



DUCC NEWS



Diakonia
of The United
Church of Canada

Sharing news, stories and reflections about Diaconal Ministers and Diaconal Ministry

IDENTITY IN DIACONAL MINISTRY

The bishops will govern the church, the priests will do all the work and the deacons will have all the fun.

Cardinal Richard Cushing

By Lynda Gow

My thesis on Ministry and Spirituality includes a focus on the work and understanding of both Diaconal and Ordained ministry, historically and presently. Though my MTS (St. Stephen's College) was completed 10 years ago, my research is relevant to our continued discussion on identity in diaconal ministry.

The United Church lacks a clear understanding of Ordained Ministry while Diaconal Ministers are very clear both about their identity and their

understanding of their ministry. There are different reasons for this. The first one is the differing perspective of power. Ordained Ministry has power inherent in the title. As Anne Wilson Schaef observes, those who hold the power do not have an understanding of who they are. Ordained ministry, being the accepted mode of ministry, does not need to be explained, so when people attempt to express an understanding of it, it is difficult for them to do so. A second reason is that the United Church itself is not clear about what

its understanding of ordained ministry is. During the last few decades the church has attempted to be just, equal and respectful of the ministry of the whole people of God. It has adapted by including Designated Lay Ministers, Congregational Lay Ministers, youth ministers, music ministers, part time ministers and diaconal ministers all under the word 'minister'. But there is no consensus for understanding what ministry is.

Diaconal Ministers might hold the title of "minister" in our
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- Diaconal Identity: Ecumenical, Lay, Ordained
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BEING DIACONAL: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

From the Editorial Team

This extended issue of DUCC News is focused on the question of diaconal identity, as background for the bi-annual meeting "Called to Order" being held in April (see page 16). Write and let us know what you are thinking on this topic!!

This is the last issue for team members Roland Legge, Patricia Baker and Carolyn Wilson Wynne, and former editor Karen Thorne. Many thanks for the great work.

DIACONAL IDENTITY DOWNUNDER

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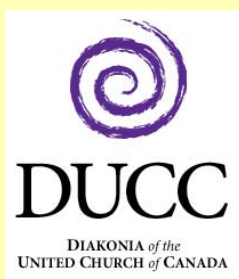
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By Alison McRae

In order to reflect on my identity as a Deacon within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) I wish to provide a basic introduction to how the UCA understands the ministry and outline something of the context of my current ministry Placement. This will then allow some context for issues of diaconal identity to be briefly explored.

Not long after the renewal of the diaconate in the Uniting Church in Australia in 1991 the following challenge was put to Deacons: 'Unless the diaconate enters into mission and ministry *with* the church rather than *for* it, I believe it will fall far short of its calling'. (1) This is a reminder to deacons, and to the church as a whole, that the task of deacons is to facilitate the mission calling of the whole church. In their ordained and representative capacity, deacons highlight the mission responsibility of the whole church. Of course mission is also the task of others within the life of the church but deacons take on a particular responsibility in order that the whole church may more truly embody its own calling within God's mission.

The diaconate within the Uniting Church has an intentional outward-directed focus, relating primarily to those people and communities who appear to be marginal from the centre of community and the social systems of the day. Though grounded firmly within the worship life of the congregation

deacons are to represent the ministry of Christ within the wider world and to model the way in which the gathered community of faith is to understand its own calling to mission within the world. In this sense the ministry is founded on justice for all and is both evangelical and educational and becomes a 'sign of the presence of God in the everyday world'. (2)

My current ministry Placement is that of operating as a Patrol Minister with Frontier Services, an Agency of the UCA's National Assembly. This Agency provides services to the most remote and isolated people of this vast land. Patrol Ministers provide a 'mobile' ministry to many isolated families and communities within a large geographical region. My Patrol is one that covers a large part of the High Country region of southeastern



Deacon Alison, a diaconal, community ministry in remote Australia.

Victoria. It is a mountainous region populated by scattered farms and where travel is often difficult and services that people in city and regional areas take for granted are few. It offers some of the most spectacular scenery in the country. I minister within a number of small and isolated rural communities visiting farming families, facilitating community development ☞

AUSSIE MINISTRY AT THE MARGINS

CONTINUED ... and support needs, and offering occasional worship to small groups of people. I spend a lot of my time on the road or in people's kitchens. Within the context of both a church and a society where city-centric ideals and assumptions prevail the people and communities I

Deacons therefore must hold firm to their calling and remember

relate to are deemed to be 'marginal' by virtue of living in a remote area and lacking equitable access to social

resources and opportunities that others assume as their right.

The members of the small congregation that forms the heart of this ministry have long seen that in order to be authentically church in this region they must be involved in the life and needs of the community. They demonstrate a strong mission focus and have had no difficulty embracing the outward-directed perspective of diaconal ministry. Unlike many other sections of the church they are not concerned with numbers but rather focus on relationships and identifying those areas of the life of the community where the church should have a presence. Maintaining an authentic diaconal identity within this context has been easy for me because the congregation assumes that most of my time will be spent out in the community. Moreover, it is frequently the members of the congregation who lead the way with such engagement and together we have

discovered that the nature of relationships developed within the community are so important that they actually become the body and expression of the church within this particular location.

Within a church that tends to define its identity through congregational structures deacons are a reminder that God's kingdom will more often than not be found outside such structures. In their person and in their ministry deacons throw up a profound challenge to our congregational based church that tends to define success purely in numerical terms. It will mean that a deacon's life will not always be easy, as the conserving tendencies of the institution will frequently attempt to domesticate the diaconate. This may cause great pain to deacons, sapping both their energy and confidence.

Deacons therefore must hold firm to their calling and remember that the basis of their identity is to be found within the mandate of ordination and an understanding of the mission task of the whole church which is, in itself, a sign of the coming kingdom of God.

Visit www.diakonia.uniting.com.au

Alison was one of the first deacons ordained in 1992, after the UCA renewed its diaconate. She was a member of the Faculty of UCA Melbourne Theological College and facilitated diaconal formation.

(1) Dorothy McRae McMahon, 'Deacons and the Mission of the Church (Unpublished Paper)', (paper presented at the Ministerial Education Commission National Consultation on Deacon Education, Mt. Martha, Victoria, April 1994), 1. (2) 'Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia, Report of the Task Group on Ministry of the Church to the Sixth Assembly' (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, 1991), 41.

DATES IN UCC HISTORY

This time line on some of the key points in diaconal history was compiled by Charlotte Caron using the work of Mary Anne McFarlane and the booklet *History of Diaconal Ministry in the United Church of Canada 1925-1991*, as the primary sources.

1925 ◀

Congregationalists, and, Methodists and Presbyterians with formal Deaconess Orders, merge

1926 ◀

Deaconess Constitution for UCC established

Deaconesses had to "disjoin", give up their standing and employment in the church if they married, or if not in the employ of the church

1928 ◀

116 Deaconesses employed

Cte on Employed Women Workers recommended diaconate be formed as second, but lower part of the Order of Ministry, with authority to preach and baptize; defeated by General Council (GC)

GC set employment standards for women workers, including 1 day in 7 rest

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▶ 1928

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Full time staff established for Committee

Bi-annual meetings Deaconess Association begin

▶ 1932

UCC Book of Common Order service named deaconess as handmaidens given to their work in "singleness of heart, simplicity and humility."

▶ 1936

Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers: coordinated regulations, oversaw deaconesses, but only few deaconesses on Committee

First woman ordained

▶ 1939

Deaconesses could be appointed as Lay Supply Ministers

▶ 1942

Revisions approved to Deaconess Constitution by GC

CONTINUED page 6 ↗

A LAY DIACONAL IDENTITY

By Barbara Lloyd

My decision to stay lay while working in diaconal ministry in the church was born out of my experiences and hopes. These included: my own disillusionment with the church in my young adult years; my experience with clericalism; my hunger for theological education; and my growing feminist consciousness. I discerned and confirmed this choice with others while at the Centre for Christian Studies (CCS). To me, this decision was not about rejecting ordination or commissioning so much as confirming and rooting my choice for ministry in my experience and my faith. My decision was not without ambiguities and, at times, prompted misunderstandings and rejection. However, in the living out of my decision in these last 15 years, I have mostly found that these challenges became opportunities for my own and others' learning about leadership and spirit-filled community.

In The United Church we are fond of talking about the 'ministry of the laity,' "The UCC recognizes that God's call to ministry is to the whole church. Every member is called to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the gospel in church and society. Ministry is expressed in personal being, occupation, involvement in the total community and service in, through and to the church." (1)

But sometimes, our stated and operant theologies collide. Just such a collision occurred for me during an educational event designed to introduce lay leaders

and ministry personnel to new resources for faith exploration. This experiential event offered participants practical tools for lay leadership in small groups. For most, the event was powerfully inspiring. Some participants, though, became agitated and asked why they were expected to go back to their congregations without the "answers." They demanded to know what the UCC wanted them to think about faith. They said they were not theologians and could not be expected to know how to educate others. There was a sense that far too much was being asked of 'ordinary' lay people.

Sometimes our stated and operant theologies collide

Diaconal ministry is committed to the empowerment of the laity, yet, in this learning event, it was as if some of our leaders did not want to be equipped. Contradictions abound! This gap between the theology of ministry was one factor that contributed to my decision to live out my ministry as a lay person – as symbol and witness to my hopes.

In Iris Marion Young's book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, she names justice as the "institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation." (2) Why has the church failed to develop the individual capacities of lay members for the sake of the proclamation and living out of the gospel?

With patriarchally defined CONTINUED ↗



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gender roles it is not surprising that women have been found working behind the scenes in the church, affecting attitudes to leadership.

As well, the rise of professionalism in western society has exacerbated classism.

“Professionals are privileged in relation to non-professionals by virtue of their position in the division of labour and the status it carries.” (3) In the church, the rise of the educated, paid, ordered ministry has created a two class system where the laity has much less power because they often lack a broad knowledge of theology and polity. Even the Reformation ideal of bringing the Word to all common folk, has been subverted by the rise of the professional ministry class, “set apart” and “called”.

Traditional teaching methods have also reinforced the dependency model by focusing on a methodology of ‘pouring in’ without valuing the experiences of adult learners.

Finally, cultural imperialism, creates a dualism marking laity as those who are ‘other,’ deviant, inferior, and subjecting them to theology constructed by white European clergy and scholars. Despite the ordination of the first woman in 1936, the tradition of male clergy dominance still models a hierarchy which leaves laity, especially ethnic minority and First Nations women, on the bottom.

At many levels lay members of our churches

have learned their role as the passive, submissive, dependent ones. As a result, society and the church have been left impoverished and twisted and the “kingdom” of God has been obscured. In searching for a way to redress and transform this reality, as well as hold myself accountable, I chose to stay lay.

The UCC recognizes that God’s call to ministry is to the whole church. In the best incarnation of this theology of baptism, followers of Jesus become “Christa community,” a “discipleship of equals” (4) finding joy in developing and using their

gifts and responding to the greatest needs of our world. Under present conditions, the church has become preoccupied with its own life and ministry personnel often fail to understand their prophetic role in equipping the saints for carrying out God’s mission of justice-love.

Jesus associated with women, men, and children from different classes and cultures.

Through diakonia, servant-leadership, he educated, trained and commissioned the ‘common folk’ to carry on without him. Lynn Rhodes talks about this “vision of ministry as friendship and solidarity.” (5) Friendship suggests interdependence, mutual care, and genuine regard for the other’s gifts. “As friends in community we take on responsibilities and accountability, but our roles can shift as our gifts emerge and as our common needs are defined...” (6) CONTINUED THIS PAGE ↗



Barb Lloyd helping laity to name themselves as theologians and ministers.

For feminist ministry, power and authority that comes with professional leadership in the church must be used to empower others. “Leadership makes new naming possible.” (7) My ministry is about helping folk name themselves as theologians, leaders and justice-seekers. CCS helped me to discover a feminist theology of leadership that validated my own strong leanings toward the ministry of the laity. In order to be true to my commitment to a round tabled church, I felt I needed to stay lay while doing diaconal ministry. It has been an exciting and challenging journey so far.

Barb Lloyd is the Program Coordinator for Public Witness UCC Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit .

1. Report of the Futures Task Group to the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, (Toronto, Canada: The United Church of Canada, February, 1993), 32. 2. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39. 3. Young, 56. 4. Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who are Right* (Minneapolis, USA: Fortress Press, 1999) , 30. 5. Lynn N. Rhodes, *Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry* (Philadelphia, USA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 122. 6. Rhodes, 124, 7. Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, USA: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 68.