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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISTINCTIVE  
DEACON IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND TODAY?



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism>

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## Abstract

This thesis outlines the history of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England, and the understanding of the diaconate contained within the Ordinal. It explores the experience of distinctive deacons within the Church of England today. It does so through interviews with a respondent cohort of sixteen distinctive deacons in active ministry.

Secondly, this thesis explores the reasons why the distinctive diaconate has failed to grow and flourish. It does so by drawing attention to the ways in which the distinctive diaconate has been misused, and the inability of the Church hierarchy to act upon the recommendations of various reports that it has commissioned. It also explores the effect that collegial relationships, stipendiary status, and methods of deployment have had on this ministry.

In its conclusion, this thesis presents an argument for the retention and development of the distinctive diaconate in the ministry of the Church of England.

## Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements .....	6
List of abbreviations.....	7
1 Introduction .....	8
Missing Voices .....	10
The influences of the New Testament and the Early Church .....	14
The influence of Kaiserswerth.....	17
A Cinderella ministry .....	20
2 Research Methods .....	22
A trio of stories and a bricolage of methodologies.....	22
Reflexivity – my story .....	24
Narrative Methodology – the distinctive deacons’ stories .....	27
A meeting of methodology and theology .....	31
Feminist Theology – a transformative methodology for the Church of England’s story .....	33
The practical and ethical issues of data collection and use .....	38
3 The Role of the Distinctive Deacon .....	43
A comparison with the Ordinal .....	43
The bishop’s officer.....	69
Conclusions .....	70
4 A History of Lost Opportunities, Misuse and Lack of Support .....	73
The Ordinals of 1550 and 1662 .....	74
Tractarianism and the diaconal ministry in the Church of England ....	76
The seesaw debate .....	82
The 1980 Ordinal.....	86
The ordination of women to the diaconate and its impact.....	87
Theology which supported the continuing debate .....	89
The Common Worship Ordinal .....	94
Conclusions .....	95

5 The Abuse of the Diaconate .....	98
The ‘long diaconate’ .....	99
The misuse of the diaconate by those opposed to the priesting of women .....	101
An invisible ministry .....	105
Issues of discernment.....	108
Being pushed towards priesthood.....	116
Conclusions .....	120
6 Collegial Relationships .....	123
Tradition .....	124
Ecumenical collegiality .....	127
Lay colleagues .....	129
Relating to bishops .....	132
Priest colleagues .....	135
Deacon colleagues .....	141
Reader colleagues .....	145
Conclusions .....	151
7 Deployment .....	155
The profile of deployed distinctive deacons.....	157
Remuneration.....	158
The Correlation between a range of factors (age, gender, family situation, educational or professional background, training pathway) and deployment, in the respondent cohort. .....	160
Description of deployment from the respondent cohort.....	163
The view of the respondent cohort about stipends for deacons.....	173
Conclusions .....	179

8 The Conclusions .....	184
What does it mean to be a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today?.....	184
Is the retention of the distinctive diaconate justified? .....	187
Mapping the future .....	191
A re-consideration of structures .....	191
Embracing the breadth of tradition in the Church of England .....	193
Relating to the world-wide diaconate .....	194
<i>Per saltum</i> ordination .....	195
Moving forward.....	196
Appendix A: A discussion of <i>per saltum</i> ordination.....	198
Appendix B: A precis of an example of the re-appraisal of the <i>diakon-</i> root words by John Collins in 2002 .....	200
Appendix C: The description of a deacon’s ministry from the Common Worship Ordinal.....	202
Appendix D: Basic statistics from the dioceses in the Provinces of York and Canterbury - active deacons, stipendiary status, those in sector ministry .....	203
Appendix E: Basic statistics from the dioceses in the Provinces of York and Canterbury - those in training and those in discernment for the distinctive diaconate .....	204
Appendix F: Basic information about the respondent cohort at January 2015 .....	205
Bibliography .....	206

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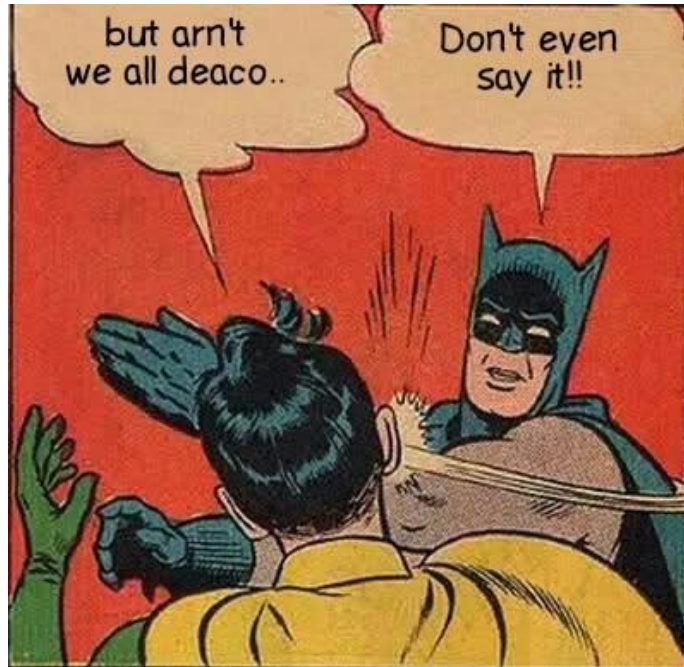
To all, then, my sincere thanks.

## Abbreviations:

ACC	The Anglican Consultative Council
ACCM	The Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry
ANDREP	The Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project
ASB	The Alternative Service Book 1980
BCP	The Book of Common Prayer
DACE	The Diaconal Association of the Church of England
DDO	Diocesan Director of Ordinands
CofE	The Church of England
CT	The Church Times
CW	Common Worship
FOAG	The Faith and Order Group of the Church of England
FSE	Feminist Standpoint Epistemology
HoB	The House of Bishops
JCCC	The Joint Committee of the Convocation of Canterbury
LTO	Licence to Officiate
LXX	The Septuagint
NSM	Non-Stipendiary Minister
OLM	Ordained Local Minister
PTO	Permission to Officiate
TEC	The Episcopal Church of the United States of America



## 1 Introduction



[www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism](http://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism)

In 1987 the Church of England ordained women for the first time. They were admitted to the third order of ordained ministry, that of the diaconate. The decision was influenced by growing pressure on the church to ordain women as priests; and allowing women to be deacons may have been a political move to appease those supporting the priesting of women, as well as those who opposed it – a via media of sorts. I was among this first cohort of women to be ordained. We were aware that ordination as priests was not going to happen quickly, and in fact, it was another seven years before the first women were priested. At the time of my ordination I was already serving in a parish as a stipendiary lay minister, and my incumbent suggested that we should explore the ministry of a deacon, both liturgically and pastorally, so that I would be able to own my ministry as a deacon, and find some fulfilment, rather than simply feeling that I was filling in time waiting to be priested. It was an excellent suggestion, and I enjoyed engaging with being a deacon,

and exploring what that meant. In the course of the seven years I developed a strong affection and respect for the diaconate, and in 1994 found that I had a difficult choice to make between the diaconate and the priesthood. After much prayer and reflection, I felt called to be a priest, but my regard for the diaconate remained.

In 2006 I was invited to become Assistant DDO for Lincoln Diocese, and became aware that both the suffragan bishops were keen to promote a distinctive diaconate within the diocese. As a result of their initiatives, several Readers were ordained as distinctive deacons. Because of my evident interest in what was happening, I was asked to provide some material to assist the discernment of distinctive deacons, and to serve on Diocesan discernment panels which included distinctive deacon candidates. When I enquired as to who had care of the distinctive deacons who were ordained and deployed in the diocese, I was asked if this was something I would like to do. As a result, I moved from being Assistant DDO to being the Bishop's Officer for Distinctive Deacons. In fulfilling this role, I have been impressed by the tenacity and dedication of those who seek, train for, and fulfil this ministry.

This thesis explores the experience of distinctive deacons in the Church of England. It is not the first study to undertake this task: between July 1997 and October 1998 Christine Hall undertook a survey of distinctive deacons in the Church of England, under the auspices of ANDREP. The survey took the form of a detailed questionnaire, for which a dataset of 105 deacons was identified. Of these, two died and two were ordained priest during the period of the survey. Of the remaining 101, 66 (65%) responded. The questionnaire covered the numbers of distinctive deacons, their deployment, selection and training, support and self-understanding. These areas are also covered in my interviews with the respondent cohort, for this thesis. A comparison of the two sets of responses has enabled me not only to ask, 'what does it mean to be a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today', but also to discover

how distinctive deacons experiencing their ministry has changed in the past twenty years.

These findings have led to a further question, which naturally arises from this thesis, although it is not the subject of my research, and that is, ‘does the distinctive diaconate have a future in the Church of England?’ In my research, when distinctive deacons have reflected on their present ministry, they have also reflected on the future of that ministry.

### **Missing voices**

Hall used a detailed questionnaire to gather her data, and she did not interview her respondents. I felt challenged to undertake a statistical analysis of distinctive deacons in the Church of England; but also inspired to engage with serving distinctive deacons to hear their stories and build a rich picture of their ministry. While Hall’s research had a broader sweep, by choosing a smaller, representative cohort, I have been able to examine the ministry of distinctive deacons more closely. While a certain amount has been written about the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, the majority of this information does not come from the distinctive deacons themselves. Nor does it demonstrate an awareness of Hall’s work. The Church of England has not provided a forum in which distinctive deacons can have a voice, and this will be made clear in Chapter 5. The picture of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England is a piecemeal one. While many reports have been written about the distinctive diaconate in theory, Hall’s survey appears to have been the only piece of research which asked the deacons themselves about their ministry, as they practised it, and reflected upon it.

A distinctive deacon in the Church of England is an ordained minister who chooses to exercise their ministry within the diaconate, rather than seeking to be further ordained as a priest. Distinctive deacons are also referred to as permanent deacons, but this term is used less frequently, and can be misleading, as it is perfectly possible, and not unheard of, for a distinctive deacon to be further called to priestly ministry. All ordained

ministers in the Church of England are ordained deacon in the first instance. They may further be ordained priest and then bishop, in what is described as sequential ordination. This contrasts to *per saltum* ordination, which is practised in other denominations, including the Nordic Lutheran churches, where candidates for ordination are discerned, trained and deployed as either deacon or priest from the outset. *Per saltum* ordination is discussed further in Appendix A.

Because, traditionally, it has been the custom in the Church of England to ordain people as deacons, and then a year later as a priest, the name deacon has become associated with what might be – and often are – termed ‘transitional’ deacons: deacons who ‘move on’ after a short space of time, into another ministry. The small number of deacons who remain as deacons have to qualify their self-description with ‘distinctive’ or ‘permanent’, or, in the American context, ‘vocational’, while the transitional deacons are simply referred to as ‘deacons’. In this study I have used the term ‘distinctive deacon’ for those who remain in the diaconate, and ‘transitional’ for those ordained deacon as a conscious first step towards priesthood. I have avoided the use of the term ‘diaconal’ as its meaning is varied, and often associated with the concept of loving service which is the ministry of all the baptised, and not primarily that of distinctive deacons. The use of ‘diaconal’ could lead to a blurring of ‘diaconate’ and the ‘*diakonia*’ of the whole church.

In the course of my research, I spoke to many people who had a connection to the distinctive diaconate, and occasionally they referred me to a serving distinctive deacon. More often, however, I was advised that if I wanted to know about distinctive deacons, I should speak to Bishop X or Archdeacon Y, as ‘knowing about’ the distinctive diaconate. Very few of the most widely read texts about the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England recorded the voices of those who were distinctive deacons. They talked about distinctive deacons but rarely talked to them. The theory of the distinctive diaconate was not being balanced by the experiences and reflections of those who were exercising the ministry.

The most recent major report concerning ministry in the Church of England, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, made the assertion that ‘distinctive deacons tell us from experience...’ (FOAG 2007, 129). However, the report gave no indication of how (or whether) this first-hand experience of distinctive deacons was collected, and nowhere in the report were the direct words of deacons reported.

One of the most popular texts, *Being a Deacon Today* (Brown 2006), which was either referred to or quoted by more than half of the respondent cohort, is a comprehensive and wise book about the history of the diaconate and the nature of diaconal ministry. In it, Rosalind Brown quotes a large number of writers including Bonhoeffer, G M Hopkins, R S Thomas, John Donne and Rowan Williams. However, there are no quotations from practising distinctive deacons, or direct references to their experience. The same is true of *Deacons and the Church* (Collins 2002), in which John Collins uses his study of *diakon-* root words in the Early Church and contemporary literature to bring a new understanding of the exercise of diaconal ministry. His views on the nature of *diakonia* and diaconal ministry are very firm, but they are not tempered at any point by dialogue with those exercising the ministry. A third text, *The Deacon’s Ministry*, is a collection of essays edited by Christine Hall (Hall 1991), who is herself a distinctive deacon. She chose contributors who would represent the ministry of deacons through a range of perspectives – historical, legal, vocational and ecumenical. Antonia Lynn, also a distinctive deacon in the Church of England, was the only contributor who spoke from a personal perspective, though she did not share any personal experiences.

The only places where I found the voices of distinctive deacons, apart from direct conversation, were on websites that were created by distinctive deacons for other distinctive deacons or those looking for information about discernment. These included the official website of the Diaconal Association of the Church of England (DACE), which closed in 2017; ‘Deacon Stories’ (<https://deaconstories.wordpress.com>)

and ‘The Everyday Deaconism Project’ (<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism>). The Everyday Deaconism Project is the source of the cartoons used as each chapter heading. They capture clearly, succinctly and humorously the frustrations that deacons feel that they face. Images can speak volumes, and these cartoons go straight to the point of the issues discussed in this thesis.

The stories told in these places reveal (or revealed) a diaconate which was lively, dedicated, self-aware and engaged with the church it served. However, because the words and experiences of distinctive deacons themselves has not been included in widely read publications, the wider church is not being exposed to an experience of, or an appreciation of, the distinctive diaconate. While the ministry of many distinctive deacons is appreciated and respected within the parishes and institutions where they minister, this is not reflected in a larger forum. In contrast, the voices of distinctive deacons from the Church of England are to be found in the ecumenical context. It is beyond the scope of this research project to consider ecumenical perspectives and relationships in depth, but ecumenical links will be explored briefly in Chapter 6, when collegiality is discussed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Within ecumenical consultations concerning the diaconate, the involvement of distinctive deacons from the Church of England has been varied. The participants at the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on the Diaconate, held in 1995 included one Church of England deacon, and two other deacons, among eight Anglican delegates. Within the Porvoo Communion there have been three consultations on the diaconate. In 2006 there were no participants who were distinctive deacons in the Church of England. In 2009 there was one, and in 2013 there were two. The report from the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission 2006-2011 (ALIC III), was *The Jerusalem Report – To Love and Serve the Lord. Diakonia in the Life of the Church* (2008). In spite of the subject none of the members of the Commission were deacons. However, there is a fellowship among deacons that transcends denomination, which I experienced myself when I attended the assembly of the Diakonia Region of Africa and Europe (DRAE) in Bergen in 2015. Other delegates from the Church of England, who were distinctive deacons, spoke about how affirming it was to be in a gathering of deacons where their ministry was respected, and where they could discuss and debate the nature of their diaconal ministry, rather than have to explain it to colleagues who did not understand it or value it. There are models of diaconate in the European Lutheran Churches, as well as the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain, whose organisation could inform the development of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England, and I will return to the role of ecumenism in Chapter 8.

The sense of connection that Church of England distinctive deacons have with their counterparts in other denominations arises from their shared history. The understanding of the distinctive diaconate that we have comes from a rich and complex heritage. There are two aspects of this heritage, in particular, which have shaped the nature of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England today. These are, firstly, the role of the deacon in the Early Church;<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, the influence of Theodor Fliedner and the Continental Deaconess Houses. These two influences can be seen in the development of the Ordination services in the Church of England, which is explored in Chapter 4. It is important to note that the ministry of the church is organic. It changes and develops according to the views and needs of the time in which it is active. While the distinctive diaconate today is shaped by what has gone before, it does not simply imitate it.

Ministry is, in many ways, like a patchwork quilt. The fabric from garments of former days are re-worked to form something new and useful, but the new quilt could not exist without the resources from the past.

### **The influence of the New Testament and the Early Church**

A tradition, once established, is hard to unpick. This has been the case for the origins of the distinctive diaconate. The tradition in question comes from Acts 6, and it is that the first deacons were seven men appointed by the Apostles to oversee the daily distribution of food to the poor and needy members of the church. From this beginning, it is not hard to see why the terms ‘humble’, ‘servant’ and ‘inferior’ have attached themselves to the third order of ordained ministry. In spite of scholarship that challenges this stereotype, it still persists within the Church.

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<sup>2</sup> The term Early Church is used here to denote the period approximately 100 – 400 CE.

In 1990, the work of John Collins explored the meaning of the *diakon*-group of words in the New Testament and in contemporary non-Christian writings, introducing a very different interpretation, which was to challenge the concept of service, and especially of menial service, as the main purpose of a deacon's ministry (Collins 1990). Collins' research created strong support for translating the *diakon*- words as 'a mandated task', or 'one who undertakes a mandated task', an 'emissary' or 'go-between'. In his re-examination of key texts that have traditionally been used to support the idea of menial service and – by extrapolation – of the deacon as undertaking humble and menial service, Collins makes a strong case for the emphasis not being on service to people, but a mandate or commission from someone. His approach to the passage from Acts 6 was an example of this, and it can be found in Appendix B. It is just one example among many adduced by Collins to support his thesis, that caritative diaconal ministry is the responsibility of the whole people of God, conferred at baptism, and that the ministry of the distinctive deacon is that of the envoy, and that their commission references the one who sends them, rather than the one to whom they are sent.

Although *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* and other Church of England reports written since 1990 were influenced by Collins, the long-held understanding of the diaconate as humble service has been hard to dislodge from the Church's ecclesiology. This was also evidenced by the comments of the respondent cohort, reported in Chapter 3. Moreover, the comments also revealed that the respondents did not wish to distance themselves from the concept of service, but wished to re-habilitate it, and imbue it with rigour and vigour. They echoed the view of John Collins, that loving service is the duty of all baptised Christians, and that distinctive deacons are commissioned to enable and accompany them in a variety of ways (Collins 2002, 132-5). This view of a deacon's ministry has been expanded by Paula Gooder:

In my view, the significance of what Collins' work makes possible is the shift from understanding ministry as 'what we do'



(i.e. acts of humble service) to why we do it (i.e. we are sent and commissioned to carry it out). Thus, we can move from a functional view of ministry, concerned with tasks, to a theological view of ministry, concerned much more with the one who sends us to do it. (Gooder 2008, 103)

This approach is supported by evidence from Early Church documents, which showed that deacons undertook a wide variety of roles, from keeping the church accounts to representing the bishop at an ecumenical council; the focus was not the task, but the action of being sent by the bishop or presbyter (Barnett 1979). The stories of the respondent cohort in Chapter 3 show that this is still the case. The tasks that they undertook varied considerably, while their sense of being commissioned by God and the Church united them.

In a Chapter entitled ‘Radical Transition’ (1979, 88-124), Barnett charted the end of what he considered a golden age of the diaconate. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity led to Imperial patronage and the unprecedented growth of the Church. The influx of so many new church members led to major organisational changes.<sup>3</sup> As deacons lost authority, their role in the liturgy also diminished. Presbyters were still ordained deacon, but the focus was on the next ordination to the presbyterate. ‘After ordination to the diaconate, they served as apprentice priests, not as deacons, except for having a liturgical function largely restricted to that of the ancient diaconate ... The Church had in effect created a different office, the transitional diaconate, even if it

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<sup>3</sup> The new organisation took the Imperial state as its model. The title ‘pontiff’ assumed by metropolitan bishops, the use of vestments and the carrying of candles, are all drawn from pagan sources. While bishops presided over groups of church communities, and were assisted by archdeacons, individual/local church communities were now led by a presbyter, and the deacons now assisted the presbyter, where before their ministry had been bound up with that of the bishop. The only offices which required the presence of a bishop were ordination and confirmation. The Council of Antioch (325CE) demoted rural bishops, making them subject to their metropolitan colleagues. The Council of Laodicea (336) confirmed a range of minor orders, and in an increasingly hierarchical church, deacons were deemed inferior to presbyters. Whereas, previously, it had been possible for deacons to become bishops, now that was only possible via ordination to the presbyterate. As liturgy and ritual became more central and complex the role of presbyter became more important.

masqueraded under the same name' (Barnett 1979, 124). The 'humble', 'inferior' and 'transitional' deacon had been created. The influence of this view of the diaconate in subsequent centuries, and in particular after the inception of the Church of England, can be seen in the Ordinals of 1550 and 1662. These are discussed in Chapter 4. As Francis Young notes at several points in his history of the diaconate in the Church of England, there is a paucity of material about deacons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Young 2015).

### **The influence of Kaiserswerth**

In the early nineteenth century, a Lutheran pastor Theodor Fliedner, responding to social pressures brought about by industrialisation in the area where he ministered, founded a deaconess order. Lutheran pastors had ceased to be ordained deacon first at some point in or after the Reformation. Fliedner was not the first to found a diaconal institution, but the structure he developed for the training and deployment of the Kaiserswerth deaconesses was influential and far reaching. According to Catherine Winkworth's contemporary biography, like Elizabeth Fry, whom he met on a visit to England and who later spent some time at Kaiserswerth, Fliedner was initially concerned with prison reform, and in 1826 was a founder member of the Rhenish-Westphalian Prison Society. In 1833 he and his wife Friederike opened their home as a refuge for female ex-offenders. Other projects followed, including a hospital. This needed a trained staff, and so, in 1836 the Fliedners established the first deaconess house. The deaconesses undertook to train as nurses, to remain celibate and to care for the poor, the sick and the young. However, these were not life-long vows, and deaconesses could leave the order and return to secular life. On Theodor Fliedner's death in 1864 there were 430 deaconesses engaged on projects across Europe; by 1876 there were 600 (Winkworth 1867, 59-60). As the reputation and influence of Theodor Fliedner spread, those with a concern for pastoral ministry, and who found the deaconess house model an attractive one, sent potential deaconess candidates from their own churches to train at Kaiserswerth, and to bring the template of the deaconess house back to

their home country to develop it there. One such was Maria Cederschiöld, the daughter of a Swedish pastor, who studied at Kaiserswerth from 1850 to 1851, before returning to Sweden to become the leader of the newly founded deaconess house at Ersta.

There would appear to be two main reasons why Fliedner and others sought to re-establish a diaconate. The first was that new scholarship was uncovering the concept of *diakonia* in the Early Church as a compelling one. At a time when pietism and evangelicalism were in the ascendancy, and the pressures of industrialisation made society seem increasingly God-less, this link to the foundations of Christianity seemed attractive. Catherine Winkworth (1867, 59-60) quotes Fliedner as saying, ‘If the Church of apostolic days had made use of their powers for the relief of its suffering members, and organised them into a recognised body, under the title of deaconesses ... why should we longer delay the revival of such an order of handmaids devoted to the service of their Lord?’ Fliedner was also recorded as taking the words of Jesus as an instruction for the deployment of deaconesses, ‘Did not the terrible saying of our Lord apply to us, “I was sick and ye visited me not”?’ (Winkworth 1867, 59) Fliedner was influenced by time spent with the Mennonites, for whom diaconal ministry, based on New Testament imperatives, was very important. The role of the Mennonite deacon was to care for the poor and needy in practical ways, and from the early days of the movement the deacon was also known as *minister to the poor* and *keeper of the alms*. Although Fliedner does not appear to have had a distinct theology of *diakonia*, and although a modern reading of the role of the deacon or deaconess in the Early Church might question whether deaconess communities could really be found there, he was constantly impelled by the general call to caring discipleship in the Gospels. His concerns were for the spiritual welfare as much as the physical or social welfare of his parishioners. Indeed, Winkworth records that he commented, in relation to European hospitals: ‘And what should I say of spiritual attendance! Little thought was given to that’ (Winkworth 1867, 59). Nonetheless, even if the primary impetus for the Fliedners was

pastoral rather than theological, what was to spring from this successful deacon/deaconess movement was, at least on the Continent, a robust theology of diaconal ministry, albeit one that owed as much to task as to commission. John Collins comments about the Deaconess Houses, ‘The interests of these innovators were not theological, although their activities introduced a discomfiting element into the modern theology of ministry’ (Collins 2002, 4). Collins felt that this approach to diaconal ministry had been overtaken by his scholarship, and was somewhat scathing about the Kaiserswerth model, for aligning diaconal ministry with social work.

The second reason for Fliedner’s re-establishment of a women’s diaconal ministry was a practical one, arising from the challenges of his ministry. There was an increasing need for ministry to women by women, brought about by industrialisation and its attendant problems. At the same time the traditional gender roles were being challenged and this ministry provided a Christian identity and framework in which respectable women could develop and practice skills of nursing and teaching in situations which otherwise might have been considered at best unsuitable and at worst dangerous. Fliedner had enabled a ministry which was at one and the same time, empowering to women, allowing them to use their skills and receive theological training in a new way; and controlling, in that it was a ministry of service, in which the lifestyle of the deaconesses was heavily proscribed, and they lived under an external, mainly male, authority.

This flowering of the diaconate was initially women’s ministry, and although male deacon houses followed the deaconess institutions, there were always more women than men. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the Kaiserswerth model was developed in the Church of England as the Deaconess Order. The first deaconess institution, the North London Deaconess Institution, opened in 1861 under the leadership of Elizabeth Ferard, who had herself visited Kaiserswerth. She espoused life vows and expected that the deaconesses would live in community, even if they

worked out in a parish. It was made plain by the Church of England hierarchy that the commissioning of a deaconess was not ordination. By the time Isabella Gilmore founded the Rochester Diocesan Deaconess Institution in 1887, the parameters of deaconess ministry had changed. Isabella was adamant that deaconesses should be ‘untrammelled by religious vows’, and have the freedom to shape their ministry within a parish, without undue interference from the church hierarchy, in much the same way as their male curate counterparts (Blackmore 2007, 107).

In 1987, when women were first ordained deacons, deaconesses were still being paid a stipend, and they were represented within the hierarchy of the Church of England by the Head Deaconess. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, once women were ordained deacon, the identity and safeguards of distinctive diaconal ministry, in the shape of the Deaconess Order, disappeared. The Order itself was closed to new members, and those who wished to be distinctive deacons, exercising a similar ministry to the deaconesses became members of the House of Clergy. There was no longer a designated representative of the distinctive diaconate, and the House of Clergy, whose main constituency was priests, was not suited to the task. Once women were priested in 1994, it became the practice to offer stipends only to those who were priested. While I was making the choice between deacon or priest, it was made clear to me that in order to justify a stipend, I would need to be able to do ‘the whole job’, meaning administering the sacraments. I spoke to other women who faced the same dilemma. Anyone who feels called to the distinctive diaconate, but has to be self-financing faces a challenge. I shall consider this further in Chapter 7.

### **A Cinderella Ministry**

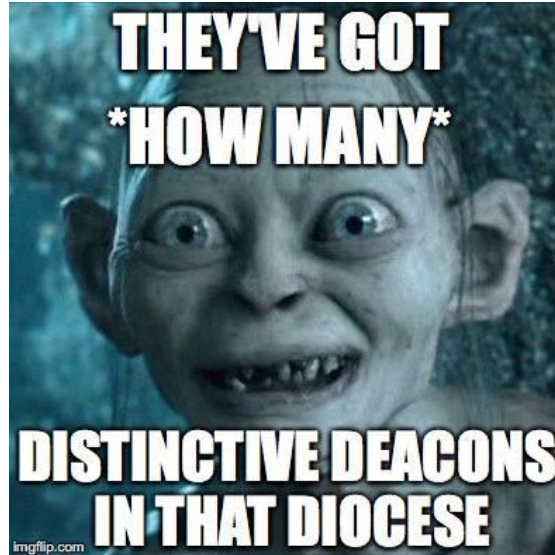
The voices of the respondent cohort and others interviewed for this project reveal a ministry which is diverse and which is undertaken with passion and determination. They also reveal a lack of support and understanding in discernment, training and deployment. These voices capture the pain of ministering in a church that produces reports with

strong, positive recommendations, and then does not act on its own recommendations, and which does not promote or safeguard the distinctive diaconate in a holistic way. The voices capture the frustration of serving a church in which they continually have to explain and justify their ministry.

While I accept that these voices do not speak for every distinctive deacon, and cannot tell the whole story, I will show in Chapter 2 that the respondent cohort is a well-balanced representative sample of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England as a whole. While I have not been able to give full value to all the nuances of the voices of the respondent cohort, I have tried to let them speak as fully as possible. In addition, this project seeks to discern what these voices can tell us about the essential nature of our church, and the consequences of either embracing, or neglecting, the distinctive diaconate.

Chapter 2 sets out the research methods that have enabled me to hear the respondents' voices. These have been applied to interview material from the respondent cohort, as they describe their ministry in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the history of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England, and highlight the issues that distinctive deacons have encountered, and why the ministry has been unable to flourish. In Chapter 6 I return to the material provided by the respondent cohort, concerning collegial relationships with other lay and ordained ministers, and in Chapter 7 to the material concerning deployment and remuneration. This examination of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, past and present, has provided me with clear evidence on which to base my conclusions, which are presented in Chapter 8.

## 2 Research Methodology.



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism/photos>

### **A trio of stories and a bricolage of methodologies**

This research project explores three stories. The central story is that of being a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today. It is told through the voices of sixteen respondents who were active distinctive deacons at the time of the study. Keeping these voices authentic, and giving them life and colour, has been challenging, and I will return to how I approached this below. My own story has been the reason for wanting to hear the deacons' stories, and has given me some depth of understanding, but it has also brought with it the need for me to be careful about how I put my story on the page, and to avoid assumptions arising from my own experiences. All research is affected by the view from where we happen to be standing at the time we undertake it. The distinctive deacons' story and my story interweave with the story of ministry within the Church of England, and are strongly affected by it. However, the story of distinctive deacons within the Church of England has not been able to impact to any great extent on the story of the

Church's ministry, and one of the questions that has arisen in the course of this research project has been why that is.

The story-based approach of this research means that it is more qualitative in nature than quantitative. This is because qualitative methods capture the meaning that the respondent cohort makes from their experiences in a way that quantitative methods cannot. However, respondents were chosen to give a broad representation of the overall cohort of distinctive deacons in the Church of England. Quantitative data supplied the information which has made this possible. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (1998, 3-4) suggest that qualitative research does not have a methodology which is entirely its own, and no specific method takes precedence over another. Just as recipes bring together ingredients from different sources, research within the discipline of practical theology needs to use different and complementary methods. This approach to research has been named 'bricolage' and its practitioner a 'bricoleur'. Bricolage knits together methods of research in such a way that they can provide solutions to real problems. This multiplicity of methods offers rigour, breadth, depth and balance. In addition, and essentially, the 'bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history' (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 4).

There is, then, a fine balance to be reached. Taking the approach of bricolage, it is necessary to identify research methods that will mesh together to give rigour and richness. They also need to be suitable for the area of research, the purpose to which the research will be put, and they need to allow myself, as bricoleur, to be a part of the process. My research project arose from my own story (as described in the introduction), so it follows that my approach will be reflexive, arising from an awareness of the place from which I hear and respond to the cohort, as well as their reflection on their own experiences, and that I will be emotionally involved in the stories of the respondent cohort (Etherington 2004, 28, 29; Bolton 2001, 3). If I process data through my



mind and heart and history, and turn it into a story through which I share new truths (or re-tell old ones in a new way) then a narrative medium could suit my purpose well. I hope that the outcome of my research will deepen the understanding of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England, and maybe affect the standing of this ministry, and the way in which deacons are discerned, trained and deployed in the future. This calls for a methodology which is transformative and seeks change. At the same time, it is important that these more fluid approaches are brought into conversation with the statistical material relating to distinctive deacons within the Church of England. In order to work with the statistics, as well as gathering stories, I need to employ methods associated with an empirical approach. To meet these needs, I have settled on three methodologies, as the facets of my bricolage.

### **Reflexivity - my story**

In *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher*, Kim Etherington quotes A. W. Frank as saying, 'The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other' (Etherington 2004, 179). My genuine concern for the ministry of distinctive deacons in the Church of England ensures that I enter the storytelling space for them. Their perception that I am a genuine listener to their stories brings the distinctive deacon cohort into the storytelling space for me. This situation carries with it two responsibilities. Because the cohort has been so open and honest in their interviews, I have to take great care of the material that they have shared, and the trust that they have shown. This leads to ethical concerns to which I will return later. The other responsibility is to be a self-controlled listener, and not to let my own experiences overshadow those of my respondents. I judge that my reflexivity should be implicit rather than explicit. Because I am no longer a distinctive deacon, I do not want to let my own views of the distinctive diaconate occlude the stories that have been shared with me, and I want to remain alert to the danger of giving prominence to the views and experiences that chime with my own, and reading my feelings into the stories of the respondent cohort. So, I aim to bring to my

research the passion that a personal interest gives me, without allowing my voice to dominate. I have travelled something of the same road as my respondents, and can empathise with what I have heard. I am aware that I put myself on the page in a subtle way as I create a new narrative from the reflections of others. I have come to accept that there is no such thing as an objective researcher, and that it is more fruitful to accept that my experiences, views, concerns, personality, and biases all help to determine the place from which I view the landscape of my research. If I am self-aware, I can be more self-controlled. I am not a constituent part of that narrative. My seven years as a deacon inform my research, but do not make me part of the dataset, because I have not remained a distinctive deacon, but chose priesthood. Therefore, I am not engaged in action research in the way that it is described by Graham (2013, 150, 164) for whom being ‘on the page’ is an essential marker.

However, there are other aspects of my research that have an affinity with Graham’s approach. Graham notes that action research is not a single discipline, but an orientation of enquiry that uses more than one discipline. She also describes action research as problem centred, and transformative of consciousness rather than simply transforming strategy. (Graham 2013, 150-154). These characteristics are reflected in my research. I use a bricolage of disciplines, in which the issues facing the distinctive diaconate are central, and the transformation of the distinctive diaconate is considered – not just in terms of their practice, but also in terms of how a strong diaconate might be better understood, not only by distinctive deacons, but by other ministers and in the Church of England as a whole. Cameron suggests that, in the end ‘action research derives its credibility from whether participants problems are solved and whether they achieve greater control over their situation (Cameron et al, 2010, 36). While I might consider this to be a desirable outcome for distinctive deacons in the future, achieving it is beyond the scope or remit of this research. In consequence, although I lay out concrete proposals, this is not fully a piece of action research.

Drawing back from a methodology which might have proven overly autobiographical, there is still a need for the appropriate vehicle for reflection. This is to be found in reflexive practice: an awareness of the social, ecclesiological and theological contexts of my research; my responses to them, and my ability to use that knowledge as a researcher. Interestingly Etherington describes the traditional approach to academic research, the grand narrative, as ‘this “God’s eye view” of the world’ (Etherington 2004, 25). If you have a theology which has a high regard for the incarnation and for immanence, then the God’s eye view becomes that of ‘God with us’ who questions the grand narrative of the prevailing religious establishment and values the marginalised and outcast. The latter view is one that resonates with a reflexive view of the diaconate. Distinctive deacons often find themselves to be marginalised within the ministry of the Church of England. Their God’s eye view is different to that of the church hierarchy. This forms a bridge to my own experience of marginalisation, as a woman seeking ordination at a time when that was not yet accepted as normal, but was already causing unrest within the Church of England. This in turn means that I can bring this experience to my interrogation of the data. Gillie Bolton writes of reflective questions as bridges (Bolton 2001, xiii). The bridge is also a common image for a deacon’s ministry. The deacon is described as the bridge between the ecclesial community and the secular community, allowing the Gospel to travel one way, and the needs of the world to travel in the other. It therefore feels fitting to see the reflexive connection between researcher and respondent as a bridge.

Research is a two-way street, and my encounters and reflections have crossed the bridge to my own theology and ministry. This is important, because as researcher it is necessary to be sustained and energised by the topic of my research. Etherington speaks of doctoral students in her own field choosing a topic that has some personal meaning to them, ‘knowing that this connection will develop and grow over time and keep them engaged in what can sometimes be a difficult and lonely place’ (2004, 179). Seeing the ministry of distinctive deacons being lived out in so

many ways, and with such dedication has added to my reflective practice on my diaconal ministry, from the mundane interest in how someone else approaches baptism preparation to the deeply theological consideration of the role that prophecy might play in my own *diakonia*.

At a pragmatic level, my wish to undertake this piece of research derives directly from my own experience of the diaconate. When Elaine Graham (2013, 150) suggests that practical theologians cannot ‘leave themselves off the page’ and that a deep listening to self is a pre-requisite to ensuring that the voices of others can be heard, this gives me a new understanding of how I need to go about hearing the stories of others. The dataset of information about distinctive deacons serving in the Church of England, alongside the stories told at interview, raise questions about the value placed on this ministry by those who undertake it, those who facilitate it, and those who receive it. Comparing the exercise of the diaconate between different dioceses raises discussion about best practice in relation to theology, church order and pastoral efficiency.

### **Narrative Methodology – the distinctive deacons’ stories**

Stories are an integral part of our lives, from our morning newspaper, through the funny incident on the way to work, to Eastenders and a bedtime story. The very nature of who we are is determined by our history, as a part of a race, culture or nation, as part of a family and as an individual. We weave ourselves and others into stories. They may be love stories, adventure stories, or stories of injustice. Our minds create these stories to a greater or lesser extent. They help us to sort things out, cope with things and shape our relationships. Telling these stories, to ourselves and to others make us who we are, and can enable us to re-create ourselves. Of course, if we are too wrapped up in our own stories we can come to inhabit a reality that others cannot share. If we ask others for information, it is often provided by way of a story. If someone tells us a story about themselves it often sparks off a similar experience or memory in ourselves. If we have a disagreement with someone, we tend to work up our story so that it justifies our words and actions as

much as possible. So, too, does the other person, often creating a very different story from the same incident. Interviewees often respond to questions with narrative. Some stories may be considered factual. Others are accepted as being fictional or mythical. But they all impart truths in some way.

In a narrative approach, the collection, interpretation and writing are all done as a way of giving meaning to the story. By giving a voice to researcher and respondents, a narrative approach can be political and powerful, and this has been my intention for the respondent cohort's stories. Using stories to share knowledge and develop self-knowledge is very old. As such this approach has power to transcend cultures and disciplines. Data collection in this method has to allow for the respondent to tell their story in their own way, with the researcher asking follow-up questions for clarification, in a way that will not impede the integrity of the respondent's story (Bell 2005, 161-162). I have followed this pattern when structuring my interviews. While there is no doubt that story-telling is very powerful, story-tellers, both respondents and researchers, become vulnerable. This is one reason why ethical safeguards have been so important.

The narratives, both those of the respondent cohort and myself, seek to reveal truths about the inhabiting of the distinctive diaconate that are not being captured in other places, using other methodologies. Like most narratives, they are a combination of quantitative and qualitative material. Hall noted in the introduction to her survey that the Church of England kept 'no single, full and reliable source of information' about distinctive deacons in 1997 (Hall 1999, 201). In 2015, when I began to collect my research material, this was still the case. The data about deacons made no distinction between distinctive deacons and transitional deacons. This would have made the collection of data through Church of England sources time consuming, complicated and not necessarily reliable. Instead, I chose to contact each diocese in the Provinces of Canterbury and York, and ask directly for information about any

distinctive deacons whom they deployed. In each diocese I began with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands or the Dean of Ministry, and where this was not successful, the Diocesan Office or Bishop's Administrator. This proved to be reasonably effective. I asked for the number of female and male distinctive deacons, their approximate ages, whether they were stipendiary or not, whether they were in sector ministries or not, and the number of women and men in training. Although I suspect that this method of collecting data involved some variation – for example, with some dioceses considering 'active' to be up to 70 years old, and others considering 'active' to go beyond that - this information has given me some idea of the size of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, compared with other ministries, and its composition. I confined my questionnaire to five questions, because I was aware that the more complex it was, the less likely it was that all dioceses would respond. Two years later, when I came to write my thesis, I repeated the exercise, in order to see if there were any major changes or trends, even in that short time. The results are broadly similar, with a small drop of numbers in training. On the second occasion I also asked for the number of potential distinctive deacons in discernment, of which there were 25, a large number when considered alongside the number of serving distinctive deacons. The results can be seen in Appendices D and E. This quantitative data is a small but essential part of the background to the narratives.

Some novels, especially historical ones, have a list of characters, a glossary and maps at the front of the book. In this way, when you begin to read the story, you have some idea of who everyone is, where they live and how they speak. I have decided to do the same with my characters – the respondent cohort. I invited them to complete a questionnaire, which asked a few general questions about personal details; their style of ministry; their process of discernment and training; theological and ministerial reflection; experience and skills. In this way, I had some sense of the person I later interviewed. The results from these questionnaires can be seen in Appendix F. However, I avoided asking a

series of set questions at interview, because I wanted to capture the individual story of each distinctive deacon, and the individuality of the story was reflected in the language and manner in which it was told. This approach has been justified, in part, by a study into research methods undertaken for the Susanna Wesley Foundation. In a research study, Christopher Stephens and Lia Dong Shimada (2017) employed a creative and open-ended way of gathering personal information. Instead of a tick-box system with pre-set categories, they simply asked wide questions. For example, when researching the ethnic identity of their respondents, instead of offering a set of options, which could, in themselves be construed as prescriptive or even racist, they simply asked, 'How would you describe your ETHNIC IDENTITY?' They found that the responses were rich and wider than they could have anticipated (from a presentation given at The Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation, 2-5 May, 2017, Swanwick, Derbyshire). In the same way, I have not asked in-depth questions in the questionnaire, because I wanted to offer the respondents the freedom to give rich and personal answers within the context of the interview. While the ANDREP survey of 1997-98 created strong statistics through its use of a detailed questionnaire, set questions precluded wider and unexpected responses.

Having created a space in which these personal responses are shared, I recognised that Constructive Narrative Theology would offer me a place from which to explore the parabolic quality of the respondent cohort's stories, in the way described by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward (2005, 47). They introduce an approach which constructed meaningful stories out of life experiences, finding deeper meanings beyond those which are more obvious. The starting point is the parabolic nature of Jesus' ministry, which makes known the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God demands change. It is revelatory. It is uncomfortable. And it is inclusive. The narratives from the respondent cohort reflect all these aspects. In addition, just as we can create a rich narrative of Jesus's ministry through a range of parables brought to us by a variety of writers, canonical and non-canonical, so it is possible to build a rich narrative of

the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England through the individual and unique voices of sixteen respondents.

*Constructive* had two meanings, as it applied to the research project. The meaning contained within the concept of Constructive Narrative Theology is that of building up. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward describe it as the ‘creative potential people have to construct meaningful stories out of the varied circumstance of their lives’ (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005: 47). Bringing together the stories from the respondent cohort has enabled the building of a narrative of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, which is rarely found elsewhere. The reflective potential of this narrative becomes evident as it is explored. The second meaning of *constructive* encompasses the positive and affirming nature of the narrative. The story of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England is not only told in a new way. It also highlights the scope and value of the ministry being undertaken by distinctive deacons.

### **A meeting of methodology and theology**

The diaconal nature of Jesus’ ministry, which we understand through his parables, teaching and healing, is reflected in the narratives of the respondent cohort. Their understanding of their faith is central to their ministry. This is accentuated by the words, pictures and artefacts that some of them chose to symbolise their ministry. These are described in Chapter 3. The building of the Kingdom of God is shown to be at the heart of the ministry of distinctive deacons in the Church of England. God is revealed through the parables of the Kingdom. Something of the relationship between God and his church is revealed through the respondents’ narratives; but something of the dysfunction between the *diakonia* of Jesus and the ministry of the Church of England is also revealed, and this is explored in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. In the parables of the Kingdom it is made clear that the revelation of God leads to a need for change in the heart and mind of the individuals and communities who



are hearing or reading the narrative. A constructive reading of the narratives of the respondent cohort demonstrates a need for change in the attitude of the Church of England towards how it exercises its *diakonia*, and a willingness for distinctive deacons to be part of that change.

It seems fitting to me that the story of Margery Kempe should be one of the examples of a Constructive Narrative Theology given by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward. She was a fellow East Anglian, but more importantly she was a challenging person, both in character and spirituality. Some of the respondent cohort see themselves, or believed that they are seen as, thorns in the flesh of the Church of England. For some, their vocation itself is inconvenient in a diocese that does not want to engage with the distinctive diaconate. Others wish to develop their ministry in ways which they feel honours the *diakonia* of Jesus, but which those around them find challenging. There are examples of the Church of England ‘dumbing down’ the ministry of distinctive deacons, by using them as long-term curates, or as interchangeable with Readers. There is an honesty in some of the respondent cohorts’ stories that I believe the Church of England may find difficult to accept. The narratives of the respondent cohort show that the distinctive diaconate has the capability, as well as the necessity to be an uncomfortable reminder of God’s presence. One aspect of the Kingdom of God which is considered discomfiting is its inclusivity. There are many points in the Gospels where the religious culture of the day was seen as exclusive – of the poor, the unclean and the foreigner – but Jesus called for inclusivity. An example of this in a parable would be the story of the Good Samaritan. In the same way, the respondent cohort speaks of the importance of inclusivity, and of reaching out to those who are on the edge of the church, and on the edge of society. The words from the ordinal about ‘reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible’ (Archbishops’ Council 2007, 15), resonated with them particularly. The necessary link between theology and practice can be expressed as praxis. In praxis, God-centred reflection goes hand-in hand with a commitment to the transformation of human

institutions. Through the lens of Constructive Narrative Theology, it is possible to reveal rich stories which are parabolic: revelatory, requiring change, discomfoting and inclusive.

While Practical Theology may focus on praxis and transformation at one level, in the end it is God who does the transforming, and offers us mystery, revelation and the poetic. The issues that I have explored are sacramental as well as social. Pete Ward uses the term ‘hospitable’ to describe the resulting relationship between theology and practice (Ward 2008). He reminds us that although theology is an expression of culture, it is also the expression of God dwelling within that culture. It is divine presence that transforms Practical Theology from a disinterested academic discipline into spiritual practice (Ward 2008, 95). The path through the mysterious, the revelatory and the poetic, leading to wisdom, healing and renewal, is found in the rich stories of the relationship between God and God’s deacons.

### **Feminist Theology - a transformative methodology for the Church of England’s story**

Formal theology and church history give us various pictures of the distinctive diaconate as a ministry of ancient standing, which has been developed, lost, rediscovered and hotly debated since the mid-nineteenth century. Through my research I wish to present clear evidence as the basis for examining the future of the distinctive diaconate as a viable ministry within the Church of England. I know also that I am a person who likes neat conclusions, who might need to challenge that in myself, in order for the voices of the distinctive deacons to be heard strongly and clearly. They could well have a narrative that was richer than I can envisage, even if it is not tidy. It would also be challenging for me to suggest transformation within the Church of England, an institution with a long history, a cumbersome legal framework, and a way of ordering itself which is slow to change and evolve. In her analysis of the possibility of bringing about transformation while remaining within a

patriarchal institution, Linda Hogan could be describing the dilemma that faced distinctive deacons in the Church of England:

I do not suggest that it is either possible or necessary for feminist scholars to attempt to step outside patriarchal traditions completely. Patriarchy is the context within which we live and work. Yet since women's experience has been excluded from the formulation of patriarchal theories ... reinterpretation can only effect limited transformation. In the words of Audre Lorde, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.' And genuine change is all that interests feminists. (Hogan 1995, 9; citing Lorde 1981, 99)

Although many of the respondent cohort are frustrated with the Church of England's unwillingness to be truly inclusive of the distinctive diaconate, none expresses a wish to minister outside the Church of England. Most of those who are in sector ministries paid for by secular bodies, retain their Permission to Officiate (PTO) within the Church. Transformation from the inside, using the master's tools, however challenging, is seen as the way forward. The master in this situation would need to be the structure of the Church of England – its ordinal, canons, and pattern of ministry. The bishops are presently misusing these tools themselves, exacerbating the lack of coherence between what the Church of England recommends and what is common present practice in relation to the deployment of distinctive deacons.

When I contacted the respondent cohort for the final time, I did so for two reasons. The first was to present the parts of their interviews that were going in in the final draft of the main Chapters, and to check that they were still happy for these contributions to be used. The second was to obtain feedback from the respondent cohort about the narrative that I had created. It was a positive and meaningful exchange of information and responses crossed the bridge in both directions. Comments showed the hope that I could be part a transformative process for the distinctive

diaconate in the Church of England. *‘I do hope your work can be used to improve the lot of the deacon in the Church of England so all may benefit from this ministry in its fullest sense.’ ‘The thesis resonates a lot with my thinking and experience.’ ‘I feel that it will have a huge and positive impact on the current move to raise the profile of Church of England distinctive deacons.’*

Anne Tuohy describes Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as committed to the transformation of the Christian tradition through a critical engagement between contemporary Western life and the Biblical promise of freedom, justice and well-being for all (Tuohy 2005). Fiorenza describes the field of this engagement as the feminist *ekklēsia*, ‘a legitimate democratic, egalitarian space where the historical experience and religious agency of wo/men and other non-persons can be truly affirmed’ (Tuohy 2005, 1). From this open place, voices from the margins can seek to challenge the patriarchy. Three of the respondent cohort espouse a feminist rhetoric when describing their ministry, and the challenges that it presents where it interfaces with the Church of England establishment. In contrast the narratives from the three respondents who are bishops within the Church of England, and the many reports about the distinctive diaconate that have been examined, tend to use a language of authority, expediency and belittling. The term that Fiorenza coins for this is a *patrix*: a collection of voices upholding patriarchy. It will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5 that the *patrix* holds a great deal of power in relation to the future of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England. This *patrix* appears unable or unwilling to engage with the inspired reality of the distinctive diaconate, even though it is an order redolent of ancient tradition.

Within the feminist tradition, Feminist Standpoint Epistemology (FSE) highlights why it is important to put distinctive deacons’ own stories back into the overall picture of this ministry held by the Church of England. FSE posits that all knowledge is socially situated; and that marginalised groups hold knowledge of their situation in such a way that they have a unique awareness of, and ability to question, that situation.

Therefore, research that focusses on power relations should begin with the lives of the marginalised. FSE has the potential to be both descriptive and normative. Although it is a feminist methodology, it is applicable to all groups who lack privilege. It exposes bias towards the *patrix* and reveals suppressed understandings. As Donna Haraway says:

Feminists don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence ... but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability to partially translate knowledges among very different power differentiated communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how bodies and meaning get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life ... Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988, 579-80).

Abigail Brooks applies FSE to the story of an American slave, Harriet Jacobs. Harriet not only gained her freedom, but wrote about her experiences of slavery:

Speaking from a position of direct experience, Jacobs' words filled the wide-spread silence and ignorance about the condition of female slaves and challenged many of the misconceptions about slave women that were predominant at the time (Brooks 2012, 53).

It is my hope that by enabling the respondent cohort to share their direct experiences of being distinctive deacons in the Church of England, ignorance and misconceptions about their ministry may be challenged. Abigail Brooks says that FSE 'requires us to place women [*distinctive deacons*] at the centre of the research process... Women's [*distinctive deacons*]' concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge' (Brooks 2012, 57). I have added [*distinctive deacons*] to reveal how the FSE approach works in this context.

Applying FSE to the debate surrounding the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England reveals the ways in which the standpoint of the

distinctive deacons differs from that of the Church establishment. While the debate surrounding distinctive deacons has not always been about women, it is about people treated as non-persons seeking to use the *ekklēsia* of wo/men to make themselves heard, in relation to their history and their religious agency. The majority of these non-persons have been women. The status of non-persons highlighted by the application of FSE to the situation of distinctive deacons appears to have two aspects – one through gender and the other through order of ministry. While it will be seen that the issues that face distinctive deacons today are not now gender biased and that male distinctive deacons fare as well, or as badly, as their female colleagues; the history of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England has been closely tied to gender issues, and the predominance of women in the order reflects this. The flowering of diaconal ministry in the late nineteenth century in the Church of England took the form of the Deaconess Order for women and Reader ministry for men. The diaconate was seen as ‘women’s work’ and this may have led to the abuse of the distinctive diaconate before, during and after the priesting of women. It may also have contributed to the current complex, even tense, relationship between the distinctive diaconate and Reader ministry. In a church in which priesthood is seen as the normative ordained ministry and priests are by far the largest of the three orders, distinctive deacons are often described in ways that chime with the FSE understanding of what it means to be a non-person. Nearly every respondent at some point had to defend the fact that they had not been ordained priest, where priesthood was seen as the completion of ministry, or the next rung up the ladder, or ‘proper’ ordination. In FSE terms priests are seen as persons and deacons as non-persons.

Where distinctive deacons, (and the theologians and church historians who have studied them), have pointed to a positive model for the diaconate from early church history, one of honour, responsibility and trusted agency, the received wisdom of the institution has painted a much more subdued picture of humble servility and an inferior office. Where distinctive deacons have pointed to a flowering of diaconal ministry

through the courage of the pioneers of the Deaconess Order, the Church of England has seen a ministry that had become in some sense old-fashioned and no longer necessary, and it closed the Order without thought to safeguarding the ministry it represented. Where distinctive deacons see the many opportunities offered by a ministry that is a bridge between the altar and the everyday, those with the authority to change and develop ministry see the issues of clericalisation of lay ministries, the potential displacement of Readers, and a preference for deacons who become priests who can serve at eucharistic altars. Where distinctive deacons see a need to be the envoys of Christ and his Church to those on the margins, many within the institution see only ministers with a limited usefulness, focussing only on what a distinctive deacon cannot do. Many, in the hierarchy and in congregations, are locked into a view that a distinctive deacon is a sub-standard priest. The stories of the distinctive deacon respondent cohort need to be told in the *ekklēsia*, and heard with an ear tuned to transformation.

### **The practical and ethical issues of data collection and use**

The respondent cohort of sixteen distinctive deacons was chosen to reflect the body of distinctive deacons in the Church of England, overall. Distinctive deacons are not spread evenly across the Church, as they rely on the goodwill and encouragement of individual diocesan bishops, whose attitudes vary considerably. The majority of distinctive deacons are to be found in a small number of dioceses, and consequently, the majority of the respondent cohort were chosen from two dioceses which each had a good number of distinctive deacons. Alongside that there was one distinctive deacon from each of three other dioceses. One of these respondents was in her thirties and the first distinctive deacon in her diocese for some time; the other two were both one of the last two distinctive deacons serving in their respective dioceses. They were all over sixty-five years old. The cohort consisted of thirteen women and three men. This yielded a ratio of women to men (81% to 19%) that was slightly higher than for the body of distinctive deacons in the Church of England (76% to 24%). This is shown in Appendix D. In addition to the

distinctive deacons three respondent bishops were interviewed. These were the diocesan bishops for the two dioceses from which I had drawn my two main groups of distinctive deacons, and one from a diocese that did not favour ordaining distinctive deacons. For purposes of clarification, the sixteen distinctive deacons are referred to as ‘the respondent cohort’ or individually as ‘respondent’, or named with their pseudonym. Where a bishop is being cited, he is referred to as a ‘bishop respondent’ or by his pseudonym. Further information about the distinctive deacon respondent cohort can be found in Appendix F.

A previous, smaller research project for a publishable article alerted me to some of the issues of data collection. For that project, I used both individual interviews and group interviews. Both were useful. The individual interviews led to more candid disclosures; while the group interviews had a real dynamic and allowed for debate. For this research project, I have chosen individual interviews for several reasons. They were more practical to set up, making them easier to deal with in the time I could give to data gathering. They offer each respondent a minimum amount of speaking time. And, most importantly, they do not disadvantage those who are quieter, or wish to disclose sensitive material.

Although I sent a list of possible questions to the respondents before we met, these were designed to give the respondents some idea of the areas to be covered, and were not followed slavishly at the interviews. Some respondents referred to them and some did not. One respondent provided written answers to the questions, but that was entirely voluntary. Each interview included the invitation to the respondent to share the story of their vocation to the distinctive diaconate, usually near the beginning of the interview. This allowed the respondents to tell their story in their own way. I asked supplementary questions if the respondent completed a part of their narrative, and needed a stimulus to continue; if I needed to clarify a point; and to gather information on topics not covered, once the main story had been told. I tried to avoid giving examples of my own



similar experiences, although my enthusiasm did run away with me on a couple of occasions. I was happy to share personal information, but only if I was asked for it. By referring to my own questions, I tried to cover the same areas at each interview, so that although they were semi-formal, they were basically comparable. I was open to any extra material that was offered. Each interview lasted between 75 and 90 minutes.

Each interview was recorded on a voice recorder. I felt that this would give a high level of accuracy in recalling the interview, without being too intrusive. I considered videoing them, but felt that this would be off-putting. Each interview was transcribed by me into a Word document. In doing so, it became obvious that I needed some notation system to be able to record, to some extent, tone of voice, emotion and emphasis. As I re-read the transcripts, I could hear the voice of the respondent in my head, and I wanted to be able to share this aspect of the narrative with my readers. The way in which the story was told was important in forming the narrative theology. Initially, I considered using a series of symbols, and started to do so, to differentiate a break where I had used parts of a transcript, from a break, which was a pause or hesitation by the respondent. However, this would have involved the reader referring to a key, which could have been disruptive. Finally, I decided to use words in italics and in brackets, e.g. (*pause*), (*hesitation*), (*laughter*), (*with amusement*), (*with anger*). As I had not added these 'stage directions' at the first hearing, I had to listen again, to add them to the parts of the interviews that I used in this thesis. Although this was time consuming, it brought me closer to the data.

Each respondent received a copy of the transcript of their interview, and was encouraged to comment on it, correcting any misapprehensions and adding further comments. I see this piece of research as an ongoing conversation with all those with whom I have been in contact, and I am keen to share what I am discovering with others who are also trying to make an impact on the understanding of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England. When I sent the copies of the transcripts, I also

invited each respondent to send something that symbolised their diaconal ministry in some way. This could be a piece of writing, a picture, an artefact (their own or another's), or anything they chose. Eleven (69%) of the respondents replied with comments or corrections on the transcript, and/or a symbolic item. Once the five main draft Chapters which included material from the interviews were written, I sent them to the respondent cohort, with their particular contributions highlighted in colour, and inviting comment. I felt that I had a rich picture of the ministry of the respondent cohort. There were themes that began to emerge, and I read through the transcripts again, armed with a set of highlighters, to capture these and to ensure that the material supported my understanding of what was emerging. After this process, the following areas stood out: discernment of a deacon's ministry; the understanding of the role of the distinctive deacon by the wider church; being a deacon in a priest-centred church, remuneration, the treatment of the liturgical role of the deacon, the misuses of the diaconate.

When I began the interviews it very quickly became apparent that some of the information being shared with me was more sensitive than I had anticipated. The members of the respondent cohort were very frank about the issues that they faced. Given that the clergy of the Church of England are a close-knit group in terms of information sharing, and that there are only one hundred distinctive deacons, some of the respondent cohort were anxious that what they had said would become general knowledge, once my thesis was in the public domain. They felt that this might impact on their ministry, especially in dioceses where they felt that they were already under sufferance as distinctive deacons. To protect the respondent cohort, I have anonymised all parts of the interview transcriptions that have been used in this thesis, and each respondent was given a pseudonym. As far as possible I have chosen the names of people, including deacons and bishops, who were active in the early church. Despite these precautions, a few of the respondent cohort felt that they could be identified. They still chose to take part in the project, and I am grateful for their courage in doing so.

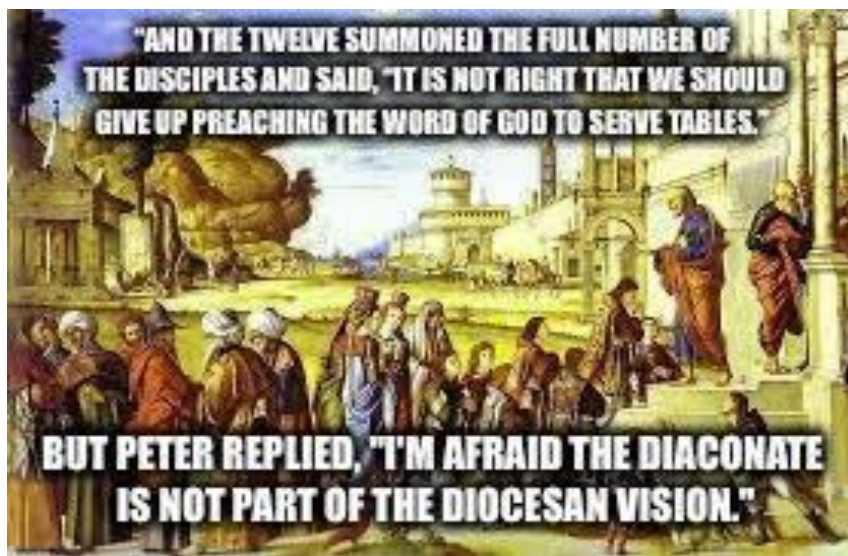
The interview procedure and the care of data has been set up according to the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee protocols, and the Ethics Committee has acted as a critical friend, pointing out issues that I might not have noticed, and offering practical solutions to problems of security, confidentiality and anonymity. As Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce point out (2013: 38):

The key ethical concerns in conducting research in practical theology are that the research does no harm to those who take part, that they understand the purpose of the research and that anything they disclose is treated with an appropriate level of confidentiality.

I would want to go further than that, and in the spirit of Constructive Narrative Theology, say that when entering into storytelling with others, a bond is formed in which the researcher has to be prepared to be part of the respondents' stories just as much as the researcher wishes the respondents to be part of the story they seek to tell. It is a privilege to become part of someone's life in this way, and it is not a privilege to be taken lightly. I am deeply indebted to my respondents. I was moved by their stories, and I sincerely hope that I have done them justice.

Listening to the recordings of the interviews, transcribing them, annotating them, sharing them with the respondents and receiving feedback all contributed to a strong familiarity with the material. In order to create a rich picture of what it means to be a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today, I shall, in this thesis, use these themes to compare, and often contrast the respondents' own understanding of a distinctive deacon's ministry, the Church of England's official understanding of a deacon's ministry as set out in the Ordinal for Deacons, and the current attitude of the Church of England to distinctive deacons, as captured in the interviews with the respondent bishops, the official reports, and the response of Ministry Division. In doing so, the convergence and divergence between these understandings and expectations will become clearer and can be explored.

### 3 The Role of the Distinctive Deacon



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism/photos>

#### **A comparison with the Ordinal**

Given the themes which emerged from my interrogation of the data, and given that the Ordinal for Deacons is the Church of England's definitive description of the ministry of a deacon, I decided that it would be fruitful to explore the different facets of the ministry which distinctive deacons undertake, in comparison with the role described in the Ordinal for deacons, in *Common Worship: Ordination Services (the Ordinal)*.

Drawing on the views expressed by the respondent cohort, I explored the similarities and differences between the two, and how this impacted on the present and future understanding of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England. Does the ministry of distinctive deacons mirror the role description in the ordinal, or are there areas of difference?

Hall did not examine the role of distinctive deacons in relation to the ordinal in any depth, although she did point out that the identity of distinctive deacons had not been properly considered because the

majority of deacons are ordained priest after a year (Hall 1999, 182). She provided a chart which indicated how parish deacons divided their working time, finding that 29% was spent on pastoral ministry, 20% on liturgical matters, 22% in various kinds of teaching, 14% in social action, and 15% described as 'other duties (Hall 1999, 209). My study does not codify deacons' activities in this way, but rather seeks to understand how they understand their ministry (or ministries), both theologically and in practice.

The role of deacons within the Church of England, both transitional and distinctive, as set out in the Ordinal is multi-faceted, and this is reflected in the descriptions given by the respondent cohort of the ministries which they inhabit. The Ordinal describes a ministry which is at once collegial and exercised on the peripheries of the Church community. Deacons are called to work with episcopal and priestly colleagues to be heralds of Christ's kingdom (Archbishops' Council 2007, 15). The duty to share in the proclamation of the Gospel, to preach and to care for the poor and outcast is shared by all three orders (Archbishops' Council 2007, 15, 32, 61). However, while there is considerable overlap between the work of a bishop and that of a priest - and the Ordinal gives the main locus for both as within the 'flock of Christ' (Archbishops' Council 2007, 32. 61) - the work of a deacon has a different emphasis.

Comparing the ordinals for the three orders of ministers, it can be seen that the priest and the bishop are both called to be shepherds of the people of Christ, serving them and caring for them. They are ministers of word and sacrament, although the bishop is the principal minister and he or she alone can confirm or ordain. They have oversight of the church and they have a disciplinary role. Those who have strayed and return are offered the opportunity for confession and absolution by bishop or priest. Bishop and priest discern and foster the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the bishop commissions the followers of Christ to minister in his name. Bishops and priests, then, are ordained to a ministry in which oversight

of the Church community and administration of the sacraments predominates (Archbishops' Council 2007, 32, 61).

Deacons, by comparison, are called to a ministry of service which has greater connection with the mission of the Church, and the people of God beyond the Church community. It is a ministry of visible self-giving, which acts as a pattern for the discipleship and mission of the whole people of God. It is a ministry which equips God's people, so that they too can live out the Gospel. While bishops and deacons are both called to follow the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd, it is Christ washing the feet of his disciples that is the example for deacons, who are exhorted to 'wash the feet of others.' Deacons are to proclaim the Gospel in deed as well as word 'as agents of God's purposes of love.' They are to serve the wider community in which they are set, and to search out those in the greatest need or distress, making the love of God visible to them. This is a pastoral ministry, exercised on the margins of the Church. When deacons participate in leading worship within the community, they are to bring the needs and hopes of the wider community with them, and present them to the church in intercession. Deacons act as companions to those on the journey of faith, bringing them to baptism, distributing communion to the sick and housebound, and studying the scriptures with God's people. Deacons, then, are called to a liminal ministry, distinct from that of priests and bishops, and which can be undertaken in a variety of ways (Archbishops' Council 2007, 15). Rosalind Brown has made the point that, 'In the Church of England there can be no ordination without a title parish in which to serve, because there can be no deacon without a community to love and serve, and with whom to worship God' (Brown 2005, 3). How, then, does this pattern offered at ordination fit with the ministry of a deacon as it is exercised by distinctive deacons in the Church of England today? For the purposes of exploration and comparison, I have used five phrases from the ordinal which encapsulate the five areas of the ministry of deacons, as the Ordinal visualises it, as headings under which I have considered the responses of the respondent cohort: equipping the Church of God to make Christ known; visible self-

giving and service of the community; exercising a pastoral ministry and working with those on the margins of society; inhabiting a liturgical role; and being prophetic. The impetus for all these roles is the requirement to be a living symbol of the love of God. I was aware that the responses from the cohort might cover areas beyond these, such as the nature of leadership, which arose in the discussion about Deacon-in-Charge; and that the five areas might be understood in different ways, as was the case when discussing sacramental ministry.

*They are to serve the community in which they are set. 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.*

Hild was a self-supporting minister. She spent some of her week cleaning and gardening in order to pay the bills. ‘On Sunday morning, I can be in the pulpit preaching, and on the next morning I can be on my knees cleaning someone’s floor... so it’s quite a leveller.’ Like Hild, the majority of the respondent cohort had no problem with the idea of service. They showed themselves to be influenced by the tradition of seeing a deacon’s ministry in terms of service, accepting the diaconate as a servant ministry, but seeing a clear distinction between service and servility. Accepting the charism of service is not the same thing as tolerating being looked down upon or being made to feel inferior. The Ordinal supports the understanding of the diaconate as a ministry of Christ-like service, and therefore, presumably, one to be respected. However, terms such as ‘an inferior office’ and ‘the humble deacon’ which are to be found in the final collect of the 1550, 1552 and 1662 Ordinals (Brightman, 1915) are still bandied about. Junia saw her ministry as honourable service. When asked what had inspired her in her diaconal ministry, she said:

*My total inspiration, and what made me sure the diaconate was where I should be is Rosalind Brown’s book, Being a Deacon Today ... ‘being a doorkeeper at Church’, and ‘butler at the Lord’s table’ are the things that speak to me most.*

However, Junia was not prepared to accept a newly ordained priest colleague quoting ‘inferior office’ at her.

*My junior priest colleague, who can be... who is very bright but dense, said, ‘oh yes, inferior office, that’s from the ordinal, isn’t it?’ Don’t put me down! (Exasperation).*

One of the students in training for the distinctive diaconate, whom I tutor as part of my role as Bishop’s Officer for Distinctive Deacons, made the point that we don’t see Christ as inferior because he came to serve, so why should a ministry of service make deacons inferior?

Some of the respondent cohort articulated an understanding of their ministry which was wide ranging and powerful, while still reflecting service. The mandate for this ministry came from Christ. Having Christ as the pattern for their calling was a strength and a liberation. The words that were revealed to Nicanor at the end of his vision of his calling to the diaconate were ‘represent Christ crucified.’ He saw this as the ultimate gesture of love, and his ministry therefore being about feeling God’s love within himself and revealing it to others. From the outset, Agnes said that she had no vision that she had to fit a particular role: *‘I felt I must just go with where I was and do the best I could. And that was how it was really, and all these other things have just come to me, you know.’ (With confidence).*

Three of the respondent cohort chose something involving foot washing when asked to choose a piece of writing, image or object that reflected their diaconal calling. Rhoda chose the painting by Sieger Koder, *Jesus washing Peter’s feet*, and said about it:



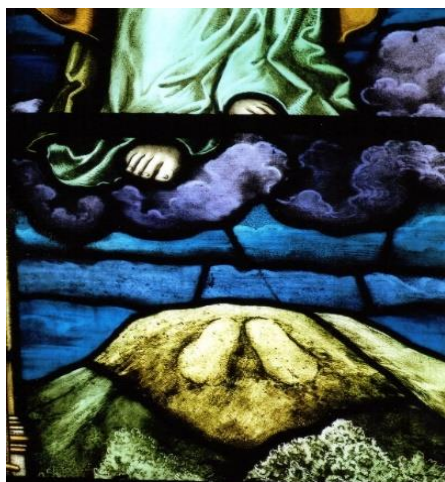


*I could write a whole essay on the painting. However, briefly, it is so purely diaconal – the face of Christ reflected in the bowl of dirty water. Peter’s hands say a lot about yes and no. The gentleness of the whole picture.*

Sophia chose her ordination stole:

*The foot washing is self-evident as a symbol of Christian service for all the baptised but expressed sacramentally in ordination. Likewise, the Trinity symbol represents the perfect model of relationship we have as an example for us in our relationships with others.*

Johanna mentioned foot-washing in the context of foot prints. As for Sophia, they were a reminder that she did not journey alone as a distinctive deacon, but followed in the footsteps of other deacons, and that God lifted her up when the going got rough:



*Themes of feet and footsteps have become obvious in my ministry and we walk in the footsteps of some amazing deacon role models, Francis and Laurence to name but two. I was inspired by the site of the Ascension on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with an alleged footprint of Jesus in the rock. I love the footprints in our*

*stained glass at St Luke’s. There’s plenty of texts to remind us that bending low enough, for example to wash feet, is an ‘automatic’ lifting up!*

Whether or not the foot washing Christ was a model of diaconal ministry that had been suggested to them as part of their ministerial formation, it was one these deacons embraced as positive and in no way demeaning.

When Junia said, *'this woman [Brown] is talking my language'* about *Being a Deacon Today*, she reflected the views articulated by seven of the sixteen respondents. As Junia read Brown's work, *'she explains that a deacon isn't a slave, a deacon is a servant, and a servant as such has some authority.'* Only three members of the distinctive deacon respondent cohort described the deacon as a servant, and their understanding was not a servile one, but one that reflected a 'life of visible self-giving'. As Rita said:

*I think fundamentally, the deacons are servants of the church ... You are not defined by tasks that you do, because there is nothing only deacons do ... There's an interesting article written in one of the American Readers on the diaconate ... about kenosis and the diaconate – that self-emptying. I think as I have gone on in ministry there's something diaconal about that sort of self-emptying and because you have to sort of give up yourself to the church in a very particular way because you're not tied to tasks, that's quite daunting.*

These responses bring together the views of Collins and Brown. The respondent cohort were guided by a theology of the deacon as one who is commissioned and so has authority, and a calling to sacrificial ministry in the pattern of Christ.

Three of the respondent cohort used the term *emissary* to describe their understanding of the role of the deacon and another referred to the deacon as *advocate*. This also picked up on the theology of John Collins (1990). There was not a conflict in this use of two different strands of understanding the distinctive diaconate. The Ordinal speaks of the deacon's 'commission'. The notion of the deacon as the pattern and purveyor of pastoral service, and the deacon as the emissary, who is sent on behalf of Christ and/or the Church, to undertake a particular commission, sat well together. From the responses of the respondent cohort a picture began to emerge of distinctive deacons who provided a pattern for the servanthood of the whole church community, but were

still strong in accepting and fulfilling a specific commission. Service is about challenging and enabling, not just supporting or comforting. Bishop Cuthbert said of the distinctive deacons in his diocese, that he found them, to his surprise, *'less churchy, more feisty!'* than he expected to find them. The concept of enabling others in their discipleship seems to be a core aspect of the modern distinctive diaconate, and brings together agency and service. Most respondents were not wedded to one particular theological expression of diaconate, and what they were articulating was a role that was a fusion of the roles described in the Early Church, and in the Kaiserswerth model.

The fusion of agency and service is an essential aspect of the Five Marks of Mission, which emerged at the 1984 ACC. These are:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. (Zink 2017, 145)

They reflect the diaconal mission of all God's people, and also the distinctive deacon's role of service, enabling and prophecy. They are a reminder that the role of distinctive deacons described in the ordinal is fundamental to the mission of the church.

Because, historically, the diaconate has been associated with humility and inferiority, this is an image that is hard to slough off. However, the responses from the respondent cohort suggested that they had a more robust understanding of servanthood. They were committed to Christ as a pattern of sacrificial service without subservience; and accept the commission that they were given. They were fulfilling what the Ordinal said, rather than what it is often assumed to say, which is that deacons are inferior to, and simply called to serve the other two orders.

*Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people; that the whole church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world.*

Agnes told an anecdote about getting the congregation to act out the Gospel, as a newly appointed deaconess. It was a serious anecdote, in that her training incumbent was so disquieted by this approach to liturgy that he asked for her to be moved to another post. Apart from this there was very little direct evidence in the responses of the respondent cohort of the Scriptures as a focus for study with the people of God. Only two of the respondent cohort included facilitating Bible Study as part of their ministry. For one of these, Lydia, Bible Study and prayer groups were a major aspect of her ministry; but she was the only one. The equipping of the church by distinctive deacons took place in a broader way.

In the course of the interviews I felt that I was hearing the words 'enabler/enabling' frequently, but in actual fact only five of the respondent cohort (31%) used them. However, when describing specific roles, ten of the cohort (62.5%) were engaged in activities that in some way enabled others and equipped the church. These included theological teaching, lay training, confirmation preparation, spiritual direction, discussion groups and prayer groups. All of these are activities to which the Scriptures are essential if not central. Agnes spoke about the importance of the diaconate to ministry outside the immediate church community. She spoke of the enabler as one who encourages others to engage with ministry outside the church, acting as an example and not just doing on their behalf. The enabler can be the starter-up of projects, but once they are established, moves on. When told by a Reader that there was nothing that she could do that he couldn't, she responded by saying:

*But the difference between you and me is that if you are doing it, I won't be. (With spirit). So, if there is something established and its running well, I won't be doing it. But if there is something that needs to be done, I see it as my role to see that, and actually look for people to enable us to address it.*

She went on to describe distinctive deacons as *'first footers, to encourage people to take the step to engage with issues outside.'* She had demonstrated this in practical ways in her ministry, having set up various support groups and lay training initiatives. Three words that she used specifically of the distinctive diaconal ministry were *'transformational, prophetic and renewing.'*

One of the hallmarks of these activities was the sense of accompanying others on a journey of faith, rather than carrying them, or giving them a road map and leaving them to it. This reflects a description given by Rosalind Brown (2005, 5): 'To be a deacon... is to be caught up in ministry that is incarnational, rooted in place, in time, in life. And it is the privilege of the deacon to be a catalyst for the ministry of all the baptised,' The fact that the instruction to deacons in the Ordinal to equip God's people to make Jesus and the Gospel known, is given twice within the same part of the liturgy, indicates that this is seen a key element of the diaconate. All the respondent cohort were involved in this equipping ministry in some form or other. Rhoda saw the necessity of patterning the behaviour for others – *'If they see it being lived out it is easier'* – while Rita saw deacons as a visual aid for discipleship:

*I sometimes use the image of deacons being a bit like a post-it note on the church, about the baptismal call of all Christians that we neglect; that sense of calling to diakonia and to serve and not to be served, that all Christians need to be enabled with.*

Julian also made a connection between enabling discipleship and being a community of worship:

*I love this dismissing, go in peace to love and serve the Lord ... All that about trying to enable discipleship for people out of church, so the liturgy after the liturgy, that's what they describe diakonia as, don't they? (with enthusiasm).*

The role of the distinctive deacon as equipping the ministry of the whole church is echoed in the stories told by distinctive deacons on the former DACE website. Those writing there used phrases such as 'a vocation to ministry outside the walls of the church', 'to bring church and

community into closer connection’, ‘I promote community projects’, ‘to share the lives of others and enable them’, and ‘another strand of diaconal ministry is encouraging and enabling all people to exercise their vocation and ministry’ ([www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon](http://www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon)). This enabling and equipping was lived out in practical activities by the respondent cohort; the foremost of which is some kind of teaching. Eleven (69%) had been involved in some level of Christian teaching aimed at giving people skills for discipleship or ministry; from teaching for new disciples to theological education as part of ordination training. The Scriptures are accessed in different ways within the different areas of church life today, and the relationship the respondent cohort to enabling others to live the gospel reflected the modern ways of growing disciples.

*Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church ... They 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.*

In the Ordinal two large areas of ministry – pastoral and liturgical – are put together in one sentence: ‘Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God’s people in worship.’ It was a key tenet for many of the respondent cohort that what happens in the world informs what happens at the altar, and vice versa, and this is reflected in the section of the Ordinal about the liturgy. These two areas of ministry were the most important for distinctive deacons, and accounted for the majority of the data received, and so I have chosen to examine them separately, while acknowledging their interdependence. When discussing pastoral ministry, most of the respondents did not draw a distinction between those ministered to as part of a congregation and those reached on the margins of church and society. As church communities shrink, and social needs increase, more and more activities could be described as mission or outreach, as well as pastoral care. The majority of examples of pastoral ministry took place in the liminal places, where church and society/community/the secular met. Only four

of the respondent cohort (25%) saw the congregation as the main locus of their ministry. All the others saw their ministry as missional.

Three respondents (19%) reflected this outward move to missional ministry in the special thing that they chose to symbolise their diaconal ministry. For Brigid, it was the prayer of St Teresa of Avila, *Christ has no Body*. She chose it for her ordination cards and it has remained a firm favourite. In a similar vein, Lydia chose the hymn, *The Servant Song*:

*The words that reflect most closely the diaconal ministry I feel I have experienced are to be found in the hymn 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' by Richard Gillard. Whenever I sing it, the resonance is complete, in body, mind and spirit.*

Mark chose a painting by Eugene Burnand:

*In response to your request, I do indeed have an image, which for many years, has assisted me in reflecting on a diaconal journey and to seek God's plan for me. 'Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre' by Eugene Burnand. Studying each face in turn we see an intensity, a focus on their task at that moment in time. They are both deep in thought and the inclination forwards of their bodies reminds me how, as deacons, we can never stand still, that we are pushing outwards and into new territory, to pastures new, to parts of society that are yet to hear the Word of God.*



All three choices spoke of movement outward, from the ecclesial body into the community.

The view that distinctive deacons do indeed share with other ministers, lay and ordained, in the pastoral and missional ministry of the church was prevalent. There was very little sense that this was a ministry exclusive to distinctive deacons, but rather that distinctive deacons should be on the cutting edge of ministry, where it does indeed reach ‘into the forgotten corners of the world.’ Nicanor described himself as the ears and eyes of the incumbent within the wider community. The distinctive diaconate is by its nature a collaborative ministry, and seven other respondents also worked with incumbents, Readers, and lay ministers. Agnes spoke about the complementarity between her pastoral role and her husband’s priestly ministry. She, Junia and Julian were part of large parish ministry teams, where they often worked with transitional deacons. The six respondents who had had some chaplaincy role have also worked as part of a chaplaincy team, often with lay and ordained members, from across the denominations and other religions. Three respondents worked ecumenically in their parish ministry, and one in an international, academic and ecumenical sphere. Two worked closely with bishops, and only two had worked with another distinctive deacon

The role of the distinctive deacon is often expressed, in the literature of that ministry, as that of envoy, go-between, doorkeeper, threshold or bridge.<sup>4</sup> One or other of these descriptions was used by half of the respondent cohort. Junia, who took the concept of doorkeeper from Rosalind Brown, talked of being the one who draws people in, making it possible for them to cross the threshold, but then handing them on to other ministers with different roles and skills in the church community. Julian acted as the go-between for her incumbent and church community, with the Muslim community. It resulted in her building links with the local Mosques, hosting an Iftar, and study days, and Muslims friends attending Midnight Mass. One of the first questions she had been asked by her DDO was where she saw herself in church. Julian replied, *In the doorway, helping people come in, helping people go out, and trying to*

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<sup>4</sup> Collins 1990, passim; Lynn 1991, 115-119; Brown 2005, xi; Ross 2006, 117; FOAG 2007, 134.



*make the door as wide as possible, and the threshold as open as possible.'*

Six of the respondent cohort worked in hospital chaplaincy, either full-time or part-time, and they articulated a strong sense that this ministry mirrors very closely what they felt diaconal ministry to be. Rhoda said that when she applied for her hospital chaplaincy post, she laid the job specification alongside the Ordinal, highlighting the key words:

*It was just amazing. The two just mirrored each other. I guess that's what I do every day, you know, stand in the doorway of people's lives; the doorway from life to death, the doorway of birth into life.*

Phoebe spoke of the variety of people with whom she interacted, from the nursing staff and other chaplains through to

*someone who has come in off the street, somebody who is actually in prison ... Talking to the policeman who is actually handcuffed to that patient; to someone who is mentally ill, to an elderly lady who has dementia; or someone who has just lost a baby. It's all there, it's all on that fringe.*

Sophia echoed this experience. *'For me a deacon is that image of being on the threshold ... I feel that I am going to the marginalised ones in the hospital.'* She shared the experience of being called to support a Muslim couple after a still birth, because the hospital could not contact the Muslim chaplain. *'I was really struck just by that shared humanity, you know.'* Christina ministered with several health care agencies. While she also felt that her diaconal calling had found fulfilment in chaplaincy, her go-between role had also been demanding and political. She felt strongly that part of her ministry was to enable and support the frontline nursing staff and liaise with the leadership team.

*I couldn't have a ward sister say to me, my team are fighting like cats and just say, oh dear, what a shame. I would say, do you want to have an away-day, do you want me to organise a team-building event? Tools that we can use to resolve issues.*

When this was discouraged under a new leadership team, Christina felt that the quality and breadth of her diaconal ministry, including the prophetic, had been compromised.

Rita said:

*I actually find that although people outside of the church or on the fringe haven't heard of deacons they actually will understand sometimes better what it is, because as far as most people are concerned, deacons are actually doing the sort of thing that they think Christians should be doing; that sort of being on the fringes ... and turning the tables.*

Junia was surprised at the interest her neighbour took in her ordination. She has also been involved in deliverance ministry, and found that those who did not have any other connection with the church accepted this ministry readily. Almost every respondent was involved in some area of ministry among the poor, weak, sick, lonely, oppressed or powerless. These included peri-natal, geriatric and end of life chaplaincies, healing ministry, support for the lonely and those living alone, bereavement counselling for children in criminal situations, support for transient and 'just about managing' families and those who lack hope and aspiration, and campaigning with and for refugees. Some respondents who were not yet involved spoke about moving into one of these areas in the future. Mark would like to move into hospice chaplaincy, and Julian spoke of starting a women's leadership network. The majority of the respondent cohort had come into ministry from other professions where they had developed skills in pastoral care, often in challenging social situations.

Two of the respondent cohort, Hild and Mark, had developed strong links with their local Churches Together groups. Through this link, they were involved in outreach activities, such as preparing welcome boxes for refugees. In both cases their incumbent colleagues did not see the point of involvement with Churches Together, and in both cases Hild and Mark saw themselves as the bridge between the church community and the local community. *I am the bridge with the outside world, and within the*

*church*’, said Hild. Mark also felt that it was important that the ministers were seen to be doing things in the community and not just in church: *‘Because we are genuinely interested in people and improving the area and want to be part of that overall desire to make life better and deal with social issues.’* Again, this was an indicator of being called as an envoy from the church into the community. This role was echoed in the experiences shared by other distinctive deacons on the DACE and Deacon Stories websites.

There was one expression of pastoral ministry which some of the respondent cohort had strong negative feelings about, and that was the role of Deacon-in-Charge. They felt that primary responsibility for an ecclesial community was a priestly function, a position which is borne out by the Ordinal, which instructs that priests are to *‘sustain the community of the faithful by the ministry of word and sacrament.’* Christina had been asked to be a Deacon-in-Charge of a parish and said no:

*It doesn’t seem to make sense to me. If you are in charge of an ecclesial community, then you need to be a priest, because you have the cure of souls... I can share in the leadership of an ecclesial community, but I won’t have the primary responsibility for it. For me, that is a priestly function.*

Brigid also felt that she could not have fulfilled the role of Deacon-in-Charge. She knew of a couple of distinctive deacons, whom she described as *‘long term deacons’* who had taken up the role, and *‘they very quickly became priests.’* Of course, that does beg the question of whether their calling was perhaps to priestly ministry, reflected both in their willingness to take on the role, and the effect that it had on them. Mark also said that he *‘did not want to run a parish’* because he wanted to be a *‘free agent ... weaving threads and making community links’*.

Even a respondent who is a Deacon-in-Charge of a parish, has this to say about her role:

*I don't necessarily think it is right for deacons to be in charge of parishes. I don't think that's the best way of using deacons ... I'm only half-time here, but if I think that half-time is used in the parochial admin stuff, then the rest of my time I'm free to be a deacon.*

The diaconal aspect of her ministry was exercised when she was not fulfilling ecclesial oversight. Rita, while explaining that not having a presidential Eucharistic role is fundamental to the fluid nature of diaconal ministry, also noted that ecclesial oversight and ecclesial identity are not the same thing. Distinctive deacons need the latter:

*They didn't need me to take Eucharists and therefore the 'useful' question wasn't there ... It's who sends you, whose authority are you in is fundamental, because deacons don't have the boundaries that bishops and priests have, by virtue of the tasks/roles that they have to fulfil. Another factor is if deacons are working at the edge of the church boundaries and the wider community they need to be clearly tethered to the church and so have that strong sense of ecclesial identity.*

Chapter 6 will explore the collegial relationships of the respondent cohort in more detail, and will show that they were willing to work with other ministers, the wider church and with other agencies to reach out to those on the margins. They were also resisting a role which is not in the spirit of the diaconal ministry described in the Ordinal, that of Deacon-in-Charge, a role which they believed would compromise both their ministry, and the role of the priest, which they might if necessary be able to imitate but could not (and did not want to) fulfil. Although distinctive deacons exercise a clear leadership, it is different and complementary to that of a priest. Chapter 6 will also demonstrate that a clearer understanding of the distinctive diaconate can also give a clearer understanding of priesthood.

*Deacons share ... in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism.*

*They assist in the administering of the sacraments, they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.*

The bridge analogy of the role of the distinctive deacon carries on into the exploration of the role of the distinctive diaconate in liturgy and worship. Something that Julian had read, and which spoke to her was that the priest offers and the deacon helps people to receive: *'I really liked that.'* Traditionally, the deacon has undertaken the roles within the communion service that make a bridge between the sacramental activity of the priest at the altar, and the worship of the laity: preaching, leading the intercessions, preparing and clearing the altar and offering instructions: 'Let us offer one another a sign of peace', 'Let us proclaim the mystery of faith', 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' (The Archbishop's Council 2000, 175; 176; 183). Jennifer Swinbank, a distinctive deacon writing on the DACE website, described the connection between the liturgical and pastoral aspects of her ministry in this way:

My sense of being called to serve my local community is made complete by a reciprocal liturgical ministry, in which we bring the world to Christ, and Christ to the world... The deacon's invitation to reconciliation and peace, the proclamation of the Good News... all mirror the vocation into which each one of us is sent out, a calling to love and serve the Lord in the communities in which we are set. ([www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon](http://www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon)).

It has also traditionally been the duty of the deacon to take the sacrament out to those who cannot come to church to receive communion, the sick and housebound. As Sophia described it: *'You are serving the priest, you are serving the people, because the diaconal role that you take in the liturgy is very much an invitation to the people to join in.'* In an article written for the website Deacon Stories (<https://deaconstories.wordpress.com>), entitled *An Altar in the Ordinary*, one of the respondents describes how the instruction from the Ordinal to make God visible in the forgotten corners of the world, came to have special significance:

On a coffee table covered in tabloids and celeb magazines, on a bedside table covered in medication or on a small garden table surrounded by overgrown plants ... The ordinary table becomes an altar ... An ordinary visit becomes a time for the extraordinary to be imagined and embodied ... It's a privilege to preside in forgotten corners – let us never get too busy for home communions.

That the liturgical and pastoral are incomplete without each other is seen as, and shown to be, central to the ministry of a distinctive deacon.

Mark, although he performed the role of liturgical deacon on Sundays and three times during the week, did not show any particular satisfaction in his role: *'Because our parish, let me explain, is very staunchly Anglo-Catholic, even though I am not. So, I am sort of in the wrong place, but there we are!'* (With resignation) Otherwise the members of the respondent cohort were happy to undertake these traditional roles. Indeed, it was important to them. Twelve (75%) of the respondent cohort regularly deacon at the altar. One had done so in a previous ministry. Junia evinced deep satisfaction about being *'the butler at the Lord's table.'* She felt that it was a privilege to make sure that everything was sorted out for the service. Rita felt that the relationship between what she did in work (as it were) and what she did in the liturgy has been important. Christina said, *'To me it is absolutely essential that I have a liturgical base and role, and it's out of the ministry at the altar that the ministry in the community flows, and back again.'* For Hild, who was not from a high church tradition, the deacon's liturgical role took some getting used to. *'I often say that it's worse than Strictly Come Dancing!'* (Laughter). For her, learning the liturgical role had been a steep curve, but she now valued her place in the liturgy.

However, because there are relatively few distinctive deacons in the Church of England, it has often been the practice for Readers, lay ministers or priests to fulfil the liturgical role of the deacon. This was an issue for some of the respondent cohort, especially when they were part

of the worship, but were overlooked in favour of someone who was not a deacon. Junia explained that when she was training she was told that if there was a deacon in the place, then the deacon took the liturgical role. The tutor said, *'and that is tough love, if someone else is used to doing it.'* Junia was respected in her role, and as she was working in a large church with a large staff, there was an accommodation about administering the sacrament. Julian ministered in a church with a number of readers, and felt the need to be flexible. *'The Readers, when they preach, they deacon. Otherwise I deacon, and I think if I marched in and said, so, I should deacon every week, that would be difficult, and insensitive, and I don't mind.'* But others have felt disenfranchised. Nicanor described how he was permitted to take the deacon's role up to the Peace, but then a lay person prepared the altar and administered the chalice. Lydia had a full liturgical role in one diocese, but moving to another diocese and parish, was simply not invited to fulfil the deacon's role, and had to watch it being fulfilled by others who were not deacons. Brigid was also side-lined, but by a priest colleague: *'There is a priest there who had sort of taken on the role of the deacon.'* Bishop Boniface thought that this was inevitable in the Church of England, where hierarchy is paramount. He felt that order – bishop, priest and deacon – was trumped by status – bishop, vicar and curate – and that the specific charisms were lost. He cited situations in which, if he is invited to celebrate and preach in a parish, and therefore takes the priestly role at the altar, the parish priest will take the role of the deacon, and the deacon will end up bringing up the offertory.

Although the ordinal describes deacons as assisting in the administration of the sacraments, the relationship between the sacraments and diaconal ministry is quite a grey area. In the Alternative Service Book Ordinal (1980) deacons were permitted to baptise when required to do so. This situation has been allowed to continue in some places, and there was a range of practices across the respondent cohort when it came to baptisms, weddings, and celebrating communion from the reserved sacrament, absolving, blessing and anointing. There are several factors that could

come into play, to contribute to the variety of practice. A church's tradition may affect how rigorously the connection between priestly ministry and sacraments is observed. That the majority of deacons are transitional, and will be priested and exercising a sacramental ministry in a year's time, may make the issue seem unimportant. Moreover, it is convenient to have colleagues who can share in the workload of occasional offices. Practice varied from those respondents who never presided at sacramental services; through those who did, but only with priestly involvement, to those who took the whole service, including the blessings. Prochorus had not been ordained for long, and had not yet taken any baptisms or weddings. He felt that he would be uncomfortable giving the blessing. This was a view that was echoed by Lydia. In many years of ministry, she had only taken one baptism, for a member of her own family; one wedding, with a priest present; and she had presided at one communion by extension in her first diocese, which made her feel very uncomfortable. When she moved dioceses, she made it clear that she would prefer not to do communion by extension and was not involved in administering any of the sacraments. Sophia had taken baptisms and weddings where it had been absolutely necessary, but she saw it as *'not ideal'*. She would want a priest to do the blessing at a marriage. Rita took baptisms and weddings in her curacy, when the parish went, unexpectedly, into interregnum. But she said, *'I wouldn't have done weddings necessarily as the norm, because you can't give nuptial blessings.'* Julian is also recently ordained. She saw the approach to the sacraments as collaborative, with the priest being rooted in the church community, and being the provider of the sacraments, while the deacon was the enabler of the sacraments:

*There is something about being between the priest and the people, so I would see it as incredibly appropriate for me to be the person that's visited the baptism family, and helped them to put the service together, and would then go and visit them afterwards ... and keep in touch, but I think it's also that thing about collaboration.*

For her it was a positive choice to have a different role.



Phoebe's current post was in hospital chaplaincy, but during her parish curacy she had found it difficult that her incumbent would not let her take baptisms unless he had already blessed the water, and would only allow her to assist at weddings, as he had to bless the rings and the couple. She trained with other distinctive deacons, who were being allowed to take weddings and baptisms in other parishes, and felt left out. She understood that this was to do with her incumbent's tradition, but it was one of the factors that led to the curacy finishing early. Brigid also had a difficult curacy. She was not allowed even to administer the chalice, let alone have a role in baptisms or weddings. However, in regard to offering absolution within the hospital where she now worked, she said:

*If there was a case for an informal absolution... there were certainly ways round that, and I never felt that God was, in his great goodness, looking down and wagging a finger and saying, you can't give absolution because you are only a deacon.*

Junia was asked to do baptisms on the Sunday following her ordination. She was also expected to take weddings. She was happy to do so and in support of this ministry she cited the role of deacons in the Early Church and also previous ordinals. Christina described the diaconate as a '*non-presidential, representative ministry of word and sacrament.*' She had been given permission to anoint by three different bishops in three different places. She felt that she needed to have that permission if she was going to be based in a hospital. A respondent who was as Deacon-in-Charge, found herself in an interesting situation. She bore ultimate responsibility for all the occasional offices in her parish, and there were frequent baptisms. As there was a priest in church on a Sunday morning to celebrate the Eucharist, she had introduced the blessing of the baptismal water as part of the liturgy, and so did not bless the water at the baptism, later in the day. She had a relaxed attitude to weddings. '*I think there is some sort of question about whether we should really do weddings because of the blessing. But stick 'may' in front of it and wrap the stole round and ...*' Mark had done a lot of baptisms, with or without a priest blessing the water, during an interregnum, and this had continued

under a new incumbent, who was happy for Mark to do the whole baptism.

There were two liturgical responsibilities which the distinctive deacon cohort felt to be very important, and not controversial. These were 'home' communions, and funerals. Thirteen of the respondent cohort (81%) had been involved in taking communion to people in their homes or in care homes. They all felt that this ministry fell clearly within the traditional diaconal role. Taking funerals was also felt to be a natural and important conclusion to ministry to the dying and the bereaved, in parish ministry, hospital and hospice chaplaincies. Brigid had an important funeral ministry which had grown out of her work at a hospice: *'They used to laugh at me in the hospice, because I was always popping up here to the crematorium, but I found that a fantastic way of reaching out to people who hadn't darkened the door of the church for ages.'*

Prochorus has also found that funeral ministry has been the natural extension of ministry to the dying, *'just because of the connections you make, relationships that you've formed at the bedside of a dying person.'* Thirteen respondents described a fruitful funeral ministry at some point in their diaconate. Julian, in contrast, remained strongly of the opinion that the distinctive deacon's role is flexible and community centred, and that taking funerals did not really fit in with it. She was resigned to taking funerals, but not reconciled: *'I suppose I will get into taking funerals, but again, it doesn't seem to be the call of what I am about.'* It may be that when she is actually exercising this ministry her reaction will change, or maybe not. The variety of relationships among the respondent cohort to sacramental ministry reinforces the concept of diaconate as commission, rather than defined by tasks.

Preaching and leading non-Eucharistic worship did not figure as prominently as the Eucharistic role across the respondent cohort, though it was of importance to some respondents. Together with a Reader in his benefice, Nicanor led Evening Prayer on a Sunday; they were trying to develop a timetable of daily offices on week days as well. Nicanor had

also been engaged in developing services of healing in the one of the churches, and saw this as having a direct link to his pastoral work. Sophia also valued the opportunities she got to lead non-Eucharistic worship: *'We're a Eucharistic church, but it's been quite nice being about to lead a few services. Like our evening worship.'* Hild saw a need for ways of connecting with the breadth of the worshipping community:

*You've got to try and reach everybody. And even if it's only a family service and you've geared it towards the kids, there's still got to be something there, that the other people can say, yeh, that's something quite simple, but I hadn't thought of that.'*

Her preaching was a bridge between the less accessible aspects of the liturgy and the variety of those who come to worship.

Sacramental engagement was easily the most confused and potentially controversial area of the distinctive deacons' ministry. Is the reading of the sentence, 'They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism' (Archbishops' Council 2007, 15) open to interpretation? Could it mean that deacons bring proselytes to baptism and also baptise them? The next sentence: 'They assist in administering the ...' (Archbishops' Council 2007, 15) suggests that this is not the case, and that their role in all sacraments is to assist and to distribute. It would seem that there are different sacramental theologies at play here, as well as a sense of expediency on the part of distinctive deacons and those who work with them, and a greater regard for the situation of transitional deacons than for that of distinctive deacons. Julian expressed her concern that a funeral ministry would tie her to a congregation-centred, task-led ministry, and this may be a concern for all distinctive deacons, who need the freedom to undertake Christ's commission when it is conferred. In at least two instances, the respondents seemed to be expected to exercise a quasi-priestly ministry, rather than collaborating with those exercising a priestly ministry, and were aware of a tension in doing so.

*They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence as he reveals his kingdom among us.*

Many of the respondent cohort spoke of the importance of their faith, their prayer life, and their sense of the presence of God. Two of them chose special words that reflected this. Hild chose a poem about the friendship of God:

To a Good Friend.  
 Don't walk in front of me  
 I may not follow.  
 Don't walk behind me  
 I may not lead.  
 Just walk beside me  
 and be my friend.

And Prochorus's choice, *Tantum Ergo Sacramentum*, was sacramentally based, but also spoke of the presence of God as an essential for his spirituality and ministry. Faithfulness in prayer and watchfulness for God's presence were the base on which a sense of vision was based.

Four (25%) of the respondent cohort spoke about the role of prophecy as part of diaconal ministry. For Catherine, the deacon was prophetic through action, rather than through words. *'The deacon is the sign of the coming reign of God, when all things will be turned upside down, and those who think they're great won't be and all this kind of thing.'* Rhoda, however felt that prophecy was about speaking out. Her definition of a prophet was one who listened to God, saw the world through God's eyes, and spoke God's word to the world. In hospital chaplaincy, she saw this played out as *'listening to the patient and listening to the Spirit, to decide what you are going to do and say.'* Julian had been keen to wear her collar, in order to be visible and recognisable as a church representative in prophetic situations: *'Because at that time I was... often at refugee rallies, and I would often be asked to speak, and I thought, actually I might as well have a dog collar and be representing and visibly church.'* Agnes, however, felt that there was too much talk about the prophetic role, and too little prophetic action. More than that, she felt that those

who tried to be prophetic were ignored or stifled by their colleagues or congregations.

This seemingly limited response to the call to be ‘expectant and watchful for the signs of God’s presence,’ depended on the definition of prophecy. Although few of the respondent cohort talked in terms of a prophetic role, this did not mean that they did not have one. The prophetic is intrinsic to being the bridge or the threshold: the love of Christ is taken out from the church community to the wider community through mission and outreach, and the needs of the wider community are brought into the church community. The way in which these needs are presented to the ecclesial community could be also prophetic, showing that God challenges his church through his world. If seen in this way, then every time a distinctive deacon confronts the church community with an issue in the wider community they are being prophetic, be it Hild encouraging others to assemble boxes for refugees; Prochorus seeking ways to break down the barriers between two congregations worshipping in the same church – *‘There is one Christ, you know!’ (With emphasis)*; Junia chairing her discussion group; or Rita being able to say things to the senior management team that others cannot: *‘It’s because I’m a deacon and not a priest and don’t fit in any box. People tell me things or get me to do things that other people can’t do.’* But Agnes was also correct. There were situations described by the respondent cohort, in which they had undertaken pastoral ministry which has strong social, moral or theological implications, including youth bereavement counselling in challenging social conditions, experience of working in media, end of life care, issues in education, and challenges in work place relationships, but in which there appeared to be no bridge between what was being revealed about God’s kingdom in this ministry, and what was being presented to the church community through preaching or discussion. Another issue was that a number of distinctive deacons were in chaplaincy roles, where they were not linked to a parish, and had no forum in which to be prophetic, to the ecclesial community. This might be addressed by giving more prominence to a role that was a feature of

the Early Church, but is not given prominence in the Ordinal – the role of the deacon as Bishop’s Officer.

### **The Bishop’s Officer**

This role was described or alluded to by several of the respondent cohort. Although there are deacons who are Bishops’ Chaplains, overall, very few distinctive deacons have diocesan roles where they work alongside a bishop. Rita saw the call of the deacon to stand at the right hand of the bishop in the liturgy extended into his daily ministry, where he saw himself as being metaphorically at the bishop’s right hand and working under his delegated authority. For most respondents, interaction with a bishop revolved around being asked to be the liturgical deacon at significant services, such as the cathedral Chrism Mass, ordinations, enthronements and consecrations. However, was this an opportunity for distinctive deacons to showcase an aspect of their ministry, or was it window dressing? Hild said:

*I believe that when we have a bishop, any bishop, celebrating, there a deacon should be. Because without a liturgical deacon you don’t have anything to start with, to get people to understand what the deacon does or why the deacon’s there.*

However, she had to push for the role of deacon to be included when a special service was being organised, with a former Archbishop presiding.

Brigid had a part-time role on a cathedral staff, and said, *‘I feel that as a cathedral, a centre of excellence liturgically, the deacon’s role is not fulfilled in the way that it should be.’* She found that the role of the deacon was not embedded into the Sunday-by-Sunday worship of the cathedral. Although Julian usually shared her liturgical role with the Readers in her parish, when the bishop came, her incumbent made it clear that she would deacon and intercede. However, she chose to delegate the role of intercessor to others. *‘In the end, I said, I really don’t think they want to hear my voice that much, and we had the young people interceding, and I oversaw them doing that.’* Junia, who also shared her role at the altar within the parish, had been called on several

times to deacon at ordinations and other services at the cathedral in her diocese, and also at Southwark cathedral, for a consecration. While she was keen that the role of distinctive deacons was seen, respected and understood, there was one occasion when she was caught out by being front and centre with the bishop:

*We got a letter asking us to be his Deacons of Honour. I hadn't a clue what Deacons of Honour meant. So, Stephen and I walked into the cathedral and there's this big dais with three thrones on it ... and I said, you can have that seat (indicating the left throne) and I'll have that seat (indicating the right throne), you see. We were laughing and joking. [The precentor] he's saying, who are Deacons of Honour? And then he points at Stephen and me, and says, you are... You two will be with the bishop from before the service to after the service and you will not leave his side. You will sit there – exactly the two seats I said we were having! (Told with glee)*

The varying nature of the relationship between bishops and distinctive deacons reflects the lack of cohesion among bishops within the Church of England over the need for a distinctive diaconate and the role that such an order should fulfil.

### **Conclusions**

While some of the respondent cohort were initially wary of telling their story, and slightly inhibited by the presence of the microphone, they soon relaxed into their narrative. These stories flowered as constructive narratives. The ministry of distinctive deacons in the Church of England, as it is revealed by the respondent cohort, is a ministry which on the whole sits comfortably alongside the expectations laid down by the Ordinal. There were no major areas of ministry undertaken by the respondent cohort which were not covered by the Ordinal. However, there were two notable exceptions. The first is that the ordinal is unclear about the sacramental nature of a deacon's ministry, and there were varying attitudes to sacramental ministry among the respondent cohort. It could be seen that, to some extent, church tradition came into play

here, and also the type of ministry being exercised. Those who worked alongside priests did not necessarily need to involve themselves in any of the priestly aspects of sacraments. For some that was a relief, and for others it was a frustration. Those in chaplaincy, where anointing might be expected and a priest not available, were relaxed about offering the ministry of anointing. As Chapter four will show, the Church of England's ordinals have varied with regard to deacons having permission to baptise. As the Church of England has no central policy about the distinctive diaconate, decisions about the relationship of distinctive deacons to the sacraments (as it has in many other areas) has been piecemeal. From the rich and complex descriptions that distinctive deacons have given of their ministries, it would appear that any attempt to impose a standardised approach to sacramental ministry could be counter-productive.

The second, where the ordinal was considered deficient, was the loss of the understanding of the deacon as the bishop's officer. The quality of the relationship between a bishop and his/her deacons depended entirely on the ecclesiology and attitude of the bishop in question, as the role of the deacon as bishop's officer is not enshrined in the ordinal. This led to a wide range of experiences across the respondent cohort, from two respondents who worked alongside bishops in some capacity, to several who felt side-lined, misunderstood, and even feared for the future of their ministries.

The stories also revealed a strong objection by many of the respondent cohort to being either pushed into roles that they did not consider diaconal, or being denied roles that were. Julian did not want to end up ministering in the church, as a pseudo-priest, and Agnes was quite clear that her ministry complemented that of the priest, rather than imitating it. There was general unease about the concept of the ministry of Deacon-in-Charge, even from the respondent who was one. At the same time, disappointment and even anger, was expressed by distinctive deacons who were denied their traditional role at the altar, and had to see the role



given to Readers or other lay ministers, in their stead and in their presence. The role of the distinctive deacon as the bishop's officer was another traditional role that was felt to have been overlooked. The pattern of ministry that was emerged from the respondent cohort's narratives, was one which allowed for a breadth of expression, in a variety of settings. The description of deacons as agents, with a commission, represented their self-understanding and allowed for a ministry which was liminal and not task based.

All that has been discussed in this Chapter raises a question. Why is it, when there is a ministry to fulfil, and ministers not only willing to fulfil it, but to do so faithfully and competently, that the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England fails to thrive? Is it confined by tradition, both in terms of history, and of churchmanship? Is it competing with other forms of ministry that are more successful? Is it too similar to the priesthood, a situation which is exacerbated by issues of sacramental ministry? In the next chapter I shall consider some of the historical factors that have affected the development of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, and in the subsequent Chapters I shall look at the process of discernment, training and deployment; collegial relationships; and the ongoing debate about the diaconate, all of which have a bearing on what it means to be a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today. It will become apparent that both issues of church order, and church politics have had a significant impact on the fortunes of the distinctive diaconate.

4 A History of Lost Opportunities, Misuse and Lack of Support



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism/photos>

This Chapter examines the failure of the Church of England to understand or support the diaconate as a discrete order, while claiming to respect the tradition of the three orders of ordained ministry. Firstly, the changing theological emphases in the role of the deacon within the Church are examined. The Ordinals of 1550 and 1662 arguably reflected the impoverished view of the diaconate which had resulted from the institutionalisation and clericalisation of the Western Church: they remained in use until the late twentieth century, with commissioning services for deaconesses being developed alongside them. However, the redrafting of the revised Ordinal in 1980 included a change in the understanding of the role of the deacon. The current Ordinal published in 2007 has a strong description of the ministry of a deacon, both liturgical and pastoral; this has not had much impact on the development of the distinctive diaconate. Conversely, the ministry instituted by the deaconess order has been allowed to slip away. Secondly, this Chapter

examines why the distinctive diaconate has not flourished, when the Ordinal appears to underpin it and a series of reports commissioned by the Church of England have supported it. These reports show that although the Church accepts a distinctive diaconate in theory, this continually fails to be supported in practice.

### **The Ordinals of 1550 and 1662**

An Ordinal sets out a Church's understanding of its ordained ministry both in its doctrine and its practice (Buchanan 2006, 1). The preface to the 1549 Prayer Book reaffirmed the three-fold order as a continuation of the Apostolic era (Buchanan 2006, 6). The first formal statement by the Post-Reformation English Church about what a deacon does was included in the text of its first rite for ordinations, published in March 1550. *The forme and maner of making and consecratyng of Archbishops, Bishops, Priestes and Deacons* states that:

It pertaineth to the office of a Deacon to assist the Priest in diuine seruice, and specially when he ministreth the holy Communion, and help hym in the distribucion thereof, and to reade holy scriptures and Homelies in the congregacion, and instructe the youthe in the Catechisme, and also to Baptise and Preache if he bee commaunded by the Bisshop. And furthermore, it is his office to searche for the sycke, poore and impotent people of the parishe and to intimate their estates, names and places wher thei dwel to the Curate, that by his exhortacion thei maie be releued by the parishe or other conuenient almose. (Brightman 1915, 950, 952)

The influence of Early Church concepts of the diaconate can clearly be seen, including the administering and distribution of communion, reading Scripture and baptizing, and to discover those in need in the parish. Just as in the Epistle of Clement to James, the names of the needy are collected so that their need can be relieved by members of the parish. At the same time, in the final collect, the modest status of deacons is made clear:

[They] maie so wel vse them sleves in this inferior office, that thei maie be fovnde worthy to be called vnto the higher ministeries in thy Churche. (Brightman 1915, 954)

The 1550 ordinal draws on centuries of experience of the transitional diaconate, and clearly reflects this.

At the Restoration the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) was reinstated as the only official prayer book of the Church of England, and remained so, until it was joined by revisions of the 1960s and 1970s and the *Alternative Service Book*, in turn largely supplanted by the various liturgies of *Common Worship* from 2000 onwards. In the Ordinal of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, the wording for the making of deacons does not differ much from its 1550 predecessor, except that the deacon now only baptizes ‘in the absence of the Priest’ (Cummings 2011, 630). The words of the final collect are almost identical, except that the word ‘behave’ has replaced ‘use’, ‘...may so well behave themselves in this inferior office, that they may be found worthy to be called unto the higher ministries in thy church...’ (Brightman 1915, 955).

Because deacons had come to be seen as assistants to parish priests, and the diaconal ministry as a preparatory period before priesting, rather than as a specific ministry in its own right, the Church of England has tended to consider the role or usefulness of deacons only at times of necessity; when there were insufficient priests, or when the needs of the church community or the wider community had swiftly increased, or when it has proved politically expedient (as in the case of the debate around the ordination of women). Thus in 1560 Archbishop Matthew Parker, concerned about the number of parishes which were vacant, issued an ‘Order for serving cures now destitute’ (Strype 1828, 138). Parker’s *Order* instructed that the principal incumbent in cases of plurality was to depute a deacon to read the order of service appointed, or else depute a suitable layman to do so, as lector or reader. Readers in this guise were never very numerous, although ‘there is evidence that the office persisted until the reign of King George II, when it was resolved that no one

should officiate who was not in deacon's orders. The existing Readers, among whom, in the Diocese of Carlisle, for example, were a clogger, a tailor and a butter-print maker, were ordained without examination.' (HoB 2009, 83). We see here a precursor of the on-going lack of clarity between the ministry of deacons and readers. Francis Young notes that while the established Church in the late sixteenth century was occasionally using deacons as substitutes for priests and appointing them to livings, the puritans, following Calvin's pattern of ministry, appointed deacons to a more pastoral role, without ordination (Young 2015, 15-16). However, there is no evidence of a thriving permanent diaconate at any time within the Church of England until the nineteenth century and the founding of the Deaconess order.

### **Tractarianism and the diaconal ministry in the Church of England**

The nineteenth century saw massive social change, which impacted on the ministry of the Church of England. Poor housing, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and the breakdown of social structures, caused massive social – and with them pastoral – problems. At the same time, the Pluralities Act of 1838, outlawing the holding of benefices in plurality, indicated a wish by church and state to develop a greater professionalism among the clergy. In 1850, William Hale, Archdeacon of London, published a consideration of *The Duties of the Deacons and Priests in the Church of England compared*, emphasising the need for an extension of Christian ministry to meet the needs of the growing urban church. In his view, every Visiting Society, Scripture Reader and Sunday School was an argument for the extension of the diaconate. Edward Browne, arguing in 1854 for the extension of the diaconate, wrote of permanent deacons being the foot soldiers, while priests were the officers. Browne envisaged deacons being drawn from the middle and lower orders of society, seeing the diaconate as a chance for 'a devout and intelligent tradesman, farmer or mechanic to give some spare hours to the work of Christianising society and bringing souls to Christ' (Browne 1845, 11, 12). Clearly both Hale and Browne had in mind an order of permanent deacons. This favouring of the diaconate also

reflected the rise of the historical critical method and new ways of viewing history, which led to new ways of thinking about the ministry described in the early church.

Despite the pleas by Hale and others for permanent deacons,<sup>5</sup> the Convocations of both Canterbury and York resolved instead to restore the office of Reader. A report to the Lower House of Canterbury in 1859 referred to Archbishop Parker's restoration of Readers as an acceptable precedent (JCCC 1904). Another report, this time to the Upper House, in 1864, suggested a 'lay agency', on an annual licence from the bishop, with leave to read lessons and say the litany in church, to be given the name Lay Reader. On 10 May 1866, the Archbishop and Bishops of both provinces sanctioned the form of licence for Readers.<sup>6</sup> This formed the basis for the licence for Readers in general use in the Church of England ever since. The decision not to re-establish the diaconate as a distinctive order as well as a transitional one had led instead to the establishment of a lay order, whose focus was not on pastoral care among the poor and needy, but on teaching and leading prescribed parts of divine service, and, for 'those of a good general education', preaching (JCCC 1904).

While the diaconate was not allowed to flourish within the Church of England as a restored distinctive order for men, another nineteenth-century phenomenon was having a significant influence on the diaconal ministry of the Church of England. The rise of the Tractarian movement brought in its wake a renewed interest in monasticism for women. The first 'sisterhood' in England was founded in 1845. While some of the sisterhoods were enclosed orders, others engaged in teaching, nursing

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<sup>5</sup> See F. Young, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England*, 62-72, for a discussion of a debate which included the media of the day, Thomas Arnold, Henry Mackenzie and the National Society.

<sup>6</sup> The office was not officially named Lay Readers, although this term was frequently used.

and social work.<sup>7</sup> The Tractarian movement and its catholic practices were viewed by many with suspicion, but through the sisterhoods it brought the possibility of a church-wide diaconal ministry for women to the attention of the wider church. In 1858 the Convocation of Canterbury began to debate the possibility of a deaconess order within the Church of England.

The deaconess order brought the ministry being patterned by the sisterhoods together with the burgeoning deaconess movement in Europe in a form that was acceptable to broad churchmen and evangelicals. Unlike nuns, deaconesses did not take lifelong vows, and were not enclosed, but the commitment demanded a strong sense of vocation, similar to that demanded by ordination, or a commitment to celibacy. In her study of the early deaconesses, Blackmore found that the deaconess communities ‘offered women a vocational and spiritual education, the opportunity for a career and an independent lifestyle supported by a loving diaconal community which encompassed each woman’s personal expression of faith’ (Blackmore 2007, xxiii). Moreover, within these communities, women were exploring diaconal ministry in a way that men were not able to, as well being pioneers at a time of social change around gender roles.

The success of the sisterhoods, together with the influence of the European deaconess houses, helped to bring about the inception of a deaconess order within the Church of England. Although Young believes that Kaiserswerth was more influential on the deaconess order than were the sisterhoods (Young 2015, 76), Blackmore notes before embarking on her own ministry Ferard visited the Community of All Hallows, Ditchingham, as well as Kaiserswerth (Blackmore 2007, xvii). In 1861, with the strong support and guidance of the then Bishop of London, Archibald Campbell Tait, Ferard was admitted as the first

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<sup>7</sup> One example was the Convent of All Hallows, Ditchingham, founded by Lavinia Crosse in 1855. The convent ran two schools, a cottage hospital, a home for ‘wayward’ girls, and a women’s refuge.

deaconess in the Church of England and the sister in charge of the North London Deaconess Institution (NLDI). Between 1869 and 1907 fourteen more deaconess institutions were established, across England. They undertook teaching, nursing, pastoral visiting, adult education, training domestic servants, and ministering in prisons and asylums. The number of deaconesses increased steadily between 1861 and 1919, from 15 to 105 (Blackmore 2007, 131-133). Nevertheless, as the 1865 annual report of the NLDI testifies, the number of deaconesses available was insufficient to meet the applications for their services from parishes, asylums, hospitals and prisons (Blackmore 2007, xix).

The deaconess order was, to all intents and purposes, a distinctive diaconate. It was apparent that deaconesses were closer to being seen as being in holy orders than the male Readers. This brought about some confusion and dis-ease within the Church of England. While it had been made clear that the licensing of Readers was not to include any form of laying-on-of-hands (Joint Committee of the Convocation of Canterbury 1904), this formed part of the Form for Admitting Deaconesses to their Office (Blackmore 2007, 44). Blackmore points out that the form of admission of deaconesses was often very similar to the deacon's ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer (Blackmore 2007, xxii) although it was not included in the Prayer Book, and the service of admission of deaconesses varied to some extent between the deaconess institutions. These services were simpler than the Ordinal for Deacons; and included some important additions which indicated that deaconesses were not to consider themselves equal to their male counterparts. Thus, for instance, in the rite used by the Diocese of London, the bishop says:

It is the duty of a Deaconess to minister to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant: and in all humility and godly submission, setting aside all womanly usurpation of authority in the church, to help the Ministers of God's Word and Sacraments. (Blackmore 2007, 43-44)

The use of *humility* and *womanly usurpation* are clear in their intention; but it is also emphasised that deaconesses are only helpmeets to the



*Ministers of God's Word and Sacraments*. Moreover, when they received the laying-on-of-hands, it was simply with an episcopal blessing, and did not confer an authority which was comparable to the authority conferred on deacons at the point of ordination.

The role of the bishop was significant. Nineteenth-century deaconess houses in England had a certain level of autonomy combined with a far closer relationship with the church hierarchy than their European counterparts, not least because the Church of England had a very different kind of church hierarchy to that of the Rhineland churches. Once the deaconess houses had been established they came under the jurisdiction of their diocesan bishop and were subject to a system of visitation by a representative of the Diocese. From the outset, authorisation for ministry was conferred on individual deaconesses by the bishop of the diocese. Henrietta Blackmore observes that 'the Order of Deaconess was considered to be part of the ecclesiastical structure of the church .... Therefore, it was subject to episcopal control just as any other branch of the church would be.' However, the relationship between the church and the institution was complex. Isabella Gilmore, for instance, who was head deaconess of Rochester diocese from 1887, 'articulated a new conception of autonomy when she argued that spiritual authority was passed down directly from Christ to the deaconess – and in this way, 'obedience to clerical rule could form part of a self-consciously autonomous ministry' (Blackmore 2007, xxii). Similarly, in her 'Memoranda for sisters leaving the home to work in parishes at a distance,' Ferard reminded the sisters that they were 'to put themselves entirely under the clergyman's direction with respect to their work ... In their private life they are to be guided by the principles and rules of the Deaconess Institution' (Blackmore 2007, xxv). She was at pains to stress the autonomy of the institution, which allowed deaconesses some – albeit limited – freedoms. While this close relationship with the Church of England may have allowed a certain amount of paternalistic meddling; it also gave formal diaconal ministry a place within the church hierarchy.

A century later this provided a platform for the ordination of women as deacons in 1987.

Although diaconal ministry had been present in the Church of England for over a century through the deaconess order, the relationship between the order and the Church had been complicated. As Charlotte Methuen argues, there was a great deal of muddled thinking about the status of deaconesses, in regard to both their ordination (2007, 5), and the locus of their ministry (2007, 6). She demonstrates that this is reflected in the resolutions of successive Lambeth Conferences. Although the 1958 Lambeth Conference recommended the restoration of a distinctive diaconate, Methuen points out that this was done without acknowledgement of deaconesses as an existing model for this ministry (2007, 10). There is a complete disconnect between Resolution 88, ‘The Office of Deacon’<sup>8</sup> and Resolution 93, ‘The Contribution of Women’.<sup>9</sup> In 1978 the Lambeth Conference resolved in relation to ‘Women in the Diaconate’ that:

those member Churches which do not at present ordain women as deacons now to consider making the necessary legal and liturgical changes to enable them to do so, instead of admitting them to a separate order of deaconesses (LC 1978: Resolution 20).

Deaconesses are not mentioned in Resolution 88, and as Methuen points out, the opportunity for a renewed diaconate was missed (2007, 15).

In addition, although the Church of England has been a partner in many of the wider ecumenical discussions about the distinctive diaconate, the results of these were largely overlooked in the run up to the admission of women to the diaconate, (with its ensuing closure of the deaconess order

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<sup>14</sup> The Conference recommends 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 (Lambeth Conference 1958: Resolution 88).

<sup>15</sup> The Conference thankfully recognises the particular contribution of women to the mission of the Church; and urges that fuller use should be made of trained and qualified women, and that spheres of progressive responsibility and greater security should be planned for them (LC 1958: Resolution 93).

to new members), and has been subsequently. Two of the respondent cohort, Catherine and Agnes, were ordained deacon having first been deaconesses. As we shall see in Chapter 8, they were happy to embrace ordination as a recognition of their ministry. However, Agnes in particular pointed to the disenfranchisement of diaconal ministry brought about by the ordination of women to the diaconate.

### **The seesaw debate.**

Lambeth Conference resolutions of 1958, 1968 and 1978 indicate that the debate about an order of deacons, that had failed to sway the Convocation of 1866, was still rumbling on a century later. In 1967 a working party was set up by ACCM and the Council for Women's Ministry in the Church (CWMC) to study women's accredited ministry, and to propose a pattern for the future. Their report, *Women in Ministry: A Study*, was published in 1968. At the time, there were three groups of accredited women ministers: religious, deaconesses, and licensed lay workers, including Church Army sisters.<sup>10</sup> The question of the ordination of women was becoming more urgent, and the working party acknowledged that, 'until the Church resolves this matter, it will be almost impossible to make any clear definitions of women's part in ministry' (CofE 1968, 39). They then saw themselves as 'obliged' to consider the relationship between the diaconate and the participation of women in ministry.

The section on the diaconate took up a large part of the report, and three independent submissions by members of the working group witness to a considerable lack of agreement among the members of the working party over the use of the diaconate to promote women's ministry. Some saw the ministry of accredited women ministers as already offering the 'true diaconate' that the church needed, describing this diaconate as assisting in worship, exercising general pastoral ministry, and compassionate

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<sup>10</sup> Although women were effectively licensed as Readers during the First World War, due to a shortage of men, they were called 'Bishop's Messengers' not Readers. The first women Readers were licensed on the same basis as men in 1969

service, the style of ministry already seen to be offered by women in ministry. They suggested that the Church should ‘stop ordaining candidates for the presbyterate as deacons’ (CofE 1968, 46), a recommendation which was paralleled by Resolution 32, ‘On the Diaconate’, of that year’s Lambeth Conference.<sup>11</sup> Instead, candidates for the priesthood should spend a year as full-time paid lay workers before being directly ordained as priests, in other words, *per saltum* ordination. They also suggested that the Church should ordain present and future accredited ministers as deacons (CofE 1968, 46). However, the other submissions contained doubts about the practicality of returning the transitional diaconate to its historic form, suggesting that women ‘whose call is to a permanent ministry of word and sacrament the Church recognised should be admitted to the priesthood, and diaconal functions should be exercised, as now, in a wide range of accredited lay ministries’ (CofE 1968, 50).

The report’s concluding summary pointed out that the Church of England needed to determine its policy about the ordination of women to the priesthood, the nature and use of the diaconate, and the status and work of deaconesses. All three were interlinked. The growing demand for the priesting of women from some quarters was vehemently opposed in others. As early as 1968 it became apparent that the admission of women to the diaconate was being seen as a way of trying to satisfy both sides of the debate, at least in the short term. However, this strategy undermined the attempt to re-establish a ‘real diaconate’.

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<sup>11</sup> The Conference recommends: (a) That the diaconate, combining service of others with liturgical functions, be open to (i) men and women remaining in secular occupations, (ii) full-time church workers, (iii) those selected for priesthood. (b) That Ordinals should, where necessary, be revised: (i) to take account of the new role envisaged for the diaconate; (ii) by the removal of reference to the diaconate as “an inferior office”; (iii) by emphasis upon the continuing element of “diakonia” in the ministry of bishops and priests. (a) That those made deaconesses by laying-on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the diaconate. (b) That appropriate canonical legislation be enacted by provinces and regional Churches to provide for those already ordained deaconesses.

In 1974 the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry (ACCM) published the report *Deacons in the Church*. This arose from a working party which grew out of a renewed interest within the Church of England in the diaconate in other denominations, and across Europe. This report sought, as it emphasised, to 'reinforce and emphasise the positive truth which underlies this renewed interest and experiment, namely the serving role of the whole people of God' (ACCM 1974, 2). It engaged with the prevailing view emerging in the WCC, the Church of Scotland, and the Roman Catholic Church, that the ministry of distinctive deacons provides a focus for the diaconal ministry of the whole church, but did not find the theological and pragmatic arguments for an order of distinctive deacons compelling.

Once again, there was an emphasis on the inclusion of women within the diaconate, rather than a re-imagining of the diaconate to enable diaconal ministry, and once again, the deaconess order was not considered as a pattern for diaconal ministry. The report exposed an underlying anxiety about clericalisation in the church, and the disempowering of the laity. (ACCM 1974, 9). It lumped together lay ministers, including readers, deaconesses, Church Army Officers, churchwardens, in a way that suggested that very little consideration had been given to an understanding of a deacon's ministry. The report was based on an understanding of *diakonia* as loving service, set within a servant ecclesiology<sup>12</sup>, and it came to the conclusion that *diakonia* was the responsibility of the whole people of God (ACCM 1974, 9). Even within the contemporary understanding of ministry, this argument was flawed. Just because there was a range of ministries that could undertake the diaconal role, did not mean that the ministry of deacons was unnecessary. It would have been just as valid to say that the Church of England did not need Readers (or any of the other ministries listed above) because a

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<sup>12</sup> Servant ecclesiology describes the understanding that one of the key roles of the church is that of service and reaching out beyond the ecclesial community to support, and champion, the poor and powerless in the wider community. Exponents of servant ecclesiology include Avery Dulles, John A T Robinson and Harvey Cox.

deacon can do anything they can do. Once again there was confusion between diaconal ministry and the ministry of a deacon.

Moreover, the arguments that the report used to refute the need for distinctive deacons were primarily functional and they convey a prevailing sense of anti-clericalisation. It asserted, first, that while priests had specific duties that only they could undertake, the same was not true of deacons; moreover, if certain tasks were set aside for deacons, that would disenfranchise the laity (ACCM 1974, 13). Second, it argued that the diaconate might lead to vicarious sloth among the laity, on the basis of the debatable assertion that when a parish has a curate the laity do less (ACCM 1974, 11), an argument which also implied that a deacon is effectively a curate. The report's third argument was that if all those who exercised *diakonia* were to be ordained, then it would exacerbate the issue of 'the vicar' being seen as the 'proper' church, because more people in collars visiting, for example, would make it even more difficult for the laity to be seen a legitimate when undertaking ministerial tasks (ACCM 1974, 12). This assumed that distinctive deacons take over parts of the ministry of the parish priest. The report showed no appreciation that distinctive deacons could inhabit different, liminal areas of ministry.

Rather, the idea of the permanent diaconate was deemed to inhibit the development of lay ministry within the servant church. However, the report made the point that although the three-fold ordained ministry had been considered the best pattern in the second century:

This development, appropriate to that situation, should not necessarily be considered normative or decisive in the Church for ever after ... The mere fact that our church has inherited a diaconate of great antiquity does not oblige us to find reasons justifying its retention. (ACCM 1974, 20, 23)

The working party concluded that the transitional diaconate was an archaism, and recommended:

the abolition of or discontinuation of the diaconate in the Church of England. We do not regard such a course as a negative step.

We hope that the abolition of an anomaly will result in lay people having a clearer picture of their role and work within the church. (ACCM 1974, 24)

Candidates for the priesthood should serve a probationary year, as paid layworkers. Any reference to the three orders should be removed from the ordinal, and the servant role of priests and bishops emphasised. Financial support should be given to adult education and to lay ministries, and any organisation that strengthened lay ministry should be encouraged. The report envisaged a professional lay ministry for men and women, within which the role of deaconesses was positioned.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these recommendations were not endorsed by General Synod. In 1977 ACCM produced a further report, *The Ministry of Deacons and Deaconesses*, which set out three options for the diaconate:

As a short and intermediate stage through which pass all candidates for the priesthood; its discontinuance in the Church of England; or its enlargement to include lay workers, deaconesses and others in a 'permanent' diaconate. (HoB 1988, 1)

However, no decision was made. Nonetheless, in 1980 a new ordinal demonstrated some development in the understanding of the diaconate, although it was still being applied only to transitional deacons.

### **The 1980 Ordinal**

The 1662 Ordinal had remained current until 1980, when the Alternative Service Book (ASB) was published, including a new ordinal. The description of the role of the deacon in the ordinal for deacons is short, and although not significantly different from that of the BCP, in its tone there is a subtle change, offering more sense of collegiality with the priesthood, and avoiding the term 'inferior office'. Whereas the BCP ordinal began with the place of the deacon within the parish and his role in assisting the parish priest, defining a very specific and localised role, the 1980 ordinal began with service to the Church of God, a wide and open-ended concept. The deacon was to work with all the members of

the church, and not just the priest, in loving service to all who are in trouble. He was no longer required to give their names to someone else for the provision of pastoral care. He was now part of a pastoral ministry which required the involvement of all the church members. The instruction regarding baptism reverted to that of the 1550 ordinal, so that the deacon was to baptise when required to do so, and not just when the priest was absent. The changes witness to the influence of the deaconess order which had loving service at its core, and they were also a reflection of servant ecclesiology.

### **The ordination of women to the diaconate and its impact**

In 1986, a measure was passed by the General Synod of the Church of England to admit women to the diaconate. By June 1987 there were 750 female and 13 male distinctive deacons in the Church of England (Young 2015, 101). These included about 700 former deaconesses, and those who had just finished training for diaconal ministry (Kimber 2015). They could be described as ‘distinctive’ in so far as they could not (in the case of many of the women) or did not intend to (in the case of the men and a few of the women) continue to priestly ordination. While admitting women to the diaconate looked like a move forward for the ministry of deacons, the context in which they were ordained deacon was in fact detrimental to diaconal ministry patterned by deacons in the Church of England, as so many of these deacons were waiting to be priested, and had no interest in exploring or developing diaconal ministry. At the same time, the deaconess order, which had been a strong focus of diaconal ministry was disbanded, as being no longer necessary. No attempt was made at this stage to create a support system for those who felt called to the distinctive diaconate. Previously, the interests of the deaconesses had been represented in Church House by a senior deaconess, appointed for that purpose, who also oversaw accredited lay ministries. Once women were ordained deacon this post disappeared, and deacons had no specific representative. All deacons were members of the House of Clergy; however, since the majority of members of the House of Clergy were priests, and the majority of the deacons were



waiting and wanting to become priests, the distinctive deacons became a voiceless minority in a setting which, in reality was the 'House of Priests'. This revealed an (on-going) anomaly in the synodical structures of the Church of England in relation to the three-fold ministry: while there is a discrete House of Bishops, a similar provision is not made for a 'House of Deacons'.

The move to ordain women to the diaconate is probably best understood as a political one, intended to pacify the increasingly insistent call for the ordination of women to the priesthood of the Church of England. In making this decision the Church of England had accepted 'permanent' deacons almost by default, and the tacit expectation was that this ministry would be short-lived. As the church prepared to take a step which it considered politically expedient, it searched for a theology to support it. The Bishop of Portsmouth was asked to chair a working group to prepare a report to the House of Bishops on the theology of a permanent diaconate. This report, *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church*, was considered by the House of Bishops in October 1987 and published in 1988. Chapter 6 explored the theology of the deacon's ministry.

The report began by re-affirming that Christ is the supreme pattern for all Christian ministry and observing that, according to Paul in Philippians 2.5-11, this pattern is one of service and self-giving (HoB 1988, 79). Like other recent scholarship it dismissed Acts 6 (HoB 1988, 85). Prominence was given, instead, to the development of the role of deacon in the first and second centuries, as giving a much firmer theological understanding of the diaconate. The report saw the diaconate both as modelled on the pattern of Christ's diaconate, and as providing an example to and support for the *diakonia* of all ministers, ordained and lay. It took issue with the functional approach of the 1974 report, seeking to re-assert the importance of 'being'. "“Doing” is important and helps to give shape and symbolic reality to “being” but on its own it is insufficient' (HoB 1988, 95). Moreover, since most of the deaconesses had now been ordained as deacons, the ministerial landscape had

changed, and even if by default an order of deacons now existed within the Church of England. The report recommended unequivocally, ‘that the Church of England make provision for, and encourage, men and women to serve in an ordained distinctive diaconate’ (HoB 1988, 119). However, even after the strong endorsement that *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* gave to the distinctive diaconate, the Church of England did not act upon it. Moreover, in 1994, when women had been admitted to the priesthood. The subsequent ordinations left only about 75 distinctive deacons across the whole church.

### **Theology which supported the continuing debate**

In 1990 John Collins’s influential book, *Diakonia*, was published, rekindling the debate about the distinctive diaconate. One of the participants in this debate was Rosalind Brown. Her book, *Being a Deacon Today*, is of particular interest, as the book which the respondent cohort most frequently cited as having a strong influence on how they saw their ministry. Brown had been involved in the development and organisation of the distinctive diaconate in the Salisbury Diocese and was able to speak with knowledge and authority about the way in which distinctive deacons exercise their ministry. *Being a Deacon Today* grew out of a report she edited for that diocese, *The Distinctive Diaconate*. The second part of the book used three strands to explore the ministry of the deacon: liturgical, pastoral and teaching. Brown’s use the terms ‘attendant, agent and bearer of a message’ (Brown 2005, xiii) to describe these strands, revealed her engagement with the scholarship of John Collins.

At the same time, when exploring and articulating the views of Collins, Brown tempered them with the traditional understanding of the deacon’s ministry as loving service. This melding of the two approaches was central to her understanding (Brown 2005, xiii). She cited Aidan Kavanagh’s description of the deacon as:

the server of servers, cantor of cantors, reader of readers. He is the butler in God’s house, *major domo* of its banquet, master of

its ceremonies. Given the service emphasis of his office and ministry, the deacon is the most pronouncedly Christic of the three major ministries. This implies that it is not the Bishop or Presbyter who are liturgically ‘another Christ’ but the deacon (Kavanagh 1982, 75, 77; cited in Brown 2005, 56).

Brown concluded that Collins has required the Church to think again about its inherited understanding of the ministry of the deacon, ‘casting it in much wider terms than assistance to the priest and service of people in need’ (Brown 2005, 14)), but she was clearly not keen to yield up a diaconate that embraces, enables and reflects a servant ecclesiology. Brown and Collins have both emerged as seminal writers for those exploring and living the distinctive diaconate. My own reading of Collins is that he casts the deacon’s ministry in quite different – and not just wider – terms, but, as shown in Chapter 3, the two strands of diaconate as agency and diaconate as service with authority can be – and in Brown’s work are – reconciled.

The effect of Collins’ scholarship was even more apparent in the next Church of England report that concerned the distinctive diaconate. *For Such a Time as This: A renewed diaconate in the Church of England*, was published in 2001. This too was a report to the General Synod, by a Working Party of the House of Bishops. The culmination of three years’ work, it brought together the experience of the diaconate in four different denominations and, significantly, included two deacons in the working party. The theological basis for *Such a Time as This* was different from that of the reports that had preceded it. The theological underpinning took as its starting point the people of God as the royal priesthood. The *laos*, both laity and clergy, all of whom play their part in governing Christ’s kingdom: offer spiritual sacrifices and above all themselves to make known the salvation of God through Christ. All the *laos* are called to discipleship and to ministry (HoB 2001, 26, 27).

The deacon undertakes a representative ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care. Picking up on the work of John Collins, the report considers the deacon ‘as the responsible agent of one in authority’:

A flexible concept that embodies being commissioned by God or the Church to carry out a task or to convey a message; a concept that does not lose the caritative content, but sets it within a pattern of leadership that enables ... the whole People of God to carry out their baptismal responsibility (HoB 2001, 34).

The report concluded:

This emphasis on self-giving love sacrificial love, that is the dominant idea in earlier understandings of diaconal ministry, remain valid; it must not be lost sight of when we look for a renewed diaconate. (HoB 2001, 35)

This report was clearly keen to move beyond the concept of the diaconate as an inferior office undertaking menial tasks.

Because *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* had already set out a clear recommendation to the House of Bishops for the enabling of a distinctive diaconate, *For Such a Time as This* concentrated on creating some pictures of what the ministry of a distinctive deacon looked like, using the most recent scholarship, but drawing also on the understanding and experience of two distinctive deacons who were members of the working party. The report recommended that provision for selection, training and deployment arrangements specific to the needs of distinctive deacons were made. It also remarked: ‘it is probable, of course, that central provision and encouragement in these areas would foster an increase in vocations’ (HoB 2001, 10).

In November 2001 *For Such a Time as This* was debated in General Synod. Concern was expressed that the diaconate should not be allowed to replace Reader ministry or other lay ministries, but that deacons should offer support, training and co-ordination for flourishing lay ministries. It was clear from the debate, as a later report from the Faith and Order Advisory Group reflected that:

many members of the General Synod, particularly those who were Readers, felt strongly that *For Such a Time as This* had not given enough attention to the relationship between the diaconate and authorized lay ministries and also that the Church of England should be giving support and encouragement to such ministries rather than to the development of a renewed diaconate. (FOAG 2007, 4)

The membership of General Synod included a number of Readers, who felt that their valuable lay ministry was being squeezed out. This was a feeling that would later be articulated strongly in *Reader Upbeat*, a report commissioned by General Synod, to explore the situation of reader ministry (HoB 2009, 14).<sup>13</sup>

*For Such a Time As This* had in fact addressed the relationship between the distinctive diaconate and accredited lay ministries, and had expressly articulated the need to honour all forms of ministry (HoB 2001, 46). However, it seemed that many in General Synod had failed to give proper attention to the report, and the careful and thorough way in which it had presented its findings and recommendations. General Synod, perhaps sensing the onset of an unproductive division between those who supported authorised lay ministries, and those who supported self-supporting ordained ministries, as the way ahead, decided to give the responsibility to someone else. In 2002, a further working party was set up under the auspices of the Faith and Order Advisory Group..

The FOAG consultation resulted in the most recent report to include the distinctive diaconate: *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, published in 2007. It was a comprehensive – albeit controversial – report on new developments in the ministry of the Church of England, both lay and ordained. The report highlighted several specific issues of ministry that had become the subject of debate. Two of these issues, which appeared closely related to each other, were:

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<sup>13</sup> This report was first published in 2003, and later updated and re-published in 2009.

Whether it is right to see the diaconate as primarily a stepping stone to the priesthood, or whether it should be given greater emphasis as a distinctive form of ministry in its own right. A further issue is how the ministry of [distinctive] deacons would relate to that of Readers and other recognized lay ministers (FOAG 2007, 3).

It was clearly perceived that the potential rift between Readers and ordained self-supporting ministries, distinctive deacons in particular, had to be addressed.

The theology espoused by the report was almost identical to that of *For Such a Time as This*, the main difference being that *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* was a much longer report, primarily because it sought to clarify why some ministries required ordination and some did not. It did so by adding 'lifelong' to the definition of the ordained ministry as public, representative and formally accountable (FOAG 2007, 125). However, this did not take into account that religious and Church Army Officers also make lifelong commitments. While the report was keen to endorse the distinctive diaconate (FOAG 2007, 162), it was over quick to define the distinctive diaconate in terms of assisting bishops, although the *Common Worship* ordinal clearly described deacons as working alongside other ministers, rather than assisting them (FOAG 2007, 131). Nonetheless, the report gave carefully considered support to the distinctive diaconate, and recognised the potentially positive effect that this transformation could have on the transitional diaconate. It again emphasised again the need for tailored selection processes, training and deployment policies for distinctive deacons (FOAG 2007, 133).

Turning to Reader ministry, the report acknowledged both that Readers inhabited a grey area between lay and ordained ministry, and also that there is always overlap between different ministries. Since the ministries that Readers and distinctive deacons undertake are often the most similar, the overlap between these two ministries is bound to be greater still

(FOAG 2007, 143-149). Far from trying to protect Reader ministry from the encroachments of the distinctive diaconate, the report suggested that, where appropriate, Readers should be encouraged to seek ordination as distinctive deacons (FOAG 2007, 159, 160). The acknowledgment that some Readers would find this difficult was brief, and rather clinical, ‘Christian ministry is not a competition and the ‘success’ of one ministry is not achieved at the expense of another’ (FOAG 2007, 160, 161).

### **The Common Worship Ordinal**

The most recent ordinal to be authorised in the Church of England is the *Common Worship Ordination Services* (2007). Its description of the role of the deacon draws on and integrates the strands of the discussion of the previous decades. This description was used to structure the discussion in Chapter 3, and can be found in Appendix C. It is the fullest description of the role of a deacon in a Church of England ordinal. While still using servant language, the image is that of self-giving, in a Christ-like way, which is stronger and less self-abasing than those offered by previous ordinals. The influence of the work of John Collins can be clearly seen in the use of the word ‘commission’ in the introduction to the service, and in the words ‘heralds’ and ‘agents’ in the introduction to the declarations. The concept of loving service, offered to those most in need, in the spirit of Kaiserswerth, is also still very much in evidence. It is contained in the moving words about a liminal ministry, ‘reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.’ As seen in Chapter 3, the role here envisaged by the Church of England is, in the main, largely congruent with that exercised by the distinctive deacons in the respondent cohort.

However, despite the mounting theological support for the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, nothing has happened at an institutional level to support, strengthen and expand the distinctive diaconate, in any practical way. It remains a small ministry. While the national selection process accepted deacon candidates for discernment,

there were no separate national selection criteria for distinctive deacons. The Bishop Otter Centre in Chichester was the only Church of England institution offering bespoke training for distinctive deacons, and it was not accredited by the House of Bishops (Hall 1999, 245).

The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church had pointed out that no new legislation was needed for a distinctive diaconate, and that the theological framework was also in place: ‘Public recognition and encouragement by the Church as a whole is all that is needed now’ (FOAG 2007, 163). Ten years on, Ministry Division has produced some criteria for the discernment process (CofE, 2011), and bespoke training is now on the informal agenda of those tasked with delivering training for ordained ministry. However, very little else has happened to bring the recommendations of the three reports *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church; For Such a Time as This* and *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* to fruition.

### **Conclusions.**

The history of the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England is complex. The Church of England has taken decades to reach this point. Thirty years after the disbanding of the deaconess order, it has failed to replace it with a distinctive diaconate that is readily accessible or supported. Moreover, as will be discussed in the next Chapter, while the Church’s reports were making positive recommendations about the central importance of the church’s diaconal ministry, the Church of England appeared to be cynically abusing the diaconate. The story of the diaconate in the Church of England has been deeply affected by issues of gender and class, by the breadth of traditions within the Church, and by the lack of a common mind among the bishops.

Initially the distinctive diaconate fell prey to the unwillingness to ordain men who would occupy an ‘inferior order’ within holy orders, in case they got ideas above their station. This can be seen that the theological struggle that led the Convocations of Canterbury and York, in the



nineteenth century, to opt for a lay Reader ministry. After the decision for Readers was made, it was made clear that they would not receive a laying-on-of-hands in their licensing, and their ministry within church buildings was carefully confined, so that they would not usurp the authority of ordained ministers. In the meantime, although the Deaconess Order was allowed to occupy a more diaconally shaped ministry, it fell victim to a push for gender equality. The ordination of women to the diaconate was seen as a positive move towards ending gender discrimination in the ministry of the Church of England, but the distinctive diaconate as exercised by the Deaconess Order was a casualty of this move. The focus was on the right of women to test their vocation to ordained ministry, with an emphasis on priesthood, rather than a wish to build up and further a distinctive diaconal ministry within the Church of England.

Although it would be too simplistic to say that the support for distinctive deacons is the preserve of the higher and more sacramentally focussed part of the Church of England, the various reports have shown that there are differing opinions about the value of the distinctive diaconate, or even of the diaconate in any form. The reports discussed in this Chapter demonstrate that there has been a continuing tension between lay diaconal ministry and the distinctive diaconate. The championing of one is often seen to be the dismissal of the other. Readers, in particular, as articulated in *Reader Upbeat* are threatened by the rise in the number of OLMs, both priests and distinctive deacons. From the responses of the respondent cohort, as well as my experience of working with distinctive deacons, it is often the case that the ministry of distinctive deacons within the Church of England tends to be marked by their role at the altar. This means that they are more likely to be drawn towards a church in which the eucharist is central. An equivalent connection between service in the world, and service in worship does not appear to have been developed in the evangelical tradition. Bishop Anselm was not very encouraging about a role for the distinctive diaconate in his diocese, and feeling that the need for diaconal ministry was met by a variety of lay ministries.

However, when asked if these ministries were represented within the worship of the parish church, he replied:

*What there isn't of course, is any way of creating the liturgical connections that I would love to see. If some of the people in these agencies were deacons, that's what I would like to see, and that is the loss.*

This issue of the distinctive diaconate and tradition are discussed further in Chapter 6, in the context of collegial relationships. It would seem that in order for the distinctive diaconate to flourish it has to make itself relevant across the traditions of the Church of England, and also gain meaningful support from the House of Bishops.

## 5 The Abuse of the Diaconate



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism/photos>

This chapter considers more closely the abuses of the distinctive diaconate which have undermined it, using the experiences of deacons waiting to be priested, recorded by Francis and Robbins (1999), and the experiences shared with me by the respondent cohort. These include its use as a ‘holding pen’ for women who wished to be ordained priest, until that became a possibility; and the closure of the deaconess order at that point, without offering any provision for the ministry of distinctive deacons. Finally, it will demonstrate the lack of structure, information and cohesion across the Church of England, which inhibit the development of the distinctive diaconate. John Collins detected a wave of what he described as ‘new deacons’. This new diaconate has been reached by the confluence of the Catholic tradition and deacons from those parts of the Protestant traditions where deacons are now ordained and performing liturgical and public roles. ‘Above all, the new deacons seek to be in the church the kind of deacons who functioned in its first few centuries but who were lost to it for over a thousand years largely as

a result of the church's unworthy ways' (Collins 2002, 2). This Chapter will discuss some of those 'unworthy ways' within the Church of England.

### **The 'long diaconate'**

The fortunes of the diaconate between the 1960s and 1990s were bound up with the ongoing debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood. As noted in the previous chapter, from 1987 to 1994, (a period known as the 'long diaconate'), the majority of 'permanent' deacons were women waiting to be priested. They had very little invested in fulfilling or promoting a distinctive ministry for deacons. Two of the respondent cohort expressed the feeling that the distinctive diaconate had been tainted as a viable ministry in the Church of England because it had been used as a 'consolation prize' for women who felt called to the priesthood but were not allowed to be priested.

Christina said of the 'long diaconate' from the perspective of a woman who felt called to the diaconate:

*It [the diaconate] felt to me like it was a very neglected order of ministry that had been this wonderful opportunity for women when they couldn't be priests, that really actually was a siding to shunt them into while they waited to be priests, and once they could be priests, most of them were, and it just felt like a really lost opportunity, and I felt that it was hugely disappointing. And the way in which [General] Synod was dealing with it, with reports like Such a Time as This and all of these other things, were just not taken seriously. It never had the opportunity to find a voice and find a credibility within the church and never has, you know.*

Rita backed up this view. When asked whether the other women in training with her were going to be deacons, she replied:

*There were, but the assumption was they'd be priests, and that was always a slightly tricky one. In the Church of England and in the Church in Wales, it's been tied up with the whole issue of the*

*ordination of women to the priesthood, and then the episcopate, which hasn't done the diaconate or candidates any favour whatsoever, and that has been a tedious challenge over the years.*

The respondent bishops accepted that this abuse of the diaconate had happened. Bishop Cuthbert thought that

*historically, the whole permanent diaconate was ... as an idea, was damaged by the fact that a group of women were penned reluctantly as semi-permanent deacons, expectant deacons, waiting deacons, frustrated deacons, whatever you want to call it, while still waiting for the agreement of the church to ordain women to the priesthood. ... so, the diaconate was seen as a place of ... frustration. A place of limitedness, a place where people could not fulfil their ministry, their whole vocation. And I think that lens has continued on to impact on how people see permanent deacons today.*

Bishop Anselm, although sceptical about the place of the distinctive diaconate in the church today accepted that, during the long diaconate

*people discovered the diaconate. Women discovered what it was to be a deacon, even though they had never wanted to be deacons in any way different from a man. But that period of extended waiting and extended servant ministry was actually good for the men and good for the church and I think if it had gone on longer it might have led to a revival of the diaconate through experience. But then suddenly, all these deacons became priests, almost overnight ... And I think that dealt for me, a devastating blow to developing a distinctive diaconate. Maybe in a generation to come, things may alter as memories fade.*

This is perceptive: the church is now a generation on from the long diaconate, and those who are coming forward within my own diocese to explore the distinctive diaconate, both women and men, are not burdened with this tainted history. Rather, they are surprised that what they see as an attractive form of ministry is so poorly inhabited. Data collected from the dioceses of the Provinces of Canterbury and York, in July 2017, shows that there are potential distinctive deacons in discernment in

twelve of the dioceses (28%). The present situation may offer an opportunity to exploit the potential of the distinctive diaconate that was missed in 1987.

### **The misuse of the diaconate by those opposed to the priesting of women**

After women were admitted to the priesthood in 1994, some dioceses and parishes which did not accept the priestly ministry of women, and were in the Anglican catholic tradition, encouraged those women who articulated a priestly calling to consider whether they might have a vocation to the diaconate instead. This caused frustration both for the women who felt called to be priests, but were being told that they would have to go to another parish or even another diocese to test their vocation; and for women who felt genuinely called to the distinctive diaconate, who were assumed not be seeking priest's orders because they or their church was opposed to the ordination of women. Even today, in my role as a vocations adviser, I occasionally meet women who are seeking discernment for the diaconate primarily because they do not want to cause a fuss with an incumbent or parish, or both, who do not accept women as priests.

Within the conservative evangelical tradition, the situation is somewhat different. In January 2017 the Church Times newspaper reported on a poll, and the ensuing debate in General Synod, which found that conservative evangelical women were being discouraged from seeking ordination, on the basis of a complementarian (headship) theology. Not all of these women were seeking priesthood, some were interested in the distinctive diaconate. However, this interest was also being discouraged, both by their parishes and by the Church of England. Instead, parishes were offering independent training, leading, in some cases, to full-time, salaried lay posts for women as children and families workers. Two views prevailed among conservative evangelical clergy: that ordination of women to any order undermined complementarity; but also, that the Church of England's lack of support or resource for permanent diaconate

did not make it a viable option. One contributor to the debate, a self-supporting distinctive deacon, said that she had

spoken to several women and their incumbents who had been told by DDOs, archdeacons and bishops “very early on – usually over the phone – that [the distinctive diaconate] is a waste of everyone’s time, if a formal approach is made, because there just aren’t the jobs available for them.” (CT, 20.1.2017)

She also thought that women were being deterred by lack of funding:

I know of two women who were told they would each have to reimburse their sending dioceses who paid for their theological training if they didn’t find a stipendiary position within two years. This was after they were gladly accepted for diaconal training a few years before. (CT, 20.1.2017)

The evidence indicates that the distinctive diaconate is simply not being offered as viable ministry for women who felt called to it. The issues surrounding deployment and payment are considered further in Chapter 7.

The misuse of the distinctive diaconate is borne out by the experiences of the respondent cohort. Johanna, who first articulated her vocation as *‘I fancied being a Vicar’* was, in the end, forced to leave her parish. It had become a Forward in Faith parish, and her incumbent said, *‘Well, you can’t be [a Vicar]. It’s not possible. Because it was very anti-women as a parish...’* Instead, she explored her vocation to the diaconate. *‘I had a lot of support from the parish to do that, as long as I was going to be stipendiary and disappear and not be sort of a nuisance in their anti-women stance. (Irony)’* She went to her first selection conference in 1991 and failed to be recommended. When Johanna explored the diaconate again later, she was advised to change parishes, in order to be in a more supportive situation. Her incumbent was incensed. *‘He said to me, if you move parishes people will think it’s due to my stance of women’s ministry, and told me I couldn’t move parishes!’* She still moved. Like Johanna, Brigid may also have been encouraged to explore the diaconate rather than recognising a vocation to the priesthood. There

is a wistfulness in her interview that speaks of someone who might have been a priest in different circumstances. After being ordained as a deacon, she was sent back to her training parish, which had a new incumbent. *'He was one of the set of priests... which were really against women in the priesthood. I shouldn't really have been placed there, because in his heart of hearts, he really couldn't accept women at the altar, he really couldn't. We really struggled with that relationship.'* In this case too, this led to a chain of events culminating in a change of direction in Brigid's ministry.

Sophia had never felt called to priesthood, and her incumbent was very supportive of her vocation to the diaconate, but she was aware that he might not have been so positive about a vocation to the priesthood: *'So, I saw my priest, who doesn't agree with the ministry of women, I suppose I could have guessed that, but really wasn't aware of that, but he is on the very high catholic side.'* Christina, too, has always felt very strongly called to the diaconate, and to pastoral care. For family reasons, she did not go forward for discernment when she first felt called, and it was in the 1990s, after women had been priested that she went forward again. Again, she went to her parish priest, by this time a different one: *'And he said to me, because this was in the nineties, and women were already being ordained priest. Anyway... and he wasn't having any of that.'* She told him that she had unexpectedly articulated a call to the diaconate at a dinner party. Once she had clarified that her calling was to the diaconate, he said, *'Oh, that's marvellous, right we must get you off to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands.'* Hild felt fortunate that her incumbent had a good understanding of the diaconate. *'That's where I say I am lucky with my incumbent; but then, he would never work with me as a priest. If I were priested ... Don't apply for [this parish] will you! (Laughter).'* There was only one respondent who could not accept the priesting of women herself. When Rhoda was asked by a friend if she had thought about ordination, she said, *'Well, I wouldn't want to be ordained priest, because I'm not, sort of, comfortable in that area.'* Recounting the difficulties of her first selection conference, she



remembered, *'From my particular tradition it was even more awkward because of a woman presiding at the Eucharist.'*

Two of the respondents had been ordained deacon even though they had not been recommended by their Bishop's Advisory Panel. Both women had come from Anglo-Catholic parishes which were not prepared to accept the priestly ministry of women. In both cases, there was some sense that their experience at the Panel was that they were being 'marked down' because they were thought to be candidating for the distinctive diaconate, not because they wanted to be distinctive deacons, but because their parish would not let them candidate for the priesthood. Rhoda certainly felt this:

*So, everything was against me. I was from X Diocese, and people have a particular view. I was being sponsored for the diaconate, and I came from a more traditional part of the church. So, when I was turned down, the Bishop said, this isn't a 'no' this is just not yet. So, eventually, I have forgotten how many years later, but quite a few years later, he just said, I want you to start training now... And in 2004 I was ordained.*

Brigid and Nicanor were not required to attend a Bishops' Advisory Panel, but were ordained after a form of diocesan selection. For Brigid, this appears to have been the usual process at a time when her diocese was setting up a complete system for the discernment and training of distinctive deacons. For Nicanor, however, it appears to have been an unusual step, in order to bypass national selection, which Nicanor was going to find difficult. He had told the bishop that he didn't do *vivas* very well, and his incumbent backed this up. She said:

*He doesn't do vivas at all well, and would probably get torn to shreds at the BAP. And he [the bishop] said, well, this one is actually in my remit to a large extent ... Well, we don't have to submit you for this one to the BAP, but you will have to go back to the diocesan panel.*

Although bishops are entitled to overturn advice from a Bishop's Advisory Panel, hence the name, it is an unusual step, because it calls into question the validity of the selection process. If those who ordain distinctive deacons set aside the usual selection process, this must affect the status of distinctive deacons.

### **An invisible ministry**

For anyone who is not in a diocese which actively promotes the distinctive diaconate, it is very difficult to find out about it. The 2017 data from the dioceses shows a disparity between the 38 dioceses (88%) who have fewer than five distinctive deacons and the four (12%) who have seven distinctive deacons or more (see Appendix D). Moreover, several of the respondent cohort had found a distinct lack of information about distinctive deacons. It seems that only a few dioceses are successful in promoting the distinctive diaconate.

An internet search for information for the 'distinctive diaconate/permanent diaconate in the Church of England' in February 2017 brought up various forms of information. The first was a document entitled, *Discerning the Diaconate* (<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Discerning%20the%20Diaconate.pdf>). Designed by the Ministry Division of the Church of England for Vocations Advisers, Diocesan Directors of Ordinands and Bishop's Advisers, it gave a clear outline of a deacon's ministry in the Church of England, and offered suggestions for further reading. The access to this document bypassed the Church of England website and it did not point the enquirer to any other source for more information. The second site listed did take the enquirer to the Church of England website, and to a short article about the diaconate, transitional and distinctive (<http://vocation.churchofengland.org/distinctive-diaconate/>). This page included a link to the website of DACE, (which was disbanded in March 2017). The third site was a page on the website of the Diocese of London, about deacons, both transitional and distinctive. The theology

presented here was rooted in a servant ministry: ‘The defining charism of the order of deacon is that of service, reflecting the servanthood of Christ, “who came not to be served but to serve”.’ (Diocese of London). There was no suggestion as to where an enquirer might go for further information.

The fourth site was that of DACE itself ([www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon](http://www.dace.org/deacons/order-of-deacon)). DACE was not part of official Church of England structure, but an independent organisation, primarily for distinctive deacons. It did, however, work with the Ministry Division of the Church of England and the Archbishop of York was its President. The page that the enquirer arrived at had a portal to further information from DACE. In fact, if the site was explored there were several indicators as to where to find more information or how to contact someone. There was also a link back to the Church of England website ([www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry](http://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry)). The page did not mention deacons, but directed them to a document entitled, *Ministry in the Church of England*. The document was prefaced by Rowan Williams, still under the title of Archbishop of Canterbury, although he ceased to be Archbishop in 2012. Here too, in the discussion of deacons, the first point made was related to servanthood: ‘The ministry of a deacon is to be a servant, both within the church and in the wider community.’ The document provided contact details for Ministry Division. However, in a conversation with a member of Ministry Division, I was told that they do not offer guidance to the distinctive diaconate, because some dioceses do not have distinctive deacons.

In general, those who navigate to the Church of England website to find out about the vocation process would probably find themselves at ‘Call Waiting’, which, in turn, would direct them to their parish priest. However, when ‘Call Waiting’ (a Church of England Ministry Division site for those enquiring about ministry in the Church of England), comes up in an internet search, it is subtitled ‘Jobs open to priests.’ In short, any attempt to discover more about the distinctive diaconate through the

internet is frustrating and confusing, and gives only a limited idea of the role of the distinctive deacon. For many years the best information and support came through DACE, an organisation set up by distinctive deacons, to meet a need completely overlooked by the structures of the Church of England. Since DACE closed, there is no national association for distinctive deacons in the Church of England, and no central source of information. From this exploration it appeared that a search by a potential candidate to the distinctive diaconate would be not only frustrating but profoundly misleading.

Given the successive recommendations of various reports that the distinctive diaconate should be supported, and the fact that the diaconate is part of the three-fold ordained ministry of the church, it is puzzling that the choice to offer information about, promote and maintain the ministry of distinctive deacons lies with the diocesan bishop of each diocese, and that there is no church-wide strategy or structure. Episcopal sovereignty has led to a patchy and piecemeal approach to the deployment of distinctive deacons. While it would be unthinkable for a bishop to say that he or she did not have priests in their diocese, it appears to be perfectly acceptable to a bishop to admit that their diocese does not deploy distinctive deacons. Thus, Bishop Anselm did not encourage the distinctive diaconate in his diocese, giving several reasons: that it inhibited lay diaconal ministry, and would lead to further unnecessary clericalisation of ministry; that it only worked within the sacramental part of the Church of England, where it had a liturgical expression; and that many distinctive deacons became priests at some point in their ministry.

In contrast, Bishop Boniface spoke about the difficulty of deploying distinctive deacons. His diocese had a large number of high church parishes, but he was more concerned about ensuring that priests would be at the altar in those churches, than about ensuring that deacons would make the connection between the altar and the mission of the church. The lack of stipendiary posts for distinctive deacons will be explored further in Chapter 7. However, it would seem that the lack of promotion

of the distinctive diaconate is just as much about the will to promote the ministry in a creative way, as it is about lack of funding for stipends, and that the will is in many dioceses simply not there.

### **Issues of discernment**

When seeking potential role models for ministry, distinctive deacons are at a disadvantage when compared with their priest colleagues. Because of the piecemeal nature of the deployment of distinctive deacons within the dioceses of the Church of England, it is the ‘luck of the draw’ whether or not someone considering ministry in the Church of England and trying to understand the nature of their calling will even hear about the distinctive diaconate or have a chance to meet a distinctive deacon. Sixteen of the forty-three dioceses in the Provinces of Canterbury and York have no distinctive deacons, and a further twelve have only one or two. One diocese has recently ordained their first distinctive deacon for many years. So, while some of the respondent cohort were familiar with distinctive deacons and had been able to explore this ministry with role models from the first inkling of a vocation to the diaconate; others had struggled for years to find the right ministry, in a situation in which none of the options on offer seemed quite the right fit for their calling.

As the distinctive diaconate is not promoted satisfactorily through the church structures, in a diocese that does not foster vocations to the distinctive diaconate, the enquirer either does not know that it exists, or may be dissuaded from exploring a vocation to the distinctive diaconate. Mark told me about a student from another diocese whom he met while training:

*I had sat down, early on the course, chatting to a fellow student, and she said how she felt the same call to permanent diaconate, but was told quite clearly, no, that doesn't exist in X, or whichever diocese it was. So, she was told, it doesn't exist, you are a priest or nothing.*

Mark's response was that it ‘*is bonkers in the same Church. That one diocese can say this, and one diocese can say that.*’ When I asked the

Diocesan Bishop of one of the dioceses that do not promote the distinctive diaconate what he would say to someone who said that they really felt called to that ministry, his response was elliptical. He spoke of having *'a very low doctrine of personal vocation, and a very high doctrine of ... the vocation that comes through the Body.'* But that response was more suitable to calling generally, and not about the distinctive diaconate per se. Based on my experience as a Vocations Adviser on Bishops' Advisory Panels, and an Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands, most testimonials of vocation to ordained ministry begin with a personal sense of calling from God, rather than discernment by the Body. If vocation is always and only a response to discernment by the Body, then there is a danger that vocations are only seen as valid if they match pre-existing roles or needs within the Church. He also said, *'I'd ask them how lonely they want to be in ministry, I think. Where they would find their support, what called them to think that given that the church more widely doesn't appear to be calling anybody to the distinctive diaconate.'* While it is true that numbers are low, and distinctive deacons often feel a lack of support, this is not a valid reason to discourage their vocations. One of the aspects of ministry is that it is carried out in collaboration with other ministers, so even for one distinctive deacon in a ministry team, loneliness should not be an issue.

While the majority of the respondent cohort had not been discouraged from their vocations, neither had they been especially encouraged. For those who were already deaconesses, and for those who had a connection with serving distinctive deacons, the path was easier. For those who had no previous experience of the distinctive diaconate, it took more determination to discover their calling and more courage to fulfil it; and there were some who, because they did not know that the distinctive diaconate was even a possibility, waited years, often in other ministries, before they tested their vocations as distinctive deacons. Discovering the distinctive diaconate and having a vocation discerned does not appear to have become any easier over time. Those of the respondent cohort who

were discerned since 2000 had experienced many of the same problems as those discerned before.

Agnes was discerned as a deaconess, but by the time she had completed her training she was able to be ordained as a deacon. She went through a process that was very similar to that of men going forward for priesthood, and found it easy and straightforward. After ordination, she played a key role in facilitating the ministry of women, first as deacons, and later as priests. Catherine had been a member of a Deaconess community, but had been one of a number of sisters who had left. She did not go into detail about the situation, but said of the superior of the community, *'she had very fixed ideas on the diaconate, and I don't agree with most of them!'* After some years in teaching, as a deaconess, Catherine began in 1985 to explore a vocation to the diaconate, and was discerned and ordained deacon in 1987.

At the time when they were first exploring their vocations, five of the respondent cohort (31%) had been in a situation where they either worked with a distinctive deacon, or where they observed a distinctive deacon being deployed, and their calling was influenced by that experience. While Prochorus felt called to Holy Orders from the age of 15, in a diocese that ordained distinctive deacons, he found, *'The priestly thing was the only offering, and it didn't feel right, so it fell by the wayside. It was only when I met [a distinctive deacon] ... that it suddenly clunked, and I was like, ahhh!'*

Sophia became involved in the church as an adult, and within two or three years felt that God was calling her to something, but she was not quite sure what it was. She undertook some initial theological training, and one of the tutors on one of the courses was a distinctive deacon.

Sophia has a strong sense of being called to the distinctive diaconate:

*I just had an overwhelming sense of God calling me. And what, how can you express it? It was deacon, that's what I felt God calling me to, that was the word I had, it was just deacon. And at*

*that time, I didn't know particularly what deacons did. I know about diaconal ministry. I had come across a few permanent deacons, but I wasn't sufficiently knowledgeable about church at that stage to understand what it was. So, I found it quite terrifying and didn't tell anyone and just carried on.*

Even when she had first-hand experience of a deacon's ministry, it took another year before Sophia felt prepared to approach her parish priest about her vocation and start the discernment process.

While she was still at university, Julian was discerned by others to have leadership potential, perhaps as a minister. On leaving university she was part of a small, informal Christian community with a distinctive deacon. She also remembers going to ordination services, hearing the commission to deacons, and thinking, *'Oh, that is my life. Not thinking I had to change, but thinking, that is what my life is all about.'* It was only after exploring teaching, that she began to see the distinctive diaconate as a way of giving ministerial shape to her way of life. Hild was confirmed in 2002, having returned to church for the first time since her childhood. Her church had a distinctive deacon in post, and Hild became interested in her ministry. Not long after this Hild began to uncover some of her family history. It was a difficult time, but also a journey into self-discovery:

*That's when I felt that a piece of my life's jigsaw had been put in and I just had to ask God then, well, what do I do with this, what do I do now? And because I was going through all the discovery in the church. I felt that he was calling me into the church, if you like, to be something that would redeem [the] past.*

She then went to speak to her incumbent, who was supportive, and entered into the discernment process.

Rita, whose vocation was fostered by a university chaplain, who was also a distinctive deacon, had a fairly straightforward path into ministry. Exposure to the ministry of deacons from another tradition, and an



opportunity to inhabit the liturgical diaconal role helped her vocation to fall into place:

*From that stage, I have never had doubts about my diaconal calling. I do constantly have a process of discerning and thinking about it, and I think that is inescapable. It's changed and developed, but I have always had very strong, deep calling.*

Rita is now a driving force in her diocese for the promotion of, and support for, the distinctive diaconate.

A further four respondents (25%) had read or heard about the distinctive diaconate. Although Rhoda was already in a lay diocesan post in a diocese that had distinctive deacons, when she began to think about a calling to ministry, she did not have any first-hand experience of the distinctive diaconate. She had previously dismissed the idea of ordination because she was not comfortable with idea of being a priest. Then she *'began to hear about this thing called the permanent diaconate'*, decided to see the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, and entered the process. The story is very similar for Mark, who had had a long career in another profession, during which he came to faith. This combined with the pastoral nature of his work, and someone talking to him about the work of a deacon, sowed the seeds of a diaconal vocation. All the way through training he had a strong sense that the distinctive diaconate was the place where he should be. Johanna began to explore a vocation to ministry in 1987, and so it made sense to her to consider the possibility of being a deacon. She said she, *'spent a lot of time talking about deacons, researching deacons, and thinking; yes, that's exactly what I want to do.'* But she also felt that, *'I would never have been able to articulate that until after I was ordained, I think, and after I was actually doing it.'* She reflects how difficult it is to discern a calling when information is not readily available. For Christina, the sense of calling was subconscious, and came to the surface unexpectedly:

*The priest who prepared me for confirmation all those years ago ...came to dinner, and I was telling him about these pastoral assistants, and what I was up to, and one thing and another, and*

*he said to me, have you thought about being ordained? And the only way I can describe it is I heard myself say yes, as a deacon. And I don't remember anything else really.*

Three respondents (19%) were not aware of the distinctive diaconate as a possibility and were initially admitted into other ministries, but found they did not 'feel right'. Junia was a Reader for many years. But, as she said, *'it never felt completely right. I loved the study element of it and that side of it ... but I never felt I was in the right place.'* In 2010, her area bishop, acting on the recommendations made in *The Mission and Ministry of the Church*, suggested that Readers of long standing might like to consider becoming distinctive deacons. Junia remembered a meeting held to discuss the possibility:

*And he finished off by saying, if there are any Readers here who feel they should be deacons, please get in touch. And I remember saying to him at the time, if it had ever been offered to me before, the alternative to being a Reader was being deacon, I would have snapped their hand off.*

Junia went immediately into the discernment process and was accepted for training within months. Phoebe also had a long path to ordination as a distinctive deacon. She trained as a lay minister, and during that time felt sure that God was calling her to something further, a vocation which was also recognised by the lay training adviser for her diocese. She met with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, and they discussed priesthood, but Phoebe did not take it any further, because *'when I was talking about the priesthood it did not feel right.'* She entered into Reader training, because nothing else seemed to be presenting itself. After twelve years as a Reader, she attended a Vocations Day, where she heard about the distinctive diaconate for the first time. As the speaker explained the ministry of a distinctive deacon, Phoebe said, *'as he was talking, my spirit felt as though it was dancing, it was coming alive.'* Many things about her approach to ministry fell into place as she began to relate them to the reading that she was given about being a distinctive deacon. *'I always knew that I was drawn to be beside people, to be on that fringe, to*

*be alongside ... basically, more getting my hands dirty, than anything else.'*

For Nicanor these feelings of finding the right ministry after time spent on the wrong path, were intensified by a vision, experienced at a very precise moment in the discernment process. At one stage in his working life he had considered a priestly ministry, but had felt that the time was not right. After having taken early retirement, he moved dioceses and became closely involved in the life of his parish church. He was encouraged by his parish priest to explore ministry, and with some reservations about it being the right thing, entered into Reader training. The Diocesan Director of Ordinands felt that Nicanor had reached the limit of his vocation, and told him to *'park up'*, so Nicanor became a Reader. Eighteen months later, Nicanor had a vision:

*Suddenly I saw, as clearly as if I were watching the telly, a picture of ... Have you ever seen the road over the Ardeche Gorge? Well, the road goes round and there's an eighteen hundred foot drop straight into the river. It meanders around, and every so often you have hairpin bends, where the outside is an open corner and the inside is a rock face. And I've seen in this picture something like the nineteen sixties or seventies, probably a Ford Escort or Popular, something of that kind, of that era, about when I first applied ... And there, on the inside of the hairpin bend, parked against the rock face was this car, parked up, to use [the Diocesan Director of Ordinands'] phrase. As I looked on, the right indicator goes on. We are in France, after all! So, the right indicator goes on, to come off this thing, and [a friend] said, well, you do realise two things? First of all, he said, if the indicator goes on, and you are looking from the outside, you ain't driving. So, faith is required to get in the car in the first place. And the road is going into mist, so whether it went over the drop, or whether it continued going up, down or wherever it went, who can say. It was just a completely blank road. So, this*

*was it, and just in case I hadn't got the point, I was conscious of the words, 'represent the Christ crucified'.*

At the same time

*[his incumbent] was in [the Area Bishop's] study, bemoaning the fact that she'd come to three parishes and she now had five, and she was going round like a headless chicken. And she really needed an extra deacon!*

Nicanor said, *'that was when things started to go!'*, and he moved through the discernment process, training and ordination within the minimum time possible.

For two of the respondent cohort, however, as discussed above, the initial call may have been to priestly ministry, and the path to the distinctive diaconate was followed at the instigation of others. Lydia's first experience of calling appeared to be to the priesthood when she was working at a Christian healing centre in 1994. After she had left the centre, she shared her sense of vocation with her parish priest, and entered a discernment process. The diocese in which she was living at the time was in the process of recovering the distinctive diaconate, and there was someone specifically assigned to discerning diaconal vocations. Lydia was sent to her:

*I remember the interview as being very positive, and she felt that [the distinctive diaconate] was possibly what I was called to, in spite of the original story about what God was saying to me at communion – I want you to do this... I remember at the time that this didn't seem to be going, maybe completely smoothly.*

For Lydia, responding to her sense of vocation by being discerned and accepted for training for the diaconate was a walk of obedience, perhaps helped by the fact that she found the thought of being a priest *'completely and utterly terrifying.'* She finished the discernment process and was accepted for training as a deacon. She subsequently exercised a long and valuable ministry as a distinctive deacon, and appeared to have no regrets.

Brigid did not have any experience of the distinctive diaconate, although she felt for a long time that God had special plans for her. It was a new member of the church she attended that recognised in her a calling to the distinctive diaconate. After some reflection, she went to see the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, who was positive and supportive:

*I think that, at the time, they agreed that I should pursue the diaconate, because [the diocese] had just initiated a special training programme for distinctive deacons. And I think they felt, OK, here's one that fits that box, so I was (and this is looking back) directed in that way, which was fine.'*

However, although Brigid was guided towards the distinctive diaconate, priesthood is something that has continued to lurk in the background:

*There have been times when I have felt, am I being called to priesthood? And hand on heart I do think there are times when I pushed it away, because I was a little bit frightened of taking that step forward. I always thought, if I was to be a priest, it would happen. Our curate... did a year as a deacon, and then at her first mass, she asked me to deacon for her, and when I got back to the vestry, I just sat and cried, and I thought, have I pushed this away?*

### **Being pushed towards priesthood**

For the majority of the respondents, however, the greatest difficulty has been, not in defining or exploring their vocation, but in finding acceptance for their vocation as a distinctive deacon, and not just a 'half-fledged' priest. If the dioceses of the Church of England are haphazard in their offering of the distinctive diaconate, and in their discernment practices; they are almost unanimous in their wish to promote priestly ministry as the default ordained ministry. Almost every respondent had something to say about being invited to consider ordination as a priest, or even coerced into it. In some cases, this pull to priesthood came from their incumbent, in the early stages of considering a vocation, from the Diocesan Director of Ordinands or Bishop during the discernment process, or from the advisers at a Bishops' Advisory Panel, where the

question ‘why not a priest?’ seemed to be common, in a situation where those offering for priestly ministry would not be asked, ‘why not a distinctive deacon?’ In a church which has espoused eucharistic-centred worship to such a large extent, there was often just plain puzzlement as to why someone would go through the whole discernment and training process and not ‘complete the job’, as it were. Moreover, the pressure does not end with ordination. Most distinctive deacons that I have met are continually asked, throughout their ministry, why they do not ‘get priested’, and this was true for the respondent cohort as well.

Some respondents had, nonetheless, moved through the discernment process with support and understanding. Rita was fortunate to have her calling discerned in a situation in which others understood diaconal ministry, and she could articulate a diaconal vocation and convince others of its reality. However, because she was perceived as a strong person with leadership qualities, even for her there have been questions:

*The bishop didn't really understand, and I think there's always been that sense ... why would I be called to be a deacon?*

*Because I am, naturally, I know, a very strong character, and they can't get their heads around, therefore, why would I 'just' want to be a deacon?*

Christina, while not put under pressure during the discernment process, was considered to have a vocation to priesthood which could not be fulfilled at that time. By the time she had trained and was in her first curacy, priesting was a possibility and her training incumbent later told her that the Diocesan Director of Ordinands had said to him, ‘*I expect you to change her mind.*’ Christina’s comment on this was, ‘*Bloody arrogance, but this what they do, unfortunately!*’ Junia was not put under any pressure to consider priesthood, but during her curacy her parish were confused, because all the other curates who have trained there have gone on to be priested:

*There was a lot of, when are you going to be priested? When are you leaving, when are you moving on? But they have accepted it now, and after three years we had a little ceremony where I*

*renewed my vows ... so the congregation knew that I wasn't moving.*

It says much about the strength of calling and the determination of the respondent cohort that they were not dissuaded from their vocations.

For other respondents, the pressure was more obvious. Sophia recounted: *'when I went to see the bishop before my Bishops' Advisory Panel, he said, "I know you've told people lots of times before, but I want to hear it from the horse's mouth – why deacon, why not a priest?"'* She felt that this was not just a question of interest, but of criticism, especially since she knew that the bishop had recently ceased to support the distinctive diaconate. *'He's just changed, actually, from one side to the other.'* Rhoda was emphatic that she had never felt called to priesthood, but when I asked whether anyone had suggested that she should be priested said:

*Yes, over and over again. Every time I go to an ordination, actually – a priestly ordination. So, when is it your turn? Accept me as I am!*

Johanna now has a clear leadership role in parochial ministry. But describing her Bishops' Advisory Panel, said, *'there was a lot of digging around, I felt, to get me to say that I wanted to be a priest.'* She interpreted this as politically motivated. She felt that the advisers were commenting on the theology of ministry in her sending parish, rather than on her calling to priesthood. Subsequently, she has been told lots of many times that she should be a priest. She has reflected on this but feels fulfilled in her ministry as she presently exercises it.

Mark has never had a conversation with his diocesan bishop about the distinctive diaconate, but felt that the bishop does not seem to place much value in the diocese's distinctive deacons. Many of Mark's priest colleagues say, *'What! Permanent deacon? You know, you get that scrunched up face looking at you! Why? You know in that moment – you think, they just don't get it, and they just don't understand why I do it, and that is sad.'* Once Julian entered ministerial training she said that

she had a lot of ‘*why don’t you want to be a priest? What are you scared of?*’ She was in the middle of her first year in ministry at the time of her interview for this research, and she said:

*I’m pretty sure I won’t be ordained priest next July. I’m quite happy about that. I’ve even friends, good friends, who I was in training with, who said, oh, really, you should not be a deacon, you’re definitely a leader. That dichotomy is something that I have had to struggle with. Leader is not a word I particularly like.*

Julian was not ordained priest in the July.

Prochorus felt especially under pressure. He, too, had only recently been ordained, was still uncertain about remaining as a distinctive deacon or going on to ordination as a priest, and felt under severe pressure to pursue the latter course. At three different points in the interview, he spoke about the diocesan bishop wanting priests for empty altars, the need to be obedient to the bishop, and about the market forces being against the deployment of distinctive deacons. Prochorus was one of a small number of the respondents who needed a stipend; he appeared to be convincing himself that the bishop has the ultimate authority to determine his calling, and that it is possible to be a ‘deaconly’ priest:

*Although you may be able to be very diaconal in the way that you approach it perhaps there’s not the time at the moment, not the resources to you, you know, enable the ministry... I went through my Bishops’ Advisory Panel sponsored by the previous Diocesan, as a stipendiary deacon. That was something that he had a vision for, but clearly now there is a change of management, and that is not appropriate at the moment.*

Prochorus’s dilemma illustrates the ultimate authority that diocesan bishops carry, which allows them to dismiss the distinctive diaconate, with no external balance to their views and actions.

An interview with Prochorus’s diocesan bishop confirmed Prochorus’s assessment. The bishop said that he respected the distinctive diaconate



but did not promote it, because he did not see the deployment of stipendiary deacons as sustainable. Nonetheless, he hoped that his diocese would remain one where the distinctive diaconate is honoured and distinctive deacons are not pressured to be priested. This ambiguous attitude was echoed by Bishop Cuthbert, who offered this analysis of the situation:

*So, an order of ministry that does not allow you to celebrate the Eucharist is, unintentionally devalued, because it's no use, they can't do that, and they can do no more than a Reader ... Vicars who have curates, always regard the year the deacon spends ... the year that the new clergy person spends as a deacon is a real kind of nuisance because they can't take the pressure off them in terms of celebrating Holy Communion.*

Bishop Anselm, re-iterating a view that I have heard expressed many times, pointed to the number of deacons who become priests:

*I think of a theological understanding of diaconal ministry possesses them [distinctive deacons], you know, the servanthood and the service of the church being expressed liturgically and being worked out in often your secular employment, which very frequently has a servant character to it, or something, and I can see that the logic of all that; but I notice that even those who have gone down that route tend to conform and end up as priests, you know, within a decade or so.*

Only two respondents felt they had not been not put under pressure to consider priestly ministry. Perversely, they were Lydia and Brigid, the two respondents discussed above, who did exhibit signs of a priestly calling, but were advised to become distinctive deacons early on in the discernment process.

## **Conclusions**

What might at first appear to be a disconnection between how the Church of England views the distinctive diaconate and how distinctive deacons see their own ministry, is revealed, instead, to be a disconnection between what the Church of England through its commissioned reports

recommends for the distinctive diaconate, and what it has failed to put into place. Those seeking a ministry as a distinctive deacon find themselves at the mercy of a church which has failed to act upon its own recommendations. There is nothing in Canon Law to prevent the distinctive diaconate, but because the system for discerning and ratifying vocations requires each individual diocese to promote, to welcome and nurture vocations to the distinctive diaconate, the outcome is piecemeal. While some dioceses actively encourage the distinctive diaconate, and have systems in place to support enquirers from first contact to ordination, other dioceses actively discourage distinctive deacons. The majority of dioceses do neither. This is due, in part, to a lack of experience of diaconal ministry exercised by distinctive deacons. Role models are essential for the promotion of the distinctive diaconate, and distinctive deacons seem to be effective role models to those they encounter. However, the number of distinctive deacons is so few, that these encounters are also few. If the status quo is maintained, the number of distinctive deacons will not increase.

And yet the testimony of those of the respondent cohort who heard about the distinctive diaconate by chance or who insist on their calling in the face of pressure to be priested, suggests that there are many more potential distinctive deacons than are presently being discerned, trained, ordained and deployed. Julian's experience, as the first distinctive deacon in her diocese for many years, suggests that, when confronted with a candidate with a strong and unassailable vocation to the distinctive diaconate, a bishop will honour that vocation. While the onus should not be on distinctive deacons to promote and develop their own order, maybe that is what needs to happen.

Although the abuses of the diaconate can be seen to have had a particular impact on the lives and ministries of those who were exploring their vocations during the period since 1987, it is difficult to tell whether this has had an ongoing effect. The women that I meet for discernment or selection do not, as a whole, dwell on the often acrimonious debate that

preceded the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1994. As Bishop's Officer for Distinctive Deacons in the diocese where I serve, I am seeing an increasing number of potential candidates for the distinctive diaconate. This is, on average, an increase from one a year to three a year over the past four years. Those exploring a vocation to the distinctive diaconate do not appear to have been adversely affected by the 'long diaconate'. The abuse of the distinctive diaconate as a default ministry for women whose vocation to priesthood was not acceptable to the Church of England, will eventually become a thing of the past. I no longer see compelling evidence that the distinctive diaconate carries a taint. The data in Appendix D would seem to indicate that while the number of distinctive deacons is falling in dioceses that previously have pushed women into the diaconate, the numbers are rising in others. It will become increasingly necessary that the distinctive diaconate is promoted by those who see it as a valuable ministry in its own right. If distinctive deacons have a place within the ministry of the Church of England, they need to make their presence felt, for the right reasons, so that the distinctive diaconate does not, like the Deaconess Order before them, disappear for the wrong reasons.

At the same time the tone of *Reader Update*, the experiences recounted by the respondent cohort, which will be discussed in the next Chapter, and conversations that I regularly have with Readers, do suggest that the Church of England is still divided about the respective roles of distinctive deacons and Readers, and that they are sometimes seen to occupy the same ministerial ground. There is a need for the Church of England to move from the comparative, competitive stance (*either* deacons *or* Readers), to the stance (*both* deacons *and* readers). The next Chapter explores the collegial relationships that distinctive deacons have with other parts of the *laos*, and looks in more detail at the issues involved in the relationship between readers and deacons.

## 6 Collegial Relationships



<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism/photos>

In conversations regarding the distinctive diaconate, surprise is often expressed that distinctive deacons still exist within the Church of England. The lack of promotion by the Church of England's Ministry Division, and the abuses to which the distinctive diaconate has been subjected in the last thirty years, as discussed in the previous Chapter, appear to have inhibited the growth of the distinctive diaconate. In this Chapter I shall examine the relationships that the deacon cohort has built with other parts of the *laos*, both clergy and laity, in order to understand more clearly, how distinctive deacons are viewed, and how they experience their own ministry among other ministries. Particular attention will be given to the relationship between distinctive deacons and Readers, as this has been an area of such unease.

The members of the respondent cohort minister in a variety of settings and relate to different numbers and types of colleagues. I have classed as a ‘colleague’ anyone with whom a respondent exercises an area of ministry, or with whom they participate in a ministry team that has a collegial structure, even if they are not working closely together. Three of the respondent cohort work in NHS chaplaincy teams, and are not licenced to a parish. In these cases, the relationship between the worshipping community and mission of the church that distinctive deacons seek to build has to be achieved in other ways. This is usually through the worshipping life of the hospital. Rhoda had invested a lot of time and care into bringing patients to the hospital chapel for worship, and is also consciously engaged with the wider church: *‘I try not to isolate myself. I’m a member of diocesan synod and deanery synod, and try to go to Chapter meetings.’*

Two respondents are working with a priest colleague in a parish, but are also part-time members of NHS chaplaincy teams. Five are members of parish teams, one was a member of a parish team at the time that the interview was conducted, but is now retired; and one was a member of a parish team at the time of the interview and has now resigned. Of the remaining four respondents, one is in a cathedral team; one is in a diocesan team; one is in sole charge of a parish, supported by retired priests; and one is an independent academic (retired). Although I shall explore the matter of stipends in more detail in the next Chapter, it should be noted that the status of the cohort as stipendiary or self-supporting has a bearing on collegial relationships. The employment status of the respondents can be found in Appendix F.

### **Tradition**

Within the respondent cohort there was a definite bias towards the more catholic end of the Church of England spectrum. Only one respondent had worshipped for any length of time with another denomination. This was Hild, who as a child had been a member of a Baptist church. Lydia, having resigned from her post as a self-supporting parish deacon, now

worships with the local Methodist congregation. She, Phoebe and Junia come from backgrounds that could be described as ‘middle-of-the-road’ Anglican. They represent 19% of the cohort. Two (12.5%) respondents could be described as coming from a conservative evangelical background. Ten (62.5%) could be described as open catholic, in that they come from high church backgrounds, but are open to working with other traditions and denominations, and do not have any concerns about working with women who are priests. Only one respondent (6%) could be described as closed catholic, who could not accept the ordination of women to the priesthood. All those who work in NHS teams, work with chaplains from other denominations and other faiths. All those involved in parish ministry are in parishes where sacramental ministry is central to the worshipping life of the church community. None of the respondent cohort is in a parish where the Eucharist is not central, so all of them are able to express their diaconal ministry through the liturgical role of the deacon as well as in other ways.

This raises a question about whether the distinctive diaconate can only thrive in a Eucharistically-centred community, or whether it could also act as a pattern for churches of other traditions within the Church of England, helping to link worship to mission. The comment of Bishop Anselm in Chapter 4 suggests that there is a link to be made between mission and worship in a more evangelical tradition. Zink makes the point that while the Five Marks of Mission have come to have a wider appeal, the marks are deeply rooted in the evangelical wing of the Anglican Communion (Zink 2017, 162). They could, therefore, offer a theological basis for the ministry of deacons within that tradition. The practice of the Methodist Church would be pertinent to further exploration in this area.

The comments from the respondent cohort revealed a group of ministers who were at ease with other traditions, denominations and faiths, and who saw varied collegial relationships as a good thing. Rita assessed the mix of traditions in her diocese:

*Actually, there are a few who are traditional Catholics, but again how they inhabit that part of the church is quite different. They're not boxed off. There's much further pushing of the boundaries. It's quite interesting to see, but certainly we've got one conservative evangelical deacon and everything in between. So, it's a very diverse group of deacons actually.*

Sophia commented that her Initial Ministerial Education cohort is, 'a mixed bunch in terms of ... we have some very high Anglo-Catholics. And people who come from really evangelical churches as well.' This was shared as a positive situation. Prochorus was expecting to go to a church of a very different tradition for placement as part of his curacy, and saw that as a positive thing:

*At the moment, I am in a very high church setting, where they have an idea of who a deacon is and can see a liturgical role played out in church and hopefully it reflects what I am doing the rest of the week. And then for the next two months I am being sent to a church where they don't have any sense of liturgically what a deacon does, and I can precisely explore what it means to be a deacon in the context where there is no sense of the diaconate. I think that'll be great.*

He had also been looking at initiating some outreach projects at a deanery level, but they had not come into shape in his mind at the time of the interview.

When Brigid began her role as a hospital chaplain she was interested to observe that the chaplains could be lay people, deacons, or priests. She said, 'Once I walked through those doors I left my traditions behind. I very soon learned to do that, and I also very soon learned not to go dressed in black, which had been my sort of, Anglo-Catholic tradition.' Mark valued his high church tradition, but found it frustrating that it was being defined by attitudes to women clergy:

*And I say, can't I be liberal catholic, can't I be in favour of women's ministry and be at the catholic end of the church? I've just been to the priesting of an old friend, Sarah. And [a retired*

*priest who assists in the parish] said, Sarah! A woman? And I said, yes. And you were there? And you didn't mind? I said, I was the deacon. Of course, he didn't know, he just thought I was 'one of us' as I call it.*

He felt caught between the expectations of the tradition of his parish, and wanting to be able to build collegial relationships that included ordained women. His own spirituality and his experiences while training had given him a different approach from that of the clergy in the parish.

### **Ecumenical collegiality**

Ecumenical links were important to some of the respondent cohort, but did not really impact on others. Overall, the distinctive diaconate has stronger inter-denominational, and international links than any other strand of ordained ministry within the Church of England. In 1997 three consultations were held at St George's, Windsor, which brought together deacons from the Methodist Church, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, as well as the Church of England (Hall 1999, 241, 242). DACE was affiliated to the Diakonia World Federation, and deacons from the Church of England regularly attend the world federation conferences as well as the area conferences for Diakonia Region Africa-Europe (DRAE). Deacons have also represented the Church of England at Porvoo consultations, many of which have centred around the discussion about diakonia and the role of deacons within the member churches. Agnes had been fully involved in such dialogues, participating in an ecumenical exploration of the Diaconate hosted by the Church of Scotland, and helped to organise two of the Windsor consultations. These activities led her to attend a DRAE conference, where she found a real openness among deacons from different denominations:

*[It] was just like walking into heaven, really, among all these nurses and things – all these spotty uniforms and white hats. But there were other people there as well, and it was like the first time that I had been to something where they said, and what are you,*



*and why do you do that, and what is one of those ... I saw there was just a common vision.*

The inspiration from the continental diaconate had a profound impact on the inception of DACE. Rita was also asked to be part of the Porvoo Consultation on diaconal ministries. She used this analogy for the consultation:

*It's almost like having different threads of the DNA for the diaconate and they're in different churches ... We had an immediate recognition of each other's ministries and what we were talking about, and that was really interesting because we were very different and working in very different circumstances ... Although the theology might be different, and where you're coming from in church, there is a recognition between deacons of different churches of diaconal ministries, and you don't get into the same issues of validity that you get with priestly ministries ... I would like the Church of England to continue those sorts of conversations, because I think they're important ecumenically, not just for the distinctive deacons, but actually [for] that wider sense of recognition of who we are as Christians.*

Catherine has strong links with deacons in the Nordic Churches and in the Orthodox Church. Unlike Agnes, she sees a closer link with the Orthodox understanding of *diakonia*, and considered the Kaiserswerth model to have had an unfortunate effect on the development of the diaconate:

*You'll probably find from DACE that they think that diakonia is a kind of social work, because they're far too influenced by diakonisches Werk ... Well, it's a German idea to start with, and Germany ... I was going to say infected! Influenced the Nordic churches, and of course, the German Lutheran churches that are still ... diakonisches Werk is their thing ...*

These concerns notwithstanding, the worldwide Diakonia network clearly allows for a broad understanding of what it means to be a distinctive deacon. It is the place where the Kaiserswerth understanding

of the diaconate and the early church understanding can meet and inform each other. It remains to be seen however, how these links will be continued now that DACE no longer exists.

Christina was the only respondent who reported working directly with an English deacon from a different denomination, as part of a hospital chaplaincy team:

*We had a Roman Catholic deacon, man, on that [chaplaincy] team ... And it was so disappointing; he really didn't have much confidence in his order at all. I tried to talk to him about that, and tried to give him that confidence, but I don't think the Roman Catholic church treat their deacons very well. They've got them, but they don't know what to do with them. And I think that the deacon in the Roman church seems to be a bit like the Reader in the Church of England. They're always slightly fed up and feeling they're not being used properly – all the ones I've come across seem to be like that. So, that was a shame, but I liked working with him.*

The importance of local Churches Together groups to both Mark and Hild, was explored in Chapter 5. During her first post, Lydia had strong links, through children's work, with a local Methodist church. *'At Christmas and Easter, we joined with the Methodists, and the Methodist children came [and joined with the church children] and we put on something specially.'* During her most recent post she had set up a prayer group and was pleased when it grew to include local Methodists. Since she has resigned her post, she has worked even more closely with the Methodist church, and worships with them. Julian was the only respondent who spoke about inter-faith links. She is building relationships with the Muslim community, as described in Chapter 3.

### **Lay colleagues**

The respondent cohort worked with a variety of lay colleagues, many of whom were outside the structures of the church, and some of whom were not Christian. Those who worked in hospital or hospice chaplaincy

teams, worked within lay structures set up for health professionals. This had advantages and disadvantages. Chaplains sometimes have access to the hospital executive, and can influence the spirituality of the institution. Rhoda felt that, *'because of my place within the structure of the NHS, I'm managed by a member of the executive team, so my voice is heard within the executive team, the people who run the hospital.'* Christina considered it to be an important part of her chaplaincy to support the hospital staff. She said that she exercised ministry in a way different to her priest colleagues: *'I tended to do a lot more in terms of the training and the staff support and the bigger picture stuff than they [the priests] perhaps did.'* She was prepared to work with the nursing staff on a ward to solve dysfunctional relationships or build team identity. Lay collegiality encompasses much wider and more challenging relationships than might at first seem to be the case. The term 'lay colleagues' is often confined to authorised lay ministers, but for those in the distinctive diaconate, possibly enabling social projects, there will be a range of lay agencies and volunteers who will be part of the picture.

Many of the areas of ministry described by the respondent cohort took place at the interface between church and the community, and so it is not surprising that there were many instances where they were working with lay leaders and organisations. Agnes was the Chair of Governors in one of her local schools, and had contacts in others. She saw the school as an institution that can offer help, protection and stability to the most vulnerable in a very transient society. In a previous diocese, she had been involved in a project to give people life-changing skills:

*What we got funding for ... was to actually provide training for local people. So, one of the principles of our project, that it would be staffed by local people, and those we couldn't use ourselves went other places. So, trained over a hundred professionals from nothing, and it's still running, twenty-five years on.*

Other respondents who saw working with school communities as a positive way of building relationships were Prochorus, Lydia and Mark.

For Prochorus, just at the beginning of his curacy, the links had still to be built. Mark maintained a role as a teaching assistant in a special school, two days a week, but he also had strong links with the primary school in the parish. Lydia had become part of a team of lay people delivering *Open the Book*, (a project set up by the Bible Society to bring Bible stories into schools in an accessible and engaging way) in one of the church schools in her benefice. For Lydia, it was very important to ensure that she was not taking over a role that a lay person was already doing. *'So, I was asked, would I become a member of the team and having checked that nobody was being pushed out because of my presence, I agreed to do that, and that was really very powerful, and that was a really good ministry.'* Lydia's interest in children's work came about unexpectedly in her first post. This set the pattern of a ministry where she has spent a large part of her time working with lay teams.

Johanna, whose background was in residential children's work, was at one stage in her ministry running a bereavement service for children. Her experience of working with a lay team in this situation reveals the need for matching skills to task, or training and preparing colleagues for the role that they are being asked to undertake:

*We started to have referrals from the youth justice team ... so where there had been death from drugs, or murder ... And some of the staff from the school [where Johanna was lead residential worker] were part of the team. It was quite hard really, and people who wanted to help were ... it's hard not to stereotype church volunteers, but some of the more middle-class ladies who retired and their children have grown up and have a little bit of time on their hands – they weren't going to cope very well with those sorts of situation.*

These areas of lay collegiality highlight the seriousness and challenging nature of the ministry exercised by many of respondent cohort. They truly were envoys into difficult situations, not humble servants in safe surroundings.

Only two of the respondent cohort described working alongside authorised lay ministers undertaking church based ministerial tasks. Mark was part of a lay team who undertook pastoral visiting and home communions. They had six or seven lay ministers of home communion and they had ten or twelve people who received every week. Nicanor was on a ministry team which included authorised lay ministers, but they did not seem to have a fulfilling role. *'We've got one or two authorised Lay Ministers, who are saying, we are authorised, what do we do?'* Nicanor did not express a need for he or his incumbent to do anything about this. Agnes had had a training role in many different situations in the course of her ministry. She had been a training facilitator for the Mothers' Union, Bishop's Advisor for Lay Training in a previous diocese, and Lay Training Officer for the diocese from which she has just retired. She made it very clear that she was a trainer and not a teacher, and she also trained facilitators:

*That is key to me, really, to not talk to people and teach them, but to actually enable them, because that course was for facilitators, and you facilitated them to become facilitators, by doing the course, so it was a real mixture of different techniques, and enabling them to feel what it was like to be facilitators.*

The enabling role was a key part of the ministry of these distinctive deacons. It is also a key skill in the future ministry of a church which is reaching out into communities and needs skilled lay teams to activate this mission.

### **Relating to Bishops**

Elaine Bardwell observes of the relationship between bishops and deacons, which has traditionally been a close one:

The bishop alone ordains the deacon and confers the diaconal role himself [sic]. The loyalty and co-operation shown to priests in parishes by deacons is in fact the loyalty which would be given to the bishop if he were present (Bardwell: cited in Hall 1991, 59).

There was a clear fault line between those respondents who spoke of a good relationship with bishops; and those who saw bishops as distant

authority figures, with the power to affect their ministries in a major and potentially adverse way. In between were respondents who simply recorded the encounters that they had with bishops at the point of their discernment, but had had no further interaction with them. Six (37.5%) of the respondent cohort experienced some aspect of the collegial relationship with bishops, after the style of the Early Church.

Rita was the only respondent who worked with the bishops of her diocese on a regular basis. She acknowledged that although her role was diaconal, it was a role that not many deacons fulfil in the present day:

*Just as in the liturgy, the deacon stands at the right hand of the priest or the bishop. I'm very much in that role in what I am doing in the diocese here ... It's very much the bishop's authority that I share in, so I think I do inhabit my role now, and the previous role that I had in the diocese, in a very diaconal way. But, that's partly how I've shaped it, and this bishop and the last one has let me do that.*

Junia was called on to act as liturgical deacon for high profile services on a regular basis; she described a respectful, but relaxed relationship between her and the bishops of her diocese: *'I deaconed for the bishop's enthronement, which was a wonderful experience, because none of us knew what we were doing! And I've deaconed at two ordinations if not three.'* Catherine had collaborated with bishops in the academic arena. This has not been a traditional bishop/deacon relationship, but one that owed more to academic respect, on both sides. She is someone with confidence in her ministry and her abilities. *'I have had some very good bishops to work with as well,'* she says. Christina had maintained a good working relationship with the bishops of the dioceses in which she served, and has felt respected and supported by them. As well as seeking and gaining permission to anoint patients from three different bishops, she had received direct praise from one of them for her *'wonderfully liminal ministry.'* Julian had three different roles, and one of them involved working alongside her diocesan bishop. Before ordination she was working in an advisory capacity to senior clergy in the diocese, and

so her present situation is a little strange. *‘[Members of the bishops’ team] have all been my colleagues for several years, you know, we have all sat on a level. Now I’m a curate, and it’s all a bit... and I suppose, even my relationship with the bishop, people could find intimidating.’* Agnes has worked with Bishops on various projects. As well as her involvement in lay training described above, she worked with a previous diocesan bishop to prepare women for priestly ministry, in the early days of women’s ministry in the priesthood. For these respondents the collegial relationship between bishop and distinctive deacon had been enriching and affirming.

For four (25%) of the respondents, the power of bishops to choose to support or undermine the distinctive diaconate was a matter of concern, especially where they felt that their own bishops were becoming or had become less supportive. Prochorus articulated a deep disappointment that the Bishops did not seek to honour the ancient connection with their distinctive deacons:

*The other thing that’s definitely missing from my theological understanding is the episcopal connection. Because in the beginning, the deacons were there, helping the bishops. Then the apostles began to fall off their perch and so priests had to come into things, but obviously, there was some kind of tension there, but I don’t see it in my own experience. I have not had any connection with any of the three bishops around here, and I think that is key to the diaconate really. I think there is a key relationship there which is being missed.*

When he did meet with his diocesan bishop he had a strong sense of the bishop moving away from his predecessor’s support for distinctive deacons, motivated by a wish to secure enough priests to maintain the sacramental ministry of parishes. Sophia has felt a similar withdrawal of support. In the curacy stage of his first post, Mark had played a large part in carrying an interregnum; he also felt a lack of support from the Bishops in his diocese. Mark also referred to a fellowship meeting of

deacons in his diocese, where the bishop's withdrawal of support for distinctive deacons was discussed:

*I came away quite depressed because it confirmed my thought that our bishop is not that fussed about permanent deacons. And I sort of knew that, but it was awful to hear it, and to hear other people say, actually, yes, that's true.*

All three shared this information very close to the beginning of their interviews, even though it was not the first topic to be introduced. It obviously troubled them greatly. It was not just their posts that were in doubt, but the whole order of ministry to which they felt called. Hild had received negative replies when she suggested to other deacons that they should ask the bishop to speak to them about the role of distinctive deacons in the diocese. She felt that her deacon colleagues might have misunderstood the bishop. *'Some people, I think wrongly, have got the idea that the bishop really doesn't want the permanent diaconate.'* This reflects a strong perception among some respondents that the primary ministerial focus was on priests, and that a bishop's right to choose whether or not to have distinctive deacons in the diocese made their ministries precarious.

### **Priest colleagues**

The majority of the data concerning collegial relationships for distinctive deacons revolves around priest colleagues. This not surprising, given that there are approximately 12,000 priests, stipendiary and non-stipendiary, in the Church of England, with another 6,000 with permission to officiate (CofE 2017, 3). Many of the respondents commented on the need for collaboration between priests and deacons, and how at best their roles should be complementary. Rhoda had experienced a working situation where this was the case:

*Working with a priest ... One of the strengths, I was saying this to someone else today, one of the important things about the diaconate for me is its collaborative nature. We cannot do anything on our own. We have to have a priest there. With [a former colleague] it really worked well, because he has such a*



*good understanding and sees the benefits of having a deacon with you.*

My exploration of collegial relationships between priests and deacons indicated that the gender of the respondents still had some effect on these relationships. The following three incidents certainly revolved around gender issues. Brigid's training incumbent couldn't accept women at the altar:

*We really struggled in that relationship. I remember the first time, the Sunday after I had been ordained, I laid up the altar. After I'd done it he took the corporal off and re-laid it. It didn't happen again, but it wasn't a nice thing to do. I could see that he was struggling, but I was struggling with things as well. In the end, I was there seven years, and it came to a very sticky end because we just couldn't work together.*

When she left, she moved into hospital chaplaincy, but she also had a part-time role as the liturgical deacon at a cathedral. However, there were still issues about acceptance:

*There was a priest vicar [at the cathedral] who had sort of taken the role of the deacon, and I was warned when I was taken on, that [he] might resent me, and we had to tread very carefully.*

Sometimes the gender issue can present itself in an oblique manner. In an incident that Rhoda recalls, there is a suggestion that having struggled to be priested herself, a woman colleague did not feel that a senior post should be given to a woman who was not a priest:

*When I was first appointed [as lead hospital chaplain] a woman priest in this deanery said, how can they have appointed you as lead chaplain when you are not a priest? I said, you would need to ask them. I said, you don't need to be a priest to be a lead chaplain, actually. The diaconate is more than suited actually. I think that afterwards she went away and reflected, and then came and apologised. But actually, at that point I was quite hurt because I thought yet again it was actually another woman who was doing that to me. And over the years ... I've been ordained*

*eleven years and over those eleven years I often find it's the women who can be the most unkind sometimes.*

But for Johanna, her gender has enabled her to fulfil an important role among her priest colleagues in the informal cluster of parishes of which she is part:

*It's a very dysfunctional cluster though. They can't stand each other basically and I'm the only one who can get them all together. So, they'll come here for a meeting but they won't go anywhere else ... I think it's both being a deacon and a woman, yes ... They're pathetic, but they're all men with big egos, territorial, competitive, and it doesn't work, you know. That isn't how collaborative ministry is ever going to work, you know.*

So, the addition of a gender aspect to the relationship between priest and distinctive deacon can have both an adverse and a positive effect.

Rita felt that it was important that the priest and deacon had different roles:

*Towards the end of the curacy, my incumbent left under a cloud, and I was sort of curate in charge, in effect, although the Archdeacon, in theory was there, actually he never came near other than preaching and taking services occasionally ... But it was interesting, we had another curate, who'd come after me, and was priested, and we worked very collaboratively together, but we had quite different roles.*

She felt that what had been a difficult title post had come right when this working relationship was in kilter:

Training posts were generally mixed, in terms both of the quality of the training and of the relationship with the training incumbent. Some were fortunate. Sophia said that her incumbent always offered her opportunities. When she did one of her first funerals, her training incumbent came, but did not take part. *'He came for moral support, which was lovely, just in case anything went wrong.'* However, a lecturer during her training had shocked her by saying, *'I was aware of*

*things changing when I became a priest: I didn't feel much use as a deacon' and she didn't feel that other curates in training parishes who were priested understood or appreciated her ministry.*

Christina, too, had a good experience of her training post:

*I was serving my curacy ... and full-time stipendiary, as I say, working alongside this excellent priest ... We now became a good double act, because he was the kind of strategist and understood, held the vision really, for the parish, but because I had my eyes nearest to the ground I could tell whether that would work and how to go about it, so we were a terrific complementarity together.*

In chaplaincy, too, she found working with her priest colleagues was 'great.' Similarly, Lydia found that on returning to her sending parish after her curacy, she thoroughly enjoyed being part of the team.

Prochorus also had a good relationship with his training incumbent and was eager to build a complementary ministry: *'I would hope to be the eyes and ears of the parish priest, and would hope to be able to say to him, did you know this was going on? Because he is busy doing his own things.'* Julian's relationship with her training incumbent was good too: *'He's lovely, a really great person and is very supportive, and very keen to learn with me, I think.'* She did however, find the dynamics of the clergy Chapter strange. Having been used to being part of a friendly, relaxed team of colleagues before ordination, she found the Chapter awkward, competitive and somewhat joyless. However, she believed that this had nothing to do with her role as distinctive deacon.

Some respondents had moved on from their title post into other parishes or ministries where they were responsible for building the team or fostering the relationships. Johanna, in an incumbency role, was amusing about gathering her colleagues:

*I have a bit of a reputation for collecting clergy, like other people collect stamps really. So, I know that I had a lot of people who would help me, and who would come along and be the priest with*

*me ... I think the biggest thing that I have noticed and that I wouldn't have realised until I was here, is that having to have priests with me all the time means that message about working together is being reinforced in every possible way that you could conceive really.*

Junia affirmed the value of

*knowing that I've got a team backing me up in the office at the other end of town. I only have to pick up the phone and say, hey, and someone will come. And I have a very good incumbent, who treats us all very equally and with a lot of respect.*

Her incumbent was prepared to work collaboratively, in an enabling and supportive way, and the others in the ministry team had also been tremendously supportive, showing understanding of the distinctive deacon's role:

*So, I might ring [a team vicar] up and say, I've talked to this bloke and he wants to do so and so, can you that on? And he will do it, and the same with Chris, and our new team vicar has only been with us two months but she works collaboratively as well. [The team rector] does.*

There had been some difficulty with one of her colleagues who, after she was ordained priest, began to put Junia down. However, she put it down to the colleague's immaturity and lack of experience: *'I just have to take that 'you're only a deacon' sort of thing.'* This comment highlights that despite the often affirming relationships of distinctive deacons with their priest colleagues, education about the nature of the distinctive diaconate for those in other ministers is still lacking.

Hild was one of the respondents who had found the relationship with her training incumbent less positive. Among her priest colleagues in the cross-partnership group of local parishes, the relationships were fine: *'I've never particularly felt, in our cross-partnership group, I've never felt not wanted, if you like.'* With her own incumbent, however, it was a different matter:

*Even now, I have to remind myself that I am here for the parish, and the parish is not the vicar, because I often feel I'm (pause). I have the mushroom complex. You know, I'm kept in the dark, and I'm not sure if I am not being fed bullshit as well! (Laughter)*

Her incumbent was known to be a bit of a controller, and he had to be pushed and nudged into any kind of meeting: *'We don't have staff meetings. We never have staff meetings, except to get together occasionally and see who has visited who.'* Mark had had disagreements with his incumbent. One revolved around supporting the local Churches Together. Another was about the need to visit families before baptisms. He was philosophical about the way forward: *Well, you know, it's OK, we'll work through it.*

Even after many years in ministry, Brigid said:

*I don't feel very valued by my colleagues, but I do feel very valued by the congregation. (Pause). I think really, it's the disappointment in priestly colleagues who don't have a good understanding or an appreciation of having a deacon. (With resignation and disappointment).*

Although Nicanor felt that he had a good relationship with his incumbent, the interview suggested that he experienced her as quite forceful, and perhaps patronising. When discussing Nicanor's possible vocation, she closed down what he was saying and said, *'I'm not listening, you are.'*

Lydia, Phoebe and Agnes had all experienced relationships which had become so strained that they had to leave. Agnes found herself removed from her training incumbency within a very short time. An already poor relationship was reported as blowing up over a liturgical experiment: *'The following Tuesday I waltz into our staff meeting and [the training incumbent] said, I'm afraid I've decided I can't work with you anymore.'* Agnes did add, however: *'I can see, looking back on it, that I was quite challenging, actually, but I was just enthusiastic really, to get on with doing ministry.'* Phoebe too, had a curacy which ended in irretrievable

break-down with her incumbent, and had to move to another training parish. The relationship was reported as breaking down because of her incumbent's tradition, which restricted the areas of ministry that he allowed her to undertake, and partly reflected a personality clash. In contrast, Lydia's increasing problems with a parish priest came at the end of her ministry, when she had a lot of experience, and had proved to be competent at building collegial relationships:

*Latterly there was this growing distance, really, and I was invited or ... invited less and less to do anything in the way of leading services or liturgy or preaching. And I was just asked if there was a desperate need I suppose to fill in. I didn't go to many Benefice Ministry Team meetings because they were held on the same night that I had a Bible study group and my instinct was to do ministry rather than feeling quite superfluous apart from the Bible study group, who were growing and learning in a quite wonderful way ... And in the end, I decided to hand a letter to the bishop ... informing him of my intention to retire (long pause). So, that really is the end of the story with the Anglican Church .... But my orders haven't been revoked. And I pray to God that I will die a deacon. (with sadness but not rancour)*

Of course, break-downs in relationships are not confined to parish priests and distinctive deacon colleagues, but these stories do point once again to the problems caused by a lack of understanding of the role of a distinctive deacon. They also illustrate the wide range of expectations arising from the different relationships of different distinctive deacons to sacramental ministry. While, in part, the experiences of Agnes and Phoebe arose from their status of curate; Lydia had come to her final parish as a mature and experienced deacon, who could expect respect for her expertise and support in her role.

### **Deacon colleagues**

In 1999 Hall's study painted a picture of distinctive deacons who felt isolated in their ministry, and lacked a robust support structure. Part of the reason for this was that the distinctive diaconate in the Church of

England was very small and its members spread out. Although 57% of Hall's respondents were members of DACE, only 34% met up with other deacons on a regular basis and 17% did not know another distinctive deacon (Hall 1999, 233, 234).

In 2015 the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England was still small and it was unusual for a parish or a chaplaincy to have two or more distinctive deacons working together. Among the cohort there was one example of this. The relationship between the two distinctive deacons was not good, and they saw their ministerial roles quite differently. And it was within this collegial setting that the only instance was reported of criticism being expressed of the ministry of one deacon by another. Nicanor had a distinctive deacon colleague at one stage, and said of her, *'She didn't do services, and she was very much a deacon operating in the corners of the area. She was very much into prayer groups, but was not actually doing the things that [his incumbent] wanted.'* This was a fascinating observation, as the role he described 'in the corners of the areas' sounded profoundly diaconal, whereas 'doing the things that the incumbent wanted' reflected more the role of an assistant priest.

One hospital chaplaincy team involves three distinctive deacons, who are all part of the respondent cohort. The full-time lead chaplain, has recruited two others to work with her one day a week. The mutual support and understanding that they enjoy is very important to them. Some dioceses have forums where their distinctive deacons can meet together. Rhoda reported that in her diocese: *'We try to meet together as a [diocesan group] of deacons when we can. So, there are a number of us who still meet up and support each other.'* Both the dioceses which provided the biggest groups of respondents had some kind of meeting of deacons on a regular basis. These meetings were felt to be, in the main, useful and supportive. Sophia, who was still in her curacy, had only been to one meeting:

*I went last year, and met deacons, and people who had been deacons for a long time obviously shared their experiences.*

*Quite a few of those who are transitional deacons – I don't like that expression – but it expresses it, they came along to that as well, so that was really good.*

Rita experienced a strong collegial relationship among deacons in her diocese, and felt that this was a good thing, especially given the small numbers of deacons and the geographical challenges:

*In the last couple of years, we haven't met quite as much, in previous years we have tried to meet several times a year... But we are quite scattered across the diocese. There are pockets where there are more. And some a bit isolated. So, we have more [distinctive deacons] than most dioceses, but it is still a comparatively small number and scattered over a large area. We don't meet as much as we could do. And I think that's an issue. I think how deacons support one another is an issue because it is a very lonely ministry.*

Although there were twelve distinctive deacons in Junia's diocese, it too was a large diocese, geographically, and deacons had to travel considerable distances to meet up. She had built up a particular friendship with one other distinctive deacon and they attended training courses or conferences together. Conferences and courses can provide companionship, especially to those who are the only deacon in their diocese, or one of a very small group. Julian had been at a deacons' day conference, and reflected: *'it was such a relief, not to be explaining or trying to fit in and actually to just be with other deacons.'* With small numbers of distinctive deacons spread out across the Provinces of Canterbury and York, developing these wider links was important, and the building up of a distinctive deacon 'forum' within a diocese was an attractive and useful support mechanism.

DACE elicited mixed responses among the respondent cohort. Now defunct, at the time when I conducted the interviews it was the only national organisation for the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England. It was not exclusive to distinctive deacons, but priests were associate members. It was started when the first women were made



deacon, and Agnes remembered that it was intended to offer a focus for diaconal ministry in the Church of England after the closure of the deaconess order and the loss of the Head Deaconess.

The membership of DACE never reflected the number of distinctive deacons in the Church of England, in part because some distinctive deacons found collegiality and support within their own dioceses, and also because ministry is time consuming. Sophia had not considered becoming a member. Rhoda had tried to join DACE, but there had been a communication problem and she had received no response from the membership secretary. Johanna had been on the DACE executive committee, but had resigned: *‘I was ... just so frustrated with them. You just go round and round the same stuff all the time.’* Catherine had acted as a theological advisor to DACE for some years, but had given it up: *‘I didn’t really feel that they were going anywhere at that time, but that’s another matter.’* Mark was a member of DACE, but was also critical of it, suggesting: *‘In a way, it’s a bit like many parishes, it’s an elderly collection of deacons and people, who can’t move forward because they can’t work out what they’re for, you know.’* Christina had been an active member of DACE but had become too busy, but was re-joining the executive. Agnes, although deeply committed to DACE, echoed Mark’s concerns:

*There’s an issue, one of the challenges that DACE has is how it’s going to continue, because actually we are small, and as these different expressions of diaconate evolve, it’s hard actually to get them to engage with something bigger and wider. My diaconate is supported by all these thousands and thousands of deacons that I know are trying for the diaconate in a worldwide ... And a lot of them I have known over the years. But it is difficult to know how to get that across as DACE, and we have struggled really, to know how to be supportive, or even engage where there is an issue ... But we are moving up to a crisis, because we haven’t got the people who are going to carry it on.*

DACE closed in 2017 for the reasons that Agnes outlined. This is a loss: although like all human institutions DACE had its shortcomings, it had

provided support to many distinctive deacons. Its demise has left a void which the Church of England does not appear willing to fill; and which the distinctive deacons themselves are struggling to fill. However, progress has been made on the *deaconstories* website, and a WhatsApp group, in the hope that these could function as national meeting places for distinctive deacons, and the visits to the site show that it is meeting with some success.

As with many collegial relationships, those among distinctive deacons are confined by the pressures of time. While many of the respondent cohort were open to the idea of a national network, and diocesan wide gatherings, time to invest in them was limited by the requirements of day-to-day ministry.

### **Reader colleagues**

As has already been noted, Reader ministry occupies a territory somewhere between the ordained ministry of the Church of England, and accredited lay ministries. While it is definitely a lay ministry, it shares some characteristics with ordained ministry. Unlike most other lay ministries, Reader ministry is publicly and nationally authorised, with an oath to the bishop, and is legally supported with the bishop's licence. The structure of Reader ministry enables Readers to know that they act with the Church's authority. It gives them confidence to develop their gifts in exercising ministry. Reader ministry operates within clear structures, laid out in Canon Law and Bishops' regulations. Readers are nationally deployable and may move from diocese to diocese without further discernment or training, and the training for this vocational ministry is to a uniform, moderated standard. Whilst there are burgeoning lay ministries in almost every diocese, Reader ministry alone is nationally accredited, transferable, licensed by the bishop and governed by Canon. This gives to Readers an identity quite different from that of other lay ministers.

As discussed above, in 2003, a comprehensive report on Reader ministry in the Church of England was published. It was revised and updated in 2009. *Reader Upbeat* sought to give a contemporary picture of the ministry of Readers, to examine their role within the diversifying ministry of the church, and to make recommendations about Reader ministry in the future. It observed that with the advent of other forms of ministry, Readers were increasingly being cast in the role of teachers and preachers:

Readers are called to serve the Church of God and to work together with clergy and other ministers. They are to lead public worship, to preach and teach the word of God, to assist at the Eucharist and to share in pastoral and evangelistic work. As authorized lay ministers, they are to encourage the ministries of God's people, as the Spirit distributes gifts among us all. They are called to help the whole Church to participate in God's mission to the world ... Individually authorised ministries are best understood through the theological principles of focusing, representing and enabling what is true of the church as a whole. Thus, for example, Readers might focus, represent and enable the reality of the church as a teaching and learning community.

(Ministry Division 2009, 15)

Added to this was the role of 'lay theologian', a term which has been quoted to me in almost every context in which I have discussed Reader Ministry. The term was originally coined by Bishop Alec Graham, in 1984, when he was Chair of ACCM. He felt that Readers should become 'the Church's lay theologians, thinking, well-informed, articulate ... theological resource people' (Ministry Division 2009, 87, 88). The report also acknowledged that aspects of the ministry that Readers fulfilled belonged historically to the diaconate:

All that Readers do under the leadership of their incumbent has at certain times in history been the province of Deacons. Reader ministry is a ministerial task of diaconal character, focused in the office to which Readers are admitted, a

commissioned task or diakonia in the service of the gospel.

(Ministry Division 2009, 47)

Because Readers had been exercising this *diakonia* in the Church of England from the late nineteenth century onwards, fulfilling a much wider ministry than teaching and preaching, there is significant blurring of the two ministries. Chosen by Convocation in preference to the diaconate or sub-diaconate, Readers have come to undertake many different ministries, including the liturgical role of the deacon in many churches. In Annex 4, *Reader Upbeat* listed some of the activities through which Readers exercised their ministry, many of which extend well beyond the confines of the church building. Just a small sample includes hymn writing, organ playing, worship leading, art ministry, and a wide variety of chaplaincies. Readers lead school assemblies, church holiday clubs, and diocesan training courses. They undertake bereavement counselling, and many other forms of pastoral outreach. (Ministry Division 2009, 62, 63). From this list, it can be seen that almost any ministry that a deacon undertook could be in danger of treading on the toes of a Reader.

As discussed above, there have been two main responses to this overlap of role. One has been to suggest that the ministries of Reader and distinctive deacon are so similar that they are in essence the same ministry; and because the diaconate is enshrined in the ancient threefold orders, all Readers should be ordained as distinctive deacons. This has led to a fear of the clericalisation of Reader ministry, a concern that has been voiced to me on several occasions. Indeed, when one diocese offered the opportunity to its 'senior' Readers, that is, those who had been licensed for a number of years, to become distinctive deacons, several took up the offer. However, the situation had not been well handled and the remaining Readers construed it as an attempt at clericalisation, which devalued their ministry as Readers. Almost ten years later, the disquiet that this caused is still having repercussions. This is unfortunate as for those Readers who chose to be ordained it was

definitely a defining moment in their ministry. No slur on Reader ministry was intended. However, to many Readers, it is important that their ministry is precisely a lay ministry, but one which is licensed and carries authority. There is a distinction between ordained and Reader ministry, which Reader Upbeat seeks to articulate:

The deacon is a sign of the calling of all Christians to tasks of service. The priest is a sign that all Christians share together in Christ's royal priesthood, offering worship and intercession Godward, and, towards the world, being bearers of grace and the gospel. The bishop is a sign that God provides oversight and apostolic leadership for his church. Lay ministries, such as Reader, do not have symbolic significance as a sign of God's gift and calling in quite the same way. However, a Reader represents the opportunity for all lay people to become theologically equipped and ready to share in the Church's mission and ministry. (Ministry Division 2009, 14)

This could provide the ground to develop a clearer distinction between Readers and distinctive deacons.

Another response is to try to separate out two discrete ministries: a teaching and preaching one for Readers; and a liminal, pastoral one for distinctive deacons. However, the list above, taken together with the experience of the respondent cohort illustrates the difficulty in making clear-cut distinctions between the ministries of distinctive deacons and Readers. Some respondents felt that the historical overlap of roles was not going to go away, so that there needed to be some give and take at a parish level, when it came to working collegially. Sophia, clarifying how she understood the different roles of ministers in her church, said:

*A priest focuses perhaps on the people in the church. A deacon would be in community. A Reader is a preaching and teaching ministry, but having said that we have a*

*Reader-in-Training who is being licensed next month, and that is going to be quite interesting because we will have priest, deacon and Reader in the church, and he is very drawn to pastoral ministry as well, so it is going to be very interesting to see how that works out for him and he works full time. I have looked at his role description and there is a big overlap with mine, but I think all three of us are conscious of what the differences are and how that actually is going to be evidenced in the parish as well, because it is important that they understand the difference.*

Johanna too, had experienced the blurring of distinctive deacon and Reader ministries:

*Well, there is the old issue about Readers and deacons and what's the difference, and I think that the difference becomes narrower as time goes on. Certainly, the Readers in [Diocese Z] are beginning to be getting much more encouraged to be involved in pastoral work and things, and if they're doing that there's going to be very little difference between Readers and deacons. I know that the Reader down at [a neighbouring parish] is quite a new Reader, but she's doing all the deacon bits, and I know that the Readers in [the parish where her mother worships] are doing the deacon bits in the liturgy. And I understand that the Reader ministry is much more teaching and preaching, but there is always going to be that cross-over.*

She felt that this is always going to be an aspect of the ministry of the Church of England.

Other respondents however, felt that distinctive deacons should be reclaiming their historic ministry. Junia, who had been a Reader herself said:

*I think there should be more of us [distinctive deacons], to be quite honest. I think it's a role that the church lost years and years ago, and tried to fill with Readers, and it's not the*

*same thing and that's such a shame, because I think there are a lot of people out there, for whom Reader ministry is not right. I'm not going to say it's not good enough, because it's a different role altogether, and I could tell that as soon as I got into it, that the role of a deacon is very different from the role of a Reader, and I just feel so at home in what I'm doing, more than I ever did as a Reader. But yes, there are Readers who are Readers and so they should be.*

Nicanor, as was discussed above, after some inconclusive discernment, was licensed as a Reader. However, he felt that there was a disconnect between his title of Reader and the deacon shaped role he was fulfilling:

*I mean, it was a fulfilling ministry, but really, looking at it, a lot of things that I took to with enthusiasm were probably well on the way to a deacon anyway.*

Phoebe had a long journey to the distinctive diaconate. Having done three years lay training and then three years Reader training, she still had not found the right expression for her ministry: *'I felt like a square peg in a round hole, and again I couldn't put my finger on it, and continued as a Reader for twelve years.'* It was only after all this time that the distinctive diaconate was suggested to her as a possibility.

Julian, who had a strong bias towards a liminal ministry, felt there was a danger that too much ministry took place within the church, and that when people displayed a sense of vocation they were diverted towards a congregational centred ministry. There were five Readers in the parish where she served:

*And, you know, when people get interested in their faith they seem to become Readers and then they run the church, and you know ... well, what about what's going on **out there!** (With emphasis).*

Using her reading, and conversations of which she had been part, she reflected in this way on the differences between the roles of deacon and Reader:

*Well, I've got the kind of list in my head. One's licensed, one's ordained. One is about more about the ministry of Word, one's more about the ministry of the Eucharist, I suppose. One, I mean, Rosalind Brown, this is her list, one is prophetic in order to teach; and one teaches in order to be prophetic or something like that. I mean, it's an interesting question, because I heard recently ... it argued that Lay Readers are ministers in the work place who have these connections into church and bring people in. I have to admit, I have never seen that. I see Readers as ministers within church, who enable the running of the church and enhance the life of the church hugely, you know, I mean I'm married to a Reader so I have to be careful! You know, and have all sorts of important ministries, you know, and take funerals and are good ministers. But I don't see that necessarily them doing the sort of doorway and the transitions and the boundaries and margins thing as much, or as particularly missional. I probably see a deacon.*

This blurring of the roles of distinctive deacons and Readers is bound up with the historical choice of Reader ministry over the diaconate for men, in the mid-nineteenth century, and the development of the Deaconess Order for women within the same space of time. How they could be separated, and to what extent that would be practical or helpful will be considered in Chapter 7.

### **Conclusions**

The evidence supplied by the respondent cohort would seem to suggest that when it comes to day-to-day ministry, collegial relationships work fairly well, and in some situations, extremely well. The exceptions would seem to be, firstly, where a woman who is a distinctive deacon is put into a working situation where her ministry is not accepted because she is a woman, rather than because she is a distinctive deacon; secondly;



where the distinctive deacon's ministry impinges on a Reader, who has become accustomed to fulfilling the deacon's role, especially where that role is liturgical; and thirdly, and similarly, where a distinctive deacon's ministry impinges on that of a priest, who is accustomed to fulfilling a deacon's role, especially where that role is liturgical.

When the terms 'priestly ministry' or 'episcopal ministry' are used in the Church of England there can be no doubt that this ministry is exercised by a priest or a bishop. Yet when the term 'diaconal ministry' is used, it can describe a variety of accredited lay ministries and Reader ministry, as well as the distinctive diaconate. In the absence of a priest, an accredited lay minister or a Reader would not simply step up to the altar and celebrate communion. However, it is seen as wholly acceptable for a Reader or a priest to take on the role of the deacon in the Eucharist, even if there is a deacon present. The Church of England is in an anomalous situation in which its traditional third order of the diaconate has gone into abeyance, its place been filled by other ministries: and the Church seems reluctant to help distinctive deacons to inhabit their rightful place.

The collegial relationships that distinctive deacons do or do not have with their bishop, is crucial. While Ministry Division supports ministry in the dioceses, the shape of the ministry in each diocese lies in the hands of its diocesan bishop. While a diocesan bishop would not say, we do not have priests or we do not have Readers, they are prepared to say, we don't have distinctive deacons. Even distinctive deacons in Diocese Z, which has had a strong distinctive diaconate for some time, now feel that their order is under threat. In a Church where only 57% of dioceses have distinctive deacons, and only 21% of those have more than five distinctive deacons, is there a well-founded expectation that a thriving distinctive diaconate can really be re-established?

The factors that support the answer, yes, to that question are compelling. The first is that, despite the abuse of the distinctive diaconate, the lack of information for those discerning a calling, and the total absence of the

distinctive diaconate from many dioceses, the number of distinctive deacons has not fallen in the past 37 years. From the evidence of the respondent cohort, it would appear that if good and visible role models existed for the distinctive diaconate, more vocations would be discerned. The second is that those who do make it to ordination are very strong in their sense of diaconal calling. There is a myth, shared with me by several bishops, that most distinctive deacons go on to be ordained to the priesthood after a time. However, while it is true that some distinctive deacons are ordained priest, just as some Readers and accredited lay ministers are, too, this is in no way inevitable. Some distinctive deacons are ordained priest because they feel under pressure from others, including their bishop, to take this step, the sort of pressure described by Prochorus. The third factor relates to the decline of the Church of England. In this situation there is an increasing and urgent need for a strong missional ministry, building connections between the Gospel and those who need to receive it, in actions as well as words. As history appears to repeat itself in terms of the social problems that are increasing in England in the twenty-first century, the need for a distinctive diaconate that incarnates the mission of the church in a similar way to the witness of the Deaconess Order in the nineteenth century is compelling.

As Chapter 5 emphasised, the Church of England needs to stand behind the recommendations that it has made concerning a distinctive diaconate, providing well-advertised discernment and training paths, and ensuring that this ministry is available in all dioceses. Those in other ministries need to be given some understanding of what the distinctive diaconate is, and what it means to have a distinctive deacon as a colleague. The evidence from the respondent cohort, about their collegial relationships with other distinctive deacons also shows that distinctive deacons need to give more priority to advertising themselves, and to being mutually supportive. Here too, a structural problem needs to be addressed. Since 1987, when the Deaconess Order was closed, there has been no deacon shaped space in the Church of England, in which distinctive deacons can thrive. The Church of England needs to put in place structures to nurture

and support distinctive deacons; however, distinctive deacons are likely to have to be proactive in causing that to happen.

7 Deployment



(<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism>)

When I gathered my most extensive set of statistics, including the number of distinctive deacons, their gender and approximate age, from each diocese in the Provinces of Canterbury and York, at the outset of my data gathering, in 2015, certain points became apparent. While there

was a wide age range, with distinctive deacons being between 30 and 84 years old, the age profile was generally older. Each diocese was asked to indicate the age range of their distinctive deacons. Two dioceses reported having distinctive deacons in their thirties; eight had distinctive deacons in their forties; fourteen in their fifties; sixteen in their sixties; eight in their seventies; and one in their eighties. Dioceses were also asked to report on distinctive deacons in active ministry, and, of these, at least 10% were over retirement age for the Church of England. Of the 100 active distinctive deacons that were accounted for in the dioceses' statistical evidence, 76 were women and 24 were men. Of a further 20 candidates in training, 16 were women and 4 were men, so that in both instances, women outnumbered men by more than three to one. This ratio of women to men was very close to that noted by Hall. Of her respondent cohort 74% were female and 26% were male (Hall 1999, 202).

While the age profile was similar to that of clergy generally, with a spike at 53-63 for both men and women; the proportion of men to women was inverse. Among stipendiary clergy there were 73% men to 27% women, and among self-supporting ministers (SSM), including Ordained Local Ministers (OLM) and Non-Stipendiary Ministers NSM, there were 49% men to 51% women. It therefore appeared that the distinctive diaconate was either more attractive, or more accessible, to women than men, in contrast to the priesthood, or that there was a gender bias regarding who is encouraged to explore the distinctive diaconate. The respondent cohort reflected the dioceses' statistics for distinctive deacons fairly closely, for both gender and age – thirteen (81%) were women, and three (19%) were men. The largest age group were six in their sixties (37.5%), followed by five in their fifties (31%), three in their forties (19%) and two in their seventies (12.5%). The age range lay between 45 and 74; unlike the larger picture, the respondent cohort included no-one in their thirties or their eighties.

There are several issues surrounding the deployment of distinctive deacons in the Church of England. The cartoon above, from the internet site, *Everyday Deaconism*, points to the issue of pay, or, more accurately, the lack of it. The diocesan data shows that very few distinctive deacons receive a stipend from the Church of England. That the cartoon appears on a site created by distinctive deacons demonstrates that payment is an issue on which deacons have a strong view. Several of the respondent cohort have described situations where they have entered a ministry which is non-stipendiary or in which they are paid by a body other than the Church of England, because the church will not fund ministries which do not fit the *status quo*. The very existence of distinctive deacons is hidden by the way in which the Church of England presents its information and statistics about its ordained ministers. In Crockford's Clerical Directory, the official directory of clergy in the Church of England, the main descriptor of an entry is by current deployment. Consequently, as I discovered by looking up each member of the respondent cohort, distinctive deacons appear as curate, non-stipendiary minister, chaplain, or retired with permission to officiate. There is no way of finding distinctive deacons just by that descriptor. Ministry statistics available from the Ministry Division of the Church of England are gathered only under the heading of 'clergy' (CofE. 2015). Because no statistics relating solely to distinctive deacons, separate from transitional deacons or priests, are held centrally by the Church of England, it is very difficult to get a clear picture of their deployment. It was only by approaching each diocese and requesting the information that I was able to assemble the data given in Appendices D and E.

### **The profile of deployed distinctive deacons**

Between 1987 and 1994, the description 'Parish Deacon' was used to signify women who were deacons and working in parish ministry. However, as Hall noted, the title 'Parish Deacon' had no legal standing (Hall 1999, 211), and when women were admitted to the priesthood, the title ceased to be used, even though not all women who were deacons were ordained priest, and a small number of distinctive deacons

remained. As noted above, none of the overall titles used for the respondent cohort in Crockford's Clerical Directory reflected that they were distinctive deacons. The titles were the same as those used for priests, and were also somewhat random in their application. Agnes and Lydia were *Retired*. Catherine was also retired but was described as *PTO Canon*. Brigid and Christina were also *PTO*, although one of them was engaged in active ministry and one was not. Prochorus, Julian and Johanna were described as *Curates*, even though the former two were in their title posts, and had only been ordained for a year, while Johanna was a deacon in charge of a parish, and had been ordained for 12 years. *Curate* only appeared to appertain to stipendiary ministry, and Sophia who was also in her title post but without stipend was described as *NSM*. Rita was stipendiary, but not in a parochial capacity, and described as *LTO Canon*. Nicanor, Hild, Mark and Junia were all described as *NSM*, although Junia was past the clergy retirement age of 70. The identity of distinctive deacons, which, as we saw, was masked by their inclusion in the House of Clergy, was also masked by the description of their ministries. There appears to be no mechanism for differentiating distinctive deacons from their priest colleagues and although clergy are able to check the accuracy of the information provided about them, they are not able to choose the descriptors of their entries.

### **Remuneration**

Of Hall's respondents, 28% had been ordained in 1987, the first year that women could be ordained, and of those 26% had been deaconesses. Although 52% of Hall's respondents had held stipendiary posts, she noted that the number of stipendiary posts was falling at the time she was writing. She did not record the percentage of her respondents who were in stipendiary posts at the time of the survey, but did say that 16% were in sector ministries, financed by other institutions, that 31% had accepted a non-stipendiary post at some point in their ministry, when they would have preferred a stipendiary one, and that the two dioceses which had the largest number of distinctive deacons each only employed one stipendiary deacon. She further noted that although stipendiary posts had

been available to deacons and deaconesses before the ordination of women as priests in 1994, the number of these posts had begun to decrease (Hall 1999, 205).

The information supplied by the dioceses in 2015 showed that this decline in stipendiary posts had continued. Only 14 of the 100 distinctive deacons received a stipend from the Church of England; another 18 were in sector ministries, being paid full-time or part-time by another body. This meant that 32 were paid and 68 were not paid for their ministry. Unpaid distinctive deacons therefore outnumbered their paid colleagues by more than 2 to 1; those not paid by the Church of England (i.e. paid by another body or not at all) outnumbered those receiving a stipend from the Church of England by more than 6 to 1. Again, these statistics are very different to overall statistics for clergy in the Church of England, which showed that 39% of all clergy were stipendiary, while 16% were self-supporting ministers, and 13% were in chaplaincy and other non-parochial paid posts. The remaining 32% were either retired or in secular employment and held Permission to Officiate. The profile of deployment for the distinctive diaconate, unlike that of deployment of all ordained ministers taken together, showed a marked prevalence of women who were not paid by the Church of England. However, in terms of payment, the respondent cohort diverged from the wider statistics. Taking status of employment from their present post (or the one from which they retired where appropriate), eight of the respondents (50%) were not paid for their work in ministry, although some were working part-time in secular jobs unrelated to their ordination, because they needed the income; five (31%) were or had been stipendiary; and three (19%) were or had been paid for their ministry by other employers.

The question which arose from this data was this: as the majority of the respondents came from two dioceses, which, at least to some extent, promoted the distinctive diaconate, are more stipendiary posts being offered to distinctive deacons in dioceses with larger cohorts? Referring this back to the wider statistics, this did not seem to be the case. The



relation between the number of distinctive deacons in a diocese and the number in a stipendiary post does not follow a pattern. While some of the dioceses with the largest number of distinctive deacons had relatively few in stipendiary posts (four out of thirty, none out of eleven, none out of ten, none in seven), some with fewer distinctive deacons had a higher proportion in stipendiary posts (two out of six, two out of three, one out of two, one out of one). It did not follow, therefore, that the presence of distinctive deacons in larger numbers had any effect on the policy of a diocese when it came to paying the distinctive deacons.

**Correlation between a range of factors (age, gender, family situation, educational or professional background, training pathway) and deployment, in the respondent cohort**

Is it possible to find any patterns within the deployment of distinctive deacons from the experiences of the respondent cohort? Age does seem to be related to deployment status, in that, those who were aged 45 or younger at the time of their ordination were more likely to be stipendiary. Of the seven (44%) in this age bracket, five had been ordained into full-time stipendiary posts, one was part-time stipendiary; and one NSM held a part-time salaried secular post. Of the nine respondents (56%) who were aged 46 or over at the time of their ordination, none had been ordained into stipendiary posts, although Rhoda had moved from being a non-stipendiary deacon to stipendiary parish deacon at the end of her first year of ordination. Five further respondents worked part-time in secular posts, and were NSM in a parish; one was an NSM in a parish but worked part-time in paid chaplaincy; and two were NSMs in a parish having retired from full-time secular jobs. Four fulfilled a diaconal ministry in a secular setting, for example through hospital chaplaincy; and two had secular employment as a source of income, which financed the time they spent in diaconal ministry as an NSM in a parish setting.

Gender did not appear to affect deployment status. The three men in the respondent cohort were spread across the range of working situations. One had been ordained into a stipendiary parish post, in which he was

still serving; one worked part-time in secular employment and was an NSM in a parish; and one was an NSM in a parish having retired from full-time secular employment. This meant that 25% of the stipendiary respondents were men, slightly lower than the proportion of men to women in the whole respondent cohort. In the diocesan statistics, the incidence of stipendiary male distinctive deacons was even lower. While 25% of the distinctive deacons were men, only 7% of stipendiary distinctive deacons were men. Amongst the distinctive deacons there was no bias towards paying men a stipend, as there clearly is in the statistics for priests, but rather the opposite.

Neither was deployment status dependent on marital status or family situation. Of the five unmarried distinctive deacons in the respondent cohort, one was in full-time stipendiary ministry, one was in full-time chaplaincy paid by the NHS, one was working part-time in higher education, and two were NSMs, who had part-time secular employment. Of the five who were married, and did not have children, one was in full-time stipendiary ministry, one was in full-time chaplaincy, one was an NSM who had part-time secular employment; and two were NSMs after retirement from full-time secular employment. Of the remaining six who were married and had children, two were in full-time stipendiary ministry, one was in part-time stipendiary ministry, one was in full-time chaplaincy, paid by a charity, and two were NSMs, with part-time secular employment.

When it came to education, training and previous work experience, again the picture was varied. Four of the respondent cohort had had no formal vocational or academic qualifications prior to ministerial training, although one of these had trained at work and had a skilled and responsible job in a scientific field. Of these four, one had spent her whole ministry in stipendiary posts, two had been NSM with some paid chaplaincy responsibility, and one had been NSM. Three respondents had vocational qualifications. These included a qualification in social work and training in the police force. Of these, one was in full-time hospital

chaplaincy, and two were ordained as NSM after retirement from secular posts. Three more had vocational qualifications and had subsequently gained a bachelor degree. Of these, one was in full-time stipendiary ministry, one was full-time paid hospital chaplaincy, and one was NSM after retirement from a secular post. Two had bachelor degrees and PGCEs, of whom one was in full-time stipendiary ministry and one was NSM after retirement from a secular post. One respondent had an MA and a PGCE and was in part-time stipendiary ministry. Two respondents had MAs but no vocational qualifications, of whom one was in full-time stipendiary ministry, and one had retired from full-time chaplaincy ministry. The final respondent had a PhD and was retired after a ministry that had been NSM, supported by part-time posts with various employers. Her ministry had been different to the other respondents, as much of it had been about raising the profile of the distinctive diaconate, and exploring ministry through academic research and writing. The variations showed that there was no direct correlation between level of qualification prior to training for ministry and access to stipendiary posts.

What was of note, however, was that eleven (69%) of the respondent cohort had a background in caring professions. These included nursing, teaching, social work, lay pastoral care, and community policing. There is no stipulation that those candidating for the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England should already have a qualification in another caring profession, as there is often in other denominations, and in other parts of the Anglican communion. However, there was a strong tendency towards these skills and callings among the respondent cohort. For ten (62.5%) of the respondents, exercising a caring role, using pastoral skills, was a key part of their ministry. A particular set of skills, and a heart for pastoral ministry were both an important aspect of their distinctive diaconate, and when it came to paid deployment, either by the Church of England or by another body, these were seen as more relevant than the level of education received.

A correlation was found between the expectation that a candidate for the distinctive diaconate would be going into stipendiary ministry, and the type of training that they undertook. Three of the five respondents who were ordained into stipendiary posts had trained full-time in residential theological colleges, while all the other respondents were trained on non-residential, part time, local training schemes. A correlation between age and stipendiary status has already been seen. Of the three members of the respondent cohort who trained full time, two were youngest at the time of ordination.

These statistics raised the question, were posts for distinctive deacons mainly non-stipendiary because those who inhabited this ministry were looking for non-stipendiary posts; or did the profile of distinctive deacons reflect the lack of stipendiary posts? To answer this, I considered the deployment experiences of the respondents.

### **Descriptions of deployment from the respondent cohort**

Of the five members of the respondent cohort in stipendiary ministry, four were, or had been before retirement, full time. Amongst the respondent cohort, Rita and Agnes had been ordained youngest, and both were ordained before women could be priested. Between 1987 and 1994, when the diaconate was the only ordained ministry that women could enter, 57% of women who were ordained deacon were stipendiary (Francis and Robbins 1999, 1, 2). By the time women were being admitted to the priesthood, Rita and Agnes had both proved their ability as ministers, and were therefore in a strong position to command a stipend while retaining their status as distinctive deacons. Rita was aware that there were assumptions that she would be priested when that became a possibility, but because she was so clear in her calling, she received support from her theological college:

*I think initially they did [assume that I would be priested] but they were very supportive, and particularly the Vice Principal had a very good sense of the diaconate ... and he was enormously helpful and supportive ...*

Of those in stipendiary ministry, only Agnes had been full-time stipendiary for the whole of her ministry. She was discerned as a deaconess before women could be ordained, and was ordained deacon in 1987, at the end of her training. After problems in her first post, she was offered full-time chaplaincy work at a hospital. When asked if this was paid for by the Health Service, she replied: *'No. The diocese said, carry on, but do that [i.e. chaplaincy]. They were so embarrassed I think, about what happened, really, they were just glad that there was something I could do that they didn't have to think about.'* By the time women were priested, Agnes was acting as Advisor for Women's Ministry to her diocesan Bishop, and making links with diaconal bodies in other denominations. Agnes and Rita fit the wider statistical evidence that those who were younger, and those who were ordained deacon before 1994, were more likely to retain their stipendiary status. In their interviews, their manner showed a confidence in their ability, and the right, to command a stipend.

Christina was ordained at the third youngest age amongst the respondent cohort. She was also ordained into full-time stipendiary ministry, but family responsibilities caused her to move from full-time parish ministry into a variety of part time-posts and finally into hospital chaplaincy. By that time, she was not confident that the Church of England would have offered her a stipendiary post:

*A job came up at a hospital, and as chaplain with responsibility for another hospital too, but working in the first hospital's team. So, I applied for that, got it, and went into hospital ministry at that point. So, I was no longer a problem for the Church of England! Paid by the National Health, so, that was a great sigh of relief, I'm sure to the archdeacon and everyone else, because deacons in stipendiary posts are like hen's teeth.*

At the time that Christina took the chaplaincy post, her previous training incumbent was keen that she should be licenced as a deanery deacon with responsibility for lay training, an area in which she had a great deal of expertise:

*But there wasn't any money, so it didn't happen. But I am quite happy that it didn't, actually. I'm fine. The way it worked out was fine. So, that was me in my stipendiary ministry. (Change to ironic tone): And going to get a pension of a lump sum of £5,000, and I get £1,000 a year. How good is that, when I'm 65!*

Unlike Agnes and Rita, Christina was ordained in 1997, by which time the priesthood had been open to women for three years, and her wish to remain a distinctive deacon had come to be seen as a 'problem'. While her training incumbent could see the value of using her gifts as a deacon, this was not explored at any other level.

Johanna came into the distinctive diaconate after a career in social work. When she felt a vocation to ordained ministry, an income was essential. She was initially ordained as an NSM while still working full time. The parish where she worshipped started to have referrals from the youth justice team, for support through bereavement counselling. The convenor of the scheme wanted Johanna to have a part-time salary for doing that work, enabling her to move more fully into ministry:

*...which might have helped, but I think it was too heavy duty and I can just (pause). If I had gone for that option, it would have been too insecure. Am I going to get enough work to pay the mortgage, and all the other stuff? I chickened out from going there.*

She looked at other options that would allow her to move away from her full-time secular employment:

*There weren't any obvious openings for a stipend, but there was a potential house-for-duty post, and I started to think that I could cut down my hours [in social work] and do house-for-duty and that might be quite a nice way of doing it ... In the end, it worked out in the best, really, and I spoke to the churchwardens here, I spoke to the archdeacon, who had been the vicar who supported me in the first place ... He was very keen to support me and so I came here in 2010.*

The role of Deacon-in-Charge had subsequently gained Johanna a stipend, but, as discussed earlier, it detracted from her role as a distinctive deacon. She was aware that her situation was unusual for a deacon and was not confident that she would find another stipendiary post if she moved on from her present one.

Prochorus and Julian were both in the first year of their ministry. Prochorus was full-time stipendiary, but he was already fearful that he would not be able to remain stipendiary without being priested:

*I went to the DDO and went through discernment. The Bishop said, that's OK – stipendiary deacon with the potential to be incumbent ... But I think there is a tension – who you purport to be and what the church wants. They are ultimately the ones who house us and pay us ...*

At several points in his interview, Prochorus demonstrated the tensions between his calling to a diaconal ministry, a sense of obedience to the present bishop, and the need for a stipend. There was also the frustration that one bishop had led him to believe that employment would be available as a distinctive deacon, and that the next could call that into question, undermining his sense of calling, and of stability.

Julian's working pattern was complex. Although she was a stipendiary parish deacon in name, she did not receive a full stipend; she also worked for a community project, for which she received a part-time salary; and did some freelance communications work:

*My training incumbent oversees my whole curacy, but actually what happens is, I have two days a week, 2½ days a week, allocated to an office job, two days in the parish, and Sunday, so Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday I'm in the parish, by Monday, Tuesday and Friday I am doing my job and then the Bishop's work comes in as and when on top of that! I don't think that sustainable even for 3½ years.*

Julian's deployment situation was already tiring and frustrating. She needed an income in order to support her family, but she also felt a strong

call to work with those on the edge of society. She was afraid that when she finished her curacy either there would be no stipendiary post available, or only in a place where her ministry was not really needed:

*I happen to have three jobs at the moment, but be honest, I absolutely love, more than I thought I ever would, being in a very ordinary suburban parish, with a very good training incumbent. I could easily see myself there full time ... But yes, that would be my absolute dream, otherwise I think they would put me either in the cathedral or [a major parish church] because they are about the only churches in our diocese that don't have one priest, and all the other churches that could afford a deacon, are in the very well-off areas, which ... I can't see what I would do there as much.*

Julian explained how receiving a stipend depended on training for a role which involved primary responsibility. This was tied to being an incumbent, and therefore would not allow for a stipend for a diaconal role:

*I went through as an assistant minister or something, from BAP which apparently means I can't ... I shouldn't really be paid and this whole thing about attaching stipends to primary responsibility, which seems to be quite un-deacon-friendly.*

She felt caught between the world of salaried work and that of stipendiary ministry:

*I wanted a stipend, because I didn't like to have to be thinking, well, I need to do this for this next job, and I need to be thinking about progression, and you know I wanted to be free to not earn a living, which is what I think a stipend is, and actually now you see I still feel as though I'm on a stipend, but I have a job, and actually it's difficult, you know, it's difficult in all sorts of practical ways, it's like, am I working or not working? Can I have time off in lieu or am I supposed to be just like a minister and work, you know. I have outcomes and all kinds of things that don't really fit with the stipend way of life, and I think it is quite a*



*big deal and I would actually still say that I wanted the stipend and the dog collar.*

Julian was, in effect, being treated as a stipendiary curate, in terms of the church's expectations, without the church having to pay in full for her curacy. Like Johanna, she also faced the prospect of having to compromise her ministry as a deacon in order to retain a stipendiary post.

Phoebe and Rhoda were in full-time chaplaincy, employed by the NHS. For them, hospital chaplaincy was the form of ministry which best expressed their diaconate and had been the place in which they had experienced a positive working environment, after negative experiences of parish ministry. Phoebe had been a Reader for many years before she had become aware of the existence of the distinctive diaconate. At the time, she was working as a counsellor, and when she was ordained it was as an NSM in her sending parish. However, her curacy did not go well, and she felt that her training incumbent did not value her or understand the role of distinctive deacon that she now inhabited. Phoebe had already been working as a bank chaplain for her local hospital,<sup>14</sup> and when a vacancy arose for a full-time member of the chaplaincy team she applied, and was appointed. Her diocese allowed her to complete her curacy on a very part-time NSM basis, in another parish, while working as a chaplain. As Phoebe's diocese does not have stipendiary distinctive deacons, she would not have been able to find a stipendiary parish appointment. For her, hospital ministry works the best, but she recognises that deacons would also be a resource in other contexts: *'I do hope that the diaconate is something that is growing because I think there are a lot of places that a deacon can actually work, and I've found that place is here.'* Rhoda had also been ordained into an NSM parish post, and was then asked to move to a stipendiary one. However, her incumbent in the new parish did not understand the role of a distinctive deacon and could not work collaboratively with her. When the chaplaincy post was advertised, she was encouraged to apply. She

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<sup>14</sup> Bank chaplains are employed for a certain period per week, usually 24 hours, of which they work a shift and are on call for the remaining time.

described getting that post as one of the greatest turn arounds in her life: *'I am blessed because I have a full-time (pause). I am paid to be a deacon, not by the church, but by the NHS.'* Rhoda had found a job where she felt her ministry to be truly diaconal, collaborative, and suitably remunerated. Although the Church of England had offered her a stipendiary post, it had not created the working conditions that allowed her to remain in parish ministry.

Similarly, Brigid, although she had begun her ministry as an NSM in a parish, and her present post was that of a *'very part-time'* Cathedral Deacon, felt that her defining ministry had been in hospital and hospice chaplaincy:

*One of my dreams, but I thought would never come true, was to work at a hospice in my new capacity as an ordained person. And that was my saving grace. I really would not have survived, I don't think as a deacon or any other shape or form of ordained ministry, if it had not been for the hospice, because there, they were used to professional women. I was respected, I was valued, and I was there for 13 years.*

Brigid had accepted that her ministry would be non-stipendiary, not because she did not want a stipendiary role, but because she knew that it would cause problems in her marriage:

*I was paid by the hospice, so I was a self-supporting minister. The church side of things was always non-stipendiary, yes. (AS: And was that something that you understood would be the case from the outset?) Yes, it was, and the reason it was, was because of my husband at the time, I knew that, he would not be happy to move somewhere for me to be a parish deacon or priest, and live in a vicarage or rectory. It just... It just wouldn't have worked. So, for that reason, really and only for that reason, I always assumed that I would be non-stipendiary.*

While Brigid's reasons for seeking a stipend were personal, like Phoebe and Rhoda, she did not find much job satisfaction in her parish ministry,

and looked to a secular employer to find respect for her as an ordained person, and a woman in the workplace.

The NSM distinctive deacons fell into two main groups; those who had been ordained after retiring from full-time secular employment, and those who had not been in full-time employment and had been ordained at a younger age. Their experiences of ministry were broadly similar. There was a marked level of job satisfaction, although there were times when, as NSMs, they felt taken for granted. Non-stipendiary ministry offered a degree of flexibility, but sometimes it also made it difficult for the NSM distinctive deacons to be as involved in their ministry as they might have wished. Sophia worked three days in her parish, one of which was Sunday. This pattern allowed her to work as a bank hospital chaplain one day a week. This meant that she was on call for a 24-hour period. She felt that being an NSM was quite difficult for someone like her, who didn't live in the parish. Although she described her incumbent as involving her in everything, she also regretted missing out on taking school assemblies, which happened on a day when she was not there.

Mark did two days a week paid work in a school, and, as he described it, *'the other two, three, whatever in the parish.'* It was clear that Mark enjoyed his parish ministry greatly, and was not much concerned about counting the hours that he worked:

*I sat down with a priest from a neighbouring parish and, who was to have been my mentor. And we looked through a sort of job description and I think I was supposed to work a day-and-a-half each week in the parish or something. But it didn't quite work out like that.*

He did not like the description part-time:

*But part-time is an awful word, isn't it, or really unhelpful word? I try really not to say to people, because in effect I work... I retired in January 2008, but I'm still full time. So, I am still full time, its dual. I didn't plan it, it just evolved.*

Mark described a fairly good working relationship with his recently appointed incumbent and saw part of his ministry as being able to prepare the ground for him. However, as discussed above, when the parish was in interregnum, Mark felt that he was not supported or consulted.

Hild described herself as a part-time curate. She was retired from a secular occupation, but she still needed to work part time. She ministered three-and-a-half days a week in the parish, one of which was Sunday. The rest of the time she is working for herself, cleaning, gardening for people, 'Yes, to pay the bills.' As we saw in a previous Chapter, Hild's incumbent was not good at working collaboratively with her or involving her fully in shaping the shared ministry of the parish. This experience was shared by Lydia. When she moved to her present diocese and was licensed as an NSM in a parish, she found it difficult to negotiate what she felt to be a deacon's role. There was no working agreement and the incumbent used all the other members of the ministry team for church-based tasks such as leading worship, and taking baptisms and funerals. Lydia felt a strong call to guiding people in prayer and reflection, and to work in schools. While this was accepted by her incumbent, it made her isolated from the rest of the ministry team. She was rarely invited to take the deacon's role at the altar. A process of steady alienation ended in Lydia offering her resignation. However, in order to avoid any questions or confrontations, Lydia officially retired rather than resigning.

Junia approached her ministry almost as if it were full time.

*I could fill my week with work, and have to say no, and I find that hard. They tend to forget in the parish that I am older than most of the clergy, and the other thing they forget is that am not paid! But I was saying to our team vicar this morning, I could work every day of the week. I could fill my days easily, but I have to learn to say no, which is quite hard. I have services on three out*

*of every four Sundays, though we do try and give me a Sunday off.*

This approach to ministry was shared by Nicanor. Both he and Junia had been ordained after they had retired from full-time secular employment. They were both in posts where they felt valued and accepted for their ministry, although, as seen above, Nicanor fulfilled a role which in some ways was more akin to an assistant priest.

Catherine's ministry was different from the other categories, in that, although she had been a deaconess, and ordained in the first year that women were admitted to the diaconate, she had never been paid directly by the Church of England, but had earned a living by working for tertiary education establishments, *'I've never been paid directly by the Church of England as such, even when I was vice principal of [a training institution].'* She served as a non-stipendiary curacy, as this was a requirement after her ordination, and she was then appointed to a salaried post with a secular education institution. Catherine's ministry was defined by her academic career, which had been interwoven with her working life, throughout which she had been a strong advocate for the distinctive diaconate and had worked in collaborative partnerships with deacons and theologians from many different denominations and countries.

While it became clear that most of those working as NSMs are not concerned about receiving a stipend, as they were, in the main, retired, those who are currently stipendiary and of working age are anxious about the lack of stipendiary posts in the future. As has been seen in Chapter 5, several of the respondents were not aware of the distinctive diaconate as a ministry open to them, until they were older and had spent many years in other ministries. Of the stipendiary deacons, only Agnes and Rita had not had difficulty finding stipendiary deployment. Christina had to move into chaplaincy to ensure a salary; Johanna had remained stipendiary only by inhabiting an incumbent style ministry; Prochorus feared that he would have to bow to the pressure to be priested, and Julian struggled to

support a ministry which looked like a traditional stipendiary curacy, while holding down two other jobs. For the other respondents, the main issue appeared to be that of being valued and respected. Phoebe, Rhoda and Brigid had all found ministries that brought them respect, responsibility, and the opportunity to exercise a diaconal ministry. Sophia, Junia, Catherine and Nicanor generally enjoyed their ministry, had supportive and collaborative colleagues, and felt that they were able to inhabit the distinctive diaconate in a meaningful way. Mark, Hild and Lydia, on the other hand, had found that they were not able to work collaboratively with their colleagues, and felt that they were treated as subordinates, either because of their NSM status or because they were distinctive deacons. Most of the respondent cohort felt that in terms of collegiality, respect and stipendiary status for distinctive deacons as a body, the situation was unsatisfactory.

### **The view of the respondent cohort about stipends for deacons**

In 1994, at the end of the 'long diaconate', as part of the study of female deacons undertaken by Leslie Francis and Mandy Robbins, their respondents were asked about their satisfaction in their ministry. While age, marital status and church tradition made very little difference to the satisfaction they felt, stipendiary status did make a difference:

While four out of every five (79%) women deacons engaged in stipendiary ministry claimed that they felt satisfied with their work in the church, the proportion fell to 64% among non-stipendiary women deacons. While two out of every three (66%) women deacons engaged in stipendiary ministry claimed that they were successful at overcoming difficulties in their ministry, the proportion fell to 53% among non-stipendiary women deacons. While 89% of the women deacons engaged in stipendiary ministry felt that they were accomplishing things in their ministry, the proportion fell to 84% among non-stipendiary women deacons ... Overall, the present data suggests that the non-stipendiary women deacons may feel somewhat less well off than the stipendiary women deacon. While four out of every five

(81%) of the stipendiary women deacons felt that they had enough money to live comfortably, the proportion fell to 71% among the non-stipendiary women deacons. (Francis and Robbins 1999, 157)

Over twenty years later, these findings were still reflected across the respondent cohort, where there was strong agreement that it was unfair that distinctive deacons were so rarely stipendiary, and that many opportunities were missed to deploy distinctive deacons more appropriately and imaginatively. Brigid pointed out the assumptions that are made about those who have a vocation to the distinctive diaconate:

*I don't know whether a stipendiary ministry as a deacon is ever really discussed with people who are looking at a vocation and not really knowing what they are called to. Maybe they do, but I have the feeling they probably don't... I think it's been seen as a non-stipendiary part-time role, especially for women.*

Johanna, too, was sceptical about the chance of anything changing in the Church of England's view of stipends for distinctive deacons. She felt that there was no point in promoting the distinctive diaconate unless there were more stipendiary posts on offer:

*Unless there are jobs for deacons with money to pay them, what is the point of us sitting here saying, how can we attract more people to be deacons? There is no point whatsoever, until people are going to get paid for it. People have to live and is not going to happen unless it's recognised nationally. There's no point training people unless there is going to be a job for them ...I wish we could encourage the Church of England to appoint a deacon in every parish and pay them, but I can't see it.*

Junia was sure that there were ministers who felt called to the distinctive diaconate but needed a stipend. She gave the example of one of her colleagues. *He said that if they paid deacons, he thinks his vocation is to the diaconate, not to the priesthood, but he can't afford to support his family on nothing.* In some dioceses one of the assumptions is that the distinctive diaconate will be a non-stipendiary ministry. This reflects the view that distinctive deacons are a deficient ministry because they are not

sacramental ministers, and that only those who can do the ‘whole thing’, warrant a stipend. Rhoda expressed how demoralising it is: *‘If the church has invested financially in you, trained you, then to be told, I’m not sure if there’s a future in the distinctive diaconate.’* Given that there was so much passion about the ministry they inhabited, and that so many of the respondents had to fight so hard to be distinctive deacons, it was sad to hear the despondency that many in the respondent cohort felt about the lack of respect when it came to deployment and payment.

However, some of the respondents, while articulating frustration about the lack of stipendiary posts for distinctive deacons, had suggestions to make about more imaginative deployment strategies. Rhoda argued that the Church of England is simply not engaging in joined up thinking about its needs and the ministries available to it:

*They talk so much about strategy and mission, and their eyes seem to be closed to the one group of people that could be the vanguard because that’s what they’re there for.*

Her solution would be to deploy distinctive deacons across a deanery rather than just a parish:

*One of the things I feel the church could look at is using a stipend in the deanery, which is where you have these high populations of nursing homes and care homes. For a deacon to be particularly there to train people to be visitors, to lead worship in nursing homes, in care homes. I think one of the things that the church really struggles to do is to think outside the box. So, they think stipend and they think parish, whereas I would want to say, think stipend think deanery. What is the biggest need in your deanery? Have someone there who can go out but also train people? Help parishes meet the needs of those people. We’re actually going to start working on a plan for this deanery, and one of my proposals will be that we work towards putting a business case to the diocese.*



While Rhoda had suggestions for changing the situation, Christina believed that only a complete re-appraisal of the situation would have any impact:

*It needs a complete root and branch rethink about how we understand the three-fold order in the church of England. And what we need in terms of selection, training and employment, because it is not working. You get lippy bints like me who make a fuss but there are not that many of us! (Laughter).*

She had put her finger on an essential point. The distinctive diaconate in the Church of England is a tiny ministry, and it has no discrete and effective voice within the synodical system. As we have seen, several reports over the past fifty years have made a strong recommendation that the distinctive diaconate should be encouraged, but no structure, such as the one Christina suggested – for selection, training and deployment – has ever been put in place.

Christina went on to point out where the power and authority lies, with regard to promoting the distinctive diaconate: with the bishops. *I don't think it's Synod that's any use. I think it's bishops you have to start with. Because they're the ones with clout.* She related a conversation with one bishop, where the points about needing priests and not having the money to pay deacons were made. In response, she challenged the idea that priests are more 'useful':

*A bishop said to me, that's a difficulty, because that's [priests] what people want, because they see [priests] as being more useful. But I said, what about all this 'fresh expressions of church'; what about all of this meeting people where they are; what about all this, it you know, being out there; what about all this enculturation of the gospel? Why do you need to have priests to do that? You don't. You need priests, obviously, but you've got to have that complementarity.*

He did not really engage with this, choosing instead to turn to the difficulty of paying distinctive deacons:

*So, he said, the trouble would be paying them. I said, well, a lot of priests are non-stipendiary too ... To me payment isn't the issue, I said, it's about deployment. Yes, he said, I could see, if you ... Is there was a team ministry say, it might be appropriate to put a deacon in to do the kind of thing you suggested. And I said, well I'm very pleased to hear you say that; hang onto that thought, you know, because that would be a very good use of the deacon.*

However, Christina concluded, somewhat bitterly, *but often there isn't that flexibility, just get someone priested and you get even more out of them in terms of more for your buck.* The conversation demonstrated that a root and branch overhaul of the threefold ministry, would require an overhaul of the theology of ministry (or maybe a root and branch overhaul of the House of Bishops).

The bishops who were interviewed, articulated similar views to those expressed in the conversation reported by Christina. Bishop Boniface said that he respected the distinctive diaconate but did not actively promote it because of the difficulty in deploying distinctive deacons. For financial reasons he did not see the deployment of stipendiary distinctive deacons as sustainable, and did not feel that his diocese could afford to pay distinctive deacons. At the same time, he had an anxiety about NSM deacons, because of his concern that they would undermine lay ministry. The logical outcome of these statements was that there was no place for distinctive deacons, either paid or unpaid. He finished the interview by re-iterating that he hoped that his diocese would remain a diocese where the distinctive diaconate was honoured, and people were not pressured to be priested. However, if the distinctive diaconate is not promoted, or paid, then existing distinctive deacons are hardly going to feel honoured, and those who feel called to the diaconate, would have to opt instead for priesthood or lay ministry. Some of the respondent cohort were in his diocese. They did not feel honoured and they did feel under pressure to explore other ministries.

Bishop Anselm felt that the root issue was not payment: *I never think for us it's a funding issue.* Instead, he felt that it was more about how the Church wanted to organise itself:

*It's a matter both of history, tradition and what we (pause). It's what we think ministry is and how open we are to giving a new expression of (pause). Well, a new expression of servant ministry, you know, within our church, and I think (pause). I don't think the will is there, I suppose that's what I believe after 40 years.*

It would indeed appear that a major issue could be that the will is not there, among diocesan bishops to embrace the distinctive diaconate, despite the statements of support of the distinctive diaconate that the Church has made over the years.

Bishop Cuthbert had already made up his mind about the place of the distinctive diaconate in relation to stipendiary posts. *'It is very unusual to have paid distinctive deacons... It's a branch of voluntary ministry in a sense'*. This statement made it sound as if the Church of England already had a position on the payment of distinctive deacons. However, the Church of England's reports about distinctive deacons make very little reference to stipendiary status. *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* has a very short section about stipends for distinctive deacons, which included the comment: *'It is to be hoped that distinctive deacons would be both stipendiary and non-stipendiary and that in both cases they would be as far as possible deployable wherever there is a need'* (HoB 1988, 107). This was re-iterated and expanded in *For Such a Time as This*:

Both stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry should be open to distinctive deacons. It should not be assumed that they will be unpaid, any more than that they will be female. Given our understanding of what it would be appropriate for distinctive deacons to do and not to do, we envisage that they will tend to be deployed in ministry teams (especially where there is an emphasis on outreach to those at the margins of the community). (HoB 2001, 63)

By 2007, when *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* was written, numbers of stipendiary clergy were seriously on the decline, and NSM ministries were increasing. No mention is made of distinctive deacons and stipends.

### **Conclusions**

This Chapter gives further evidence of the gap between what the Church of England says and what it does with regard to its ordained ministry, and highlights the Church's pre-occupation with the priesthood. The Church of England's unwillingness to create discrete diaconal posts or to pay distinctive deacons is just another part of the picture that we have seen developing through this thesis. It is the logical outcome in a church in which the distinctive diaconate is only promoted in some dioceses, discernment can be actively discouraged, and where distinctive deacons have no independent voice in the Church of England's system of governance. This is a church which has not built systems which allow the distinctive diaconate to flourish, despite several reports that have recommended such a path.

The pre-occupation with priesthood works to the detriment of both priestly and diaconal ministries and consequently to the detriment of mission. Traditionally, the 'vicar' has been both priest and deacon within parish ministry. He or she has administered the sacraments, provided doctrinal structure and discipline, and discerned the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially in relation to vocations to ministry. But he or she has also undertaken pastoral ministry, outreach, leading the study of the Scriptures, and taken the sacrament out to those unable to attend church. These latter roles are the diaconal ones. In spite of having an order of ministers which, in the words of the Church of England's own ordinal, already exists to exercise the diaconal roles, when the work load of the 'vicar' has become too much, the Church of England has created a variety of ministries to fill the gap, but has overlooked the diaconate.

The number of those attending church regularly in the Church of

England has dropped by 12% over the past decade (Church and Society statistics). The Church of England has responded by reaching out more and more to those on or beyond the margins of the church community. Worship is becoming progressively less eucharistic, and more informal and inclusive in nature; Messy Church is just one example. Churches are providing meeting places and support for groups in the secular community, who do not attend church or have any church affiliation, including food banks, lunches for the elderly, support groups for those with dementia and their carers. This is diaconal ministry. To reverse the sentiments of Bishop Cuthbert, why waste deacons by ordaining them as priests, when there is so much diaconal work to do? Can the Church of England afford priests at its altars, when it needs deacons in its communities? The need for diaconal ministry in today's Church of England is huge, and the Five Marks of Mission remind us that it is integral to the mission of the church. My own ministry as a parish priest in the Church of England, makes this point. An analysis of my diary, shows that in any one week I spend about 15 hours on priestly tasks: baptisms, weddings, funerals, confessions, eucharists, and vocational discernment, with some time allowed for preparation, though if I had a distinctive deacon colleague, their ministry would encompass some of that preparation. However, I spend about 22 hours on diaconal tasks: Bible study and courses for enquirers, home communions, lunches for the elderly, informal all age worship, coffee mornings, pastoral visiting, baptism preparation, care home worship and school assemblies. It is often the quality preparation for my priestly tasks, for example, the production of good quality liturgy, and preaching, that is squeezed out by the diaconal tasks. I am not saying that priests should never do any of these things, but that it makes no sense to deny distinctive diaconal vocations, when there is a clear ministerial and missional need.

In May 2017 I was invited to be an Anglican observer at the Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation in Swanwick. The Methodist Church has 280 deacons, active in ministry in the British Isles, and they are all

stipendiary, unless they are between posts or are in retirement. This is how they describe themselves on their website:

Diaconal ministry is one of two ordained ministries within the Methodist Church; Deacons and Presbyters, Equal but Different ... Deacons are normally appointed to work in Circuits alongside presbyters and lay people. Their role focusses on bridging the gap between the church and the world, and has been described as 'standing in the doorway of the church', keeping the door open both ways.

The theme of the convocation was justice, and many deacons were involved in projects supported by their circuits that sought to support and speak on behalf of the most needy and disadvantaged in society. The proceedings of the convocation fed into the Methodist Conference, and deacons had a place and a voice within the governance of the Methodist Church. The Methodist diaconate is both an order of ministry and a religious order. While the distinctive diaconate within the Church of England may not want to become a religious order, there is much to be learned from the Methodist model about shared ministry between ordained ministries, which are 'equal but different'.

A recent report commissioned by TEC, a sister church to the Church of England, within the Anglican Communion, *The State of the Clergy 2012: A Report for The Episcopal Church by the Church Pension Group Office of Research*, showed that while clergy numbers in general had declined over the past six years, the overall percentage of clergy who were permanent deacons had risen to 30%. While the number of priests being ordained in TEC was falling, the number of permanent deacons being ordained was remaining steady. The report also describes the permanent diaconate:

Deacons are members of one of three distinct orders of ordained ministry (with bishops and presbyters). In the Episcopal Church a deacon exercises 'a special ministry of servanthood' directly under the deacon's bishop, serving all people and especially those in need. This definition reflects the practice of the early church, in

which deacons were ordained ‘not to the priesthood but to the servanthood [diakonia, ‘ministry’] of the bishop’ (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*). In the ancient Greek-speaking world the term *diakonos* meant an intermediary who acted or spoke for a superior. Christian deacons were agents of the bishop, often with oversight of charity. Since ancient times the liturgical functions of deacons have suggested the activity of angels. As they proclaim the gospel, lead intercessions, wait at the eucharistic table, and direct the order of the assembly, deacons act as sacred messengers, agents, and attendants. The revival of the order of deacons in the twentieth century has emphasized social care and service. Many bishops in the Episcopal Church expect their deacons to promote care of the needy outside the church.

(<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/deacon>)

This description is strong one, and shows the influence of John Collins, as well as Kaiserswerth, whence deacons were sent to the United States in the nineteenth century. However, while the Methodist Diaconal Order was formally re-opened in 1989, with a structure in place, and with careful consideration of deployment and remuneration; the Association for Episcopal Deacons (AED) in TEC has been the result of gradual changes and developments, from the missionary deacons of 1840s onwards. TEC is, of course, a much larger church than the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and the nature of the diaconate varies somewhat from diocese to diocese. Permanent deacons do not have to be members of the AED. And they are mainly part-time and NSM. This excerpt from *Customary for Deacons for the Episcopal Diocese of West Michigan*, gives an idea of the conditions for the deployment of permanent deacons in TEC:

The deacon shall normally serve the congregation or ministry to which he/she is assigned for a maximum of eight to ten hours per week without stipend, or other compensation. The Diocese is currently in a state of discernment regarding this question, however. If our Diocesan community determines a stipend should be given to those serving in the diaconate, that stipend will likely

be modest and will be paid from the Diocesan budget.

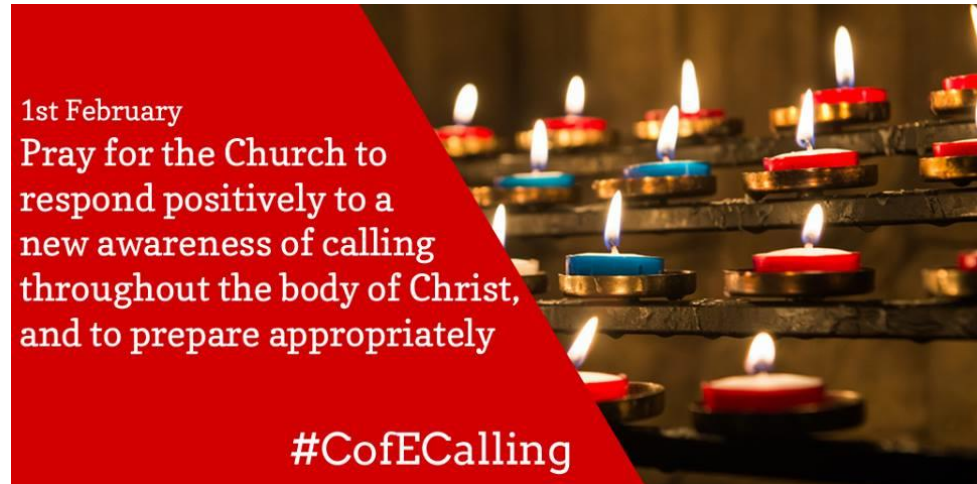
([http://www.edwm.org/Deacon\\_Customary.pdf](http://www.edwm.org/Deacon_Customary.pdf))

The history of the permanent diaconate in TEC which was charted by Ormonde Plater has strong resonances with the present experience of distinctive deacons in the Church of England, including a lack of stipendiary posts (Plater 1991, 159).

These two models for a permanent/distinctive diaconate underline the importance of careful deployment, representation in the national church, and a stipend, where that is required. Deacons in TEC are not organised into an effective body, they have no clear voice in the governance of their church, and they are not, in the main, paid by the church. The Methodist Order of Deacons has all these things. Their ministry is more confident and effective as a result. And, while the Methodist diaconate does include a large number of deacons in the 40 to 60 age group, there are also a good number of younger deacons, and a larger percentage of men. In the conversations that I had at the convocation, it became clear that many of the deacons would not be able to exercise this ministry if there was no stipend. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that the low numbers of both younger distinctive deacons, and male distinctive deacons in the Church of England is related to a lack of stipends. Without proper representation in the governance of the church, this is unlikely to change. And without stipends, it is difficult to deploy deacons in an imaginative and constructive way.



## 8 The Conclusions



(<https://www.facebook.com/everydaydeaconism>)

### **What does it mean to be a distinctive deacon in the Church of England today?**

The voices of the respondent cohort have told the story of a ministry which is at once fulfilling and frustrating. In Chapter 3, they gave testimony to fulfilment. They spoke of the privilege of enabling the discipleship and ministry of others. They described a ministry which was about having the confidence to push the boundaries and take the love of God into new situations. They shared their satisfaction in being door-keepers, and helping people to make difficult transitions in their lives. They spoke of the positive challenge of connecting with those on the edges of society, meeting their needs, dealing with social issues, and making community links. Many of them described the importance of being able to express their ministry within the Eucharistic liturgy, and being humbled, yet empowered by inhabiting the role of the liturgical deacon. None of the respondents described a purely task-oriented ministry, and there was no one set of tasks that was common to all the respondent cohort. Julian was convinced of the need to be a free agent, and Lydia commented on the variety of manifestations that a deacon's ministry encapsulated.

The fulfilment that they found in their ministry was such that the respondent cohort were determined to stay loyal to their calling, in spite of the frustrations. These were laid out in Chapters 4 to 7. They included decades of debate, culminating in recommendations that the distinctive diaconate should be encouraged and supported within the Church of England, which were never put into effect. At the same time, the diaconate was being used as a consolation prize for women who felt called to priestly ministry. Then, after women could be priested, it was used as an alternative to priesthood in dioceses or parishes that could not accept women as priests. The respondent cohort were frustrated by references to priesthood as ‘proper’ ordination, and to their ministry as if it were some deficient form of priesthood. They were discouraged by a Church which has often been too short-sighted to create posts that made best use of their skills, and which, after investing in their discernment and training, appeared too short-sighted to invest in stipendiary posts for distinctive deacons where their ministry could flourish and support the Church’s mission. They felt hampered by a Church which failed to promote the distinctive diaconate in a proactive way. Many of the respondents had waited a long time before they were aware of the possibility of being a distinctive deacon, the ministry to which they then found that God had been calling them.

The role which the respondent cohort inhabited was, on the whole, congruent with the role as described in the Common Worship Ordinal, although it went further, highlighting the potential relationship with the episcopate. The influence of the work of John Collins on the current understanding of the role of the distinctive deacon was set out in Chapter 4. The concept of the deacon as an envoy, as one carrying out a commission, is reflected in the Common Worship Ordinal in a way that it had not been in the previous ordinals; it was a concept that resonated with the respondent cohort. Being an envoy of God and of the Church leads to an approach to ministry which is at once liberating and problematic. It is liberating in that, as Mark, Agnes and Julian all said in

different ways, it allowed them to see the bigger picture, to respond to situations in new ways, and to be the ones to create opportunities for enabling and equipping people. It is liberating in that it allows God to call people to minister in accordance with their skills, rather than in accordance with a pre-determined set of tasks. This was reflected in the breadth of ministerial situations of the respondent cohort, although the lack of stipends, and creative thinking about suitable posts, had limited the ability of some of them to completely follow their perceived calling.

However, the concept of the deacon as an envoy, who fulfils a commission, where Godly commissions are varied and unpredictable, is problematic because the general approach to ministry within the Church of England is broadly predicated on a structure where a set of tasks is attached to a particular named ministry. While these sets of tasks are not mutually exclusive, and there is a certain amount of overlap between ministries, they define a different situation from that of a ministry in which the ministers can say that they are not defined by tasks, but by a mandate. Free agency is regarded with suspicion. Given this situation, it is not difficult to see why some of the collegial relationships described in Chapter 6 were difficult, and why Readers in particular felt threatened. It also partly explains why there is a wish to define the distinctive diaconate as ministry of service, tying distinctive deacons into a set of pastoral and caring tasks. If the distinctive diaconate were simply a ministry of loving service, then the view expressed in *Deacons in the Church* would hold true – that there would be no need for a distinctive diaconate because there is nothing that deacons can do that lay ministers cannot. There would be no need for a ministry that simply accrues to itself what is the duty of the whole people of God – to love and serve others as Christ first loved and served them. However, the re-appraisal of *diakonia* and the role of the deacon in the New Testament and the Early Church that was discussed in Chapter 1, makes clear that the commission of loving service is the mandate of all the baptised, the commission of a distinctive deacon is something rather different. At various points in this thesis mention has been made of the ministry of distinctive deacons as liminal.

Orton, speaking about the Methodist Diaconate, describes this liminal ministry as challenging status and power, occupying an ambiguous position between Church and world, and being enabling (Orton 2012, 260, 268, 272). These attributes also apply to the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, who need to be freed from the pigeon-holing that prevents them and the Church from moving forward.

### **Is the retention of the distinctive diaconate justified?**

The answer to this question depends on the answer to a wider one. How does the Church of England understand mission? As I indicated in chapter 4, across the worldwide church there has been a move to a servant ecclesiology, and this calls for a ministry which has the capacity to be outward looking and to make connections between the Gospel in action and those who need those Gospel actions. The Church of England espouses this model of being church through the adoption of the Five Marks of Mission, as discussed in chapter 3. In order to be true to this framework, the ministry of the Church of England would benefit from, and its mission would be significantly enhanced by, the specific inclusion of those who are commissioned to enable it to act on the Gospel imperatives of being salt, yeast and light. In this context the retention of the distinctive diaconate is not only justified but advisable. It is a ministry which is designed to undertake these commissions. If the Church of England is to honour its commitment to mission, it needs to 'get out more'. One way of achieving this would be to encourage distinctive deacons to exercise their ministry, which in turn is about encouraging and enabling the *diakonia* of others as salt, yeast and light in the situations where God sets them.

Bosch describes the dangers and opportunities of the increasingly secular world in which this mission takes place. These pose specific challenges and arouse particular expectations of the mission of the Church (Bosch 1991, 3-4). As Bosch points out, mission has been seen as a fringe activity to which the Church only pays attention when all is going well within the ecclesial community. (1991, 381). In recent decades all has

not gone well, and many congregations within the Church of England have experienced decline. Morisy, in her exploration of community ministry, sees mission as not just achievable in the present climate, but as the catalyst for transformation and flourishing of the Church and society. She points out that while decline seems to have slowed, the Gospel requires a structured discipleship, not a surviving remnant (1997, 1). Her model of community ministry calls for renewed discipleship within the church (1997, 19) and a rich and varied dialogue with those beyond the ecclesial community (1997, 61-2).

In my view, if distinctive deacons were not compromised by a lack of understanding of their role, and lack of stipendiary support, they could be a major missional force in the Church of England, and answer the question posed by Morisy as to why the Church has never made ‘appreciable inroads into our secular society on behalf of the Gospel.’ (1997, 1). As this thesis has demonstrated the majority of the respondent cohort felt that their true ministry as deacons was missional, and that this calling was frustrated by the Church’s lack of understanding and vision.

In Chapter 1 I described the ministry of the Church as being like a patchwork quilt. If part of the quilt needs to be blue, and you have some blue fabric, it would make sense to use it. You would not throw it away, and use some green and yellow patches, in the hope that they might somehow look the same. In the same way, there is a lack of logic in the suggestion by the report, *Deacons in the Church*, and by some of the respondent bishops, that there is no place for the distinctive diaconate because other ministries could, and should, undertake their ministry. *Deacons in the Church* objected to the distinctive diaconate because it was assumed to clericalise *diakonia*, and disenfranchise lay ministry. Christine Hall is of the opinion that there is no published evidence to substantiate this view (Hall 1999, 236). This concern was based on the mistaken assumption that a deacon’s ministry was only that of loving service. However, the experience of the respondent cohort was that they were not usurping lay ministry, but rather undertaking commissions that

enabled it. The respondent bishops also could not really see a future for the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England because distinctive deacons could not celebrate communion. This view was based on the mistaken assumption that a distinctive deacon is a half-fledged priest or a perpetual first year curate, not a minister with a different and complementary ministry to that of a priest. The respondent cohort did not feel called to celebrate communion. Far from being excluded from the possibility of priesthood, many of them had stayed faithful to their calling as deacons in the face of encouragement, or even bullying, to be priested. Subsequent to the recommendations of *Deacons in the Church*, the Church of England received the strong recommendations from three major reports, *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church, For Such a Time as This* and *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* that the ministry of distinctive deacons should be welcomed and supported. Blue fabric was clearly acknowledged to be available for the patchwork quilt, but very little use has been made of it thus far.

In Chapter 4 the origins of Reader ministry were set out, alongside the development of the Deaconess Order, in the Church of England. These lay ministries were chosen as much for social and political reasons as for reasons of theology or ecclesiology. Although Reader ministry subsequently came to cover many of the same areas as those now served by the distinctive diaconate, Readers were originally licensed to participate in services of the Word, and to undertake Christian teaching. It was the ministry of the Deaconess Order which more closely prefigured the modern understanding the nature of the distinctive diaconate. From this it can be seen why one neat solution to the friction that appears to exist between Readers and distinctive deacons might be to force Readers back into a box which is labelled ‘lay theologian’, the role suggested by Bishop Alec Graham in 1984. But that too would be unhelpful, and just as constricting as suggesting that distinctive deacons should only undertake a ministry of loving service. The reality is that these ministries will have a shared future. Arguments for one or the other have a counter argument. For example, if a Reader says that as a

lay person they are better able to relate to and be a model for other lay people, then a distinctive deacon can say that their ordination gives them the authority and specific mandate to equip the people of God. The Church of England needs, and has room for, both Readers and distinctive deacons, and it is unnecessary and illogical to say that because a Reader can undertake a deacon's ministry, then distinctive deacons are not needed. While it has been suggested in some quarters that all Readers should become distinctive deacons, this view was not expressed by the respondent cohort. What was expressed was the willingness to give and take in a collegial ministry. The only concern that was expressed was that distinctive deacons should not be disenfranchised from their traditional liturgical role without their agreement.

*Deacons in the Church* argued that the retention of a distinctive diaconate within the ministry of the Church of England was not justified simply by the fact that the diaconate was an ancient order. For the writers of that report tradition was not enough, and the factors of clericalisation and the disenfranchisement of the laity outweighed it. I have addressed these criticisms above, but this view does raise the question, what does a renewed distinctive diaconate have to offer to the Church? In Chapter 2, Constructive Narrative Theology was chosen as the vehicle for the respondent cohort's stories. The telling of the stories has indeed been parabolic, and has offered up to the Church of England cautionary tales about being so tied into particular systems of ministry that opportunities are missed. An example of this is in the area of ecumenism. Chapter 6 touched on the collegiality which is enjoyed between deacons from different denominations through world-wide networks. Distinctive deacons from the Church of England have been involved in major consultations, including those leading to the Porvoo Common Statement. However, because the distinctive diaconate is not sufficiently woven into its life, the Church of England does not benefit fully from these ecumenical links. Chapter 2 also described how the political interplay between the distinctive diaconate and the Church institution would be analysed through Feminist Standpoint Epistemology, because the telling

of the stories needed to be transformative as well as descriptive. The need for change in the Church of England, not just to meet the needs of its distinctive deacons, but also through them, and other missional ministers, to meet the needs of those in ‘the forgotten corners of the world’ (AC 2007, 15), has been a theme which has run throughout the testimony of the respondent cohort.

### **Mapping the future**

If the weight of tradition, the recommendations of three working parties, and the tenacity of the existing distinctive deacons, are not sufficient to sway diocesan bishops, and galvanise church structures, what might the future of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England look like? Comparing my results with the ANDREP survey (1998) suggests that not much has changed in the past 20 years. The number of distinctive deacons has risen slightly, but the issues of recognition, suitable deployment, and remuneration still remain. If nothing much changes going forward, either to encourage or suppress the distinctive diaconate, the indications are that it will not disappear, but neither will it thrive. If members of the respondent cohort managed, finally, to realise their vocations, even without encouragement or information, a small number of potential deacons will continue to do the same. However, the distinctive diaconate deserves better from the Church of England, and there are steps that could be taken to encourage its growth and development.

### **A re-consideration of structures**

What then can be done to break this deadlock, and allow for the flourishing of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England? This thesis has highlighted certain failures within the structures of the church which could be addressed. Distinctive deacons could and should be made far more visible. As has already been pointed out, the collective voice of the distinctive diaconate is entirely lost in the House of Clergy, where of 198 seats, none are reserved specifically for distinctive deacons, although specific seats are set aside for various types of chaplain, for



archdeacons, and for members of religious communities. If these groups are granted the right to elect their own synodical representation, then it would be entirely possible to allow distinctive deacons to do so also. This would give distinctive deacons their own voice within synodical structures. Deacons would also be made more visible if Crockford's Clerical Directory had a clear category and title for distinctive deacons. In addition, the Church of England and its dioceses should keep and report clear statistics regarding distinctive deacons.

Discernment to the distinctive diaconate also needs to be more explicit. The diaconate is not a new form of ministry, and it was a discrete and distinctive order before it was ever a transitional one. Moreover, the distinctive diaconate has been endorsed and encouraged by a series of Church of England reports. Sharing information about this ministry, and about discernment and training, is the responsibility of the Church of England, and perhaps specifically, of Ministry Division, through their communication networks, such as the Church of England website, and the resources produced for DDOs and those exploring a call to ordained ministry. More central support is needed to prevent this important aspect of the church's ministry from being subject to the whim of individual bishops.

Related to this it is apparent that there is an important task of education about the distinctive diaconate which needs to take place on all levels. As all those in the respondent cohort had found, it is perfectly possible for other ministers, even within a diocese that has a number of distinctive deacons, not to know what a distinctive deacon is or does. It is not enough for distinctive deacons themselves to know who they are and what they do. Their colleagues in other ministries need to know as well. Dioceses need to be helped and encouraged to have a better understanding of the distinctive diaconate, and to have robust structures for the discernment of vocations to the diaconate. As was made clear in Chapters 4 and 5, discernment at a national level has been, and continues to be, hit and miss, and there is no guarantee, for a candidate for the

distinctive diaconate going to national selection, that there will be a vocations adviser who is a distinctive deacon, or who has practical experience of ministering with a distinctive deacon. This situation undermines the quality of the discernment process.

### **Embracing the breadth of tradition in the Church of England**

There is also a discussion to be had about the role of the distinctive diaconate across the breadth of the tradition of the Church of England, and what it might look like in churches which are less sacramental and more evangelical. The debate recorded in the Church Times in January 2017, discussed in Chapter 5, showed that there was interest in the distinctive diaconate within the evangelical wing of the Church of England. While the connection with the worshipping life of the Church might look different, because the worship is focussed more on Word and less on sacrament, there is a strong tradition of pastoral, missional and prophetic ministry which reflects both the deacon's ordinal, and the Five Marks of Mission, as was discussed in Chapter 6

While the Church of England would benefit from channelling some of its missional activities through a strong distinctive diaconate, distinctive deacons themselves would also find value in creating a forum in which the nature of the distinctive diaconate could be explored, deepened and developed.<sup>15</sup> Both Bosch and Morisy call for a renewed understanding of mission as the gift of the Gospel to those who need it, and not just the gift of the Church to those they judge to be the poor and the marginalised. Bosch identifies the problem of affluent Christians promulgating the values of the West rather than of the Gospel (1991, 4-6) and Morisy challenges the assumption that the message of the Gospel is a one-way street from the Church to those outside it (1997, 63). The strength of the distinctive diaconate is drawn in part from those it serves, and distinctive deacons could use this strength to challenge the Church in a positive and transformational way.

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<sup>15</sup> This process has already begun through the deacon stories website started by Deacon Gill Kimber (<https://deaconstories.wordpress.com>).

If the distinctive deacon is a bridge, then maybe a re-imagining of the places that the bridge joins, and the possibility of two-way traffic, would allow for a broader understanding of distinctive deacons in the Church of England today as those who make the connections between the enacting of the Gospel and the flourishing that the Gospel brings. This view of a distinctive deacon's ministry within the mission of the Church could be applied to those across the varied traditions of the Church of England. The bridging process could properly look different within different parts of the Church. As has already been discussed, deacons are linked by the source of their commission, rather than the nature of the commission. In traditions which express their worship more through the Word than the sacrament, the connections should work just as strongly.

### **Relating to the world-wide diaconate**

Reflecting on the results of the ANDREP survey, Hall offered this analysis:

Several factors are likely to affect the position of the diaconate in the Church of England in the next decade. Deacons are currently few in number but their great strength lies in the natural facility of the diaconate demonstrated already in a variety of historical contexts, to engage in mission and outreach in a fragmented society and to act as a unifying force within the Church. The deacon is a kind of *passe-partout*, interpreting the world to the church by active engagement in both, exemplifying that vital link between the Eucharist and the world in the context of the coming final reign of God, and relating naturally to deacons in other Christian traditions. (Borgegård & Hall 1999, 241)

Two decades later, this still rings true. However, there are things to be learned from models of good practice in other churches. The Methodist Church and the northern European Lutheran Churches have stipendiary distinctive deacons, carefully deployed in situations which need their skills, and reflect their calling. They have structures of discernment and training that are tailored to distinctive deacons. While training structures

in other denominations may not be ideal (Orton 2012, 274), the Church of England is yet to begin to address the issues surrounding the training of distinctive deacons in relation to their potential ministry.

The broadening of the horizons of mission and the ministry of deacons would bring them closer to the world-wide diaconate. While support structures for distinctive deacons within the Church of England may be inadequate, those across the world-wide diaconate are much stronger, as Agnes found when she attended her first DRAE conference, and as Rita describes in her analogy of deacons from different denominations as strands of the same DNA. The involvement of the distinctive diaconate in ecumenical conversations does not only offer them support, but also links the Church of England into the world-wide mission of the Church of God. Distinctive deacons in the Church of England have something significant to bring to ecumenical dialogue among deacons through their theology and practice of the role of the deacon as a bridge between the liturgy and their commission. They also have much to gain in terms of support, encouragement, and exposure to good models of mission and the resulting commissioning that flows from it.

### ***Per saltum* ordination**

In some of the traditions where distinctive deacons are ordained, *per saltum* or direct ordination is practiced, as described in Chapter 1. This has not been the case in the Church of England, which like the majority of episcopal churches, keeps the tradition which arose from sequential ordination. These ordination practices are embedded in the historical DNA of the Church of England, and are unlikely to change. However, churches which practice direct ordination find that it brings clarification to the respective roles of deacon and priest and prevents the devaluation of the diaconate as merely a stepping stone to priesthood. This is explored further in Appendix A.

However, while *per saltum* ordination may not be a practical suggestion for the Church of England, some attention might be given to clarifying

the traditional relationship between deacons and bishops in the episcopal ordinal. In Chapter 3 it became clear that distinctive deacons took their ordination seriously, and fulfilled their calling as it is described in the ordinal. The respondent cohort also expressed a wish for a closer relationship with their bishops, and the respondent bishops expressed a sense of connection with their deacons. The episcopal ordinal could be re-examined, and this relationship could be made more explicit, providing the basis for a closer collegial partnership.

### **Moving forward**

If the Church of England had the courage to embrace and invest in the distinctive diaconate, it could re-calibrate the balance within its three-fold ordained ministry, and ordained ministry with its burgeoning lay ministry. Instead of expecting ‘vicars’ to be both priest and deacon, a breadth of ministry which is almost impossible to maintain (especially in these days of multi-parish benefices), it could build fruitful partnerships in which priests were freed to fulfil their sacramental and leadership ministry with integrity and lay ministers were resourced and enabled to fulfil their mission, pastoral care and evangelism. ALIC III looked beyond the diaconate to the *diakonia* of the whole church, and described it as ‘the ministry of all the baptized, with the ordered ministries of the church as supporting them.’ (2014, 7) The distinctive diaconate is an ordered ministry well placed to do this. A distinctive diaconate that was supported by the structures of the Church of England and had the confidence to create its own strong theological conversations could give voice to its prophetic calling to speak to the Church about what the ‘forgotten corners of the world’ had to teach about the Gospel, and to speak to the ‘forgotten corners of the world’ about what the heart of missional Church for them. A distinctive diaconate that was a committed and active player in the arena of world-wide *diakonia* would not only grow, flourish and contribute the flourishing of others in this ecumenical setting. It would be a conduit through which the Church of England could further establish its place within the world-wide church.

These steps would show the active support of the Church of England for the distinctive diaconate; would raise the profile of the diaconal ministry; and support its renewal. This is not about renewal of the sake of it. As Robert Taft has written about liturgy:

A tradition can only be understood genetically, with reference to its origins and evolution. Those ignorant of history are prisoners of the latest cliché, for they have nothing against which to test it. That is what knowledge of the past can give us. A knowledge of the future would serve us equally well, but unfortunately that is not yet available to us. This does not mean that our ignorance of the future leaves us enslaved by our past. For we do know the present; and in the present the past is always instructive, but not necessarily normative. What we do today is ruled not by the past but by the adaptation of the tradition to the needs of the present. History can only help us decide what the essentials of that tradition are, and the parameters of its adaptation. (Taft 1986, xiv, xv cited in Gibaut 2003, 6)

By implementing the changes proposed here, the Church of England, with the help of those in the distinctive diaconate, could adapt that ministry for the needs of the present. In doing so, it would bring about the recognition and renewal that this ancient, mission-focused ministry deserves, and would offer new perspectives for the Church's mission today.

## Appendix A: A discussion of *per saltum* ordination.

Direct ordination is practised by some European Lutheran Churches including the Church of Sweden. In 2014 I visited the Diocese of Lund and interviewed Carin Hompe Svedberg, the deacon in charge of discernment and training for deacons in that diocese, as well as five other deacons working in outreach projects in Lund and Malmö. There was general consensus that direct ordination to both the diaconate and the priesthood worked well. My respondents in this situation were unable to compare it with sequential ordination, which is not the normal practice in the Church of Sweden. From a vantage point of not having the sequential tradition, they were somewhat bemused by the idea that one would be ordained deacon for a year, if one's calling was to the priesthood.

Those who champion sequential ordination often use the argument that it is also cumulative, and that the priest and bishop carry their diaconate with them into their new ministries. This is summed up in the phrase 'once a deacon always a deacon'. This argument might carry more weight if transitional deacons spent their year engaging with the ministry of a deacon. Often, what is meant is that they retain a certain sense of humility, and a sense of service. This however, as outlined in the main thesis, is not the diaconate, but a recognition of their commitment to loving service, as a member of the *laos*. Bishop Anselm, in his interview, encapsulated the negative danger of this view:

*I am still a deacon ... Every time you ordain deacons, it is reflective of the very close relationship between the bishop and the deacon, and the servant character of both ministries ... But I still think experiencing the diaconate for a year before you are priested is a very different experience. To be launched on the world, and the parish noticing that you cannot yet celebrate the Eucharist, and that you can't do certain things.*

Occupying one's ministry with love and humility is not the same thing as exercising the ministry of a deacon and a priest, and possibly a bishop, at one and same time, which would lead to a conflict of priorities. While the argument made in *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church*, that being a deacon for a short time prepares priests to work with distinctive deacons (HoB 1988, 105, 106), appears reasonable, it is actually not logical. Distinctive deacons have to work with priests and bishops without having been ordained to their order, and have shown that it is perfectly possible.

Sequential ordination also holds the inherent danger that the diaconate will be used as a consolation prize for those who feel a strong call to priesthood, but where the Church cannot ratify that call. In 1976 the

Anglican Consultative Council suggested that the transitional diaconate should be retained and be used for continued training and testing of vocation, concluding that it should not be assumed that it would necessarily lead to priesting (ACC 1976, resolution 10). This could possibly lead to a diaconate tainted by frustrated would be priests.

The complications of having a diaconate that serves both as an apprenticeship to the priesthood, and as a distinct ministry is highlighted by the necessary use of qualifiers to clarify which sort of deacon is under discussion. I chose to use the term ‘distinctive deacon’ for absolute clarity. However, Hall, a distinctive deacon herself, objects to having to use a qualifier for her ministry. As she says:

Many of the so-called ‘permanent’ or ‘distinctive’ deacons of the Church of England prefer to be called simply ‘deacons’ and to use the term ‘transitional deacon’ for those who are to be ordained to the priesthood. (Hall 1999, 184)

John Gibaut recognises that the debate surrounding the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England has given rise to a renewed interest in the possibility of direct ordination. While he does not argue a case for either direct or sequential ordination, he records the view that

as long as candidates to the presbyterate must first be ordained deacons according to the longstanding practice of sequential ordination – the *cursus honorum* – the diaconate can hardly be a distinct order with its own integrity, but will be no more than a stepping-stone. (Gibaut 2003, 4)

This view is endorsed by James Munroe Barnett:

As the idea of *cursus honorum* was the greatest single factor in bringing about the decline of the office [i.e. of deacon], nothing would help restore its integrity more than a return to the ordinal practice of the pre-Nicene Church by ordaining only those to the diaconate who intend to make it a permanent vocation. (Barnett 1981, 156)

In 2001 the Berkeley statement of IALC made a recommendation that, as there was historical precedent for both direct and sequential ordination, and because some parts of the Anglican Communion were advocating direct ordination as being more representative of the distinct nature of the three orders, ‘provinces may therefore wish to consider the possibility of direct ordination to the episcopate and the presbyterate’ (Gibson 2002, 9). However, in 2003, a motion in the synod of TEC to introduce direct ordination was defeated. Many episcopal churches are simply not yet having the discussion.



Appendix B: A precis of an example of the re-appraisal of the *diakon-* root words by John Collins (Collins 2002).

In this passage *diakon-* root words were used three times (though not the noun, which could possibly have been translated as deacon), as underlined in the passage:

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 on tables. Therefore, friends, 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.’ (Acts of the Apostles 6.1-4, NRSV)

Collins pointed out that if a consistent translation was used, then a very different reading comes to light. There is no food mentioned in the Greek. Luke had gone out of his way previously to show that all the believers shared and were cared for in their community. Collins found it more likely that the Hellenist widows were excluded from the preaching both because of a language barrier, and on account of their custom of staying in the home. The seven Greek-speaking men were therefore, commissioned to take the preaching into the widows’ homes. Meanwhile, the Apostles were left free to carry on with their commission of public preaching of the Word. To Collins to translate the three *diakon-* root words in this passage as variously as ‘distribution of food’, ‘wait on tables’ and ‘servicing the word’ was too broad a spectrum (Collins 2002, 47-58).

Taking the liberty of paraphrase, and including a number of explanatory phrases, we might re-read Luke’s account of the Seven in the following way:

‘The Greek-speaking members of the community complained against those who spoke Aramaic that their housebound widows were being overlooked in the great preaching (*diakonia*) that was going on day by day in the environs of the Temple. So the Twelve summoned the whole complement of the disciples and said: “We cannot possibly break off our public proclamation before the huge crowds in the Temple to carry out a ministry (*diakonein*) in the households of these Greek-speaking widows. Brothers, you will have to choose seven men from your own ethnic group who are fully respected, empowered by the Spirit, and equipped for the task. We will then appoint them to the role

that needs to be filled. That will mean that the Twelve can get on with attending to worship in the Temple and to our apostolic ministry (*diakonia*) of proclaiming the Word there.” (Collins 2002, 58).

According to this translation the Greek-speaking seven men were chosen as another group of apostolic ministers, to heal divisions that were beginning to appear between the Hellenist believers, and the Hebrew believers. This is endorsed by James Munroe Barnett, who acknowledged that they were appointed as leaders of the Hellenist faction, and that their activity, in the end, was not very different from that of the Apostles (J M Barnett 1979, 29).

## Appendix C: The description of a deacon's ministry from the Common Worship Ordinal.

To serve this royal priesthood, God has given various kinds of 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 commission; as he washed the feet of his disciples, so they must wash the feet of others. (AC 2007, 10)

Deacons are called to work with the Bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people. 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.

Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the Church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism. They assist in administering the sacraments; they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.

Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people, that the whole Church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world. They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us. (AC 2007, 15)

Appendix D: Basic statistics from the dioceses in the Provinces of Canterbury and York in January 2015 and June 2017 – active deacons, stipendiary status, those in sector ministry.

Dioceses	Active d deacons Women/men 2015	Active d deacons women/men 2017	Stipendiary 2015 Women/men	Stipendiary 2017 Women/men	Sector ministry 2015 Women/men	Sector ministry 2017 Women/men	Age range 2015 Women/men	Age range 2017 Women/men
Bath & Wells	0/0	1/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	NR/-
Birmingham	1/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	60+/-	45+/-
Blackburn	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	60+/-	60+/-
Bristol	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Canterbury	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/54
Carlisle	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	55+/-
Chelmsford	1/0	1/2	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	50+/-	60+/60+
Chester	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Chichester	23/7	20/6	3/1	3/1	4/0	3/1	50-65/40-60	49-75/48-65
Coventry	1/0	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	48/-	-/57
Derby	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	55-65/-	-/-
Durham	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Ely	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Europe	2/1	2/1	2/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	37&67/73	NR
Exeter	4/3	4/4	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/2	30+ to 65	40 to 70
Gloucester	3/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	3/0	0/0	55-70/-	65-75/-
Guildford	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	60/-	-/-
Hereford	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/55	-/55
Leicester	1/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	46/-	49/-
Lichfield	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Lincoln	5/5	5/4	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	45-74/55-75	47-75/57-70
Liverpool	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
London	9/2	6/1	0/0	0/0	3/0	0/0	45-75/66-84	53-69/70+
Manchester	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Newcastle	1/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	65/-	48-65/-
Norwich	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Oxford	1/1	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	63/NR	63/-
Peterborough	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Portsmouth	2/0	2/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	50-69/-	NR/-
Rochester	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	40-60/-	NR/-
St Albans	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
St Eds & Ips	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Salisbury	3/1	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	51-71/69	69/-
Sheffield	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	64/-
Sodor & Man	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
Southwark	0/0	3/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	NR/-
Southwell	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	56/-
Truro	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/70	-/-
W Yorks/Leeds	7/3	3/1	1/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	55-65/65	-/-
Winchester	4/0	4/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	50+/-	50+/-
Worcester	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	-/-	-/-
York	3/0	6/2	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	50-70/-	31+/65+
TOTALS	73/26	73/24	13/1	10/2	12/0	7/4	30-75/40-73	31-75/57-70

NR = no information offered

Appendix E: Basic statistics from the dioceses in the Provinces of Canterbury and York in January 2015 and June 2017 – those in training and those in discernment for the distinctive diaconate.

Dioceses	In training 2015 Women/men		In training 2017 Women/men		In discernment 2017 Women/men	
Bath & Wells	0	0	0	0	0	0
Birmingham	1	0	0	0	0	0
Blackburn	0	0	0	0	1	1
Bristol	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canterbury	0	0	1	0	1	1
Carlisle	0	0	1	0	4	1
Chelmsford	2	0	2	0	1	0
Chester	0	0	1	0	0	0
Chichester	0	1	0	0	0	1
Coventry	0	1	0	0	1	0
Derby	0	0	0	0	1	1
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ely	0	0	0	0	0	0
Europe	2	1	2	1	0	0
Exeter	2	1	0	1	0	1
Gloucester	1	0	0	0	0	0
Guildford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hereford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leicester	0	0	1	0	0	0
Lichfield	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lincoln	1	0	0	0	2	1
Liverpool	0	0	0	0	0	0
London	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newcastle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norwich	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oxford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peterborough	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portsmouth	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rochester	0	0	0	0	0	0
St Albans	0	0	0	0	1	0
St Eds & Ips	1	0	0	0	0	0
Salisbury	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheffield	0	0	0	0	4	0
Sodor & Man	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southwark	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southwell	1	0	0	1	0	0
Truro	0	0	0	0	0	0
W Yorks/Leeds	1	0	2	1	0	0
Winchester	1	0	0	0	0	0
Worcester	0	0	0	0	0	0
York	3	0	1	0	1	1
TOTALS	16	4	11	4	17	8

Appendix F: Basic information about the respondents at January 2015				
Name/ Crockford's designation	Age/Year ordained	Training	Education	Posts held since ordination
Phoebe/ Hospital Chaplain	54 2012	Part-time non- residential		Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 12-14 Full-time, salaried Chaplain from 16
Rhoda/ Hospital Chaplain	59 2004	Part-time non- residential	Cert Ed	Full-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 04 Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon 05 Full-time, salaried Chaplain from 08
Brigid/PTO	c65 1998	Part-time non- residential		Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 98 Part-time, salaried Chaplain 00-13 Active in retirement
Prochorus/ Curate	46 2014	Full-time residential	BA PGCE	Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon from 14 (One day on call Chaplaincy)
Julian/ Curate	45 2015	Part-time non- residential	BA MA PGCE	Part-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon from 15 and part-time, salaried Diocesan post and part-time, salaried freelance work
Sophia/NSM	52 2014	Part-time non- residential		Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon from 14 (One day on call Chaplaincy)
Catherine/ PTO Canon	70 1987	Deaconess training	BA PhD	Full-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 87-92 Academic/teaching 92-15 Retired 15
Lydia/ Resigned	c65 1998	Part-time non- residential		Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 98-15 Resigned 15
Johanna/ Curate	55 2003	Part-time non- residential	BA Cert Ed	Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon 03-10 Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon from 10
Nicanor/ NSM	68 2011	Part-time non- residential	BA PGCE	Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon from 11 (ordained after retirement from secular employment)
Hild/NSM	61 2011	Part-time non- residential		Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon from 11
Christina PTO	63 1997	Part-time non- residential	MA	Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon 97-02 Part-time, salaried Chaplain 02 Full-time, salaried Chaplain 03-15 Retired
Rita LTO Canon	48 1991	Full-time residential	BA MA	Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon 91-95 Part-time, salaried theological trainer 95-09 Diocesan post from 09
Mark/NSM	59 2012	Part-time non- residential	BA	Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon from 12 and part-time, salaried teaching (ordained after retirement from secular employment)
Junia/NSM	74 2011	Part-time non- residential	Cert Ed	Part-time, self-supporting Parish Deacon from 11 (ordained after retirement from secular employment)
Agnes Retired	65 1987	Full-time residential		Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon 87 Full-time, salaried Chaplaincy 87-91 Full-time, stipendiary Parish Deacon from 91

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