it is likely that the Greek-speaking widows were excluded from hearing the preaching, both because of a language barrier, and on account of the custom of women in Greek society being restricted to the home.

So the Twelve ask the Greek speakers to select some suitable people ("full of the Spirit and of wisdom") to deal with this. The seven Greek-speaking men were therefore commissioned to take the preaching and any other necessary service into the widows' homes, while the apostles were freed up to carry on the public preaching (in Aramaic) of the Word in the Temple. It is not a story about some people being delegated to run a soup-kitchen but about selecting people to lead the full *diakonia*, the ministry that Christ does, to a particular community (who would otherwise for cultural and language reasons be excluded). The seven receive a *diakonia*, a sacred commission, to minister to the Greek-speaking women and community.

It can thus rightly be pointed out that Acts 6:1-7 is actually about a radical expansion of the apostolic ministry beyond that of the Twelve. Indeed Acts uses the *diakon-* words for the kind of ministry by which the Word of God is to spread out from Jerusalem to the world, as seen in these two statements ascribed to Paul:

"the *diakonian* which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace." (Acts 20:24)

"He related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his *diakonias*." (Acts 21:19)

So Acts 6:1-6 is not about the ordination of seven 'deacons' to take the load of running soup-kitchens off the hands of the Twelve 'presbyters' doing the real work of God, though this story clearly does have a connection to a Church that is diaconal and hence links to the sense in which the diaconate operated in the early Church.

The Church, now as then, needs a leadership to **organise** the people of God for *diakonia*.

But, unfortunately, because of the Acts 6:1-7 misinterpretations, charitable or welfare or social and economic justice actions may be taken as inferior to “preaching the word” and the *diakonia* of these types may not be seen as essential – they can be sub-contracted out to ‘deacons’ or welfare societies instead of being something that all Christians have to do if they are true followers of him who came to fulfil *diakonia*.

## The *diakon-* words in the New Testament

Sometimes we are not fully aware of how ideas and practices change, often quite radically, over time. For Christians, the changes in their thought often come because people keep discovering, or rather rediscovering, what is in the Christian scriptures.

Collins’s 1990 book led to precisely such a re-evaluation of the meaning of *diakonia*. The 2001 Church of England report, *For Such a Time as This: A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England*, went so far as to describe it as “the recent rediscovery of the biblical idea of *diakonia*” (p. 9).

Collins found that in the recent past *diakonia* had been misinterpreted as menial service or service to the needy, which he believed was incorrect and led to a serious theological misunderstanding of the diaconate and indeed of ordained Christian ministry in general. Collins (2002, p. 20) asked:

“If service is the defining characteristic of deacons, in what way does their involvement in works of service distinguish them from other members of the Christian community, all of whom are called by the gospel to attend to the needs of those round them?”

The impact of the new understanding of *diakonia* meant a change from thinking of *diakonia* as service or help or about a deacon doing this. It changed to that of the performance of a person commissioned to fulfil a task or mission, whether that was being an agent or intermediary or to provide a service.

Collins found that the *diakon-* words imply mediation and mandate in the name of a commissioner. They were not about humble service but about persons acting as the assistants, or attendants, or delegates, or messengers of people of higher authority. They were in a person-centred relationship with the one doing the commissioning.

As used within early Church writings the *diakon-* words apply to the Church as a whole (not just deacons), are applied to Jesus, and to the Church’s mission (including the spread of the Word of God, missions from one church congregation to another, and to individuals within the church), and refer to the highly respected attendants of persons of high rank.

So *diakonia* is an authorised, mandated (and therefore respected) activity and so the deacon (*diakonos*) never stands alone as there is always someone to whom the *diakonos* is responsible who has mandated the task the *diakonos* performs. So diaconal work was always the work of a commissioned agent, operative, envoy or delegate. Indeed the work of a *diakonos* is closer to that of a messenger (*apostolos*)

than to humble service. For example, typically Paul used the term *diakonos* to refer to an agent with a sacred commission. Even the ruling Roman government administration in Romans 13:4, is described by Paul as the commissioned agent of God, “God’s *diakonos* for your good.” In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 Paul says that false apostles are the disguised “*diakonoi*” of Satan. The Christian ministers doing *diakonia* that Paul mentions include himself (Romans 15:25; 1 Corinthians 3:5; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23, etc.), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9), Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5) and he says that Jesus “became a *diakonon* to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness” (Romans 15:8).

The Acts stresses the *diakonia* of the apostolic proclamation and Luke uses *diakon-* words for the kind of ministry by which the Word of God is to spread from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.

In Acts 1:25, the replacement apostle, Matthias, has to:

“take the place in this *diakonias* and apostleship from which Judas turned aside”

So *diakonia* is performing a sacred mandate, a religious task or delivering an important message. Thus the sending of the relief to the Christians in Jerusalem in the hands of Barnabas and Paul is a diaconal act. Paul and Barnabas are delegated, given a sacred mandate, and sent to deliver it and report to the presbyters in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29, 12:25):

“The disciples determined that, according to their ability, each would send *diakonians* to the brothers and sisters living in Judea; this they did, sending (*aposteilantes*) it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. ... Then after completing their *diakonians* Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem”

Paul sends out such diaconal attendants (Acts 19:22):

“So he sent two of his *diakoneōs*, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia.”

Acts makes reference to Paul’s ministry of *diakonia* (Acts 20:24, Acts 21:19). This is also the case in his letters. He sees himself as a *diakonos* sent by God (Ephesians 3:7):

“Of this gospel I have become a *diakonos* according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power.”

Several Biblical scholars, whilst agreeing with Collins’s analysis that *diakon-* words express the mandated, commission work done by a subordinate, have argued that the *diakonia* of Jesus is also an expression of loving service.

Collins had argued that *Mark* 10:45 does not actually present Jesus as a humble waiter-servant responsive to others’ needs but as a person sent with and obeying a mandate from a superior, the Father.

Breed (2017) did a detailed analysis of *Mark* 8:1–10:52 asking the question:

“According to *Mark*, does the [diakon-]word group (also) express loving service to other people?” (Breed, 2017, p. 352)

Breed (pp. 354-355) affirms that *Mark* (in 8:31-38) has Jesus describe his followers as his envoys who should represent him and his way in every detail of

their lives, no matter the cost to them. However, he contends that Mark 8:1–10:52 stresses Jesus' mercy and responsiveness towards people in need and weakness. For example Mark 8:2 where Jesus says: "I have compassion on the crowd" and Barthimaeus repeatedly calling on Jesus to have mercy on him (10:47-48). As part of Jesus' teaching that the disciples must be last of all and *diakonoi* of all (9:35) he holds a child and says that what his followers do to a child (who is someone who is unimportant and with no claim to mercy) is what they do to him and the One who sent him (9:35-37). Breed says (2017, p. 357)

"It is clear that Mark connects the *διάκον*- word group closely to compassion, mercy and receptiveness, emphasizing that it should be done to 'all' without exclusion."

To sum up Breed's revision of Collins's findings:

"Jesus's way to glory and kingship went through serving his father and serving people. Serving people was an intrinsic part of serving his Father. As has been made clear, an intrinsic part of the disciples' following of Jesus was being receptive to all (including children and beggars, e.g., Barthimaeus) and having compassion for those in need."

## The rediscovery of the meaning of *diakonia* and the diaconate

The rediscovery of the meaning of the *diakon*- words has immense implications for what we understand to be the place of *diakonia* in the Church and more specifically, for re-examining the function of the order of deacons in the Church.

First, the evidence is clear that the people doing *diakonia* in the early Church were not menial skivvies – waiters at table – but commissioned agents and officers of the Church doing a wide variety of ministries in furtherance of the gospel. The people who came to be called deacons – *diakonoi* – and who in time became one of the three orders of the ordained ministry, must have in their functions, reflected the status and actions denoted by the *diakon*- words, functions intended to ensure that the gospel imperatives were performed by the whole Church.

Service and care for all was the duty of the whole Church, of all Christians. But from the evidence in early Church writings it seems that the mandatory task of deacons, as authorised agents of the Bishop, was to get ministry and service organised – whether that was by evangelising, exhortation, preaching, communicating or simply good management of resources. Deacons were there to get all to do loving service. And their authority to do this was from the Lord.

Second, an attempt to renew the diaconate based upon a misunderstanding of the meaning of *diakonia* by limiting it to church providing social workers for the needy is a *cul-de-sac* that removes the duty of **all** Christians to do such service and increases a polarization between evangelism and social concern (whether of caring, advocacy, or political action). Further, it clericalizes what is the vocation of all Christian disciples to do *diakonia*.

Yet it was precisely such a purely social service perspective that informed many of the attempts to revive a real diaconate from the Lutheran deaconesses movement of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to more modern attempts in other denominations. Even the Anglican's 1981 Commission on the diaconate argued strongly that a

diaconate could be used “to carry out works of charity and administration, and to do works of social welfare in the name of the Church” including care of the sick, widows and orphans, and the poor and oppressed.

Ironically enough, one of the great success stories of the Christianisation of large parts of the world is that what were once unique features of Christian teaching and ministry, are now considered ordinary facts of secularised social life – all persons are of equal value and dignity, women are of equal value to men (that one with many lapses across the ages), children must be valued and respected, the sick, the poor and needy must be cared for, and social justice is important. Moreover, with the rise of national and increasingly bureaucratic states and secularisation in the European and North American societies, many of the previously key services of the churches were systematically taken away from them – hospitals, schools, social welfare, poor relief. In South Africa, during *apartheid*, there were also political reasons for the state divesting the churches of any control over schools and hospitals.

The need for ministry to the poor, the needy, the exploited and oppressed has again come to the fore as neo-liberal economies create greater and greater disparities of wealth and governments reduce welfare support (once provided via progressive taxation) that has led to the strain on and near collapse of welfare and hospital systems. In addition, recent wars (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine) have created international destabilisation and floods of refugees. In South Africa there is a common perception that the Church as a prophetic voice in society went into hibernation after 1994. Whilst concurring with the renewed understanding of a deacon as an agent of *diakonia*, as a commissioned person and not merely a soup-kitchen worker (as per the misinterpretation of Acts 6:1-7), there is a need for this aspect of diaconal organisation to be reactivated.

Third, deacons exemplify the task of ministering to the world and keeping the worshipping community alive to that task of *diakonia*. As Hartley (2014) puts it:

“An embrace of a revised definition for diakon-terms, while of course not refuting true Christian humility, may help the diaconate (and the Church as a whole) embrace the radical missionary values of God’s reign whereby the whole Church brings the whole Christ to the whole world.”

## References

Breed, G. 2017. *Diakonia: In conversation with John N. Collins, Ecclesiology* 13 (2017) pp. 349-368

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gert-Breed/publication/320073048\\_Diakonia\\_In\\_Conversation\\_with\\_John\\_N\\_Collins/links/59ce1c35a6fdcce3b34b841c/Diakonia-In-Conversation-with-John-N-Collins.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gert-Breed/publication/320073048_Diakonia_In_Conversation_with_John_N_Collins/links/59ce1c35a6fdcce3b34b841c/Diakonia-In-Conversation-with-John-N-Collins.pdf)

Church of the Province of Southern Africa. 1981. *Report of the Provincial Commission on the Diaconate 1981*. Cape Town: Church of the Province of Southern Africa

Church of England Working party of the House of Bishops. 2001. *For such a time as this: A renewed Diaconate in the Church of England*. London: Church House England Publishing

Collins, J.N. 1990. *Diakonia: re-interpreting the ancient sources*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Collins, J.N. 2002. *Deacons and the Church : making connections between old and new*. Leomister: Gracewing

Hartley, B.L. 2014. *What's in a word? Diakonia and deacons in the Bible and today*. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent>

### Unit 3: Self test questions

1. The scholar John Collins provided evidence that the *diakon*-words refer to ministries of all types commissioned by God or Church, contrary to the idea that diaconal service is only menial, humble service inferior to the spiritual ministry of the Word. What is your experience of how *diakonia* and deacons have been perceived in the Anglican Church?
2. Provide your definition of *diakonia*.

## Unit 4

# A theology of the diaconate

---

### What do we mean by ‘A theology of ...’ ?

“Theology” is usually defined as the study of the nature of God and religious truth. “A theology” is a systematic account of a set of ideas concerning God and religious questions. So when we talk about “a theology of” something – work, bishops, marriage, the Church, whatever, we are looking at a set of ideas that seek to explain the relationship between what is understood as being the nature of God and that something. So in looking at a theology of the diaconate we are exploring the relationship between what we know of God and the order of deacons.

### Present understandings of the diaconate

The recent revitalised understanding of *diakonia* means that many churches have moved away from the idea that the diaconate is an inferior order dealing with social welfare activities to free up the presbyters to deal with a more ‘spiritual’ ministry. The diaconate is increasingly seen as a full, equal, and distinctive order of people attending to the business of *diakonia* under the oversight of the bishop and presbyters in a bridge-building ministry that brings together liturgy, proclamation and service to the world, particularly in times of crisis in contemporary society.

“The Early Church combined liturgical ministry with social responsibilities without neglecting either of the ministries. This elicits the question, what can the interactionist ministry of the deacon contribute to effective ministry in times of crisis? On the assumption that the deacon is involved in both the sacramental ministry of the liturgy of the Last Supper and provision of social services, what kind of diaconal ministry is suited for urbanisation and the subsequent crisis such as the displacement of people and redefining of spaces?”

(Klaasen, Louw and Muller, 2021, p. 163)

In 2019, the Scottish Episcopal Church changed its ordinal to reflect both the regained understanding of the deacon as one sent, commissioned, and mandated as an operative of the Church focused on the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and also the long accepted function of the diaconate to serve and advocate for the needy:

“In the name of the Church, deacons are sent to declare the kingdom of God and to care for those in need, serving God and the world after the pattern of Christ. They have a commitment to outreach and witness, advocacy and prophecy, flowing from their historic ministry for the poor, needy and sick, and seeking out the careless and indifferent. They are called to build bridges between the Church and the world, and to be an expression of the unconditional love of God.”

(Scottish Episcopal Church, 2021, p. 2)

## An order of transformation

Clark (2023a, pp. 4-5, 2023b, pp. 1-3 ) makes an interesting distinction between

- the order of the presbyterate as being an order of **continuity** having care of and celebrating the theology and tradition of the institutional Church and working to help the gathered people of God live and work as part of the Kingdom of God through worship, learning and pastoral care and
- the order of the diaconate as an order of **transformation** being part of a movement to bring the gifts of life, liberation, love and learning and servant leadership to transform society and the world.

The point Clark (2023a, p. 5) makes is that the balance between continuity and transformation is needed because continuity alone leads to stagnation and introversion, a focus only on transformation tends to fragment and weaken.

## The unmaking of the transitional menial deacon

The new understanding of *diakonia* stimulated by Collins's work on the New Testament *diakon*- words has thoroughly demolished the view that the deacon is the ecclesiastical equivalent of a menial or slave and at the same time ended the idea that the seven in Acts 6:1-7 were deployed to organise a soup kitchen.

This new understanding is complicated by the existence of the transitional deacon who is being trained as a presbyter by the priest in charge of the congregation where posted. The idea that usually the deacon is only a transitional deacon – a priest in training – and in this phase expected to exhibit the demeanour of an abjectly humble priestly apprentice, is totally inappropriate.

Generally, though various Anglican communions have considered the idea of the direct ordination of presbyters without an intervening transitional diaconate, the likelihood is that there will remain an insistence that the transitional diaconate continues, even if the practice of the presbyter remaining a lifelong deacon and a bishop remaining a lifelong deacon and lifelong presbyter is seldom explained and is theologically unexamined.

## Avoiding the social-work *cul de sac*

Because of the record of the past millennium and a half of misconstruing a deacon's function there is still a tendency to have a restricted view of permanent deacons as only social workers or food bank organisers or justice advocates. The new understanding of *diakonia* sees this as a restrictive dead end.

The whole of Christ's ministry is thoroughly diaconal. The deacon's work is the business of *diakonia* in its fullness. As Ignatius said, deacons are "entrusted with the *diakonia* of Jesus Christ." *Diakonia* is not restricted to particular good works or the organising of good works. It may just as well be evangelism or confirmation instruction or pastoral visiting or whatever.

This is not to say that the sending out of deacons to do precisely social, economic, welfare and justice organising is not to be encouraged, and in the present Southern African and world context may well be a growing priority. But it must not be seen as the sole characteristic of the distinctive diaconate.

## Where is the deacon located?

What a deacon is can be heavily influenced by where deacons work and therefore, who has immediate authority over them. There are two contemporary tendencies here.

The first one is to at least nominally reaffirm the ancient link between bishop and deacons and to see diaconal work as out-of-the-ordinary ministries directly under the oversight of the bishop.

*“Deacons function in ministries of liturgy, word, and charity. They serve directly under the bishop of a diocese and help to carry out the bishop’s ministry. Bishops normally assign deacons to special responsibility for mercy and justice. Dioceses usually require that prospective deacons already serve in specialized ministries among the poor, sick, and oppressed. Once ordained, deacons exercise leadership among the faithful, encouraging, training, and organizing them for various ministries. In many ways the vision of the historic diaconate has become a reality in our time.”*

(Anglican Church of Canada, 2023)

The Scottish Episcopal Church has clearly spelled this out in several reports:

*“It must be clearly stated that Deacons, while being communicant members of congregations, having a liturgical ministry and dovetailing with the work of presbyters, are primarily a task force at the disposal of the Bishop, for work, most of which is out in the world. They have their proper place in a diocesan rather than a congregational strategy of mission. They are a pioneer corps rather than auxiliaries to share the load of existing intra-congregational ministries.”*

(1987, p. 12)

*“Deacons work closely with the bishop, and may also serve within a congregation.”*

(2018, p. 8)

*“In liturgical attendance on the bishop, and in discharging such pastoral and administrative functions as may be delegated by the bishop, the deacon represents and extends the presence and ministry of the bishop him- or herself.”*

(2020, p. 53)

The question is whether the idea that the deacon is the bishop’s assistant and agent in a meaningful sense is an **anachronism**. The problem with this approach is that in the current context, with about one bishop per 100 or 200 or more presbyters, genuine direct oversight of deacons by the bishop may seem impractical and would only work for relatively few deacons in specialist non-parish-based ministries reporting directly to the bishop or in teams deployed by the bishop.

The development of the three orders of bishop, presbyters and deacons took place under circumstances where a typical congregation of less than a couple of hundred people would have a bishop, several presbyters and several deacons. That context, in which what Ignatius said about the relationship between bishop, presbyters and deacons made direct sense, has not now existed for over fifteen hundred years.

The current church context, in which a single bishop oversees at a great remove hundreds of lone presbyters in charge of congregations with no deacons and in which the pressures of secularisation and late neo-liberal industrial capitalism steadily reduce the number of, and the churches’ capacity to finance stipendiary ministers, poses both a challenge and a temptation to find solutions that will be only palliatives to a now untenable situation.

**anachronism:** when something from one time period is inappropriately placed in a different time period

The second tendency accepts that the local presbyter is the *de facto* the equivalent of the bishop of a congregation as in ancient times and locates the work of the deacon very much in the parish in its interface with the world.

Realistically, where the deacon is placed is a heavily influenced by the context. Taking the position that a theological understanding of the diaconate must always be contextual is always a double edged sword. The pressure of the context may twist or malform the theology rather than the theology be precisely configured to address the context with the full demands of the gospel.

## An example of a contextual problem – ‘What about the lay-ministers?’

In our current context, one of the reasons why most dioceses in Southern Africa have lay-ministers, was the absence of permanent deacons. This placed heavy demands on presbyters to do the necessary diaconal work. Then, added to that, there was a growing shortage of presbyters.

As a Scottish Episcopal Church document puts it (2020, pp. 26-27, 29, 35):

“The last century has seen an exponential increase in the range of activities in the life of the Church in which lay people have exercised leadership, and also in the numbers of both men and women who have assumed such responsibilities. Despite this, and perhaps precisely because this has consisted largely in incremental delegation to lay people of functions which there are no longer sufficient numbers of clergy to perform, the identity and vocation of the lay Christian, both in terms of Anglican ecclesiology and ecumenically, remain vague and ambiguous. The process which has brought increasing numbers of lay Christians into ministerial roles in the life of the Church has not been guided so much by theological insight into the significance of Baptism, as by the practical demands created by declining clergy numbers.”

“Declining clergy numbers have made the Church increasingly dependent on lay people, certainly in ways which never strictly required the presence or action of a priest or deacon in the first place, but also in liturgical and pastoral activities which have traditionally been the function of the clergy – which is not the same as those restricted to the clergy by Church discipline or reserved to the ordained as a matter of theological principle. In absorbing the time and energy of increasing numbers of lay people, and drawing them away from life and witness in the world to maintenance of its own structures and routines, the Church has in many ways turned in on itself, and thereby arguably accelerated its own decline. Furthermore, in effectively giving priority to traditionally clerical roles, the Church, intentionally or otherwise, implies that these are more important than those activities in and through which lay Christians have, over the centuries, been the “leaven” which has brought Gospel values to bear upon life in the world.”

“... When the time and energy of committed Christian laity is increasingly absorbed into the institutional life of the Church, and in liturgical leadership, to compensate for the lack of clergy, faithful lay people are being clericalised and the work of the laity neglected. ... The reaction of the Church to decline, both in clergy numbers and in lay adherence, has generated a collective introversion which, unless reversed, will simply aggravate and perpetuate that decline.”

This is a powerful argument and hard to refute. It suggests that any genuine attempt to restore the diaconate requires a reform too of the presbyterate and of

the current inability to grasp the nettle of the proper and effective place of self-supporting ordained clergy. A subsidiary argument is that the current emphasis upon training up and licencing lay-ministers should rather be directed towards a restored diaconate much of whose work would be the empowering of the laity for their baptismally founded ministry in the world.

## Some foundational principles for a theology of the diaconate

Any renewal of the diaconate should be grounded on:

- a theological foundation that must, inter alia, be linked to a theology of the baptismal vocation of all, and
- an understanding of the diaconate's relationship to the orders of presbyter and bishop and to the so-called lay-ministries,
- must take into account the revised understanding of the meaning of *diakonia* as the activities of mandated, commissioned persons who are operatives of the Trinity which calls all people to be servants of the kingdom community:

Clark (2023b, pp. 6, 7-12, 2023c, pp. 1-9), in distinguishing between the leadership work of bishops, presbyters and deacons, sees the bishops as an order of unity, the presbyters as an order of continuity and the deacons as an order of transformation.

As an institution, the church is primarily a community of place, of neighbourhood, where people gather to worship, learn and socialise and where, in worship and sacraments the church recalls and celebrates its Christian legacy and teaches its members on the practical implications of the gospel and exercise of the gifts of the kingdom community. The danger of the church as institution is stagnation and introversion, made worse by the ongoing secularisation of society which weakens the institution's ability to influence society. However, the Church is also a movement of transformation, and it is the people of God active in the world who are the diaconal church's essential resource for mission and engagement in, and transformation of a variety of non-neighbourhood communities of practice.

### *The basic ministry of the baptised*

The ministry incumbent on all the baptised is well expressed in this formulation, made by the Anglican Church of Canada (2016, p. 15) somewhat adapting the Anglican Communion's 'Five Marks of Mission':

"The basic ministry of every baptized person is to be found in the baptismal covenant:

- (1) to continue faithfully in the worship and faith of the Christian community;
- (2) to resist evil and be ready to repent and return to that community;
- (3) to proclaim the gospel in word and deed;
- (4) to seek and serve Christ in all persons; and
- (5) to do justice, seek peace, and respect every human being.
- (6) to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and to respect, sustain and renew the life of the earth."

All Christians are, without exception, called to this *diakonia*, this ministry. Humble ministry and service to all in need is the duty of all Christians and not a specific mark of the diaconal ministry performed by deacons.

## *An ordained ministry*

“The particular ministries of presbyters and deacons can only be understood within this context, as focusing, expressing and enabling the ministry of the whole people of God.”

So states a 2004 Methodist Church document on *What is a deacon?* (p. 3). A theology of the diaconate must therefore be clear on what marks the special nature of the ordained ministry to be performed by deacons that assists the people of God to do this ministry, this *diakonia*. An attempt to express this position is found in these statements by the Anglican Church of Canada (2016, pp. 18, 19):

“Some are called, equipped, and ordained to embody *diakonia* as deacons, to exemplify to the faithful what it is “to serve all people, especially the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.” As such, they serve as icons of Christ, inviting us into proclamation and service of the gospel for the sake of the world.”

“Ordination as a deacon is an affirmation by the church that an individual is being called to this distinctive ministry of service and agency, gifted and equipped to inspire and mobilize others into ministries of service, healing, and justice. They become sacramental signs of the presence of Christ in places of need and risk and vulnerability, in the faces of strangers and friends alike.”

The diaconate is an ordained ministry of people solemnly authorized and commissioned for diaconal leadership within the life of the church and in service to the world. As such, deacons are expected to be highly committed and to have the requisite experience of both the Church and the community. They are also expected to be theologically trained individuals, so that:

“the Church can be confident in allowing the Deacon to serve and to represent the Church by leading worship, celebrating marriage, conducting funerals; being involved in Christian education and participating in the courts and functions of the Church at large.”

(Church of Scotland, 2018, pp. 1-2)

## *Operatives of the Kingdom*

The weight of the Biblical and historical evidence is that deacons are to be seen as mandated, commissioned persons who are operatives of the Trinity which calls all people to be servants of the Kingdom community. They go out to bring people in across the threshold into that community. They go out to encourage the faithful, to stand by them, as they do the work of the Kingdom. They go out to reach the unreached and the lost.

In military analogy they lead the ground troops. In espionage analogy they are the spies and reconnaissance agents of God in the world, sabotaging the forces of evil, building up networks of resistance in all spheres of society, setting up liberated zones of the Kingdom. And they report back home on what they have found and done to be re-supplied and re-directed for further missions.

## A contextual ministry

The original deacons were not assistant presbyters. They had leadership of a God-given commission that was both:

- Church facing (in their liturgical role, in engaging the people of the Church in communal transformation, and in equipping and enabling), and
- world facing (as a catalyst, within the changing world contexts, working for the spread of the Kingdom, resisting injustice and lies, serving as intermediaries, bridge builders, network hubs, and partnering with what is good and positive in cultural and civic movements, and disrupting the complacent).

What that means in Southern Africa in the remainder of the 21st century is hard to prescribe, given the rapidity of the changes in context. Indeed it is perhaps of the essence of a restored diaconate that its roles and functions must be constantly changing and responding to the context. This has consequences for the Church, for institutions that do not change, die. It was not for nothing that the Church of England named its 2001 report on the diaconate *For such a time such as this*.

To take some changing context issues that we are all grappling with at this time. On a massive scale there is climate change and ecological catastrophe (and to what extent is every congregation of the Church active here (and not diminishing the good work of ‘Green Anglicans’)), the hideous spectre of unemployment and lack of income generating work, a society festering with corruption, the social media, so full of promise but rapidly corrupted to be the purveyors of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (which congregants need to be informed about and armoured against), the collapse of effective education for a majority of children, and the list goes on. It is to this world that the world-facing work of the diaconate must respond.

Given the massive challenges of the contemporary Southern African and worldwide context it is important that deacons be not seen as solitary outriders and there have even been suggestions that a permanent diaconate should be seen as a kind of religious order, with both the duties but also the support and collegiality that such provides. The Methodist Church uses this religious order language (Methodist Church 2004, p. 11):

“Methodist deacons are not only members of an order of ministry but also members of a religious order known as the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO).”

This suggests that a theology of the diaconate will need to be flexible and from which it will be difficult to lay down a set job-description for the deacon, which means in turn, that definitions of the diaconate and the ordinals used at their ordinations need to be broad, and inclusive of many possibilities.

## Towards a new ordinal

A revised understanding of a theology of the diaconate will require the development of revised definitions of what a deacon is and does and therefore, too, a revision of the ordinal.

There are number of recent Anglican Communion definitions of the diaconate that do seek to describe a contextually responsive diaconate such as these two:

### **Association for Episcopal Deacons (2022)**

“A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ’s servant ministry for all people. As agents of God’s compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world’s needs, hopes, and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to these needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ’s presence as they embody Christ’s servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.”

### **Scottish Episcopal Church (2018)**

“Deacons are heralds of the Gospel, called to proclaim and make visible God’s love in word and deed. They seek out those in need to bring them the good news of the Kingdom, and bring the concerns of the world to the attention of the Church and its congregations, reminding them of their call to serve others in love in their mission to the world.”

The ordinal for deacons should accordingly reflect the revised understandings and definitions of *diakonia* and of the deacon.

The *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662 describes the deacon as a liturgical assistant to the priest and administrator and distributor of Holy Communion, a reader of the Scriptures and Homilies, a catechiser and occasional baptiser and preacher. In relation to ministry outside the walls of the church, “where provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the Parishioners, or others.”

Whilst the liturgical base is secure, the external work, though important, is constrained by the “serving tables” misinterpretation of Acts 6:1-7.

A draft prepared in 2019 by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa Liturgical Committee has a statement of intent where the Bishop says:

“Brothers and Sisters, God calls us to follow Christ, and forms us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to declare the wonderful deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ who has called us out of darkness into God’s marvellous light.

The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and one of the dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the whole Church is summoned to witness to God’s love and to work for the coming of God’s kingdom.

To serve this royal priesthood and to support its work of witness, God has given particular ministries.

Deacons are ordained so that the people of God may be better equipped to make Christ known. Theirs is a life of visible self-giving. Christ is the pattern of their calling and their commission; as he washed the feet of his disciples, so they must wash the feet of others.

They are to lead God’s people in the offering of praise and the proclamation of the gospel. They share with Priests and the Bishop in the Church, delighting in its beauty and rejoicing in its well-being.

With the Bishop and their fellow presbyters, they are to sustain the community of the faithful by the ministry of word and distribution of the sacrament, that we all may grow into the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice acceptable to God.

...

We are mindful that they will exercise this ordained leadership within and not apart from the communities which they are called to serve. For all ministry is dependent on our common discipleship of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The text reiterates the importance of the ministry of the baptized and the special role of the diaconate in the equipping of the people of God for diaconal ministry.

The Bishop's charge is as follows:

"My sisters and brothers, you stand here today as God's dear children and members of the Body of Christ.

By baptism you and every member of God's Church have been called to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord of life, to proclaim him to the world and to follow in his footsteps.

God now calls you to a special ministry of humble service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, and to seek out particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.

By your word and example, you are to make Christ known to those among whom you live and work and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world.

You are called to make disciples, bringing them to baptism and confirmation; to lead the people in prayer; faithfully to read the Scriptures and proclaim the word of God.

You are to assist the Bishop and priests in public worship and in the administration of the sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time.

At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving those in need, they are serving Christ himself.

As a deacon in the church you are to study the holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them.

This ministry will be your great joy and privilege. It is also a weighty responsibility which none would dare to undertake except for the call from God. To you whom God calls, God will always give the strength you will need."

These possible revisions can be considered a great improvement and can be compared with those in the Church of England's 2021 *Common Worship: Ordination Services*.

## References

- Anglican Church of Canada. 2016. *The Iona Report. The diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Anglican Church of Canada  
<https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/iona-report.pdf>
- Anglican Church of Canada. 2023. *The Diaconate*. [Website]  
<https://www.anglican.ca/faith/ministry/om/diaconate/>
- Anglican Church of Southern Africa. 2019. *Suite of Ordination Services. June 2018 – Revised May 2019*. Cape Town: Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Liturgical Committee. [Unpublished document]
- Association for Episcopal Deacons. 2022. *For deacons*. [Website]  
<https://edsd.org/clergy/deacons/>
- Church of England. 2001. *For a time such as this. A renewed diaconate in the Church of England. A report to the General Synod of the Church of England of a working party of the House of Bishops*. London: Church Publishing House
- Church of England. 2021 *Common Worship: Ordination services (Study Edition)*. London: Church House Publishing
- Church of Scotland. 2018. *Deacons of word and service. The vision statement of the Church of Scotland Diaconate*. Edinburgh: Church of Scotland  
[https://churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/50240/Deacons\\_of\\_Word\\_and\\_Service.pdf](https://churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/50240/Deacons_of_Word_and_Service.pdf)
- Clark, D. 2023a. *A new paradigm – the diaconal church*. Unpublished paper
- Clark, D. 2023b. *The diaconal church – servant leadership*. Unpublished paper
- Klaasen, J, Louw, J. and Muller, R. 2021. *The deacon as model of ministry within urban locations, African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 162-183 <https://atjcs.netact.org.za/index.php/netact/article/view/39/91>
- Methodist Church. 2004. *What is a deacon?* London: Methodist Church Working Party  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-deacon-2004.pdf>
- Scottish Episcopal Church, 1987. *Truly called by God to serve as a deacon: The Report of the Bishops' Working Group on Distinctive Diaconate*. Edinburgh: General Synod Office, Scottish Episcopal Church
- Scottish Episcopal Church. 2018. *Ministries in the Scottish Episcopal Church*. Revised 2018. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church  
<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Ministries-in-the-Scottish-Episcopal-Church-revised-2018.pdf>
- Scottish Episcopal Church. 2020. *Grosvenor Essay No. 13. Theology of authority in the ministry of the Church*. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church,  
<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Grosvenor-Essay-No.-13.pdf>
- Scottish Episcopal Church. 2021. *The Vocational diaconate in the Scottish Episcopal Church*. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church  
<https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/uploads/2/6/7/3/26739998/diaconate-scottish.pdf>

## Unit 4: Self test questions

1. Recent developments in how churches view the diaconate have been influenced by a re-appraisal of the meaning of *diakonia*. How has the view changed?
2. The Methodist scholar David Clark argued that deacons can be distinguished from presbyters in the roles they perform. What are these differences?
3. Who was originally the supervisor of the deacons and how has this changed?
4. There have been criticisms of the place of the lay minister in relation to the deacon and the impact this has had on the life of the Church? What is this critique?
5. The Marks of Mission of the Anglican Church are now seen as the responsibility of whom?



## Unit 5

# What should deacons be and do?

---

### Introduction

“The diaconate is at the same time the most problematic and the most promising of all the ministries of the Church. Some churches have been agonising about what a deacon is, while others have begun to discover what a deacon can be.”

(Avis, 2009)

If there is to be a truly effective permanent and distinctive diaconate, the immediate question is, ‘What are deacons and what should deacons do?’ Such a question is needed because, certainly, in the light of the renewed understanding of the Biblical concept of *diakonia*, the current (1989) Southern African ordinal provides insufficient guidance in this respect. Neither do the **canons** of the Southern African church although other Anglican communions have undertaken recent revisions of the ordinal for deacons.

However, an ordinal must necessarily deal in broad strokes with the work of the deacon. What in more detail, as a practical guide for bishops, presbyters, and the deacons themselves, would be the potential work of distinctive deacons?

Many churches have been cautious about laying down a list of specific functions for the deacon. Given that *diakonia* must be multiple in its potential activities, that list of functions might be exceeding long. So they rather insist that it is up to the bishops to commission and delegate deacons to particular work.

### Attempts at simplification

There have been various attempts at simplifying the matter by providing broad categories of roles and activities. For example according to Clark (2023b, p. 5 and also see Clark 2023c, pp. 102-106):

“a renewed diaconate has two core roles which are *church-facing*: **enabler** and **educator**, and three core roles which are *world-facing*: **catalyst**, **intermediary** and **partner**. The other roles identifying servant leadership – visionary and strategist – remain important and come into the picture as and when needed.”

The Diocese of Exeter (2023) states this:

“Distinctive Deacons have a strong call to an outward-looking and community-minded ministry. They prefer to be out and about, making contacts, building relationships, identifying and meeting needs, creating stepping-stones between God and the world. They often have a particular concern for issues of poverty and justice and many minister of those on the margins of church and society.”

**canon:** In a church context, “canon” refers to a rule, law, regulation or guidelines that govern the church as an institution. The set of canons help maintain order, consistency, and unity among the church members and congregations and ensure that the church operates in line with its core values, beliefs, and teachings. They help define the roles and responsibilities of clergy, outline the worship practices, and establish standards for conduct and discipline.

The canons of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa can be found at:

<https://anglicanchurchsa.org/canons/>

# Attempts at describing diaconal competencies

Another approach mimics the lists used in the training world of competencies required for various skills and professions.

So competency grids have been compiled to assist in the selection, growth, lifelong learning and support of ordained clergy in their work such as those developed in the Anglican Communion and mainly used in North America and England. These usually take a staged approach, identifying particular expectations for selection time, ordination, and for lifelong learning after ordination.

Though useful as a checklist, the sheer number and detail of the competencies can prove overwhelming.

## Looking at what deacons did in the past

It is possible to create a summary of what can be gleaned from the New Testament and Patristic sources on what deacons were and did. Whilst the early days of the diaconate as an official position within the early Church are obscure, it is clear that they were initially the effective minister-operatives of the *diakonia* of the Church. The early deacons had multiple tasks, roles, missions. They led the outgoing transformative ministry of the Church and had a key role within the liturgical assembly of the Church which were presided over by the bishop in the council of the elders.

Companions and co-workers of apostolic missionaries like Paul
Worked directly with the bishop Executive officers of the bishop Gatekeepers of access to the bishop Checkers of the credentials of visitors from other congregations Information gatherers for the bishop Administrators of the Church's finances and assets Security officers and body-guards of the bishop in times of persecution
Ensured the regular celebration of the Eucharist Kept order in the assembly and ensured no favouritism in position or seating Presenters of the oblations (offerings) Organisers of the sharing of the oblations Distributed the bread and wine both within the assembly and to those unable to attend (the sick, the imprisoned, women forbidden to leave the home) Involved in baptismal instruction, the actual baptism and penitence Ministers of the word though only some preached
Equippers of the laity for diaconal action
Performers of a service ministry, for example to the sick and needy Having personal interactions with all congregants
Envoys, ambassadors or diplomats to other congregations
Ministers of outreach standing on the threshold of the church (a liminal ministry) bridging church and community
Modellers of the servanthood of Christ

A variety of these competency grids can be found on the website of the Fellowship of Deacons at:

<https://www.acsafod.org.za/competency.html>

What is clear is the link between their diaconal actions and their presence in the liturgy, their presence in the assembly and their going out to do *diakonia* in the wider world. Their servanthood is expressed in being servants of the bishop, respectful of the presbyters, and in their humility in interactions with others.

What this suggests is that, though the status of the deacon has changed over the centuries and there may be a need to construct a new 'job description' for a renewed diaconate, it could and should resonate with the old.

But in responding to the historical evidence, the present day question may not be so much 'What was a deacon?' as 'What is the *diakonia* of the Church and how may deacon leaders within the Church galvanize the diaconal work?' That is both a historical and theological question and also a contextual one on how *diakonia* is expressed today.

## Functions of the deacon

With some caution, here is a list of possible functions/roles – the work that deacons can do – derived from numerous church documents:

Function	Categories
<b>Proclaimer</b>	Apostolic missionary, Herald of Christ's kingdom
<b>Ikon</b>	Ikon of Christ, Model of servanthood, Minister of service
<b>Worship leader</b>	Liturgical worship leader
<b>Administrator</b>	
<b>Interpreter of needs and situations</b>	Interpreter, Needs reporter
<b>Educator and equipper</b>	Teacher and catechist, Information giver, Equipper
<b>Outreacher</b>	An outwards-reaching minister
<b>Liminal/Threshold/Bridge</b>	
<b>Collaborator/Partner/Team worker</b>	
<b>Networker</b>	Connector, Messenger, Ambassador
<b>Prophet and Social justice activist</b>	Prophet and Social justice activist, Disrupter

**ikon:** an ikon is a religious picture used in Eastern Orthodox churches and by extension of meaning, a person or thing widely admired especially for having great influence or significance.

On the following pages these functions are illustrated with quotations from various church documents on the diaconate:

<b>Proclaimer</b>	
<b>Apostolic missionary</b>	<p>They proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.</p> <p>“The distinctive diaconate is particularly appropriate where an individual feels strongly drawn to the missionary, go-between ministry, seeking out the lost sheep and bringing both the message of the gospel and the practical care that goes with it to the unchurched and, therefore, may be reluctant to proceed to priesthood with its additional responsibilities and constraints. The distinctive diaconate appears to be suited to those with an evangelistic gift, provided this is clearly related to the three basic dimensions of ministry, tied into the liturgy and directed towards the full sacramental initiation of new converts.”</p> <p>(Church of England, 2017, p. 2)</p>
<b>Herald of Christ’s kingdom</b>	<p>“Deacons equip the saints to be heralds of the gospel”</p> <p>(Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“Deacons are heralds of the Gospel, called to proclaim and make visible God’s love in word and deed. They seek out those in need to bring them the good news of the Kingdom, and bring the concerns of the world to the attention of the Church and its congregations, reminding them of their call to serve others in love in their mission to the world.”</p> <p>(Scottish Episcopal Church, 2018, p. 8)</p>

<b>Ikon</b>	
<b>Ikon of Christ</b>	<p>“Deacons are Jesus to the world and the church (St Ignatius)”</p> <p>(Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“The deacon who usually is from the community, or who has strong ties with the community, symbolised the identity of the community, and by exercising the calling as “servant” or “messenger” holds within the liturgy the identity of the community as the image of God.”</p> <p>(Klaasen, Louw and Muller, 2021, p. 178)</p>
<b>Model of servanthood</b>	<p>“The basin and the towel are common images of the diaconal ministry reflecting the servant ministry of Jesus recorded by John in his gospel.”</p> <p>(Church of Scotland, 2018, p. 6)</p> <p>“Deacons are a visible reminder to the church of its own servant ministry. ... Deacons are called to model servant leadership ... Deacons are ambassadors for Christ’s servant ministry.”</p> <p>(Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p>

<b>Minister of service</b>	<p>“Where the sacramental role is pivotal for Ministers, the role of service is equally so for Deacons. Therefore, both ministries are equal and complementary as responses to the Word of God.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Scottish Episcopal Church, 2018, p. 3)</p> <p>“They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Scottish Episcopal Church ordinal)</p>
----------------------------	---

The difficulty with the last two categories (of servanthood and service) is that it can be argued that all the baptised are called to servanthood (being directed by the master, the Lord) and should be directed into practical service of the needs of others. The counter argument is that if presbyters at the altar can represent the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 4:5-9), then deacons can represent the servanthood of Christ.

<b>Worship leader</b>	
<b>Liturgical worship leader</b>	<p>“Deacons bring the world into worship, and worship into the world.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“Within the diaconal church, a renewed diaconate’s participation in worship would facilitate a sense of common purpose, collegueship and mutual support between the church as institution and the church as movement, between it being a community of continuity and a community of transformation.</p> <p>When involved in the leadership of worship, a renewed diaconate’s task is not to clone the role of the presbyter nor to take on the task of presbyter’s assistant. It is to engage in those aspects of the liturgical life of the diaconal church which bring to the fore the Trinitarian commission to the people of God to be kingdom community builders in the life of society and world.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Clark, 2023a, p. 4)</p> <p>“The Deacon’s traditional ministry in the liturgy represents the ministry of service and mission of the whole Church. This includes: calling the community to confession of their sins; proclaiming the gospel; preaching; leading prayers of intercession; receiving the gifts and preparing the altar for Holy Communion; assisting the president with the distribution of Communion; and sending the community out in the service of the Lord.”</p> <p>(Scottish Episcopal Church Diaconate Working Group, 2012, p. 7)</p>

<p><b>Liturgical worship leader</b> (continued)</p>	<p>“Deacons’ sacramental participation in the Eucharist flows out to the world in servant-hearted mission” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“The deacon as servant and messenger connects different communities by proclamation of the Word and dismissing of the gathered community into the urban community.</p> <p>The deacon as reader and preacher of the gospel proclaims the Word of God from the context of the community. The symbolic procession from the middle of the church to the pulpit is a confirmation of different communities that come together and draw capital from each other. The deacon also connects the different communities by pointing all people to the ultimate end of salvation for all. Both the Eucharist and the dismissal are commands to exercise agency of justice and peace.” (Klaasen, Louw and Muller, 2021, p. 179)</p> <p>The Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church (2020, pp. 57-58) states that:</p> <p>“The liturgical role of the deacon defines and reflects the pastoral relationships within which he or she exercises a wider ministry in the community, and defines also the authority which he or she exercises in discharging that ministry.”</p> <p>Lawlor (2023) argues that deacons have a role in liturgical renewal:</p> <p>“If the way we do Church is no longer relevant, how do we find out what the pastoral, spiritual, and “congregational” – and dare I say liturgical - needs of our current diverse groups are?”</p> <p>Tilady (2020, pp. 67-68) says something similar, that deacons have a:</p> <p>“translational role, to allow the liturgy to meet people in their own space and using their own language, instead of expecting them to adapt to our existing traditions, language, and liturgy.”</p>
---	---

<p><b>Administrator</b></p>	
<p><b>Administrator</b></p>	<p>This is a very ancient function of the deacon. Some deacons can specialise in church administration and also in charitable and social justice advocacy organisation administration.</p>

<b>Interpreter of needs and situations</b>	
<b>Interpreter</b>	<p>"Deacons are interpreters of the world to and for the church."  (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>"It is a ministry which is well placed to interpret the Church to today's society, and interpret society to today's Church."  Church of Scotland, 2018, p. 1)</p>
<b>Needs reporter</b>	<p>They serve the community in which the church is set, bringing to the church the needs and hopes of the people. Many ordinals include this role, e.g.</p> <p>"[It is] a role associated especially with service, often in contexts of great social need; or lastly ... It is a diaconal role to make connections, to search out social needs and help the Church deploy its resources, spiritual, financial and practical into those needs."  (Southgate, 2020)</p> <p>It is not just a matter of reporting on materials needs. What are the spiritual and religious needs of Anglican church members of all ages, in this era of technology and information overload – of instant information? Further it is not simply an expression of a patronising needs-meeting ideology but a genuine engagement with where people are with all their strengths, assets and needs.</p> <p>"Our contention is that ministry in the form of prayer, Scripture, and worship does not adequately address the neo-liberal and materialistic emphasis of urbanisation. What is needed is an urban ministry that contributes to a more wholistic approach to urbanisation. We contend that the ministry of the diaconate is more effective for a more inclusive approach to urbanisation. The diaconate addresses the shortcomings of the broad ministry of prayer, Scripture, and worship, and keeps in tension the liturgical and social responsibility ministries. The ministry of the diaconate engages with the narrow approach to urbanisation and the top-down approach of the church's ministry towards urban regeneration."  (Klaasen, Louw and Muller, 2021, pp. 168-169)</p>

<b>Educator and equipper</b>	
<b>Teacher and Catechist</b>	<p>Teaching both the faithful and in the secular world.</p> <p>They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism, providing them with appropriate instruction.</p> <p>“Deacons bring people to baptism and confirmation.” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p>
<b>Information giver</b>	<p>Deacons provide correct information to the faithful and correct instances of <b>misinformation</b> (incorrect information but which the sender thought was true), <b>disinformation</b> (information which the sender knows to be untrue), <b>malinformation</b> (false information designed to cause direct harm) that are rife in the social media used by most people.</p>
<b>Equipper</b>	<p>“The mark of true diaconal ministry is to foster the initiation of lay ministries galore – to pioneer and then hand over in order to be free again to pioneer.” (Scottish Episcopal Church, 1987, p. 15)</p> <p>“The deacon’s primary purpose is to enable others. Deacons also act as a model and sometimes pioneer too. They often possess specialist skills in some aspect of diaconal work yet always work collaboratively, helping others develop their gifts. It is in this sense that the deacon represents, rather than replaces” (Methodist Church, 2004, p. 3)</p> <p>“Deacons are ordained so the people of God may be better equipped to make Christ known. Theirs is a life of visible self-giving. Christ is the pattern of their calling and their commission.” (Church of England, 2007)</p>

<b>Outreacher</b>	
<b>An outwards reaching minister</b>	<p>“Deacons have a focus which is outwards from the church, encouraging the whole church to be Christ’s servant in the world” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>Deacons can engage in pioneering work to engage with: “those who are currently well beyond any contact with churches as currently formed (that is, it is not about those on the fringe of church; it is about those who never give church a second thought).” (Tiplady, 2020, p. 64)</p> <p>“Deacons are risk-takers and lost sheep-finders” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“Deacons are the heart, feet, hands of the church in the community.” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p>

<b>Liminal/Threshold/Bridge</b>	
<p>The term <b>liminal</b> refers to a threshold, whether a space between spaces or a time between times, or a middle ground between two grounds. When you are in a liminal space, you are neither here nor there, neither this nor that. At the same time, you’re both here and there.</p> <p>It is a place of transition, waiting, and not knowing, therefore a liminal space is where all transformation takes place. During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain, and taken for granted expectations called into doubt. It is where a situation can be reshaped and new institutions and customs established.</p>	
<b>Liminal/Threshold/Bridge</b>	<p>“The diaconate has biblical and apostolic origins that predate the presbyterate. The essence of diakonia has continued throughout history and across denominational lines in different forms, but with a consistent thread of identity that combines notions of both authority and marginality, of service and agency, especially arising from the edges of systems and institutions. The paradoxical position of deacons at the edge and centre of the church’s leadership can be seen in their role of service in response to needs within and beyond the local community, as Christian educators, welcoming “outsiders” (strangers, seekers, newcomers, candidates for baptism) and bringing them into the faith community, and as caregivers, especially to those who are isolated from community life by illness, poverty, or injustice.” (Anglican Church of Canada, 2016, p. 19)</p>

<p><b>Liminal/Threshold/ Bridge (continued)</b></p>	<p>“The diaconate has biblical and apostolic origins that predate the presbyterate. The essence of diakonia has continued throughout history and across denominational lines in different forms, but with a consistent thread of identity that combines notions of both authority and marginality, of service and agency, especially arising from the edges of systems and institutions. The paradoxical position of deacons at the edge and centre of the church’s leadership can be seen in their role of service in response to needs within and beyond the local community, as Christian educators, welcoming “outsiders” (strangers, seekers, newcomers, candidates for baptism) and bringing them into the faith community, and as caregivers, especially to those who are isolated from community life by illness, poverty, or injustice.”  <p style="text-align: right;">(Anglican Church of Canada, 2016, p. 19)</p> <p>“Deacons are shown to have a liminal ministry that through its very existence and practice can challenge understandings of status and power that can exist between different groups such as those who are lay and ordained, those in the church and those in the wider community. Reflecting on this liminal ministry can help churches as they seek to make connections between worship, mission and service, by enabling the whole Church to put their faith into practice in their everyday lives as they engage with wider society. This is especially important in terms of reflecting carefully on the Church’s response to those who are suffering, disadvantaged or marginalised.”  <p style="text-align: right;">(Orton, 2013, p. 260)</p> <p>“The deacon is sent by the Holy Spirit to the forsaken. This is why it is crucial for the diaconate to remain a liminal vocation. The deacon lives at the doorstep between the culture and the liturgical mysteries so that he can see and hear the cry of the poor and lay these needs at the foot of the altar and the pastor. The deacon is also an ecclesial porter, opening the gates of mystery to those who desire to have their spiritual needs satisfied by God, and unbolting the doors of society to other clerics who may want to more deeply understand lay life.”  <p style="text-align: right;">(Keating, 2006, pp. 131-132)</p> <p>“Increased secularisation has left a gap between the Church and the communities in which it sits. ... Deacons have consistently been working on the margins of church and society for, so find it natural to be bridge builders meeting people where they are and developing new forms of ministry and worship.”  <p style="text-align: right;">(Church of Scotland, 2018, pp. 2-3)</p> </p></p></p></p>
---	---

<b>Liminal/Threshold/ Bridge</b> (continued)	<p>"The Deacon as a bridge reminds the people of God of their call to cross over between church and community in both directions."          (Church of Scotland, 2018, p. 7)</p> <p>"Deacons are bridge builders between church and community. ... Deacons welcome people across the threshold of the church ... and send them back out into the world refreshed and empowered."          (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p>
--	---

<b>Collaborator/Partner/Team worker</b>	
<b>Collaborator/ Partner/ Team worker</b>	<p>"The nature of diaconal work is collaborative. Deacons are trained and deployed to work in teams. Deacons will seek to form teams with those who are willing to collaborate and as such these teams could be with para-church organisations or other groups."          (Church of Scotland, 2018, p. 9)</p> <p>"Team working is not an optional exercise for the Diaconate, it is a core skill, critical to the distinctive ministry of the Diaconate."          (Aitchison, 2003)</p>

<b>Networker</b>	
<b>Connector</b>	<p>"The deacon as servant and messenger connects different communities by proclamation of the Word and dismissing of the gathered community into the urban community. The deacon as reader and preacher of the gospel proclaims the Word of God from the context of the community. The symbolic procession from the middle of the church to the pulpit is a confirmation of different communities that come together and draw capital from each other. The deacon also connects the different communities by pointing all people to the ultimate end of salvation for all. Both the Eucharist and the dismissal are commands to exercise agency of justice and peace."          (Klaasen, Louw and Muller, 2021, p. 179)</p>
<b>Messenger</b>	<p>"Deacons are people on a mission, a messenger or ambassador — making connections between liturgy and pastoral need, building bridges between the life of the Church and those who are not yet within it."          (Church of England, 2017, p. 2)</p>

<p><b>Ambassador</b></p>	<p>“Deacons are people ‘on a mission, a messenger or ambassador — making connections between liturgy and pastoral need, building bridges between the life of the Church and those who are not yet within it.” (Church of England, 2017, p. 2)</p> <p>“An ‘ambassadorial’ role as one commissioned for a range of tasks – sometimes specifically in the service of the bishop – often tasks involving communicating between church groups or between church and world. ... the deacon is understood as trusted go-between. The one who explains to church people the thinking of their bishops, the one who relays to senior staff the impact of policies on the spirituality and morale of laity. Also one who makes and deploys those vital ecumenical connections that enable the people of God to work with unity in crisis, and the one whom the Church can send into liaison with local councils and charities, to bridge differences and catalyse action with common purpose, action moreover that prioritises, as the Church of God is always called to do, the needs of the poor.” (Southgate, 2020)</p> <p>“In exercising authorised leadership amongst others or acting as an ambassador, however, deacons are to remember the radical redefinitions of power, dignity, authority and leadership contained in the words and example of Jesus.” (Methodist Church, 2004, p. 3)</p>
--------------------------	---

<p><b>Prophet and social justice activist</b></p>	
<p><b>Prophet and social justice activist</b></p>	<p>“Deacons are prophets, speaking truth to power. ... Deacons are the conscience of the church.” (Diocese of Exeter, 2015)</p> <p>“Theological training, practical community based work and experience of the World Church gives Deacons a prophetic imperative. In this they call the Church locally and nationally to address the needs of others. They are the interface between the church and the community. In this prophetic voice, the call for the people of God to serve the church, community and world is also given. This may be communicated in weekly worship, traditionally prayers of intercession, or through Christian Education. This Prophetic voice may also be exercised in the preaching of the Word when required. Beyond the church the Deacon speaks to places of power on behalf of those who have no power, the Deacon advocates for those in most need.” (Church of Scotland, 2018)</p>

<b>Disrupter</b>	<p>A person who disrupts conventional certainties and comfortable beliefs and practices and opens up new frontiers and horizons.</p> <p>“When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(1 Kings 18:17)</p>
------------------	---

## Can one summarise diaconal functions?

The above list is long and exhaustive with at least twenty functional categories. A similar problem arises with the competency grids developed for the diaconate.

Can these lists be summarised, condensed? Yes, in the sense that Clark (2023b, 2023d) has done with his broad areas of **enabler, educator, catalyst, intermediary** and **partner**, but these are very broad, particularly at the practical level of a deacon being deployed to particular activity. Thus a list of functions such as we have developed should be seen as an indicative list of possibilities rather than a job description cast in stone.

The functions have to be seen contextually and flexibly. As the Methodist Church report of 2004 (p. 10) puts it:

“Similarly today, demands made upon the Church will change, and the form that diaconal ministry takes will vary from place to place and from deacon to deacon. It changes over time in response to the needs of the World and the missionary tasks of the Church. This means it frequently takes place beyond the margins of the Church and respectable society. Yet, whatever form diaconal ministry takes, deacons remain representatives authorised and sent by the Church, owned and supported as such.”

## References

- Aitchison, R. 2003. *The Ministry of a Deacon*. Epworth Press
- Anglican Church of Canada. 2016. *The Iona Report. The diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Anglican Church of Canada  
<https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/iona-report.pdf>
- Anglican Church of Southern Africa. 1989. *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*. Westhoven: Anglican Church of Southern Africa
- Avis, P. 2009. *Wrestling with the diaconate*, *Ecclesiology*, Vol. 5, 2009, pp. 3-6
- Church of England. 2007. *Common Worship services: Ordination*. London: Church of England  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/common-worship-ordination-0>
- Church of England. 2017. *Discerning the diaconate*. London: Church of England, Ministry Division.  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/discerning-the-diaconate.pdf>

Clark, D. 2023a. A new paradigm - the diaconal church. Unpublished paper

Clark, D. 2023b. *The diaconal church – servant leadership*. Unpublished paper

Clark, D. 2023c. *Meeting the global crisis: Kingdom community, diaconal church and a diaconal world*. Unpublished paper

Diocese of Exeter. 2015. *Is God calling you to be a deacon?* Exeter: Diocese of Exeter  
<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/deacon-vocation-leaflet.pdf>

Diocese of Exeter. 2023. *Exploring the ordained ministry of distinctive deacons*.  
Diocese of Exeter [Website]  
<https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/vocations/diocesan-deacons/>

Keating, J. 2006. *The moral life of the deacon*. In: Keating, J. 2006 (Ed.). *The deacon reader*. New York: Paulist Press

Klaasen, J, Louw, J. and Muller, R. 2021. *The deacon as model of ministry within urban locations*, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 162-183  
<https://atjcs.netact.org.za/index.php/netact/article/view/39/91>

Lawlor, G. 2023. Personal Communication. 13 March 2023

Methodist Church. 2004. *What is a deacon?* London: Methodist Church Working Party  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-deacon-2004.pdf>

Orton 2013. *The diverse and contested diaconate: Why understanding this ministry is crucial to the future of the Church*. *International journal of practical theology*, Vol., No. 2., pp. 260-284  
<https://dro.dur.ac.uk/13186/1/13186.pdf?DDD34+dss3ajo+mvr145>

Scottish Episcopal Church, 1987. *Truly called by God to serve as a deacon: The Report of the Bishops' Working Group on Distinctive Diaconate*. Edinburgh: General Synod Office, Scottish Episcopal Church

Scottish Episcopal Church. 2012. *Truly Called ... Two*. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church, Scottish Episcopal Church Diaconate Working Group

Scottish Episcopal Church. 2018. *Ministries in the Scottish Episcopal Church*. Revised 2018. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church  
<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Ministries-in-the-Scottish-Episcopal-Church-revised-2018.pdf>

Scottish Episcopal Church. 2020. *Grosvenor Essay No. 13. Theology of Authority in the Ministry of the Church*. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church, Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church  
<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Grosvenor-Essay-No.-13.pdf>

Southgate, C. 2020. *A way to think about Anglican ordained ministry during the coronavirus crisis*. [Tragedy and Congregations website]  
<https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/2020/04/26/a-way-to-think-about-anglican-ordained-ministry-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

Tiplady, R. 2020. *The Vocational Diaconate as a vehicle for pioneer ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church*, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, Winter 2020, Vol. 4 Number 4, pp. 63-72

<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-44a-SEI-Journal-Winter.pdf>

## Unit 5: Self test questions

This unit has presented a large number of images/descriptions of what a deacon can be and do (eleven categories (or twenty including subdivisions within them) – Proclaimer, Ikon, Worship leader, Administrator, Interpreter of needs and situations, Educator and equiper, Outreach, Bridge/Threshold/Liminal person, Collaborator/Partner/Team worker, Networker, and Prophet and social justice activist. Relook through this list and ask yourself two questions:

1. Which of these functions correspond to the work you imagined you would be doing when you first responded to the call of God to be a minister?
2. Are there any other functions which you are now attracted to as possible calls to your future *diakonia* actions?



## Unit 6

# Liturgy and Prayer

The Anglican Church is known for being a Church with a set form of services for daily and Sunday worship and for special occasions, which are written down in its *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662 and the later revisions of it in the various Anglican Provinces. In the Anglican Church of Southern Africa the most recent of these is the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*.

The very titles of these books raise an immediate question, 'What is the difference between **liturgy** (the services in the Church using these written forms) and **prayer** (particularly private prayer)?'

### What is liturgy?

In contemporary English the word liturgy has a general meaning – a prescribed form or set of forms for public religious worship – and a narrower meaning – the prescribed form or pattern for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In other words, liturgy is the format of worship of a gathering of a religious community. Liturgy contains all the rites, ceremonies, prayers and sacraments of the church, as opposed to private prayer and devotions.

### Liturgy is a tool of worship

Liturgy is a tool of worship, not worship itself. Worship is the reverent love and devotion shown to God and can be shown in multiple ways. Worship is a basic function of the church.

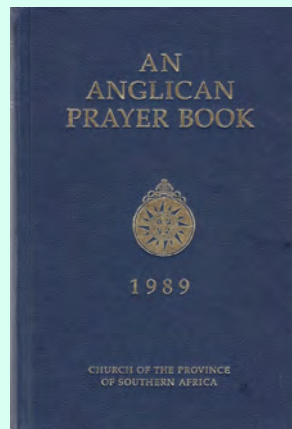
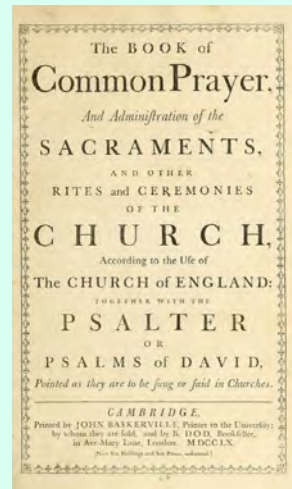
Liturgy is a tool that helps us carry out that basic function. The forms and rituals of the liturgy assist us to worship the divine.

### Liturgy is a work

The English word liturgy comes from the Greek word *leitourgia* which meant an act of public service done at the person's own expense. The word itself is a combination of two words: *leitōs* meaning 'of the people' and *ergon* meaning 'to work'.

In the New Testament, it is used to speak of our acts of service to God or our service to others (Philippians 2:17, 30). It is also used to speak of service in relation to the formal worship of God when his people gather together (Hebrews 8:6, 9:21).

The word is now applied to the work of worship and ministry done for God. So when Christians meet for worship, they perform a liturgy, that is, a work of offering service to God together as a community. It is used to describe acts of worship and service to God and others.



**Leitourgia** is one of several key words used in the New Testament to describe the main elements of Christian practice:

**kerygma**: proclamation of the gospel

**didache**: teaching (of the faith and good behaviour)

**leitourgia**: worship work

**koinonia**: fellowship and partnership in divine and human community

**diakonia**: ministry and service

**martyria**: witness

## Liturgy is a set form

Liturgy in the Anglican tradition is a set form, the form expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer*, which regulates how public worship should take place.

The reason for the introduction of the *Book of Common Prayer*, when the Church of England broke away from the Roman Church, was to ensure liturgical and doctrinal correctness and uniformity of practice in all its services in all places.

This set form is most evident in the Eucharistic liturgy which is very similar to those in most Western liturgical churches. One of the best known books explaining this, *The shape of the Liturgy*, was written by an Anglican scholar, Gregory Dix, in 1945. This influenced liturgical revision in the Anglican Communion.

For example, the basic shape of liturgical worship on a Sunday is: **gathering, the Word, the meal, and the dismissal**. In the specifically Eucharistic part of the service there is a four-action shape: **offertory, prayer, fraction** (the breaking of the bread), **communion**.

## The Holy Eucharist Service

The basic structure of the Eucharist service has four parts:

1. Introductory Rites (Introduction, Penitence, Collect)
2. Liturgy of the Word (Biblical Readings, **Homily/Sermon**, Creed, Prayers of the Church, the Peace)
3. Liturgy of the Eucharist (Offertory, Eucharistic Prayer, Fraction, Communion)
4. Conclusion and Dismissal

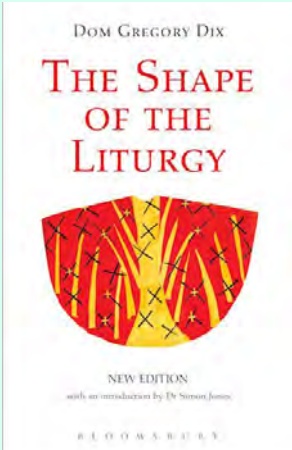
The first two parts, the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word, are called the *Synaxis* (gathering) and it follows the tradition of Jewish Synagogue worship. It includes the gathering in of the assembly into fellowship (*koinonia*), the proclamation (*kerygma*) of the Word of God, and the Prayers of the Church.

The Liturgy of the Word is a central component of the Eucharist (and also morning and evening prayer and in daily worship) inviting everyone to encounter the living Word of God through the proclamation of the Scriptures. Through the liturgy of the Word, God speaks to everyone, and through the Word of God we are prepared to be in God's presence. Since Scripture is revealed to us by God, specifically by the Holy Spirit, we also believe that God in the form of the Holy Spirit is present for us when we read the Word.

Part three, the celebration of the Eucharist replays Jesus's actions at the Last Supper. He Took, Blessed, Broke, and Gave.

It starts with the taking of the offerings of the congregation and the bread and wine.

The actual Eucharistic prayer of consecration (sometimes called the *anaphora*) includes an introductory dialogue between the president and the people, a thanksgiving, the narrative of the institution at the Last Supper, the recalling of



### THE SHAPE OF THE LITURGY

**homily:** a homily is a religious address intended for spiritual edification rather than doctrinal instruction. A homily usually restricts itself to an informal commentary on some parts of the scriptures.

**sermon:** a sermon is a more formal, complex, structured discourse or lecture (with introduction, parts and a conclusion) on a religious, doctrinal or moral topic.

**anamnesis:** the ritual recalling of a past event in its full power and that sets those who engage in it in the very event which the celebration commemorates.

that past event into the present (*anamnesis*, somewhat inaccurately translated as ‘remembrance’ or ‘memory’), the invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*), and a concluding **doxology**.

The bread is then broken (the fraction) and the two elements distributed to the congregation in the act of communion.

Finally, there are some concluding prayers and the dismissal by the deacon as the congregation is sent out on mission in the world.

## The Daily Offices

The Anglican services of Morning and Evening Prayer originated in the eight offices said by monks and clergy every day in pre-Reformation times (Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline). They were combined into these two offices in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In most Anglican provinces, ordained ministers are required to say Morning and Evening Prayer daily.

In previous times, Morning and Evening Prayer were often the main Sunday services, and this is still often the case in places where there is no priest. Deacons and lay people can lead the offices.

## The liturgical role of the deacon

Deacons in the Anglican Church have specific tasks in liturgical worship.

When the Bishop ordains a deacon, the Bishop charges the candidate to “assist the Bishop and priests in public worship and in the administration of God’s word and sacraments” (*An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, page 583). This charge means that the liturgical ministry of a deacon is a ministry of service, as are all the other aspects of diaconal ministry. The liturgical role of the deacon is important and worthy of respect, especially in the Sunday Eucharist, the principal occasion where the deacon is known to the whole Church. The deacon is a mediator between the bishop (or in his place, the presbyter (the priest)) and the whole congregation. The bishop is the presider at the Eucharist. Of all the others ministering in the sanctuary (deacon, lay ministers, altar servers, etc.) the deacon holds first place.

The deacon is an assistant to the president (the bishop or priest) and is subject to the leadership of the president. However, the deacon’s primary ministry in the service is to the gathered congregation, the assembly, not the person presiding. The deacon guides the singing, says prayers, delivers instructions, etc. During the service, the deacon sees that everything moves in an orderly and dignified way. The deacon gives whatever directions are required.

All lesser ministries in the sanctuary come from the deacon’s ministry and they are subordinate to it and they assist it. The deacon has to coordinate all the lesser ministries of lay-ministers, servers, readers. The deacon, therefore, should be reasonably competent in all these ministries. He or she should be able to carry them out at least as well as anyone else.

Regardless of the particular style of worship and customs of a particular parish (and these vary tremendously in the Anglican Church), there are certain things that the deacon should do in the Eucharist and deacons have a right to request that they do them.

**doxology:** a short praise of the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

A common list of things the deacon does are:

- Reading the Gospel
- Announcing the Prayers of the Church
- Preparing the altar for the Eucharist
- Doing the Offertory
- Saying the Acclamation
- Holding up the chalice at the end of the Eucharistic prayer
- Starting the Lord's Prayer
- Helping distribute Holy Communion
- Cleaning the vessels after the Eucharist
- Giving the Dismissal

Note the following:

- From the **ordinal**: "Take authority to proclaim the Gospel" (*An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, page 586) The deacon proclaims the gospel. The **rubric** (on page 103) shows that it is the privilege of the deacon to read the Gospel. (If no deacon is present the priest will do this, though some clergy allow lay ministers to read the gospel.)
- The deacon brings the needs of the world to the church and in the liturgy this is symbolised by the deacon leading the Prayers of the Church. From the ordinal: "You are to interpret to the church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world." (on page 583).
- The deacon serves the *laos*, the people of God. In the liturgy this is symbolised by the deacon preparing the altar at the offertory. From the ordinal: "In the name of Jesus Christ you are to serve all people."
- The deacon assists with the administration of the Eucharist and other sacraments. From the ordinal: "... assist ... in the administration ... of the sacraments."
- The deacon leads the church in its ministry to the world. This is symbolised by the deacon saying the Dismissal. (In ancient times it is possible that the deacon gave detailed instructions to the congregation at the end of the liturgy). From the ordinal: "By your word and example you are to make Christ and his redemptive love known to those among whom you live and work and worship." A deacon needs to continually enhance his or her understanding of the specific liturgical responsibilities of deacons and priests in the Anglican Church, and the diaconal role in proclaiming the Gospel, leading prayers, participating in the Eucharistic service by drawing people to the altar for communion and sending them out of the church building to "love and serve the Lord." The work of the deacon is essentially from the altar to the street and back from street to altar.

Deacons also assist with baptismal preparation and with baptism, and are licensed to baptise when there is no priest and when there is an urgent need such as imminent death. They also have a role in a variety of other liturgical situations (see the Fellowship of Deacons website page on *Deacons in the Liturgy* ([www.acsafod.org.za/liturgy.html](http://www.acsafod.org.za/liturgy.html))).

**Ordinal:** the text of the ritual and rubrics for the ordination of clergy

**Rubric:** an authoritative rule for the conduct of a liturgical service

## What is the purpose of liturgy?

The purpose of liturgy is to help enable the people of God to actively participate in the **mystery** of Christ's redemption by publicly expressing praise, penitence, thanksgiving, and petitions to God through a structured ritual, essentially acting as a visible manifestation of the Church's faith, unifying believers and deepening their relationship with God through the sacraments. The added benefit of communal worship enables congregants to form stronger relationships with their fellow parishioners and become a true community of faith.

**mystery:** in Christian theology that which can never be known unless revealed by God

## Prayer

This section of the Unit looks at individual private prayer, as distinct from the prayers in liturgical worship.

Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:5-8):

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus also gave us a pattern for prayer in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-4) and set us an example by taking time out to pray.

St Paul in various letters, speaks of prayer as thanksgiving to God, as praying for the Christian people of God and for the Israelites who have not accepted Christ, for others praying for him, of making petitions for help, and for protection from evil men.

## What is the purpose of prayer?

The primary purpose and objective of prayer is to change us to be what we were created to be, that is, to work in God's service and to glorify God, in any and every situation. Jesus commanded us to pray and it is powerful.

## Why is prayer necessary for the church?

Prayer is the lifeblood of the church whether during a service, in personal prayer or in service to the community. Deacons along with all clergy are called upon to pray with and for people at any time. Whether in a shop, at work, in the street, in conversation, in church and in fact everywhere. Deacons and clergy are also called upon, to teach people to pray.

## What are the types of prayer?

There are several different forms of prayer, notably as: a conversation, as a way of getting into the right attitude, as a thanksgiving, as a making of requests to God, as meditation, and as a way of experiencing God.

### Prayer as conversation

The more individuals talk and spend time with someone, the more they are able to get to know them. Similarly when we spend time in prayer connecting with God the closer we will become to God. James writes (4:8): “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you”. Private prayer is an action between God and oneself.

### Prayer as gaining the right attitude

Prayer may not directly change our personal life circumstances, but praying individuals usually experience changes in attitude and are not being consumed by problems, challenges and fears. Prayer lifts emotions above fear, discouragement and hopelessness. Praying about specific issues, expands human vision strengthens our concern for others. By bringing problems and joys to God in prayer one receives God’s direction, encouragement and comfort. Prayer allows one to gain spiritual perspective and calm in our souls. Our minds are set right – Romans 12:2 “be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Philippians 2:5: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

For example, praying to God for wisdom, strength, and an understanding of his broader purpose will align our will with God’s purposes. Jesus modeled this kind of prayer when he cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus expressed his personal desire, but ultimately submitted to the Father’s higher plan.

Studies have shown that those who pray regularly experience lower anxiety levels and greater emotional stability. This is possibly because, prayer helps us disconnect from the chaos of life and reconnect with God. Prayer relieves stress and anxiety. The apostle Paul wrote “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7). As we pray, we surrender our desires to God’s greater plan for our lives. Focusing on God prayer allows a deacon to become more compassionate and caring, more focused and less egotistical.

### Praying for discernment

We often need to pray for discernment, that is to exhibit keen insight and good judgment. Instead of relying only on our limited human understanding we can draw on God’s infinite wisdom and discernment. Over time, our prayers will increasingly reflect God’s desires rather than just our own. One may bring to God in prayer anything that requires discernment as well as desires, goals and difficult decisions, including when we have to make decisions as a leader.

## Prayer as adoration and thanksgiving

These will often take a liturgical form in hymns and choruses.

## Prayer as supplication and petition

Supplication is a form of prayer, a call for help from God, with a spirit of reverence and devotion. A prayer of supplication is humbly asking God for something, usually for oneself.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to ask for our daily bread in Matthew 6:11 and in Luke 18:1-8. Jesus teaches us not to give up praying for what we need.

James says that: on the one hand we don't receive because we don't ask (James 4:2). On the other hand, we ask and don't receive because we are thinking only of our selfish desires (James 4:3). God always answers prayer in one way or another. However God will never give us anything that will hurt or harm us. Jesus said "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?" (Matthew 7:9-10). Perhaps the best way to approach supplications is to ask God in all honesty as children talking to their kind-hearted Father, but ending with "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:39).

Paul (Romans 8:26) reminds us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

## Prayer as intercession

This is the praying on behalf of others. Intercession requires us to be selfless and to put the needs of others before our own. As with requests for ourselves, prayers for others in trouble or for their conversion may come up against God's prior gift of free will to those persons.

## Prayer through contemplation

Contemplative prayer is when we apply our minds and our emotions, and sometimes our imaginative ability, to recognize God's presence and fix our attention on him. Contemplation seeks a direct awareness of God which transcends the intellect, often through practices such as meditation.

Meditation trains our senses and our emotions to respond to this life-giving reality which is characterized by quiet, stillness, and simply resting in God's presence. Through patience and practice, we frame our days with truth rather than the shifting sands of circumstance that can so easily sabotage our peace and spiritual growth.

## Prayer as a (mystical) experience of God

Some people have experienced in prayer a direct experience of God, what is usually called a mystical experience.

**Many people use the terms intercession, supplication, and petition, interchangeably.**

## Daily prayer

Both ancient Jewish and Christian traditions encourage daily prayer, morning and evening or at various times during the day and night. Morning prayer sets the tone of the day through praise, penitence, scripture, prayer and supplication. Similarly evening prayer ends the day in the same way with emphasis on protection from ‘perils and dangers’ during the night.

At their ordination Anglican clergy commit to doing morning and evening prayer and use the forms in the *Book of Common Prayer* which include three pieces of scripture and three canticles each morning and each evening.

All ministry should be steeped in prayer since one needs to be in tune with God’s leadership and guidance. Temptation lurks around every corner and each person has their personal weakness. Ego is usually a huge stumbling block. Prayer keeps one connected to God and helps with humility.

## To sum up

Prayer helps us find direction in life, prevents us from making wrong decisions and falling into sin. Through it we learn to align ourselves to God’s will.

- Prayer helps us focus on what is important.
- Prayer gives us hope.
- Prayer helps us connect to God on a deeper level.
- Prayer guides us through emotional difficulties and situations.
- Prayer helps us find comfort and peace.
- Prayer develops a stronger relationship with God.
- Prayer enables individuals to become more compassionate.
- Prayer strengthens us during difficult times.
- Prayer keeps temptation at bay and helps our thought processes.
- Prayer helps us receive and give forgiveness – Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” (Luke 11:4).

## Teaching people to pray

A deacon may well be called upon to teach people to pray, for example in baptism or confirmation preparation.

There are two common simple prayer formats that can be quite useful here:

### ACTS

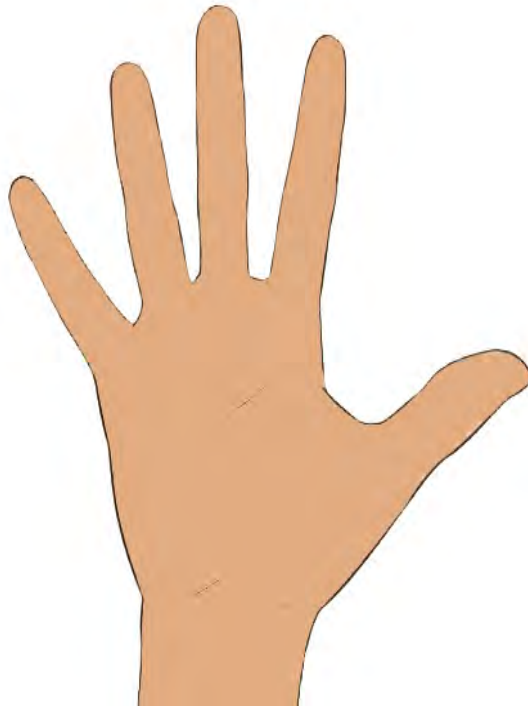
The **acronym** ACTS is always a good starting point for prayer and an easy word to remember. This acronym also covers the basic components of Anglican spirituality.



**acronym:** an abbreviation formed by (usually initial) letters taken from a word or series of words, that is itself pronounced as a word

## The Five Finger Prayer

The Five Finger Prayer is a method of praying that uses each finger to represent different groups of people to pray for: the thumb for family, the pointer for teachers and guides in our life, the middle finger for leaders in government, business, church and in society in general, the next finger for the vulnerable, poor and oppressed, and the little finger oneself. This approach helps to focus the prayers and reminds us to consider others before ourselves.



**Thumb:** Pray for those closest to you: your family and friends.

**Pointer finger:** Pray for those who point you in the right direction: teachers, mentors and other guides in your life. Pray for wisdom and support.

**Middle finger:** Pray for those that lead us: those in government, in business, in organizations in society, in church leadership. Pray for guidance and wisdom.

**Fourth finger:** Pray for those who are poor, vulnerable, in trouble, sick, exploited, oppressed, those most in need.

**Smallest finger:** Pray for yourself and your own needs.

## References

Church of England. 1662. *Book of Common Prayer*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer>

Anglican Church of Southern Africa. 1989. *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*. Westhoven: Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Dix, G. 2015. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. New Edition. London: Bloomsbury (T&T Clark)

<https://archive.org/download/20191218theshapeoftheliturgy/20191218-THE%20SHAPE%20OF%20THE%20LITURGY.pdf>

Fellowship of deacons. 2024. *Deacons in the Liturgy*. [www.acsafod.org.za/liturgy.html](http://www.acsafod.org.za/liturgy.html)

## Unit 6: Self test questions

1. Distinguish between 'liturgy' and 'prayer'.
2. In what way is the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* an example of liturgical set forms?
3. Name the four parts of a Eucharist service.
4. What do the words "He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave" refer to?
5. List several things the deacon does liturgically in the Eucharist.
6. What is an 'ordinal'?
7. What is prayer as intercession?
8. What does the acronym ACTS stand for?



## Unit 7

# The deacon as educator

---

### Introduction

The New Testament is clear on the importance of teaching. As Jesus' great commission to the Church states (Matthew 28:18-20):

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus is frequently referred to as "*didaskalos*", teacher, highlighting his role as a teacher of divine truth. Teaching was cited as first among the defining characteristics of the early church (Acts 2: 42):

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (*didache*) and fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Teachers are the second in the list of ministers coming after the Twelve apostles (1 Corinthians 12:28):

"And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers (*didaskalos*) then deeds of power, then gifts then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues."

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul highlights the gift of a teachers for the church :

"The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (*didaskalos*), to equip the saints for the work of ministry (*diakonias*), for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

In Romans 15:14, Paul states:

"I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

So deacons must expect to play some kind of educational role in their ministry, depending of course on their gifts and the extent to which the situations they work in call for education and training or the organising of such. Typical examples of teaching situations will be in giving homilies and sermons, leading Bible studies, preparing children and adults for baptism and confirmation, teaching or organising the teaching in Sunday school, leading Lent and other courses.

# What makes for an effective teacher?

Accepting that for the deacon doing Christian education is part of his or her obedience to Jesus' great commission, what education and training can help the deacon to be an effective teacher?

An effective teacher certainly needs the knowledge and skills to achieve the following:

1. Know the content they have to teach.
2. Know the learner.
3. Know what is relevant to the learner.
4. Be able to apply the most appropriate methods to achieve the teaching purposes.

## 1. Knowing what to teach

Knowing the doctrines of the Church is an obvious must for any minister of the gospel. These doctrines, teachings about the faith, are enshrined in the scriptures, creeds, and **catechisms** of the Church. The deacon needs to have a reasonable knowledge of them (and much of the formal study required of candidates before ordination includes biblical studies, theology, church history, liturgical and pastoral studies). They must also know the purpose of their teaching this content. Is it that those being taught can recite it, understand it, or apply it to their lives?

At a very basic level, a deacon needs to be really familiar with the Christian Bible and be able to rapidly find his or her way around it. To be able to lead Bible study groups the deacon must have some familiarity with the texts being used.

The same applies to a basic knowledge of the creeds (Apostles' and **Nicene**) and what they mean.

The deacon should be familiar with the catechism (pages 423 to 444 of *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*) and be able to use it in baptismal preparation for adults and in confirmation classes.

Diaconal work may require all sort of special knowledge and skills – knowledge of how organisations work (see Unit 11), health related knowledge, financial management skills, etc., the deacon needs to be as knowledgeable and skilled as practically possible. In many cases deacons ordained later in life will bring into their ministry skills from their previous secular work.

## 2. Know the learner

There are two aspects to getting to know the learner.

The first is simply a matter of how the teacher engages with the learner or group of learners. This is all a matter of attitude, openness to human interaction, to the avoiding any atmosphere of threat or stress, to being able to get close enough to the learners to be able to understand who they are and what their needs, fears and hopes are.

**catechism:** a text summarizing the basic teachings of the Christian faith, usually in question-and-answer form.

**Nicene creed:** See an exposition on the Nicene Creed on the Fellowship of Deacons website:

<https://www.acsafod.org.za/study/The%20Nicene%20Creed%20an%20exposition.pdf>

The second is some basic understanding of the influences and changes affecting learning as people move from childhood to adulthood to old age. In other words, ‘How do children, youth and adults learn?’

## Stages of Faith

In 1981, James Fowler, a North American theologian and psychologist, published a book called *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. In this book he outlined stages of faith development.

These stages of faith development were along the lines of the findings of two other psychologists: Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development.

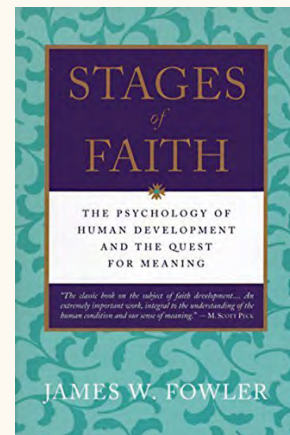
The importance of this work for the teacher of religion is that it showed that different approaches and methods had to be used by the teacher for the different stages and age groups.

If people understand and learn in different ways at different ages and stages of psychological development, then the teacher has to adjust what they teach and how they teach to that reality.

## Fowler’s stages of development

In his book, Fowler describes six stages of development.

Stage	Name	Age	Description
0	Undifferentiated faith	0 - 2 years	Learn from their senses and body movements. If the child is lovingly nurtured the child will develop a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine.  However, negative experiences will develop distrust about the universe and the divine.
1	Intuitive-Projective	3 - 7 years	Children at this stage have acquired language and the ability to work with symbols to express thoughts. They have not yet developed formalized religious beliefs.  They cannot easily distinguish between reality and unconscious desires and dreams.  The child cannot yet understand abstract concepts.  Religion is learned mainly through experiences, stories, images, and the people that they come in contact with. They have a deep intuitive sense of what is right and wrong, and innocent perceptions of how God causes the universe to function.



**mythic:** because in contemporary English people often use the word **myth** to describe some factually untrue story, it is important to understand the correct use of the term in scholarly writings on religion. A **myth** is an ancient story or set of stories, a sacred narrative, explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form. Most religions contain a body of traditional sacred stories that are believed to express profound truth.

**concrete:** something that is clear and certain, or real and existing in a form that can be seen or felt

2	Mythic-literal	7 - 12 years	<p>Can now deal with concepts that have real <b>concrete</b> existence in reality. They have a strong belief in the justice and reciprocity in the workings of the universe (e.g., doing good will result in a good result, doing bad will cause a bad thing to happen), and their idea of God is almost always anthropomorphic.</p> <p>During this time metaphors and symbolic and <b>mythic</b> language (so common in the Bible and religion) are often misunderstood and are taken literally. Hence if these promises don't come to pass in the world or stories are found to be not factually true, then a person at this stage might feel cheated or disappointed in God.</p>
3	Synthetic-conventional	12+ years	<p>Is characterized by conformity to authority and the development of a personal religious identity. Can begin to think abstractly and can now conceive of God as abstract or formless, not simply a thing.</p> <p>Conflicts that occur when beliefs are challenged are often ignored because they represent too much of a threat to the faith-based identity. But some will pick up inconsistencies and start to distrust.</p>
4	Individuative-Reflective	21+ years	<p>Particularly from the mid-twenties to late thirties is often a stage of angst and struggle. The individual takes personal responsibility for his or her beliefs and feelings.</p> <p>As the person is able to reflect on their own beliefs, there is an openness to a new complexity of faith, but this also increases the awareness of conflicts and inconsistencies in belief.</p>
5	Conjunctive (joining together)	35+ years	<p>People able to enter this stage acknowledge the paradoxes and transcendent values behind the traditions and symbols of the religion they inherited.</p> <p>They may resolve conflicts from previous stages by a complex understanding of a multidimensional, interdependent "truth" that cannot be explained by any particular statement of faith.</p>

6	Universalising	45+ years	This stage is only rarely achieved by individuals.  The individual would treat any person with compassion as he or she views people as from a universal community, and should be treated with universal principles of love and justice.
---	----------------	-----------	---

## Adapting your teaching to where the learner is

The reality of these stages of development means that the teacher has to adapt their teaching purposes and methods for each age-group/stage and also to be conscious that what is taught to one age group may interfere with or contradict what is taught later when they are older.

It is clear from Fowler's work that teaching young children requires that the teacher understands that they respond well to stories and particularly exciting ones but not to abstract concepts and generalised moral rules. Everything must be expressed in concrete terms. They simply do not have the mental development at that age to think in abstractions.

But it is also clear that, as they get older, children soon pick up the inconsistencies between some of the religious stories told as if they were literally and historically true and what they learn in school. Children are adept at spotting lies, hiding of the truth, and hypocrisy.

A typical example is the story of Noah's Ark. A wonderful story for young children. Pictures and activities can enhance its effect. But then they later learn that there was no universal flood and not one ark or hundreds of arks could have accommodated examples of every kind of animal on earth.

[The scholars tell us that there may well have been great floods in Mesopotamia and individuals surviving on rafts and boats to live another day. The writers of the Genesis story retold this ancient tale as a way of saying that there are natural disasters, that God cares for his people in times of disaster and will always save a remnant.]

So one understands the difficult task of teaching mythic stories which children under seven accept as true to and then to reverse and say they are not literally true to older children but teach a more abstract concept of God's providence.

[Part of the problem is the rise about 100 years ago of so called Fundamentalism. This religious tendency from the United States of America reacted against the rise of modern science and started to treat the Bible as if it were a scientific textbook, inerrant, and to be read totally literally, an approach that would have dismayed the theologians of the early Church.]

It is therefore important that a sound curriculum or course is followed for Sunday School and Youth instruction such as in Confirmation classes.

Similarly, special attention must be given to what are the differing needs of youth, adults and older people.



The Anglican Church of Southern Africa publishes a range of courses for baptismal and confirmation preparation at : <https://anglicanchurchsa.org/product-category/course-material/>

## The adult learner

There are a number of characteristics of adult learners that have to be taken into account in Christian education:

- Generally, adults are volunteers and they recognise their need to learn. Their motivation is generally high too, but can be easily lost if their needs and expectations are not met. Adults learners want to be treated as adults and have their experiences and values recognized. They will not put up with the harsh criticism or humiliation that schoolchildren are often - but should not be - subjected to.
- Adults come to religious education with varied intentions and needs. Some of these are specific, some more general, sometimes related to the subject matter of a course, sometimes not, and sometimes unknown even to themselves. It is helpful to encourage them to state what they actually want to learn. Adults learn best when their immediate needs and problems are addressed and they see that the teaching is relevant to their daily lives. They also often want their learning to have (immediate) results.
- Adults will also have entrenched beliefs, opinions, prejudices and positions. New ideas and material may question their existing knowledge, beliefs and world view. Learning may well be experienced as painful and risky. This is more readily accepted if the relevance of the new learning is clear.
- They also have other responsibilities and pressures outside the learning situation. Adults may be fatigued from work. Older adults may suffer from a number of physical disabilities, particularly in relation to hearing and sight.
- Adults come to courses with different expectations about the learning process. Some may expect to be taught everything (as in a formal school) and feel uncomfortable with participatory education methods. Some may wish to find out everything by themselves. They will have different assessments of what they can and cannot do by way of learning. They often lack confidence in their ability to learn. People learn best when they feel secure and a sense of safety should be encouraged. Protecting and building up the adult learner's self-esteem is important. What is to be learned should be within their capabilities.

## Typical types of Christian education

Deacons are ordained as teachers who are called to believe, teach, and practice the Gospel of Christ and indeed, during their ordination they are given a book of the Gospels.

During their ministry, the content of what they need to teach will be determined by the various typical forms of church-related education and training: Homilies and sermons; Bible studies; Lent and other courses, e.g., **Alpha courses**; Baptismal preparation (including of parents of children to be baptised); Confirmation preparation; Sunday school (teaching or organising and training teachers); Youth groups; Server training; Lay minister training; Home visiting training; Dealing with alcohol and drug abuse training; Evangelistic training; Stewardship training; electronic presentations and videos; School teaching; etc.

All these require their own content and the use of appropriate teaching methods appropriate to the learners and their context (see Kleinhans, 2025).

**Alpha course:** a very popular ten-week course of talks and discussions on the basics of the Christian faith, the world. Anglican in origin and somewhat charismatic in tendency. It is run by various churches and organisations around the world.

### 3. Know what is relevant to the learner.

It is an indisputable fact that we more readily learn knowledge, skills and attitudes that we find relevant to ourselves and our context. For the teacher this requires knowing who the learner is and what is relevant to their lives and context at this particular stage in their lives. It also means understanding the political, economic, social and other influences upon people that help form what they think, correctly or incorrectly, is truly relevant to their lives and that they need to learn.

If learners' needs are met then they will be more motivated to learn and the content will be more relevant to their own situations. Eliciting and responding to learners' needs signals to learners that they are important and that their concerns will be taken into consideration.

### 4. Be able to apply the most appropriate methods to achieve the teaching purposes.

There is often a lot of nonsense said in the world of education about what teaching methods are best – much of it based on current educational fads. Some people say one should not teach (that is 'teacher tell'), only facilitate, one should never lecture, only work in group discussions, etc.

The simple reality is that different types of learning require different methods and that the only general rules are that learning should be relevant, be used or applied as quickly as possible to reinforce the learning, and that learning needs to be broken up into suitable time slots.

It all depends on the purpose for which the education or training is being done. Is it to ensure that the learners know some information, or that they can apply it? Is it something that they need to be able to do – a new skill or better way of doing something? Is it about a change of attitude or value – such as to be less prejudiced or biased?

For learning information, the old fashioned methods of the lecture, the talk, the sermon, and the homily, are perfectly appropriate, particularly if there are large numbers of people. Obviously the more interactive the teaching the better – questions allowed, responses requested, quick mini-discussions done, readings done beforehand, etc. For changing attitudes or behaviour, lectures are not the way to go. Here the discussion format is far more effective, where emotions and values can be discussed.

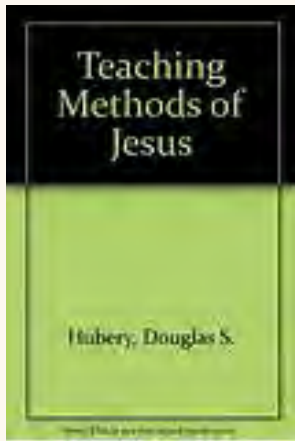
Each of these purposes requires appropriate and effective teaching methods. It also must be noted that the particular methods, however well chosen, will be influenced by the expectations of the learners, the expertise of the educators, the size of group of learners, and the time and resources available.

Overall, a participatory approach that rests upon an the underlying belief that all learners should be given an opportunity to participate and make their voices and opinions heard, is recommended. It also relates to the notion of learning by doing and that learners should be active in the teaching and learning process.

But before looking at those methods – how did Jesus teach? What methods did he use?

For a detailed description of teaching methods see the guide, ***Planning teaching and choosing methods*** on the Fellowship of Deacons website:

[www.acsafod.org.za/study/ Planning teaching and choosing methods.pdf](http://www.acsafod.org.za/study/Planning_teaching_and_choosing_methods.pdf)



## The teaching methods of Jesus

Various scholars have analysed the teaching methods used by Jesus (e.g., Douglas Hubery) and all recognize that he used a variety of methods. Here are examples:

Type	Description	Example
Homily	A commentary delivered after the reading of a scripture that has been read during a religious service.	Luke 4:16-27 Jesus delivers a homily in the Synagogue at Nazareth
Sermon (preaching)	Jesus preached in public on the coming of the Kingdom of God.	Jesus often preached in public and sent out his disciples to do the same (e.g., Luke 9:2-6, 10)
Story	A narrative to inform or entertain using everyday examples and typical situations to make teachings meaningful and relevant. Jesus was an acute observer of nature, details of village and town life, the minds and hearts of people. He often uses picturesque language, <b>metaphors, similes, hyperbole</b> and humour. His favoured form of story was the parable.	Jesus told numerous stories/ parables.
Parable	Short stories with a religious or moral lesson using situations familiar to the listeners that make complex ideas easy to understand. The characters portrayed were living characters, recognisable to all.	The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37)
Interactive Teaching	Engaging listeners in discussions.	The dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3: 1-21)
Practical demonstration	Visual lessons to reinforce teachings	Washing the disciples' feet (John 13:3-17)
Questioning	Asking thought-provoking questions that make people think. Also asking questions in reply to challenge thinking.	Matthew 7:3; 9:5 Luke 10: 25-29
Object Lessons	Using everyday things to teach	Birds and flowers - Matthew 6:25-28 Children - Matthew 18:2-5
Repetition	Repeating key themes	"The Kingdom of God is like..." Luke 13:18-21
Bold Declarations	Speaking with authority	"You have heard... but I tell you..."
Use of scripture	Jesus quotes scripture to confirm what he is teaching or to refute error.	There are at least 48 occasions where Jesus quotes scripture.
Time with learners	Jesus frequently retired with his disciples from the public ministry to pray with and teach them.	Mark 3:13-14 Matthew 20:17
Training practice	Jesus sends out pairs of disciples on mission trips.	Mark 6:7-13; 30

**metaphor:** a figure of speech that compares two different things by stating that one is the other, highlighting similarities for emphasis or symbolism. The compared elements are not literally the same but are linked to create a deeper understanding. Examples: "I am the bread of life." "I am the door."

**simile:** a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another

**hyperbole:** a figure of speech in which an extreme exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect. Example: where Jesus talks of a camel going through the eye of a needle.

## Practical choice of methods

When choosing methods, some practical considerations are:

- **The particular context and environment in which the teaching takes place**

The context and environment in which the teaching takes place sets the tone for all educational interaction. Methods which are incompatible with the environment may be unsuccessful – not because of the qualities of the methods themselves but because they are incompatible with the particular environment.

- **Learner expectations**

Teachers may wish to be learner-centred and participatory in their practice but find that their learners have very traditional expectations of the role of the teacher and type of activities that are to be used. What can teachers do about this very much depends on the expertise of the teacher.

- **Degree of experience and expertise available on the part of the teacher**

Different teaching methods require different levels of training and some of the more 'progressive', innovative methods require high levels of skills on the part of the teacher and time and experience to gain those skills.

- **Size of group, time and available resources**

It may seem obvious to consider these factors yet their importance cannot be overstated!

Last, Jarvis (p. 106 based on Kidd 1973) has some wise and humorous commandments for the teacher:

1. Thou shalt never try to make another human being exactly like thyself; one is enough.
2. Thou shalt never judge a person's need, or refuse your consideration, solely because of the trouble he or she causes.
3. Thou shalt not blame heredity nor the environment in general; people can surmount the environment (or perhaps some of their heredity).
4. Thou shalt never give up a person as hopeless or cast him or her out.
5. Thou shalt try to help everyone become, on the one hand, sensitive and compassionate and also tough minded.
6. Thou shalt not steal from any person his or her rightful responsibilities for determining his own conduct and the consequences thereof.
7. Thou shalt honour anyone engaged in the pursuit of learning and serve well and extend the discipline of knowledge and skill about learning which is our common heritage.
8. Thou shalt have no universal remedies nor expect miracles.
9. Thou shalt cherish a sense of humour which may save you from becoming shocked, depressed or complacent.
10. Thou shalt remember the sacredness and dignity of thy calling and, at the same time, 'thou shalt not take thyself too damned seriously'.

See James 3:1 for some cautionary words about teachers:

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness."

## References

Fowler, J.W. 1995. *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. Revised edition. San Francisco, California: HarperOne

Hubery, D.S. 1970. *The Teaching methods of Jesus*. Nutfield, Surrey: National Christian Education Council

<https://theimtn.org/main/documents/trainingexamples/DH%20The%20Teaching%20Methods%20of%20Jesus.pdf>

Jarvis, P. 1995. *Adult and Continuing Education: theory and practice*. Second Edition. London: Routledge

Kleinhans, A. 2025. *Reading Scripture with Head, Heart, and Hands*. [Paper presented to the Diocese of Natal Theological Conference on 19 September 2025 in Kloof, KwaZulu-Natal]

<http://www.acsafod.org.za/papers/20250919%20%20Alyssa%20Kleinhans%20Reading%20Scripture%20with%20Head,%20Heart,%20and%20Hands.pdf>

### Unit 7: Self test questions

1. What evidence is there for teaching in the New Testament?
2. Name four things that any teacher needs to know to be an effective teacher.
3. The scholar James Fowler lists some religious development characteristics of children aged 2 to 7. What are they?
4. Think of any 'truth' inconsistencies you picked up in your own religious education.
5. Think of your own religious education and anything that you remember being taught or learning that you thought important or striking. What teaching method was being used?
6. Consider your current church congregation experiences. What educational methods have been used in the last three months?

## Unit 8

# The deacon as guide and counsellor

---

### Introduction

Much of the servant ministry of the deacon takes place outside of the church building – in the community, in people’s homes, in the workplace. The deacon reaches out to the community and is a bridgebuilder to the world, a networker and a go-between.

To be able to do this, the deacon has to be able to interpret the needs of people and the situations they live in (see the next Units 9 (Truth sayer and activist) and 10 (Doing social analysis)). In that outside-of-the-Church world the deacon often has to work with groups of people and their organisations (see Unit 11 (Team worker and advisor) and Unit 11 (Working with people in organizations)).

Out there in the community people may have only a weak sense of the presence of the Church. This is particularly the case in bigger towns and cities and in large urban informal settlements. For many in the population they have grown up thinking that Church privileges and benefits are out of their reach. Often the only time they may approach the Church and its clergy is when they or their families are in need and trouble or in times of grief.

In this Unit we look at a specific subset of the deacons’ activities as workers in Church and community when deacons are asked, or feels they should, give advice and counselling to people.

### The deacon as advice giver and counsellor

People in their life journeys often seek guidance on the path forward. This is where the deacon may be asked to provide **advice**. Also, at various ages and stages, people encounter a variety of situations in which they may have difficulties in coping. An aid to coping is to talk to someone who can provide **counselling**.

One needs to distinguish between ‘advice giving or guidance’ and ‘counselling’ and see what guidance and counselling activities it is appropriate for the deacon to do.

### What is guidance and what is counselling?

Some people incorrectly use the terms ‘guidance’ and ‘counselling’ interchangeably. Though both guidance and counselling are helping activities that have as overall goals the prevention and easing of difficulties and suffering and the finding of solutions to problems, they are different concepts about distinctly different activities and processes.

**Guidance** can be defined as the process of **giving advice or information** aimed at resolving a challenge, problem, difficulty, etc. It is largely an information-giving activity that helps the person seeking guidance to make sensible decisions.

**Counselling** is much more a complex process of giving counsel to assist a person or family to resolve for themselves personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties.

This table explains some of the differences:

		Guidance	Counselling
1.	Who is the initiator?	Can be either the person seeking guidance though is frequently initiated by the minister.	Can be either, though is usually initiated by the person seeking counselling.
2.	What is the helper's role?	To preemptively provide accurate, usable, information or training that will meet the person's future needs or to respond to the person's request for information or guidance.	To assist the person being counselled to identify the nature of the problem(s) and to explore ways of resolving the problem(s) themselves.
3.	Who determines the aims of the interaction?	In much guidance activity the guide normally determines the aims. If the person initiates the interaction he or she may determine the aims but these will often be modified in the process of the interaction with the guide.	Of necessity the aims have to be determined by the person being counselled.
4.	Which aspects of a person's functioning are emphasised?	Cognitive (knowledge and skills acquisition)	Personal, social, psychological or spiritual, with a strong stress on the emotions and feelings
5.	What helper skills are required?	Ability to find and communicate information relevant to particular needs and ability to train in appropriate lifeskills	Counselling skills and considerable wisdom (including the ability to know when to encourage the person to be referred to professional help)

In the secular world the professions of social worker and psychologist are the ones which generally give this sort of guidance and counselling in relation to social and psychological dysfunctions in families and individuals (perhaps one could also include financial advisors). But invariably clergy (and sometimes lay ministers) also do guide and counsel on matters related to social and psychological problems in families and individuals. This is not the same as clergy giving **spiritual direction**.

**cognitive:** relating to conscious intellectual activity such as such as decision-making, problem-solving, attention, memory, learning, etc.

**emotions:** the immediate, physiological responses to events

**feelings:** the conscious interpretations of those emotions influenced by thoughts and experiences

**spiritual direction:** the interaction between a spiritual director (usually an ordained person) and a person seeking to attempt to deepen their relationship with God and to grow in their personal spirituality. The person seeking direction describes their spiritual experiences (or lack of them). The spiritual director listens and asks questions to assist the directee in his or her process of reflection and spiritual growth, and may prescribe various spiritual exercises and disciplines. Spiritual direction is neither psychotherapy nor counselling nor **financial planning**.

**Spiritual direction usually involves a series of regular meetings or can take place on a religious retreat. In many dioceses newly ordained clergy are expected to have a spiritual director.**

# Looking at guidance

Guidance is a helping process which :

- encourages individuals or groups to discover, release and develop their potential
- transmits accurate information which will be of positive use to those being guided
- is planned by the guide with specific developmental goals in mind
- encourages those being guided to take responsibility for their own lives
- motivates these receivers to make a positive contribution to the church and to the society in which they live.

If you engage in guidance activities, you need to keep your own objectives clear, and make sure that you don't fall into the trap of being prescriptive, or imposing your own ideas on others. There is no place for **moralizing** in guidance.

It must be remembered that learning something new is often a painful process of **unlearning** previous incomplete or faulty learning or needing to change established **beliefs, attitudes** and **values**. Even receiving advice involves emotions and feelings in those being guided – indeed it may arouse very strong emotions and feelings. People should be encouraged to identify and express feeling responses, so that the importance of these feelings is acknowledged, and they can learn to use and control them. Hence, also, the importance of good communication, including an awareness of the difficulties in cross-cultural communication where the guide and those being given advice come from different backgrounds.

If you give guidance to a group you need to provide the participants with an opportunity to share their feelings in a supportive context where there is no fear of any kind of repercussion in terms of others holding different views or values. They should feel free to explore any topic, in a non-threatened way; to share their ideas and feelings with other members of the group without fear of discrimination.

Guidance activities vary dependent on the situation. These may include disseminating information, being able to link with other resources, leading discussion to promote insight, teaching problem-solving and decision-making skills, building self-confidence and self-esteem, teaching organizing and planning skills, encouraging the development of coping and conflict resolution skills and focusing on improving human relationships.

Often for young people guidance relates to the difficulties and barriers that stand in the way of participation in education and training and work, the need for advice on how to gain access to appropriate forms of study and training, career development, avoiding unemployment, and gaining greater self knowledge. In very poor communities it may involve such things as advice on how to gain identity documents, child grants and pensions, etc.

Of course all these guidance activities often overlap with each other and are influenced by the various layers of the environment in which people live: family and home, neighbourhood and workplace, and the wider world with its beliefs and values and economic and political systems.

**moralizing:** to moralize is simply to express judgments about what is morally right and wrong, but the word in modern English has the sense of speaking as if giving a judgmental sermon which is not appropriate to the situation.

**beliefs:** what we agree with and generally consider being true of our world. Fundamental beliefs are those that we consider central to our sense of reality. They may or may not be reinforced by the people around us. Note that when the scriptures or the liturgies use the word "belief" it does not simply mean we intellectually believe something to be factually true but that we trust or have faith in or are devoted to something.

**attitudes:** relatively long-lasting ways in which we organise our beliefs. They include the way we evaluate people, feelings and experiences positively or negatively, These can be less or more intense and less or more important.

**values:** these are our ideas about what is good and what is bad. They are usually embedded in social, cultural, moral or religious systems. We make judgements based upon our own value systems, which we communicate to each other and take to be the truth. Note too that values are often in conflict within a community.

Many of the guidance activities that a deacon may be called upon to assist in can be described as teaching the lifeskills that people need to survive and grow, to relate and communicate with others and to handle key situations, and are one of the means through which individuals become whole.

The table below indicates some of these typical lifeskills:

A classification of lifeskills	
Skills of learning	Literacy, Numeracy, Study skills, Finding information, Using computers, Learning from experience
Skills of relating	Making, keeping and ending human relationships, Communication, Assertiveness, Being an effective member of a group, Conflict management, Giving and receiving feedback, Parenting
Skills of working	Seeking and keeping a job, Career management, Time management, Money management, Choosing and using leisure options, Home management, Managing unemployment, Accessing social grants, Preparation for retirement, Setting objectives and action planning
Skills of developing self and others	Being positive about yourself, Problem solving, Decision making, Stress management, Life transition management, Managing sexuality, Parenting, Keeping fit, Managing negative emotions, Discovering interests, values and skills, Discovering what makes us do the things we do, Developing the spiritual self, Helping others, Developing the responsible citizen

Teaching lifeskills involves effective presentation of how to use problem solving processes and developing knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Although guidance and advice giving is often done on an individual basis, it can often be done in courses and workshops, sometimes run by the local church, often by other organizations.

In any group development, it is important for the participants to first feel safe, thus exercises for the building of trust and acceptance are initially important. As participants grow more confident, they may be prepared to try out new behaviours modelled by the guide or other group members. Support and encouragement from the group are still important.

Once a group is stronger and members more familiar with each other, stronger feelings and opinions may be expressed in the group environment, and conflict may be expressed without the integrity of the group or the self-esteem of the members being damaged.

In many cases, guidance activities the deacon may be involved in will be done through or with other organizations and institutions in the community (see also Unit 11 on Working with people in organizations).

## Looking at counselling

A person may need help of different types and to different degrees.

A man who has trouble with his vegetable garden which is not growing well, or with his neighbours who do not respect his property rights, may seek help from a horticulturist or a lawyer. He needs advice, guidance, on what to do, not counselling.

This need for help in the form of information or advice differs from that of a person who has trouble in making a decision, or coping with anxiety or depression, or relating to others, or being devastated by guilt, enslaved by an addiction, or facing some other personal or social problem. In these situations there is more involved in the problem situation than a simple lack of accurate, usable, information. Help in these situations must be directed **to the person**. It is not about giving advice about the situation but about the person, through counselling, gaining capacity to deal themselves with the problem.

Everybody at times has to relate to people amongst family, friends or colleagues, who are troubled, whether mildly or severely. In every church congregation there are troubled people. In every community there are troubled people. Who can help them? Who can counsel them?

It is not just professional counsellors (social workers and psychotherapists) who are involved in offering this kind of help. Remember there are more ministers in the world than psychologists and social workers and the bulk of counselling in the world is done by such ministers. Clergy regularly face people with these types of problems in the course of their everyday work. It is likely that every deacon will at some time be asked to provide counsel. But they should have training on this.

### A cautionary note

Note that, because “counselling” is also a professional practice, it is illegal in South Africa for anybody to advertise themselves as or call themselves a “counsellor” unless they are a professional psychological counsellor fully university qualified and registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPSCA). Social workers and child and youth care workers also have to be registered through the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). Though priests and deacons may have received training in pastoral counselling, they are not, legally speaking, “counsellors”.

It is important to bear in mind that although you have learned or been trained in certain counselling skills this does not turn you into a professional counsellor, equipped to offer counselling outside of a Church setting and you need to be very aware of your limitations. It is also inadvisable for a deacon, unless fully trained as a counsellor to do counselling except in the initial stages and under the supervision of a trained social worker or psychologist. Remember – you are not your client’s substitute parent, doctor, teacher, social worker or psychologist! You are there to enable the person to talk about the obstacles in their life, to identify key ones and to support them in finding ways to change how they deal with the obstacles.

With these cautions in mind, the rest of the Unit is an introduction to basic counselling concepts, and to the key skills of the competent helper.

## The principles of counselling

Counselling is a helping process in which a counsellor, working within the framework of a special helping relationship :

- encourages open-ended face-to-face discussion in a safe environment
- employs special listening and responding skills
- encourages the person being counselled to gain better insight into herself or himself, into the blockages to their responses to difficult situations, and how to improve interpersonal relationships
- motivates and empowers the receiver to solve problems (of a personal, social, psychological or spiritual nature) more effectively (and especially through finding and using his or her own resources)
- provides opportunities for the receiver to gain additional help when required.

Usually people who need counselling are stressed or traumatised in some way due to a problem or crisis. While being stressed in this way is uncomfortable and can be harmful, it also provides an opportunity for growth and change, even though the person can regress and develop maladaptive ways of coping.

The counsellor's job is therefore helping the troubled person to grow through the situation. What the counsellor needs to do then, is to create a supportive and encouraging atmosphere in which the person can find a way of coping with their situation in a way that is best for them, not just for the short term.

The counsellor does this by providing an accepting, caring relationship in which the person or family can explore thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and options. At all times in the counselling process the responsibility for growth and change remains with the person or family and it is recognised that some people may not be ready to make changes in their lives at the time when they are seeing the counsellor.

### Another cautionary note: confidentiality

Most people know that in the Anglican Church, as in the Roman Catholic, the tradition is that a priest must keep totally secret anything that a person confesses. A priest, therefore, cannot break the secrecy, directly or indirectly, even to save his or her own life, to protect his or her good name, to refute a false accusation, to save the life of another, to aid the course of justice (like reporting a crime or giving evidence in court), or to avert a public disaster. However, a priest may ask the penitent for a release from the secrecy to discuss the information with somebody else or take beneficial action.

Now a deacon is not authorised to hear sacramental confessions, but the same standard of confidentiality should apply to what is said in a counselling session, though of course the deacon may ask the counselled person for permission to talk to others about it when it is in the interests of the person (for example when referring the person to somebody else for further help) or may only agree to counsel if the person agrees that the deacon is allowed to report on it to another (such as the parish priest or a supervisor).

In all counselling work done by the deacon it must be made clear that the conversations are confidential unless the person counselled agrees otherwise.

# The key counselling skills

These are **listening**, **reflection**, and **questioning** (to clarify).

## Listening

The counsellor has to be a good listener because being so enables the following:

- the person can talk freely and frankly.
- they can speak about the problems that are important to them, and how they react to these problems.
- they provide as much information as they can.
- by speaking they can articulate their problems and the causes of the problems in an understandable way.

The capacity to be an active and understanding listener is probably the most fundamental counselling skill of all: listening is the way in to a helping relationship. Good listening is not a passive act, it is active, deliberate and disciplined. It involves your own level of self-awareness as well as awareness of the spoken and unspoken communication of the other person. By listening carefully the counsellor is more likely to be able to then respond in an appropriate way.

Good listening requires that you receive the other person's information accurately and are then be able to send a response so that the other person feels that she or he is being heard and understood. This active listening is central to empathetic understanding that involves trying to put yourself in the other person's world, having the capacity to understand the problem as if through their own eyes; yet never losing this 'as if' quality, always acknowledging the reality of the other's differentness. The counsellor must sense the meaning of the other's feelings without being emotionally overwhelmed by the experience.

Empathetic listening and responding helps the person being counselled to listen to themselves, which in turn helps the helper to listen to them at a deeper level. This kind of listening requires letting people have the acceptance and psychological space to do their own exploring, not only of their thoughts but also their emotions and feelings.

### Some guidelines for effective listening

**Know why you are listening:** You should have a reason for listening and know what is being looked for. As with observing, you should listen for cues. You should also be listening for the "who, what, where, why, how and when" of the situation. To do this, you must not only focus on the words, but also the tone of voice.

**Also look at body language:** As you listen to and observe their non-verbal behaviour you will be paying attention to: the person's voice (tone, volume, speed of delivery, silences); facial expressions (frowning, blushing, becoming tearful, smiling); body movements (fidgeting, posture, eye-contact, hand movements); and appearance (apparent state of health, clothing, cleanliness).

**Suspend your own judgement:** If you are going to listen to what the person has to say, you must temporarily suspend things that you say to yourself. You must let the person's message sink in without trying to make premature decisions about it.

There are several different approaches to counselling which influence how different institutions train counsellors.

The three main approaches are:

- A behavioural change approach in which the counsellor is very directive, suggests changes in behaviour and tries to model good behaviour.
- A cognitive change approach which is more interactive in which irrational beliefs are challenged and issues reframed. Changes in behaviour are often role played.
- A very non-directive person-centred approach is more centred on feelings and being authentic and honest and responsible for self. This approach is a very commonly used one in the caring professions.

**Wait for the full stop :** Never interrupt or break in on what he or she is saying. Wait until the person has reached a full stop in what he or she is expressing before you respond.

**Allow silences:** If the person stops talking, but you feel he or she is not really finished, don't let the silence make you nervous. The person may be thinking through something important or difficult. Good listening inevitably involves silences, so try to understand what the silence is expressing, and reflect that.

**Listen for feelings:** While the person is talking, listen to the words but also listen to how he or she feels about whatever he or she is saying, or about the situation he or she is describing. Give gentle encouragement such as “Mmmm”, “Uh-uh”, nodding, “Yes”, “Go on”.

**Express yourself quietly and slowly and in a somewhat tentative manner:** Put a little question into what you are saying. You will communicate a sincere desire to understand better, without giving the impression that you are making any judgements.

**Questioning:** This should be used very carefully and sensitively. Never ask “Why?” Beware that your questioning does not take you out of the person's frame of reference and back into your own. Concentrate questions on feelings, on the immediate present, rather than on facts and content. The “gaps” in the person's account can become the basis for questions that you may ask at a later stage.

**Assume nothing about the person:** Don't assume that she or he has values like yours, or that his or her feelings in a situation are similar to yours. This will be easier if you are really concentrating on listening and understanding. With practice, it is possible to learn to see things from the other's position.

**Don't be pressured into giving opinions or answers:** Rather say something like: “You wish someone could give you the right answer”, or “You seem to think my opinion is important”.

**If you want to spend more time on an issue:** Ask them to repeat what they said, or to explain. You could repeat their last few words questioningly, but be sure not to interrupt their train of thought.

**Resist distractions:** Perhaps the most important thing is to resist anything that will take us away from the person to whom we are listening. If we are distracted by noises outside the room – and notice that the person is too – then “bring” the noise into the room by acknowledging the existence of the disturbance as a problem you both share.

## Reflection

Reflection is sometimes called ‘mirroring’ – by reflecting, we serve as a mirror to the experience of the speaker, enabling him or her to see and understand better. You are reflecting back to the person as accurately as possible what they have revealed to you.

So as a good listener you act as a mirror – you assist the person to understand what is happening to them, what they want and value, and how they will reach their goals.

Consider how a mirror works :

- It doesn't make things better or worse than they are. It shows the image without adding flattery or faults. A mirror accepts me as I am without distortion. It gives a picture not a sermon. It doesn't need to be liked. I may not like what I see but that's the way it is.
- A mirror doesn't make decisions. It is up to me to decide how I wish to appear (and what to do about my appearance).
- It doesn't hurry things on.
- It shows things as they are here and now, not as they were in the past or could be in the future.
- It doesn't give its opinion, contradict or interrupt.
- A mirror isn't curious. It does not want to know or need to know all the details.
- It doesn't tell other people what it saw.

To begin with, the use of reflection may seem forced and artificial - it is not an easy skill to acquire. Good reflection does not entail the mechanical parroting of the last words the person has said to you.

In reflection of content, only the verbal content of the communications is mirrored. Reflection of content is one way in which people can build up the skill of disciplined accurate listening.

In reflection of feeling the emotional tone and meaning are mirrored both in your verbal responses and congruent facial expression.

A relatively straightforward but not absolutely foolproof approach is to start your response to what you are told by saying 'You ...' and 'Your ....'. paying attention both to what the speaker is saying (content) and to how it is said (feeling). It may be that the person is not yet ready to face the deeper feelings implied by their own body language, so a reflection of content is more appropriate. Reflection is thus not just a mechanical skill but requires sensitivity on the part of the counsellor.

It is not the place of the counsellor to judge. You reflect what the person is saying, not on what your opinion or judgement on it is.

So you would not say:

“You have got yourself into serious trouble, you have committed a crime.”

but rather

“You say you feel guilty about what you did and are scared of the consequences. Is that correct?”

Good responses indicate a basic acceptance of the other. They do not inhibit the flow of talk and emotions, or make the other feel inferior, inadequate or defensive.

The responses are understandable and clear, accompanied by good vocal and bodily communication. The implicit attitude of the helper is a collaborative working with the other to understand his or her frame of reference and communication to you.

*Characteristics of an ideal good counsellor include the following:*

Be warm, approachable, and accepting

Create mutual respect

Be calm

Be trustworthy

Be discreet and keep confidentiality

Be thoughtful and self-aware

Be open-minded and doesn't jump to conclusions or make assumptions

Not judgmental and accepting of human flaws

Not preaching, lecturing, or moralizing

Not patronizing

Having a sense of humour

Knowing how to establish and keep boundaries

Being available appropriately

Be constructive

*The person being counselled expects:*

To be taken seriously

Allowed to be themselves

Not interrupted when speaking

Not argued with

Not to have the seriousness of their problem minimized

Not to be given false reassurances

To be seen as capable of change

To be challenged

The counsellor not to try and solve the problem for them

## Questioning

It is important to recognize that "questioning" is not interrogation but rather a matter of sensitively clarifying and summarizing what the person has said.

Some of the questions you will have been asking yourself as you listened to what they said will include the following:

- Why now? (Especially if the incident concerning them is in the past!)
- What exactly did this person experience?
- How does this person feel about what happened?
- What did this person do – how did this person react?
- How is this person behaving now – honestly and openly or not?

How do you follow up these questions when you respond?

Questioning, used sparingly and carefully, can be helpful. Five possibly beneficial ways in which questions can be used are:

- for obtaining specific information
- asking for elaboration
- asking for feeling responses
- when exploring alternatives
- when checking whether your own perceptions are accurate.

Good questioning can take the information gained in the reflection/mirroring process and help clarify and summarise what has been said and aid in breaking up what has been said into understandable chunks, what is sometimes called partializing – the breaking up of the host of problems into parts, digestible, manageable pieces, that allows for further simplification, prioritization and goal setting. Partializing is only possible once the person has explored their story fully. Often this is sufficient for the person to find their own solutions and appropriate ways to remove obstacles to change.

Questioning, however, requires much caution. Wrongly used, questioning can lead to the person being passive, expecting the counsellor to take all responsibility for the process, and possibly ascribing to the helper an 'expertness' which may lead to difficulties.

The following are common errors in questioning:

- too many questions - the person may feel interrogated
- closed questions - these close down the options for responding, often to one word or Yes/No answers
- leading questions - these are often in the counsellor's frame of reference, and may disrupt the person's train of thought
- questions which probe too deeply may lead to anxiety
- 'why' questions may lead to intellectualising or defensive responses because they may put pressure on a person to explain or justify, rather than describe their behaviour
- questions used as a way of giving advice.

# The process of counselling

A typical full counselling process can be represented in four phases:

## Orientation phase - listening to and being with the person

This is the phase in which the establishment of the relationship is most important. It includes the recognition of the problem by the person and their seeking for help. In response, the counsellor needs to signal concern and respect, focussing on listening carefully and empathic responding. The focus on collaborative problem-solving rather than on advice-giving should be clarified. The rules of appropriate confidentiality must be clarified.

## Exploratory phase

In this phase, exploration of the various aspects of the problem is done. The aim is definition of the problems in concrete terms so that goals can be set, and both counsellor and the person being counselled have greater clarity on cognitive, feeling, and behavioural aspects of the problems and their solutions. The helper still focuses on empathic responding, but may use some questioning for clarification, aiming to summarise when all aspects have been explored, breaking up what may be a host of problems into the individual problems, and prioritizing which one is most urgent and/or important.

## Action phase

More active problem-solving becomes important in this phase. The person is encouraged to generate prioritized goals, and may be assisted in this by the counsellor. These goals may be in the cognitive, feeling and/or behavioural domains, and the merits of each need to be explored. Following this exploration, the person is encouraged to make a decision on what is to be implemented. Ideally there should be a joint summing up.

Effective counselling doesn't mean that the person will immediately feel better or less angry or guilty or whatever. Sometimes all you can do is be with a person as they struggle. It is necessary to be aware of resources which may be of help to you, and/or to whom you can refer people in need of professional help.

## Post-session

It is helpful to record some notes of the session for future reference. An overall summary of the counselling session is valuable.

Note taking within the session is distracting, though some counsellors, with the permission of the person being counselled, record the session. These notes must be kept safe and confidential.

## Evaluation phase

It is important that any intervention is not left 'in mid-air'. A follow-up session, with evaluation of the problem-solving is important, and it may be necessary to recycle to the exploratory phase if the planned goal reaching strategy has not been successful. Should it be decided that further help is not necessary in the immediate future, it is still helpful to reassure the person of your support.

Part of the evaluation process is to examine the impact on the counsellor's own thoughts and feelings. Counselling can be emotionally draining and the deacon counsellor will need to draw on their own spiritual resources to remain whole and disciplined.

## Referrals to other people or agencies

In many guidance or counselling situations the person will need to obtain help or advice from another person, such as the parish priest, specialist agency or professional helper. It is the task of any deacon providing guidance or counselling to know when to refer a person to such help and it is wise to have done some forward planning about this. This would involve:

- realistically assessing the types of problems for which you may find people needing help, and
- networking locally to find out about, and make initial contact with, appropriate helping agencies.

## Networking with helping agencies

To be able to refer you need to know to whom to refer people to and you need to have assurance that these helping agencies will be willing to accept your referrals. You need to make contact with the most appropriate agencies so that you get to know what they can offer and they have advance warning that you may refer people to them. This is also part of the deacon's need to understand the local environment (See Unit 10) and have an accurate assessment of what are the typical problems in it.

Typical problems usually relate to:

- marriage and preparation for marriage
- inappropriate sexual activity by young people and teenage pregnancy
- having children and bringing up a family
- abusive relationships in a marriage or the family
- career choice, job changes and unemployment
- unethical and corrupt activities in the place of work
- coping with middle age
- preparation for retirement and old age
- coping with illness and handicap
- economic and social problem in the area - failures in service delivery
- gaining official documents and applying for grants.

Some of the problems will reflect the socio-economic conditions of people - poor people are more likely to have financial or transport problems or service delivery issues than well-off middle class ones. In areas of high unemployment, seeking employment may be a major concern. Young adults learners will be particularly concerned with career development and sexual behaviour.

At the simplest level this means that you must have a listing of the appropriate agencies that can help people who have the problems that you have identified

as being likely to occur. In some cases, resource directories are available but even when they are they often need to be updated. You may even want to produce an information sheet on helping agencies for the local church or archdeaconry - for in some cases a person may want to go directly to such an agency rather than via you.

All this means that a certain amount of work is required to be able to refer people to other agencies or sources of information. It is pointless to refer people to agencies, materials or brochures one has not personally examined.

Deacons who guide and/or counsel must be knowledgeable and able to utilize the multiplicity of agencies. They must keep in touch with industry, employers, personnel officers, etc. It often needs up to nine telephone calls (a telephone is essential equipment) to sort out a problem. Given the lack of knowledge of people who are disadvantaged, how can one expect them to succeed without these contacts and resources?

## The referral process

It is important, whilst considering a referral, to explore fully with the person their ability to take advantage of the help offered. It is necessary to bear in mind that many people may be reticent to make the first contact due to prior experiences of not being helped. A person will not take advantage of a referral if they do not believe that another agency can help them.

This may mean that the deacon needs to engage in a certain amount of advocacy work to make people aware of the resources provided by other agencies. Your role may be to make initial contacts and provide emotional support.

Any contact with another agency on behalf of a person must be with her or his full consent, and developing the person's self-help skills implies that one does not fall into the trap of doing too much.

## Following the pastoral standards

The Anglican Church has issued *Pastoral Standards* (2002 and 2011) as well as a *Charter for a safe and inclusive church* (2019). These both provide guidance on the correct behaviour of ministers (clergy, lay-ministers and other church workers) and ways of preventing and dealing with abuse, particularly sexual abuse, within the Church.

The summary of ACSA Pastoral Standards includes the following:

"All who minister in the Church:

- Should care for God's people with compassion and integrity
- Should avoid abusing any person in their pastoral care, or anybody else
- Should take special care in counselling relationships and where confidential information is shared
- Should keep confidences."



## Unit 8: Self test questions

1. Briefly describe the distinction between guidance and counselling.
2. What are three key counselling skills?
3. What is referral?
4. Under what conditions can a counsellor disclose to others what was said in a counselling session?

## Unit 9

# The deacon as truth sayer and activist

---

### Introduction

The ordinal (*An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, p. 583) says that the deacon is called:

“to a special ministry of humble service. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, and to seek out particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely. ... You are to interpret to the Church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world.”

Note that this ministry is to **all** people (not just the congregation or only Christians), it is to particularly **focus on the vulnerable and powerless** in the world, and to bring to the Church **accurate understandable information about the world, its needs, concerns and hopes**.

The deacon bringing the needs of the world into the Church is symbolised liturgically by the deacon leading the Prayers of the Church.

The response to discovering those needs is *diakonia*, the diaconal action by the Church.

This is beautifully illustrated by an account in Acts 11:27-30 and 12:25:

“At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the brethren living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the presbyters by Barnabas and Saul. ... Then after completing their *diakonion* Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.”

So information about needs is brought to the Church which then takes diaconal action, collecting resources and diaconally commissioning Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to journey to Judea with the aid.

### The deacon as information gatherer, intelligence agent, truth-teller and prophet

Accepting that a prime task of the deacon as truth finder is to provide information to the Church, how is this truthful and accurate reporting on the “needs, concerns and hopes” to be achieved? It clearly demands an ability to gather information honestly and fully without being selective or biased and to “interpret” that collected information, so that it can be understood by the members of the Church.

**truth sayer:** a person who speaks the truth about important issues, especially when the truth is contrary to conventional wisdom and goes against the norm, even when it is difficult or unpopular.

**activist:** in contemporary speech, a person who is extremely energetic in forwarding some cause or who campaigns for some kind of social change or who works for an organization fighting for change. People who are against the said social or political changes will often describe activists as extremists, militants, zealots, fanatics or subversives.

Gathering and analysing and reporting on information is no easy task. It requires intellectual and emotional honesty, an utter commitment to the truth, openness to new facts that may contradict what one had previously thought to be true, intelligence to sift fact from fiction, and the bravery to present unpalatable truths to those who do want to hear them. Further it means going beyond stating the obvious facts to asking ‘Why?’ questions of those facts.

Being one of God’s spies in the occupied territory of a fallen world is fraught with difficulty. The enemies of the good and true do not like information gatherers and even devout church members may find the message of **truth sayers** uncomfortable, if it contradicts their own personal political, economic or social interests.

Taking diaconal action in response to the gathered intelligence is no easy task either. Taking action and taking into account all the (often unintended) consequences of that action, is often complex. Taking action, becoming an **activist**, is also placing oneself in an exposed position, vulnerable to criticism and opposition.

## What can the deacon learn from the prophets?

The above statements on what a truth saying activist does suggests something akin to the role of the Old Testament prophets who in God’s name disrupted conventional certainties and comfortable beliefs and practices. They denounced injustice, foretold the inevitable consequences of God’s judgement on evil, but also opened up new horizons of hope. That this similarity in role between deacon and prophet is real is pointed out in a statement from the Church of Scotland on the diaconate (2018):

“Theological training, practical community based work and experience of the World Church gives Deacons a prophetic imperative. In this they call the Church locally and nationally to address the needs of others. They are the interface between the church and the community. In this prophetic voice, the call for the people of God to serve the church, community and world is also given. This may be communicated in weekly worship, traditionally prayers of intercession, or through Christian Education. This Prophetic voice may also be exercised in the preaching of the Word when required. Beyond the church the Deacon speaks to places of power on behalf of those who have no power, the Deacon advocates for those in most need.”

So being a truth finding and truth saying saying activist can indeed be seen as a role for the deacon.

In the Old Testament the prophets were individuals inspired by God to speak with authority to a situation and a time in the life of the nation. This explains why the books of the individual prophets introduce the prophet by name, date and place of activity. The message of the prophet can only be fully understood in the context of the time and place in which it was given. This also explains why the message of the prophet is so concerned with the politics of the nation (that is, how the nation is ruled or governed and how people are treated) and with international politics (that is, with the nation’s dealings with other nations and particularly with the great superpowers of the day). Prophets were primarily spokespersons for God, tasked with calling the people back to faithfulness and obedience to the covenant. They addressed issues of social justice, idolatry, and moral decay, urging repentance and a return to the ways of the Lord.

The idea that the prophets were fortune tellers, making astrologer-like predictions of what would happen or describing the end of the universe, is a false one. The prophets are not talking about some apocalyptic end of the world but of what has been done and is being done right now by the powerful, the greedy and the corrupt to the poor people of God and how that local world, built on injustice and exploitation, will inevitably come crashing down in ruins, that world will end.

It is instructive to read the passage from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah that describes how the prophet has been assaulted, arrested and the message from the Lord that he gives in response (Jeremiah 20:1-6):

“Now the priest Pashhur son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord. The next morning when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, The Lord has named you not Pashhur but ‘Terror-all-around.’ For thus says the Lord: I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword. I will give all the wealth of this city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, shall go into captivity, and to Babylon you shall go; there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.”

Note the following: the specificity of place and time; the attempt to suppress the truth (“Jeremiah prophesying these things”), the injustice done to the messenger of God, the message of warning from the Lord – the oppressors shall themselves be defeated and taken into exile for the rulers of Judah have not read the signs of the times correctly about the new political superpower, Babylon. Indeed the rulers of Judah have been lied to with false prophecies.

The other point to make is that Jeremiah did not find standing for the truth easy (Jeremiah 20:7-13) but the Word of the Lord was “like a burning fire shut up in my bones” and he was compelled to speak out whatever the cost.

## The prophets in the New Testament

The New Testament describes how, in the earliest days of the Church, before the three orders of bishops, presbyters and deacons were developed, it was led by the Twelve apostles, and its expansion supported by “prophets and teachers”.

Acts 13:1 says that in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, among them Barnabas and Paul. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul writes that:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.”

Ephesians 4:11: echoes this:

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of *diakonias*, for building up the body of Christ.”

You can read a short text on the Old Testament prophets in the Fellowship of Deacons website text, ***Lights for the nations: a quick course on the prophets*** ([www.acsafod.org.za/study/Prophets.pdf](http://www.acsafod.org.za/study/Prophets.pdf))

Prophecy was seen as a very desirable gift. Paul recognizes the edifying and transformative power for good of prophecy within the Christian community, emphasizing its importance for building up, encouraging, and consoling believers (1 Corinthians 14:3):

“Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. ...those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation. ... those who prophesy build up the church. ”

The *Book of Revelation* is an example of a prophet addressing local church communities to strengthen their resolve and patience to endure suffering at a time of impending persecution and providing an acute political and economic analysis of a tyrannical Roman Empire heading for disaster.

The New Testament highlights the role of prophets within the early Christian church as foundational to its growth and development. It seems that these prophets are primarily addressing the local church communities for the edification of the faithful in difficult times. When prophecies are addressed to individuals, other believers are present, and the content is focussed on the advance of the gospel. When these prophets speak, the church considers the message.

The subsequent history of the Church has many example of people who exercised a prophetic ministry, not least our own Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

## Truth in a time of lies, misinformation and social media

The prophets of old were sent by God into situations where the truth of things was denied by corrupt and evil rulers and the wealthy and people who spoke the truth punished. Yet the ordinary people, what the Old Testament calls ‘the poor of the land’ had a good sense of the truth about their often bitter reality (Amos 8:4):

“Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land.”

In recent decades there has been a massive assault on the very idea of there being such a thing as truth. The rise of electronic communication and most recently the so-called social media has seen an unprecedented flow of lies and other untruths. So much so that the world now often echoes Pilate’s question at Jesus’ trial (John 19:37-39):

Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’”

If we are aligned with Jesus we have to be aligned totally to truth.

But how do we discern what is true in the current age in which it is so difficult to know what is true and what is false?

And how is the deacon, as information gatherer, truth sayer and teacher, to communicate truth to the people of the Church and to others? And how is the deacon to equip people to defend themselves from a powerful environment that is penetrated by lies and misinformation?

Here we are reminded of the passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 about needing to wear the whole armour of God, amongst which is “the belt of truth”.

What, in the current age do we do to equip Christians with the armour to defend themselves against untruth and find the truth when it is hidden behind a cloud of misinformation?

Compare John 1:17, “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

# Understanding the categories of untruth

Untruths come in various forms and it is helpful to be able to distinguish them:

- **lie** (teller knows it is not true)
- **misinformation** (incorrect information but which the teller thought was true)
- **disinformation** (information which the teller knows to be untrue)
- **malinformation** (false information designed to cause direct harm)
- **bullshit** (deceptive, insincere, manipulative speech without particular concern for truth, clarity, or meaning)

Although it is a common perception that politicians often lie, until recently being caught out in some big lie was often the end of a political career. That has now changed. The best example of this is the 2017 to 2021 President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, leader of the most powerful nation on earth, who made 30 573 lies or misleading statements during that period. This astounding statistic raises curiosity as to why his conservative evangelical church-going supporters did not consider lack of truthfulness important anymore, so much so that they re-elected him to serve another term starting in 2025.

He was not alone. In 2023, Trump's successor, Joseph Biden, publicly said that he had seen photographs of 40 babies beheaded during an attack by the Hamas resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This was totally false. Subsequent to that major resistance attack, the Israeli authorities went into major overdrive and their propaganda has been largely repeated by the Western governments and media – television and newspapers. This path was well laid out by Adolf Hitler who stated that the bigger the lie the better, as people would not believe that anybody “could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously”.

This is a disconcerting environment for the Christian minister, servant of the truth, who is required to protect the people of God from untruth. Yet the problem is that the rise of the social media have made the problem of a lie-flooded environment even more pressing.

## Untruth in the social media

The invention of the **internet**, the **world wide web**, and the **smartphone** allowed for the creation of social media. The smartphone was the means by which advertisers could now have direct access to potential customers. The way to get their direct attention was to offer “free” services that people would want to use and to which adverts could be attached, ‘monetising’ the service into a profitable business. Thus, Google (in 1998), which offered a free search facility to find information on the World Wide Web, then Gmail (in 2004) a free email service that enabled the Google company to gain access to your list of email contacts, Facebook (2003) a social network, which also gained access to all the user's contacts, messenger applications such as WhatsApp (2014) (owned by Facebook), e video services YouTube (2006) (owned by Google), and Instagram (2010) (owned by Facebook), and TikTok (2017). Selling advertising space on these “free” services made two companies in particular, Google (now called Alphabet) and Facebook (now Meta), the most profitable of all time.

**internet:** the huge network of numerous computers connected through a number of major nodes allowing electronic communication among millions of computers around the world

**world-wide web:** an information system that enables the content of web pages to be shared over the internet

**smartphone:** a mobile telephone that is also a miniature computer that can link to the internet

See the Fellowship of Deacons study course on **Advertising and popular culture** for a detailed look at advertising in today's economic systems and culture.

[www.acsafod.org.za/study.html](http://www.acsafod.org.za/study.html)

So far, fairly morally neutral. Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, and YouTube set up “free” services (and in many ways most useful ones) as a way of building a platform on which to place adverts. You ‘pay for that ‘free’ service by being exposed to a whole lot of adverts and giving them contact details of your friends (maybe that is not so moral).

But having a profitable platform on which to place adverts was only the beginning. By astute use of computer technology, these companies were able to generate an astonishing amount of data on every person using the applications (and cross-linking it with the data on the people in your contact lists). Computer algorithms (a sequence of instructions given to the computer to go through a series of defined steps to analyze large data sets and make predictions) could now be applied to that data. This analyzed data could now be sold to advertisers (and to politicians and lobbyists).

It all starts with the algorithms that are used to analyse all the words and key phrases in the messages you make on social media (except for a few such as Signal, which don't), categorises them, and adds them to the personal profile they build up on you (and which is also linked to the profiles of all your contacts – social media know what your friends think and what they buy because they know who your friends are from Facebook and who your contacts are because they have all your contacts on your email and WhatsApp – yes, you gave them permission to do this because it was in the small print of the agreement when you downloaded the app to your phone (and probably did not read).

That profile can then be used to direct appropriate advertising to the social media and websites you use. So, for example, if you often message about clothing, you will see more and more adverts about clothing and fashion. It is called ‘targeted advertising’.

It is at the next stage that the real trouble starts. The more adverts you get to look at, the better for the advertiser and the better for the social media that sell the advertising space. So the trick is to ensure that people spend as much time on the social media as possible and move as fast as possible from one item to the next. You are likely to do that if you already have engaged with that sort of content, it is already being discussed by your friends on social media (and remember the social media know what your friends think), conforms to you biases, grievances, insecurities, **phantasies** and **fantasies**, is emotive and makes you outraged, angry or envious. The social media's algorithms know you more intimately than do your own best friends and will serve you tailored “information” that aligns with what it is predicted you're most likely to agree with.

So the way the algorithm works out is to provide “click bait” to keep you engaged and the inevitable effect of following that “click bait” is to become encased in a “confirmation bias bubble” that often ends up encouraging our worst attitudes and feelings, insecurities and desires. The algorithms can also be adjusted to ensure that political propaganda that the owners of the social media companies support (or get paid to support) is fed to you.

But there is more. Because the aim of these media is rapid movement, pieces tend to be short, untaxing on the mind, with no incentive to read critically and in a nuanced way or to seek out alternative views or to have facts checked. What is concerning is that there is now overwhelming evidence that the social media, the

Two similar words may be given slightly different meanings:

**phantasy**: unconscious imaginings or ideas generated by drives, needs, and instincts (and which underlie dreams)

**fantasy**: conscious imaginings or thoughts that a person can create

most prominent of which are Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram (all owned by one firm and man) and Twitter (now X), communicate falsity and untruth far more effectively and speedily than truth.

A good example of this was social media during the Covid pandemic. A study by the University of Cape Town on vaccine information in South Africa and five other African countries found that only 23% of information was pro-vaccination or neutral, 41% was anti-vaccination and 35% was vaccine hesitant. So over three-quarters of the information was misleading and most came from South Africa.

Nowadays most people get their information about the world not from the press or television, but from the social media. Social media can make information go viral in minutes, whether it is right or wrong and many studies have shown that false news stories travel faster and in greater quantity than the true.

The final issue is why have the social media companies not used their immense technical capability to fix at least some of these problems? The reason is simple and horrific. They want to keep making bigger and bigger profits.

## What can you do about it?

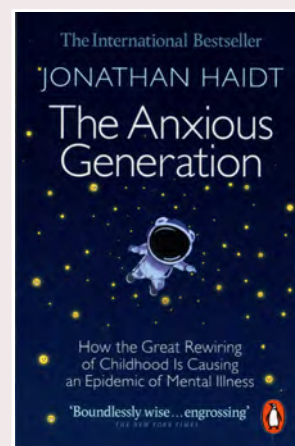
Isaiah (6:9) warned of a corrupted people who:

“Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.”

In the face of the situation in which the whole profit-driven social media machine rolls on regardless of the victims left in its path, the deacon as truth finder and truth sayer may feel overwhelmed. What can the deacon do to resist this constantly running machine of social media encouraging all the worst of human desires for consumption and acquisition and at the same time fragmenting society, communities, our sense of self, and our attention spans?

What are the deacon's options?

- We can get off the social media entirely (the ascetic option) or only use those that are not tied to the advertising cesspit (such as the messaging app called Signal). Not many people will follow you on this route.
- Or we can use social media with extreme caution, always being alert for ‘fake news’ and correcting such false information when we get it from friends’ or church people’s posts. This requires constant alertness to the regular presence of falsehood in communications, including communications within the church, and education of all Christians, young and old, on the perils of social media use. Deacons are often expected to teach confirmation classes and warn children and young people about all the sins to avoid – violence, stealing, and sexual abuse, and so forth. But do we prepare them for the temptations and pitfalls of modern communication? Are they trained so that they will not bear false witness – wittingly or unwittingly – nor become complicit in it? The Old Testament took “fake news” very seriously. Prophet after prophet rails against false prophecies uttered to please rulers or or the rich.
- The last option, the hardest, is to work for a society in which riches and profit are not the major drivers and in which social media would be advert free but regulated public utilities. Yet this option is clearly the one most aligned to the prophetic call for a world that reflects the kingdom of God.



Jonathan Haidt's book *The Anxious Generation* offers evidence of the devastating impact social media have had on the mental health of teenagers.

## Training in fact checking

The deacon needs to become reasonably competent in checking the reliability of information from the media and social media. There are a host of internet and YouTube resources on training in information verification. Here is a sample checklist for such verification:

Step	Item	Questions and actions	✓	✗
1	Assess the source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who shared the information with you?</li> <li>And where did they get it from?</li> <li>Even from friends and family, check the source.</li> <li>Click away from the story and investigate the website, its mission and contact information.</li> </ul>		
2	Are other sites posting a similar story?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genuine facts are usually broadly spread - check the mainstream media or fact-checking sites.</li> </ul>		
3	Identify the author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the author a credible source?</li> <li>Search for the author's name online to see if they are a real and credible source.</li> <li>If the author is named it shows that the author takes responsibility for the content and potential consequences.</li> </ul>		
4	Go beyond the headlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Headlines and opening images may be intentionally sensational or emotive.</li> <li>Have they been used out of context?</li> </ul>		
5	Check the date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it up to date and relevant to current events?</li> <li>If the information is not recent do not share it.</li> </ul>		
6	Is the source local?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where is the post from? What area?</li> <li>Information in a post might not be relevant.</li> </ul>		
7	Check the evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credible stories back up their claims with facts.</li> <li>Does the article include sources and verified links to back up its claims?</li> <li>Read beyond the site. Follow the source links to see if they work, where they go, and if they align with the claims of the story.</li> </ul>		
8	Is the motive of the piece clear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it to elicit a specific emotion like anger, panic, outrage or amusement?</li> </ul>		
9	Check your biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider that your own beliefs may affect your judgement.</li> <li>If you are not sure, do not share.</li> </ul>		
10	Turn to fact checkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult trusted fact-checking organizations, such as those in the International Fact-Checking Network.</li> </ul>		

Some fact checking sites that are usually reliable though, as most are based in the United States of America, less so on international political matters:

<https://www.snopes.com>

<https://www.factcheck.org>

<https://www.truthorfiction.com/>

<https://fullfact.org/>

<https://africacheck.org/>

Another useful tool for identifying manipulative messaging and media campaigns is the **NCI Engineered Reality Scoring System** which can be downloaded from the internet.

## Asking the “Why?” questions

Finding out the truth has to go beyond finding out the facts and really making sure that they are true. Further questions have to be asked, ‘Why are things like they are?’ In seeking out “the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely” and interpreting their “needs, concerns and hopes” the deacon needs to also ask “Why?” Why are these people poor, why are these people weak, why are these people sick, why are these people lonely? What are the root causes of these situations and conditions? For the deacon to engage in the task of organizing diaconal action requires not only palliative action (bandaging the wounded) but preventative (stopping the wounding in the first place), a point tellingly made by the German theologian **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**:

“We are not simply to bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

“If I sit next to a madman as he drives a car into a group of innocent bystanders, I cannot, as Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe, then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver.”

## From information to action

The original *Book of Common Prayer* 1662 ordination instruction to the deacon read:

“search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the Parishioners, or others.”

This makes very clear that the purpose of all this truth finding and reporting is to galvanize diaconal action. In the context of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that meant collecting money and supplies for the poor and sick. That is action that is still needed, both locally at congregational level and at regional, national and international levels, for example through organisations such as Christian Aid. But in the modern world where the Church does not run the local municipal services as it did in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, diaconal action in the interests of the poor, marginalised, exploited, displaced, and oppressed will be much more varied and often political in nature and therefore more contentious and complicated.

Finding and telling the truth, taking a prophetic role, includes not only telling the truth (as in Micah 3) and revealing the disastrous situation but also showing what must be done to avoid the disaster or how to live with the consequences of the disaster (as in Micah 6:8):

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?

Or as Paul in Galatians 6:10 puts it:

“So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran theologian who opposed Hitler and the Nazis and was executed in 1945. His writings on Christianity’s role in the secular world have become widely influential.

Because addressing social ills and striving for justice and fairness is often a matter of political action, the question is asked whether ordained clergy should join political parties or even serve as office bearers in them. The general consensus in the Anglican Communion is that they should not - because of the partisan and divisive nature of most political parties.

And yet the Gospel needs to be proclaimed in every aspect of human life, including politics, social conflict, and institutions. Being non-partisan doesn’t mean that we should avoid politics or protests or social conflicts.

## Unit 9: Self test questions

1. Considering the congregation you are most familiar with, how would you collect information on who in that congregation is poor, weak, sick, and lonely?
2. How would you collect information on people, not in the congregation, but living in the same area, who are poor, weak, sick, and lonely?
3. Imagine that the you as a deacon saw the following posted on your ongregation's WhatsApp page:

Dear parishioners. Please do not flash your headlights at any car with no headlights on! Police officers have issued this warning! if you are driving after dark and see an on-coming car with no headlights on, "do not flash your headlights at them". This is a common gang member initiation game. The new gang member, under initiation, drives along with no headlights on and the first car to flash their headlights at them is now his target. He is now required to turn around and chase that car, then shoot and kill people in the vehicle in order to complete his initiation requirements. Police stations across the country are being warned. Please forward to all loved ones!

What would you do?

4. What role do you think you have in correcting mis- and disinformation among the congregation?
5. What prophetic issues do you consider to be the priority at this time.

## Unit 10

# Doing Social Analysis

---

Who are we?



Who are these people?

Where do they come from?

What sort of area or community do they come from?

What are their needs and aspirations?

Why do they come to this church?

## A starting point

Much attention in deacon formation is given to the personal identity, the character, and gifts, of the individual deacon. All these are important. The attention given to them is necessary.

But, we never live as individuals alone, we are inevitably individuals in family, a community, a society.

Who we are as persons, and how we behave, is inextricably bound up with the community (or communities) we are embedded in, the society which influences us.

Two statements that sum up this reality are the following:

The first is a West African proverb:

“It takes a village to raise a child.”



The second comes from Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

“A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. I am because other people are.”

What are those factors which come from society that influence and mould us in our life situation?

The main factors are economics, environment, politics, culture, and religion.

These influences form us and the lives of the people we minister to.

And these influences, these forces do their work on us, whether we are conscious of those influences or not.

A deacon, to fulfil his or her basic function, has to understand these influences.

## What the ordinal tasks the deacon to do

There is a wonderful instruction in the Anglican ordination rite for deacons in the *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* where they are instructed:

“You are to interpret to the Church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world.”

This instruction, this order to the deacon, demands that the deacon understands the community and world that people live in and which forms them.

The earlier wording of the instruction in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* is more down to earth:

“to search for the sick, poor and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the parishioners, or others.”

So the deacon has to find out who the powerless and needy people of the area are and ensure that this information is used to generate a response from the worshipping congregation.

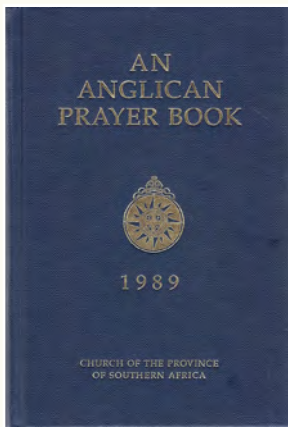
## The work of the deacon in finding out about the community

The finding-out work of the deacon can be seen in two forms:

- finding out about the congregation and their situation
- finding out about the whole area and its people.

The same principles must inform this information gathering, finding-out work of the deacon whether it is learning about a small worshipping community or a larger area or region in within which the Church works.

The formal name we can give to this intelligence gathering is **social analysis**.



**ordinal:** a liturgical book that contains the rites and prayers for the ordination and consecration to the Holy Orders of deacons, priests, and bishops

**impotent:** simply meaning ‘without power’, not having the power or ability to change or improve a situation.

**estate:** the state or condition, rank and social class of a person (not the modern sense of the property and assets left behind by a dead person)

**people of the parish:** not in the modern narrow sense of people who are members of the parish congregation, but all the people in the geographical area

# What is social analysis?

Social analysis is an important way of understanding how individuals, groups, communities and societies interact with each other, how they are structured, and how they are shaped by underlying social and economic forces. Social analysis seeks to explain why social relationships and institutions take the forms they do, how they are maintained, how they change, how they are experienced, and how they are shaped by broader social, economic, and political contexts. Social analysis can also be used to identify and address social problems such as inequality and injustice, as well as to develop strategies for social change.

Social analysis can employ a variety of methods, such as personal observation, interviews, surveys, and reading existing information such as census data.

## Some problems in understanding a community

There is an immediate problem. Is it possible to understand other people and communities? How can we get accurate information?

Often we hear people say that you cannot understand people or a community unless you yourself are a member of that community, sharing its language, beliefs, **ethnicity**, culture, etc.

As with many such statements there is some truth in this statement, but it is only a very partial truth.

At the very basic level all human beings have the capacity for empathy – that is, the ability to understand what other people are thinking, feeling and the state they are in. Social life would be impossible without this capacity.

But sociologists often describe two problems, both of which can make full social understanding difficult.

The first is what they call “**residents’ short-sightedness**”.

This is the tendency to not “see” beyond what we are close to and accustomed to. Ask yourself, is a fish aware that it lives in water, or a bird that it flies in air? Yes, we may well understand all the complexities of our own situation and culture – but we often cannot look at our situation with objectivity and see how odd or misshapen it may be. We can see clearly close up but not beyond that. We can see the individual tree but not the forest.

The second and opposite problem is called the “**aliens’ long-sightedness**”.

This is the tendency for a person from outside a community (who can indeed see the ‘big picture’) not to understand the fine details of a community and its culture. They can see the forest but not the individual trees.

Deacons who are non-stipendiary clergy may well remain embedded in a home parish for all of their ministry. They may think they understand that congregation very well. But do they see clearly the broader situation they are in? Do they have “residents’ short-sightedness”. Can they see beyond what they are accustomed to?

**ethnicity:** the social and cultural characteristics, backgrounds, or experiences shared by a group of people usually of the same ancestry. The Greek word ‘ethnos’ was used in the Bible for the various different peoples of the world. We do not use the term ‘race’ as it has no scientific validity at all.

**stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy:** in the modern world stipendiary clergy are those who work full-time for the Church and received a stipend to cover their living costs. Non-stipendiary clergy are responsible for their own living costs and hence usually are only able to work part-time in direct Church work. St Paul is an early example of a non-stipendiary minister (Acts 18:1-3).

For stipendiary clergy, who get moved from time to time to a new parish, they are regularly faced by new situations, and may suffer the opposite condition. They can see the big picture but may find it difficult to understand the social complexity of the new parish to which they are posted.

Another problem relates to the **size of a community**. Particularly within large urban areas, a church congregation may be a very small part of the overall population of the area. For example, in the area I live in there are two Anglican churches. The members of the smaller congregation represent only one thousandth of the community (one in every thousand people attend worship on a Sunday). The larger congregation reaches only one in every 400 people in the area. So you have to ask yourself how representative are these congregations of the people of the whole area. In what ways are they the same or different?

Another enormous problem is getting information about or from people or communities who are “invisible” – that, is the people who are not considered important, who are never consulted, taken seriously, or who are marginalized in various ways. Reaching out to these people should be a special focus of diaconal information gathering.

## Doing social analysis

You, as a deacon, are tasked with understanding the people of the community, both those people inside the worshipping church and those outside. You have to know what their **needs, concerns and hopes** are. And you have to discover the **why**, the reason, they have these needs, concerns and hopes.

In most cases, doing social analysis involves asking the right and appropriate questions, sometimes using some kind of survey checklist.

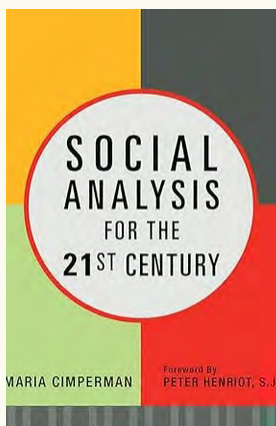
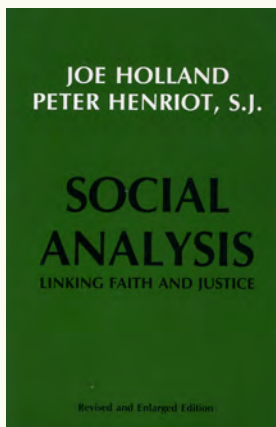
First, however, you must ask yourself what you already know about the various parts of our social reality. What you already know and what you don't know will both push you to further study and the asking of appropriate questions. (Two useful social analysis resource books here are Holland and Henriot (1984), and Cimperman and Henriot (2015).)

In most cases, to do a comprehensive social analysis you need to ask these questions:

1. What is the history of this place, this situation, these people?
2. What are the structures and forces [Economic, Environmental, Political, Social, Cultural, Religious] which influence this place/situation/people?
3. What are the key values operating in this situation or structure?
4. What is the future direction of this situation?

Naturally, in many cases, you do not need to find out do all these things at once. Beginning social analysis in a local situation may need to be done in a quite simple way. It may take quite some time to get to know the community more fully.

Here we will provide some simple tools for engaging in social analysis. They include questions that may help us to determine the areas upon which to focus attention.



# 1. What is the **history** of this place, this situation, these people?

Most of us value our history, that of our family, our ancestors, our people. Part of our identity as individuals or a community comes from our sense of our past. Older people are often very conscious of how things have changed over time, and may indeed be nostalgic for what they see as the 'good old days' or its opposite talking about how bad or difficult things were in the past.

A deacon needs to have some sense of the history of the place or community and be able to answer questions such as :

- What have been the major stages or periods through which this place or situation has moved?
- What changes have occurred in the past twenty years?
- What have been the most important events and turning points?
- What dynamic patterns of development (or of decline) can be observed?

The modern world is a very rapidly changing world and South Africa, notably, has gone through dramatic historical change with the ending of *apartheid*. These changes will impact of the area as a whole as well as at the smaller level of a parish community.

Can you name major events which have influenced the course of the history of this situation or place, for example, national events, government actions, provincial or municipal actions, church decisions, etc.?

# 2. What are the **structures and forces** which influence this place/situation/people?

**Structures** shape our lives in a variety of ways, through the influence of institutions, organizations, processes, and patterns. Social structures are often the determining factors in the situation. Some structures are obvious to us; others are hidden; but all are interrelated.

There are several ways in which society is organized and structured: Economic, Environmental, Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious.

## Economic

Economic structures control how we make a living. The major economic structures determine how society organizes the making of resources and their distribution:

- the growing of food by farmers and the production of things in factories and workshops
- the distribution of things through transport by rail and lorry, through shops and malls
- banks control the money we exchange for goods and services

**structure:** a structure is an object or system made up of an arrangement and organization of interrelated elements or parts. Thus for example, a built structure is made up of interrelated things such as walls, windows, doors, floors, roof, etc. A social structure is the pattern of relationships in a society or community - that is how the society is organized by a characteristic pattern of relationships. So **social structure** here refers to factors such as social class, religion, sex, gender, ethnicity, customs, etc. that influence how people live.

**capital:** money and possessions, especially a large amount of money used for producing more wealth or for starting a new business. Capital is the financial resources, machinery, and technology used to produce goods and services

**production:** the making and providing of goods and services

**labour:** the labour refers to the physical and mental effort used by workers to produce goods and services

**monopoly:** a person or company who is the only supplier of particular goods or services. A monopoly is characterized by a lack of competition to produce a particular thing, a lack of viable substitute goods, and the possibility of a high price on the product or service.



- government taxes and interest rates influence how much money people have to spend
- people with wealth determine what money, **capital**, is invested in **production** and new technology
- trades unions negotiate fair wages for the **labour** of workers
- sometimes **monopolies** totally control what is produced and sold, e.g. social media

As a deacon you should gain a good sense of the general economic profile of the community and area you work in. What are the industries or farms? Where do the things people buy come from? What is the role and strength of business and trades unions in the community? Are people using new technologies (such as cellphones)? What is the economic situation like? How wealthy or poor is the community? And how is that wealth distributed? What percentage of the population is unemployed? What are public services like? Is there enough housing? Is it easy for poor people to access social grants?

## Environmental

In recent years, world-wide attention has been given to environmental issues – issues related to the physical world that surrounds us (both the natural world and the human constructed). There is global concern about man-made global warming, the using up of fossil fuels, food waste, biodiversity loss, pollution (of air, water, and land), deforestation, destructive agriculture (fertilisers, soil erosion, overgrazing), over-fishing, food and water insecurity, fashion-driven textile waste, etc.

What is the environmental situation in the area?

Does the local church take environmental issues seriously?

One of the Anglican Church's *Five marks of mission* states:

5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The response of congregations to this environmental crisis can take two forms:

- At the local and individual level, people can use less resources, they can recycle paper, cans, glass, etc. The parish plant can use less water, paper, electricity, etc. Church grounds should be planted with trees, etc. It is a moral priority that the teaching in the church to both adults and children should include the development of ecological awareness.
- On the wider level, much of our individual actions, however piously done, may be ineffectual. Worldwide, huge sums of money are used in lobbying and bribing by, for example, the fossil fuel industry, the car industry (versus the greater need for public transport). This requires concerted and sometimes “political” action to fight against the degrading of our environment in the interests of the super rich.

## Political

The idea that politics and religion are totally separate domains is a very modern one. The idea would have been considered absurd in New Testament times. Politics can be considered as being “the art of living together in community” which includes whatever has to do with power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status. Clearly the Gospel has much to say about that.

The question of who makes the most important decisions that affect the lives of all the people in the area is an important one. What is the political profile of the locality? What are the political structures which determine how society organizes power and shares resources?

What are the major political structures which determine how society organizes power? Do all people have access to public influence. Do people participate in political decisions that affect their lives? What are the procedures of decision-making?

As a deacon you need to know what political structures - political parties, local, provincial, and national government representatives and institutions - operate in the area. You also need to be able to make an assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the political leadership and influential people. Are there also active trades unions, business, interest, and lobby groups, cliques, and even corrupt mafia-like groups that influence the political life of the area? What do the media and social media say about political matters affecting the people of the area? It must be remembered that much political leadership may be informal.

How involved is the congregation in the politics of the area and what political tendencies do they mainly represent?

## Social

Most people take very seriously those relationships that link them to family, clan, tribe or ethnic group. The neighbourhood relationships they have may be very important too (particularly in rural areas and small villages, less so in a large city, where you may have no connection at all with the other people in your street or block of flats). Many people are connected to multiple social networks - a sports club, a church women’s group, a reading club, parents of children in the same school class, and so on. Nowadays, a person’s main social relationships may be with people on a Facebook or WhatsApp group.

Generally, there are major **social structures** which determine how society organizes these social relationships (other than those which are primarily economic and political relationships).

A very important influence is the **demographic** character of the locality? What is the present population and is it growing or declining? Is the demographic character (ethnicity, language, sex, age group) of the church community the same as that of the broader community? What will the locality be like in ten or twenty years’ time?

What is the **spatial** character of the area? Do some people live in particular areas? In South Africa, with the breaking down of *apartheid*, racial segregation, the demography of areas, and congregations may change quite rapidly.



**demographic:** a portion of a population with size, composition and changes over time

**spatial:** in this context, the geographical areas where people have homes and where they work

**class:** a social class is a group of people within a society who possess the same socio-economic status. Typical classes are: underclass, low income manual workers, low income service workers, blue-collar workers (doing manual labour or skilled trades and earning wages, white-collar workers (clerks, administrative workers, professional workers - teachers, etc) who earn salaries), managerial class, the super-rich.



So the deacon needs to get a sense of the ethnic and language characteristics of the area. The deacon also has to consider the **class** structure in the locality.

How representative is the church congregation of the demography of the area?

Are people from a particular spatial area or class the main worshippers? Which demographic or class is absent?

Doing social analysis also enables one to see more clearly what the dominant **social problems** are in the area?

These problems can be ethnic conflict, lack of care for the aged, abuse of women, youth problems, family breakup and domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of recreational activities and facilities, crime, etc.

Getting a sense of the social relationships is vital for the deacon in the process of finding out the “needs, the concerns and hopes” of the people in the church congregation (itself a social structure) and in the broader community.

## Cultural

By culture we mean the way of life of a people group - ethnic, class, religious, or social. It is all the beliefs, traditions, customs, folklore, rituals, works of art and music, and ways of behaving that influence their everyday life. Culture, including religion, determines how the group or society and the individuals within it make sense of their lives and develop the attitudes they have towards everything in their world.

What is the cultural character of a congregation or the locality?

What is the ethnic make up and important traditions? Are these community ties strong or weak?

What is the education level (schooling) of the people?

What is the state of culture and the arts?

Where do they get their information about the world from - word of mouth, radio, television and newspapers, or social media?

## Religious

Religious behaviour can be considered a sub-set of cultural behaviour. Religion is that set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe as the expression of the holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, and usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the human conduct.

What is the religious climate in the locality?

What is the denominational breakdown? And is there ecumenical co-operation?

Are other faiths present?

Are there people of no apparent faith?

Are there signs of affection or disaffection for religion and what are the reasons?



More specifically for the Anglican Church, what is the health of the local church?

What kind of leadership by the clergy is present and is their morale high or low?

Is it clear what the role of the Church is in this situation and locality?

### 3. What are the key **values** operative in this situation?

Values are the goals that motivate people, the **ideologies** and moral norms that guide their lives, the aspirations and expectations that people have, the social emphases that are acceptable and accepted. These are, of course, closely related to the cultural and religious environment and its structures. In many societies, notably in Europe and North America but also in other parts of the world, religiously inspired values are in decline because of **secularisation**.

As you look around what seem to be the actual values that people have? What persons, role models and institutions do they respect?

Examples of various sets of values that people have may relate to any or all of the following:

Is the individual or the community more important?

Should people strive to compete with each other or co-operate?

Is getting things, accumulating wealth, more important than spiritual good and sharing?

What do they understand by having power and influence?

Should one work to ensure equality?

What is more important, justice or security? And so on.

### 4. What is the **future direction** of this situation?

A look into the future may in fact reveal more about the present than about the future. That is, the attempt to imagine the future “scenarios” may give insights into the dynamics of what is actually occurring now.

When doing a comprehensive social analysis you need to complete it by asking yourself what trends are evident in what you find.

What will things be like in ten years if they keep going in the same way? Why?

What are the most important causes of the way things are today? Why?

What did you learn from all of this?

And pray for strength to move into the decisions and actions which are called for by the situation which has been submitted to this social analysis and your theological reflection on it.

**ideology:** the ideas and view of the world that one has, particularly in relation to political beliefs and philosophies.

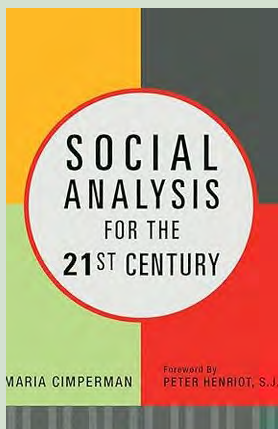
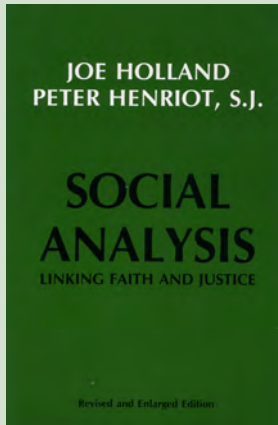
**secularisation:** an historical process in which religion declines in social and cultural significance. This has mainly happened in highly industrialised and urbanized European countries, and particularly Protestant ones. In a narrower sense, it is the formal legal and political separation between Church and the State as it is now in most Western countries and in South Africa.

# References

---

Holland, J. and Henriot, P. 1984. *Social analysis: Linking faith and justice*. Maryknoll: New York: Orbis

Cimperman, M. and Henriot, P. 2015. *Social analysis for the 21st Century: How faith becomes action*. Maryknoll: New York: Orbis



# Unit 10: Self test questions

1. How would you define 'social analysis'?
2. Relook at this photograph from the first page of this unit. What does it tell you (if anything) about the following?



- The economic level of the people?
- The local environment?
- The social character of the congregation in terms of demography:
  - ethnicity
  - sex
  - age
  - class
- What do you think the future direction of this congregation is?



## Unit 12

# Organizing for *diakonia*

---

Given that *diakonia* covers all the Christ-driven activities that the deacon may be commissioned to do, how does the candidate for the diaconate or the newly ordained deacon organize him or herself to do them?

This organizing will, *inter alia*, be influenced by **personal factors**, one's **background**, one's **previous formation**, previous **experience of ministry**, **interactions with the clergy and parish**, own **self organization**, one's adherence to one's **duties as an ordained person** and to church law, spiritual discipline and commitment, **care for self**, **care for others**, courageously undergoing the **trials of life**, and of course being informed by a good understanding of *diakonia* and of the situation within which we live.

### Understanding *diakonia*

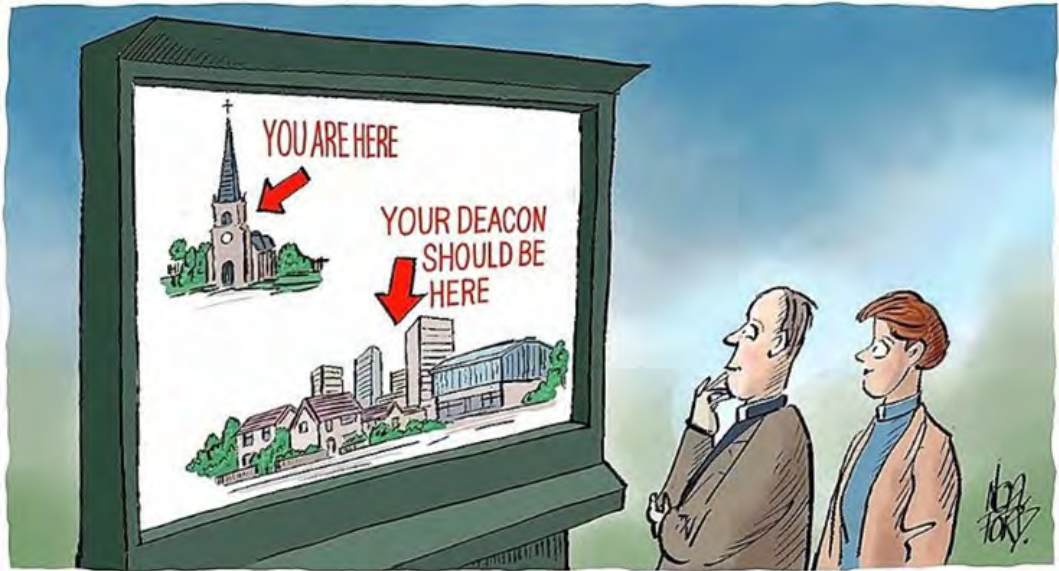
*Diakonia* is a mission of compassionate service and justice (see Unit 3). Faith and church fellowship (*koinonia*) without *diakonia* are powerless and lacking compassion. In the current world, national and local contexts, a combination of volunteers from the congregation, together with the organizing work of the ordained is required for *diakonia* to be realised.

James 1:22 "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

Injustice, authoritarianism, racism, sexism, poverty and gross inequality, misinformation, disunity and a general state of alienation wound all. The Church, in South Africa and in other countries, has also shared in these failures, abused power and used the institution to further its own agenda rather than the needs of others. Our diaconal ministry exists in this situation beset with issues of poverty, lack of education, lack of facilities and no help from governments that leave the masses to deal with their own problems. Deacons have to work in a rapidly changing world with massive social and cultural changes going on all the time.

Obviously in these contexts the diaconal work of the deacon is wide and varied. Deacons interpret the social needs of the community and work in the community and the wider church, as well as performing liturgical tasks and duties.

A deacon can serve in a variety of spaces depending on their ministry. Deacons can be servant leaders, mediators, advisors, a bridge to the world, intercessors, teachers, messengers, healers, advocates, disrupters and enablers. One's capability in exercising ministries such as these will be heavily determined by one's personal background and the formation one receives *en route* to being ordained as a deacon and in post-ordination training and ongoing lifelong learning.



## Factors influencing the deacon's organizing for *diakonia*

Here we will look at the following factors:

- Personal
- Previous formation
- Ecclesiastical
  - ◊ Church variety
  - ◊ Moving between parishes
  - ◊ Invisible hierarchy of authority in the parish
  - ◊ The attitude of priests to the diaconate
  - ◊ The relationship with the training Rector
- Self-organization
- Spiritual discipline
- Care for self and care of others
- Overcoming the trials of life
- Lifelong learning

Note that Chapter 5 of the *Report of the Commission on the Ministry of the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate* has information and examples of the current experiences of deacons in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

### Personal factors

Clearly the deacon's **family situation** – married or unmarried or contemplating marriage, with or without dependants, influences how they operate, as does their **work situation** – stipendiary or non-stipendiary, **economic situation**, their **mobility situation** – own vehicle or reliant on public transport. In multi-lingual South Africa their **language ability** in the language or languages of the area is important. Lastly, the **psychological robustness** of the deacon partly determines their capacity to handle difficulties and stress.



## Previous formation

The deacon's previous formation, educational, workwise and involvement in congregational life, will heavily influence their ongoing biblical and theological studies and ability to interpret these resources in ministry. Has the deacon had training and experience of preaching, teaching and pastoral visiting? It usually helps in leading services and organizing lay ministers and servers if the deacon has previously been a server and lay minister.

Here are two examples of the impact of previous formation:

"I found people wanting to share parts of life with me that held hurts/pain from the past. When I accepted to become a Lay-Minister this aspect continued to grow and I realized that God was touching my life to fulfil a bridge building ministry, of healing among the broken in society. This influenced my choice of calling to become a Deacon rather than a Priest."

"In my case my ministry began in my calling to be a teacher. At school I helped fellow pupils and during my student years and initial years of teaching I was able to reach children who were failures in mathematics through a part time tuition and a post at a school. Later I owned a business teaching mathematics full time. During that time I counselled students and parents alike. My main ministry was in helping broken children find their place in life. Through that ministry I was ordained a Deacon. My ministry took on a new level. It soared at work and my business grew."

## Ecclesistical

### Church variety

The Anglican Church has a wide range of church practices – sometimes this variety is expressed by distinguishing between **high church** and **low church** or between **evangelical** or **ritualist** or **charismatic**. Previous experience of this variety is valuable as it reduces the chance of being biased and prejudiced against others who are not of the same church tendency as oneself.

If the deacon is non-stipendiary and stays in their home parish the issue of adjusting to a new variety or style of Church behaviour or worship may not arise. However, if deployed elsewhere, which is inevitable if one is a stipendiary transitional deacon, the ecclesiastical culture shock may be heavy.

### Moving between parishes

One serious problem with a deacon who is transferred to another parish is that much of the community engagement, outreach programmes and projects initiated by the active deacon may be left directionless once the person is transferred. The answer to this is to seriously consider, when starting any programme, whether the parish has the capacity to run the programme independently and to ensure that the organisational development has in fact taken place to sustain the programme.

### Invisible hierarchy of authority in the parish

Although nominally the deacon is under the oversight of the Rector or Priest-in-charge there may be other nodes of authority within the parish – the Church wardens, the parish council, lay ministers, the head of the Mothers' Union etc. Often for a newly ordained deacon it is hard to understand whose orders and

**high church:** these congregations place a 'high' emphasis on ceremony, clergy vestments, and the sacraments and associated rituals. They are usually conservative in attitudes to worship. They also tend to emphasize concern about social issues and having a better educated clergy who are concerned about the pastoral care of church members.

**low church:** these congregations place a 'low' emphasis on ceremony and ritual and follow freer worship practices. They tend to be more **evangelical**.

**evangelical:** these congregations emphasize the importance of personal conversion, the authority of the Bible, and the need to share the Christian gospel and may tend to avoid social and political concerns. They tend to be **low church**.

**ritualist:** congregations which place great stress on the Sunday Eucharist and the observance of rituals in worship – similar to **high church** in worship.

**charismatic:** these congregations or groups emphasize personal religious experience and divinely inspired powers, as of healing, prophecy, and ecstatic utterance (tongues).

instructions have to be followed. Sometimes these less visible hierarchies of power may become abusive.

For example as one deacon put it:

“I was effectively barred by the priest from any liturgical ministry for years so as not to offend the lay ministers.”

Another gives an example of such a struggle but also of the overcoming of it:

“At church the priest was furious at my ordination and so began a 15 year struggle at the altar and with relationships in the church. Only after I revealed some untoward practices did I understand. The priest did reluctantly acknowledge that “God must be helping you to survive”. My ministry changed when I retired. I was now employed as parish administrator and with God’s grace I was able to pull together 12 years of administrative neglect in that church and get the administrative and tithing profiles up to date in six months.”

### The attitude of priests to the diaconate

Unfortunately it has to be recognised that some priests will see deacons as being in a lower level, inferior ministry, totally subordinate to and serving as handservants of the priesthood. Because such prejudiced priests invariably have a faulty conception of the diaconate and of the meaning of *diakonia* they often literally do not know what to do with, or how to relate to, the deacon in their charge.

### The relationship with the training rector

A deacon has to be realistic about the difficulties he or she may encounter working with and under the training supervision of a priest. This is the case particularly if one is a transitional deacon (heading towards ordination as a priest) as the training rector may give no specialized distinctive diaconal training at all and treat the deacon as simply an apprentice priest.

The period immediately after ordination should be one in which there is genuine training of the deacon (including transitional deacons) to be a deacon.

### Self-organization

Organisation of duties in the parish setting, including liturgical duties, in the wider community requires a commitment to self-organization. This will require keeping a diary listing appointments, and the necessary requirements or preparation for that meeting, event or task.

Without this self-organization, the deacon is unlikely to be able to work organizationally with groups and other organizations within or without the Church.

Crucial to this self-organization is the task of prioritizing what is to be done immediately and what postponed, but always keeping in mind the key mission of the deacon – “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, and to seek out particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.” (*An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, page 583). The tyranny of the urgent and the wants of the unpoor parishioners, must not distract the deacon from that mission.

## Spiritual discipline

The deacon needs to be committed to God through regular prayer and spiritual discipline. Morning and evening prayer are essential for spiritual fulfilment, keeping on track and keeping connected to God. Fasting is another essential tool in ministry, especially during times of depression or anxiety.

Included in this disciplined life is the saying of the offices, confession and daily meditation on the scriptures (ideally in the context of morning and evening prayer) as well as attendance at parish or diocesan retreats and quiet days.

Being committed and self-disciplined does not mean being overworked and burnt-out. That leads to being overtired, letting down your spiritual and psychological defences, and allows temptation in.

## Care for self and care for others

Care of self involves regular hours of prayer, sleep, meals, relaxation, family or friends and service. It also requires keeping physically fit with appropriate physical exercise. Note the danger of eating too much because of the over-generous provision of food when you visit people's homes. We have, in the words of Jesus to love others in the same way that we love ourselves. If you do not take care of yourself, you cannot adequately take care of others.

Care of others requires the deacon to be a good listener, offering advice when asked, being there when people need you but taking care also that they do not use you at their convenience. As a deacon you are a minister, not an over-active parent trying to solve all their children's problems for them. Be able to stand your own ground. Do not let others lead you from your God-given ministry. Although we are instructed to carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2) it is instructive to note the warnings before and after that saying:

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.** If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves."

Care of others above all requires **empathy**.

Empathy is the ability to identify with or understand another's situation or feelings. It involves understanding the emotional states of other people, their bodily feelings as well as their beliefs and desires. It extends to being able to imagine oneself as the other person. So empathy means deeply connecting with and sharing in the other person's thoughts and feelings **from their perspective**.

Note that generally women have higher capacity for empathy than men. They are better at recognizing facial affects, expressions, and emotions in general. Males tend to be better at recognizing specific behaviours such as anger, aggression, and threatening cues. Note also that the overuse of the social media tends to reduce the capacity for empathy.

By contrast, **sympathy** involves understanding and feeling concern for someone else but still being apart from them. Essentially, sympathy is feeling **for** someone, whereas empathy is feeling **with** them.

Saying the offices with a small online group of parishioners using Signal or WhatsApp can be helpful to all participating and a cure for the loneliness of saying the offices day by day alone by oneself.

## Overcoming the trials of life

All of us experience trials in our life. It is not for nothing that we pray every day that we be saved from the time of trial. Not all of these 'trials' are ones where we have to stand firm in our faith, they can simply be the inconveniences and irritations of life or natural things such as sickness or accidents. Be assured that any deacon in their ministry will experience trials of varying degrees of severity.

Deacons are meant to be ministers who by example and guidance help others. How the deacon handles adversity is therefore important. God has created a universe that allows adversity into your life.

How you respond to suffering can strengthen your faith and build your capacity to minister to others. Through your trials you may help others realise that they are not the only ones who suffer. Above all, through suffering we tread the path that Jesus and the apostles travelled.

## Lifelong learning

One of the criteria used in the Church of England for the selection of a candidate for the ordained ministry is:

“Intellectually capable of theological study, ministerial preparation and the demands of ministry”

The Anglican Church has for a long time prided itself on having a well-educated clergy. Being well educated in a rapidly changing world requires not merely having gained some theological Higher certificate, Diploma or Degree but lifelong learning – study never stops.

Obviously the deacon learns lessons daily from their experiences and from others. But this is not enough.

There must be ongoing study of the scriptures and other theologically and practically appropriate resources. Deacons should attend clergy theology schools and forums.

Deacons need to be familiar with the canons (the laws) of the Church (easily accessible at <https://anglicanchurchsa.org/canons/> )

They need to know what an Archdeacon does and how the Synod and other Councils of the Church operate. Deacons need to study the Church regulations on how parishes operate, particularly if they play some role in the administration of the parish. Most dioceses have some kind of parish manual about this.

The ACSA Fellowship of Deacons played a pivotal role in the last decade in generating a serious discourse about the place of distinctive deacons in the life of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa.

It is represented on the Provincial Standing Committee and at Provincial synod. It has strong international links with the Diakonia World Federation. All deacons should consider joining this Fellowship as a means of developing their learning more about the diaconate.

The Fellowship has a useful website with many learning resources. and materials: <https://www.acsafod.org.za> .

In looking at the areas in one's learning life where you want to study and learn more, a useful (though at the same time slightly overwhelming resource) is the set of deacon competencies developed by the Fellowship of Deacons and available on their website:

<https://www.acsafod.org.za/grids/2025%20FOD%20Formation%20Grid%20Draft%201.pdf>

Competencies are described for the following areas:

1. Call to the ordained ministry
2. Character
3. Academic knowledge
4. Diaconal Studies
5. Anglicanism
6. Discipleship
7. Human awareness, communication and understanding
8. Leadership and collaboration
9. Social context and social justice
10. Mission and evangelism
11. Practical competencies

These are all areas for personal, intellectual, and spiritual development as a minister of the Gospel of Christ, a ministry to which you have been called.

## Unit 12: Self test questions

1. Consider each of these factors which influence your capacity to be an effective deacon. Which ones do you need to give special attention to by way of more learning, more experience, getting advice or counselling, or taking action:
  - Personal
  - Previous formation
  - Ecclesiastical
    - ◇ Church variety
    - ◇ Moving between parishes
    - ◇ Invisible hierarchy of authority in the parish
    - ◇ The attitude of priests to the diaconate
    - ◇ The relationship with the training Rector
  - Self-organization
  - Spiritual discipline
  - Care for self and care of others
  - Overcoming the trials of life
  - Lifelong learning.

# Self Test Answers

---

## Unit 1: What is a deacon and how equipped?

**1. What do you think are the differences between a deacon and a priest (presbyter)?**

Your own answer. Common distinctions made are that the presbyter (priest) has delegated responsibility from the bishop to teach and nurture the gathered worshipping community and preside over the Eucharist, whilst the deacon assists the bishop in a ministry to focus the church and the world alike on compassion, justice and mercy.

**2. Look at the list on page 6 of the characteristics of deacons.**

**(a) Which characteristic or characteristics are closest to your sense of call to the ministry?**

Your own answer.

**(b) Which one or ones would you have difficulty with?**

Your own answer. Several of the units in this course deal with some of these roles.

**3. Have you had an experience of observing a deacon in the church or churches you attend? If Yes, did the deacon play a prominent role in the Eucharist?**

Think of what you learned or felt about this experience (or lack of it) and how this may inform or prejudice your study of the diaconate.

**4. If you have experienced some kind of call to ministry, was it to a general role of minister or specifically to that of deacon or priest (presbyter)?**

Your own answer. Think what the consequences of this are to your formation as a minister.

**5. Looking at the list on page 9 of aspects of a person to be ordained, which one or ones would you want to develop greater capacity or strength in?**

Your own answer. Several of the units in this course deal with some of these aspects.

## Unit 2: A history of the diaconate

**1. What does the *Didache* describe as the ministry of bishops and deacons?**

They do the work of prophets and teachers and ensure the regular celebration of the Eucharist.

**2. Several early Church documents describe the deacon as being what kind of officer?**

An executive officer.

**3. Who said of the three orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon, “Apart from these, there is no Church!”?**

Ignatius of Antioch

**4. Did the deacons in the early Church combine liturgical and welfare functions?**

The evidence is that they did.

**5. Where did the idea that there could only be seven deacons per bishop come from?**

The misunderstanding of the passage in Act 6:1-7 as being about the institution of seven deacons.

**6. The account of the diminishing of the role of the deacon when the Church rapidly expanded its membership when persecution stopped in the Roman Empire, suggests that Church ministerial structures did not respond adequately or quickly enough to the changes. What do you think are the challenges at our present time that might benefit from a renewed diaconate?**

Your own answer.

**7. In your opinion, how visible are deacons currently in the ministry of the Anglican Church?**

Your own answer.

**8. Given what you knew of the diaconate before studying this unit, what is new or has changed in your knowledge and appreciation of the deacon?**

Your own answer.

## Unit 3: The meaning of *diakonia*

- 1. The scholar John Collins provided evidence that the *diakon*-words refer to ministries of all types commissioned by God or Church, contrary to the idea that diaconal service is only menial, humble service inferior to the spiritual ministry of the Word. What is your experience of how *diakonia* and deacons have been perceived in the Anglican Church?**

Your own answer. Many people's experience is that the deacon's work is considered menial and inferior to that of the priest, though this is slowly changing in the Anglican churches.

- 2. Provide your definition of *diakonia*.**

Your own answer.

## Unit 4: A theology of the diaconate

- 1. Recent developments in how churches view the diaconate have been influenced by a re-appraisal of the meaning of *diakonia*. How has the view changed?**

Deacons are no longer seen as being in an inferior or lower order only dealing with material matters to free presbyters to deal with 'spiritual issues, but ministers responsible for guiding the *diakonia*, the work of Christ, of the whole Church.

- 2. The Methodist scholar David Clark argued that deacons can be distinguished from presbyters in the roles they perform. What are these differences?**

Clark sees the presbyterate as being an order of continuity (looking after the theology and tradition and leading worship, learning and pastoral care). Deacons are order of transformation (bringing gifts of life, liberation, love and learning and servant leadership to transform society and the world).

- 3. Who was originally the supervisor of the deacons and how has this changed?**

Originally bishops were the direct overseers of the deacons. Over time as the Church expanded in size and the number of congregants and presbyters grew, the deacons were no longer supervised by the bishop (except for special ministries ) but by the local presbyter in charge of a congregation.

- 4. There have been criticisms of the place of the lay minister in relation to the deacon and the impact this has had on the life of the Church? What is this critique?**

As the ratio of clergy to the laity has decreased, lay ministers have increasingly taken on semi-clerical roles inside the Church leading to an impoverishment of lay diaconal action in the world and a sense of a more introverted Church.

- 5. The Marks of Mission of the Anglican Church are now seen as the responsibility of whom?**

All baptised members of the Church.

## Unit 5: What should deacons be and do?

This unit has presented a large number of images/descriptions of what a deacon can be and do (eleven categories (or twenty including subdivisions within them) – Proclaimer, Ikon, Worship leader, Administrator, Interpreter of needs and situations, Educator and equiper, Outreacher, Bridge/Threshold/Liminal person, Collaborator/Partner/Team worker, Networker, and Prophet and social justice activist. Relook through this list and ask yourself two questions:

1. Which of these functions correspond to the work you imagined you would be doing when you first responded to the call of God to be a minister?

Your own answer.

2. Are there any other functions which you are now attracted to as possible calls to your future *diakonia* actions?

Your own answer.

# Unit 6: Liturgy and Prayer

## 1. Distinguish between 'liturgy' and 'prayer'.

Liturgy is the prescribed format or pattern of public worship as distinguished from private prayer.

## 2. In what way is the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* an example of liturgical set forms?

The original *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662 set out the only forms of public worship to be used in the Church of England so that there would be uniformity and no doctrinal error.

## 3. Name the four parts of a Eucharist service.

Introductory Rites (Introduction, Penitence, Collect)

Liturgy of the Word (Biblical Readings, **Homily/Sermon**, Creed, Prayers of the Church, the Peace)

Liturgy of the Eucharist (Offertory, Eucharistic Prayer, Fraction (the breaking of the bread), Communion)

Conclusion and Dismissal

## 4. What do the words "He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave" refer to?

Jesus' actions at the Last Supper where he took the bread and wine, blessed them, broke the bread and gave to his disciples, a procedure replicated in the Eucharist.

## 5. List several things the deacon does liturgically in the Eucharist.

Reading the Gospel, Announcing the Prayers of the Church, Preparing the altar for the Eucharist, Doing the Offertory, Saying the Acclamation, Holding up the chalice at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, Starting the Lord's Prayer, Helping distribute Holy Communion, Cleaning the vessels after the Eucharist, Giving the Dismissal.

## 6. What is an 'ordinal'?

The text of the ritual and rubrics for the ordination of clergy

## 7. What is prayer as intercession?

Praying on behalf of others (the needs and hopes of whom it is the deacon's job to know).

## 8. What does the acronym ACTS stand for?

A prayer sequence of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication

# Unit 7: Self test questions

## 1. What evidence is there for teaching in the New Testament?

Jesus is referred to many times as a teacher and in his great commission tells his disciples to teach everything that he has commanded. Paul lists teachers prominently in his lists of ministers and ministries.

## 2. Name four things that any teacher needs to know to be an effective teacher.

- Know what you are teaching.
- Know who your learners are and how they think and respond to learning.
- Know what is relevant to the learner.
- Be able to apply the most appropriate methods to achieve the teaching purposes.

## 3. The scholar James Fowler lists some religious development characteristics of children aged 2 to 7. What are they?

- They can speak, use symbols and express thoughts.
- They have not yet developed formalized religious beliefs.
- They cannot easily distinguish between reality and unconscious desires and dreams.
- They cannot understand abstract concepts.
- Religion is learned mainly through experiences, stories, images, and the people that they come in contact with.
- They have a sense of what is right and wrong and the steady functioning of the God's universe.

## 4. Think of any 'truth' inconsistencies you picked up in your own religious education.

Your own answer.

## 5. Think of your own religious education and anything that you remember being taught or learning that you thought important or striking. What teaching method was being used?

Your own answer.

## 6. Consider your current church congregation experiences. What educational methods have been used in the last three months?

Your own answer.

# Unit 8: The deacon as guide and counsellor

## 1. Briefly describe the distinction between guidance and counselling.

Guidance is the process of giving advice – accurate and useful information – to help a person solve a problem, difficulty or barrier in some situation. The guide is expected to have the requisite knowledge and information or access to it and be able to communicate it well.

Counselling is an interactive process in which the counsellor works with a person (or couple or family) to help them understand a personal, social, psychological or spiritual problem and build up their capacity and strategy to resolve or cope with the process of resolving the difficulty.

## 2. What are three key counselling skills?

These are (empathetic) listening, reflecting (mirroring the person's description of the problem to deepen understanding), and questioning (to aid in clarifying, summarising and partializing (breaking up the problem into its parts or sub-problems)).

## 3. What is referral?

Referring the person being counselled to another helper or agency for further counselling or additional help (that may include guidance). The referral is done with the permission of the person being counselled.

## 4. Under what conditions can a counsellor disclose to others what was said in a counselling session?

Normally counselling is done in complete confidence. Disclosing information to another can only be done with the permission of the person being counselled or where the counselling encounter is entered into with explicit agreement that it is not totally confidential.

# Unit 9: The deacon as truth sayer and activist

1. **Considering the congregation you are most familiar with, how would you collect information on who in that congregation is poor, weak, sick, and lonely?**

Your own answer. Usually you would be able to collect information from the parish priest, lay-ministers, a congregation social media group (yes the social media can have positive uses!), etc.

2. **How would you collect information on people, not in the congregation, but living in the same area, who are poor, weak, sick, and lonely?**

Your own answer. This might require some sort of survey or house to house visiting in a small community, or gathering information from community organizations and welfare societies. Unit 10 on social analysis has more information on this.

3. **Imagine that you as a deacon saw the following posted on your congregation's WhatsApp page:**

**Dear parishioners. Please do not flash your headlights at any car with no headlights on! Police officers have issued this warning! if you are driving after dark and see an on-coming car with no headlights on, "do not flash your headlights at them". This is a common gang member initiation game. The new gang member, under initiation, drives along with no headlights on and the first car to flash their headlights at them is now his target. He is now required to turn around and chase that car, then shoot and kill people in the vehicle in order to complete his initiation requirements. Police stations across the country are being warned. Please forward to all loved ones!**

**What would you do?**

Your own answer.

[Note that this is not an imaginary example. It really happened in a local South African parish and here is a deacon's account of what he did:

I read the post and was worried. This message was asking parishioners not to do what is ordinarily the right thing to do – flash your car lights to warn a driver that their car lights are not on. That instruction to do the ordinarily 'wrong' thing would only be acceptable in a real emergency situation. So was this situation true? I thought, surely if this story is true and police stations across the country were being warned, we would have heard about it. It would be in the newspapers, on television. I became skeptical. So then I used my computer to look up a fact checking website (the particular one I used was called Snopes (<https://www.snopes.com>)). There I discovered that it was a hoax that originated in California in 1984, had spread across the whole United States of America in the 1990s, spread to the United Kingdom, Canada and Mexico in the 2000s and was now in South Africa in the 2020s. I informed the parish priest and he agreed to delete the post. But damage had already been done – many parishioners had already sent it on to their loved one and friends! We agreed to monitor posts on the WhatsApp site more carefully.]

## Unit 9: The deacon as truth sayer and activist (continued)

4. **What role do you think you have in correcting mis- and disinformation among the congregation?**

Your own answer.

5. **What prophetic issues do you consider to be the priority at this time.**

Your own answer.

# Unit 10: Doing social analysis

## 1. How would you define 'social analysis'?

Social analysis is practical activity aimed at understanding how individuals, groups, communities and societies interact with each other, how they are structured, and how they are shaped by underlying social and economic forces. It is often done to identify and address social and development problems. It uses a variety of research and information gathering methods.

## 2. Relook at this photograph from the first page of this unit. What does it tell you (if anything) about the following?



- **The economic level of the people?**

The congregation seems well dressed, these are not the poorest of the poor and may well be middle-class or lower middle-class.

- **The local environment?**

Hard to tell, but the church building is solid brick, has stained glass windows, and there are garden plants, so it is probably in a middle-class neighbourhood.

- **The social character of the congregation in terms of demography:**

**ethnicity** - mixed, so this is probably a neighbourhood where a post-apartheid demographic shift is taking place

**sex** - more women than men (fairly typical for most congregations)

**age** - most of the white people are much older than the rest of the congregation

**class** - middle-class, though some may be lower middle-class.

- **What do you think the future direction of this congregation is?**

If the older whites die off, will it be a mainly black middle-class congregation?

# Unit 11: Working with people in organizations

## 1. What are four common features of an organization?

An organization has the following features:

- the planned **co-ordination** of the work of a group of people
- to achieve a clear **common purpose** or objective,
- through the **division of labour** and function
- and **controlled** or managed by a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.

## 2. What are the distinctive roles of management and administration?

Management's role is to make broad decisions about what the organization does in its work and ensuring appropriate staff are deployed and systems and procedures set up to implement those decisions in an orderly way. It involves formal planning, designing and redesigning organizational structures and monitoring results against plans.

Administrative work involves the day-to-day work of running those systems and activities, and implementing the decisions.

## 3. What has your experience of being in a management or administrative role been?

Your answer.

## 4. What has your experience of leaders in the church or elsewhere been - were they autocratic and commanding or democratic, consultative and participatory?

Your answer.

## Unit 12: Organizing for *diakonia*

1. Consider each of these factors which influence your capacity to be an effective deacon. Which ones do you need to give special attention to by way of more learning, more experience, getting advice or counselling, or taking action:

- Personal
- Previous formation
- Ecclesiastical
  - ◇ Church variety
  - ◇ Moving between parishes
  - ◇ Invisible hierarchy of authority in the parish
  - ◇ The attitude of priests to the diaconate
  - ◇ The relationship with the training Rector
- Self-organization
- Spiritual discipline
- Care for self and care of others
- Overcoming the trials of life
- Lifelong learning.

Your own answers.

