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The Diaconate: Barrier or Catalyst for Lay Ministry?

ROBERT B. SLOCUM

In his article "Do We Need Ordained 'Icons' of Lay Ministry?," Bishop Charles Duvall of the Central Gulf Coast answers his question with an emphatic "no!" According to Bishop Duvall, "it is very difficult to get the icon out of the Church and into the world where the servant ministry is to be exercised." He adds that "deacons become 'mini-priests'" and "reflections of a priestly icon rather than being icons themselves of a lay servant ministry." Bishop Duvall cites a case in his own diocese in which a deacon moved to a small congregation with no regular priest: "The lay members of that congregation saw the deacon as one who had more training and skills in the leadership of worship than they and pressed me to put him in charge." Bishop Duvall confesses that he "gave in," and, he wonders, "If someone with serious reservations about the use of ordained persons to model lay ministry falls into the trap of using deacons primarily in the Church rather than out in the world, what would happen in those situations where there are no reservations?"¹ An editor's note appended to Bishop Duvall's article adds, "I have just recently heard that Oklahoma has over 80 permanent deacons. Is this the result of ordaining everyone who 'hears a call'?"² In effect, Bishop Duvall opposes the diaconate as an order of ministry in its own right because of possible confusion relative to other forms of ministry. Bishop Duvall's concern raises questions of function, role, and identity for the ministry of deacons.

Does the diaconate in some way diminish or interfere with the ministry of lay people? This is a serious question, and it can be evaluated in light of the current practice of diaconal ministry. I mailed surveys to one hundred diocesan bishops of the Episcopal Church on 15 September 1988. These bishops were asked to report the number of "vocational" deacons in their diocese, whether they consider aspirants for the diaconate, and how they evaluate, train, and deploy deacons. They were also asked about their

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¹Charles Duvall, "Do We Need Ordained 'Icons' of Lay Ministry?" *On Target* 3 (June 1988): 1.

²The editor was, apparently, misinformed. According to the Ven. Eleanor Hill, Archdeacon of Oklahoma, there were 26 deacons in the diocese as of 23 January 1989.

understanding of the role of the diaconate in the ministry of the church today. The survey form specifically excluded "those who are ordained deacon on a transitional basis in the process leading to ordination as a priest."³ As of 19 May 1989, I had received eighty-four substantive responses from diocesan bishops or their designees and seven substantive responses from diaconate program officers. Overall, I received substantive responses from ninety-one or 91 percent of the one hundred dioceses surveyed. I will summarize the survey results.

Several bishops indicated some uncertainty about the diaconate in their responses. Bishop C. Cabell Tennis of Delaware wrote, "If I had a clear understanding [of the role of the diaconate in the ministry of the church today] or if I thought that the church had a clear understanding, I would find it much easier to deal with the issue of responding to aspirants and taking care for their training and deployment."⁴ Bishop Peter James Lee of Virginia expressed similar concerns.

The Diocese of Virginia, through its Commission on Ministry, is following closely the development and deployment of vocational deacons elsewhere in the country. . . . It may be that Virginia will develop a vocational diaconate at some future date, but we are observing developments elsewhere in the nation and in the world with care so that the integrity of servanthood at all levels of ministry is maintained and not simply isolated in one order of the church.⁵

The bishops of Delaware and Virginia seem to be watching and waiting as the church goes through a time of confusion regarding the diaconate.

Other dioceses are more actively embroiled in a process of transition. Some dioceses are reconsidering *whether* to have a diaconate program, while others are reconsidering *how*. The Rt. Rev. Frank K. Allan, writing as Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Atlanta, reported that "For the last fifteen years, no one has been ordained to this order. We are in the process of re-examining this policy in the light of the new understanding of the diaconate as expressed in the Prayer Book."⁶ Representatives of the di-

³Survey questionnaires were sent to bishops of Episcopal dioceses in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, and in the Virgin Islands. A follow-up letter was mailed on 2 December 1988 to bishops who had not responded. Copies of the questionnaire were mailed on 11 January 1989 to diocesan program officers for the diaconate (as listed by the North American Association for the Diaconate) in dioceses that had not yet responded. Copies of all responses to the survey and related materials are available in the Library of the School of Theology of the University of the South.

⁴The Rt. Rev. C. Cabell Tennis to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 23 September 1988.

⁵The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 28 September 1988.

⁶The Rt. Rev. Frank K. Allan to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 29 September 1988.

oces of Alabama, Los Angeles, and Ohio also indicated that they are not currently considering aspirants for the diaconate; that policy is now under review by commissions on ministry in these dioceses.⁷

The survey results indicate various attitudes toward the diaconate in the Episcopal Church today. Eight of the responding dioceses had no deacons at all. Thirty-eight dioceses had from one to five deacons. Fourteen dioceses had from six to ten deacons. Eight dioceses had from eleven to fifteen deacons. Twelve dioceses had from sixteen to twenty deacons. Five dioceses had from twenty-one to thirty deacons. Three dioceses had from thirty-one to forty deacons. Three dioceses had more than forty deacons.

Seventy-three of the responding dioceses consider aspirants for the diaconate; seventeen dioceses do not.

Missouri is "developing a program now."⁸ Two of the dioceses (Arkansas and Rochester) that consider aspirants indicated that they do not encourage or promote this ministry. Five of the dioceses (Alabama, Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York, and Ohio) that do not now consider aspirants reported that they are currently reconsidering the question. Five of the eight dioceses with no deacons (Arkansas, Montana, Northern Michigan, Upper South Carolina, and West Virginia) do consider aspirants. Of these five dioceses, Montana had eight in process at the time of the survey response, Upper South Carolina had one, and West Virginia had three. On the other hand, fifteen dioceses with vocational deacons do not consider aspirants. But this list of fifteen dioceses includes all five of the dioceses that are reconsidering their position. With the exception of Newark (with twelve deacons), all of the dioceses having deacons but not considering aspirants have less than five deacons.

Geographical Comparison

Very different policies concerning the diaconate can be found in close proximity. For example, the Diocese of Newark does not now consider aspirants. On the other hand, the Diocese of New Jersey considers aspirants and has thirty-two deacons. The Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast (encompassing southern Alabama and northwestern Florida) has no deacons and considers no aspirants. But all four of the other dioceses in Florida consider aspirants. The Diocese of Florida has four deacons, Central Florida has about forty-five, Southwest Florida has twelve, and Southeast

⁷The Rev. Canon B. Massey Gentry (Alabama) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 5 December 1988; Maricela Koenigs (Los Angeles) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 5 October 1988; the Rev. Gay C. Jennings (Ohio) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 18 November 1988.

⁸The Rt. Rev. William A. Jones, Jr., to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 21 September 1988.

Florida has twenty-four. The Diocese of Southern Virginia considers aspirants, but Virginia and Southwestern Virginia do not. The Diocese of South Carolina does not consider aspirants, while aspirants for the diaconate are considered by Upper South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. In Texas, the Dioceses of Texas and West Texas have two deacons each and do not consider aspirants. But Dallas (three), Fort Worth (about eight), Northwest Texas (nine), and the Rio Grande (twenty) all have deacons and consider aspirants. Massachusetts and New Hampshire do not consider aspirants. But Maine and Connecticut consider aspirants, and both have 17 deacons in their programs. The three largest diaconate programs are California ("40-50"), Central Florida (45), and Michigan (43). Geography does not seem to be a major factor in the Episcopal Church's response to the diaconate.

Basic Conclusions from the Survey

There is considerable disagreement in the Episcopal Church today about the ministry of deacons. There are, however, many more dioceses with deacons (eighty-three of the survey respondents) than dioceses with no deacons (eight of the survey respondents). More dioceses consider aspirants for the diaconate (seventy-three of the survey respondents) than dioceses that do not (seventeen of the survey respondents). A significant majority of dioceses in the Episcopal Church favor considering aspirants, even if one "adjusts" the figures for the two dioceses that consider aspirants but do not promote the diaconate. Five dioceses that currently do not consider aspirants are reviewing their position; no dioceses that do consider aspirants are re-evaluating their choice.

The Relationship of Diaconate and Laity

Does the deployment of deacons create an obstacle to the exercise of lay ministry? Several bishops expressed this concern in terms of their understanding of the diaconate, and some appear to use it as a basis for not considering aspirants. For example, Bishop Duvall notes in his survey response that "I have chosen not to have vocational deacons in this diocese because of my belief that that office 'muddies the water' concerning our emphasis on the ministry of all baptized persons."⁹ Bishop A. Heath Light of Southwestern Virginia writes that "I see the vocational diaconate as another barrier to the full exercise of baptismal ministry and activities authorized for laity by the canons."¹⁰ Bishop Lee of Virginia notes that "the

⁹The Rt. Rev. Charles F. Duvall to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 22 September 1988.

¹⁰The Rt. Rev. A. Heath Light to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 30 September 1988.

Commission on Ministry and I share a degree of caution that the development of the vocational diaconate may well confuse the strong ministry of the laity, which is a hallmark of the ministry of the Diocese of Virginia."¹¹ The dioceses of Central Gulf Coast, Southwestern Virginia, and Virginia do not consider aspirants for the diaconate.

The Rev. Andrew Fairfield of the Diocese of Alaska focused the question of diaconal function and meaning in relation to the laity.

The ministry of a deacon lies in the balance between symbol and function. If it is mostly unique symbol, without unique function, it is weak. With respect to function, I would say that it is not enough that a deacon simply demonstrate a ministry of service. I believe the unique function of a deacon must be more focused in the enablement of a broad range of lay ministries. A deacon should be not just a "hospital visitor," but especially someone with gifts and training for helping people discern their own gifts for ministry, and skill in helping people find a way to deploy them. Without a specific function such as this, I see a deacon as little more than a clericalized lay minister.¹²

Alaska does consider aspirants for the diaconate. It appears that a successful aspirant for the diaconate in Alaska would be a person with gifts for enabling the ministry of the laity.

The Deacon's Role in Enabling Lay Ministry

The survey indicated that many dioceses understand the deacon as one who is a catalyst for lay ministry. This understanding is illustrated by the diocesan responses concerning evaluation and training of aspirants and deployment of deacons.

a. Evaluation of Aspirants

The capacity to enable and draw out the participation of others in service ministry was listed by several dioceses as a qualification for an aspirant. For example, the diaconate program proposal for Ohio describes a prospective deacon.

A person identified as having a vocation to the diaconate would be recognized both by himself or herself and by the Church as

¹¹Lee to Slocum, 28 September 1988.

¹²The Rev. Andrew Fairfield to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 27 September 1988.

being called to assist all baptized persons to recognize their vocation as servants, and to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. Therefore, evidence of a servant ministry, however significant, is not enough in and of itself to warrant ordination to the diaconate.¹³

Maryland's program manual is specific about the aspirant's capacity for involving others in service as a qualification. "Since the deacon is to assist the church in ministering in the world, he or she must also show some ability to involve or teach others to carry out these types of ministries."¹⁴ A similar concern is shown in the Southern Virginia program, in which one criterion for selection is "[r]ecognition by the candidate that the diaconal ministry is . . . enhancing to other ministries."¹⁵

According to the diaconate program guidelines in Arizona, "The Deacon models the servanthood of the whole community in liturgy, but the primary role of the office is to enable the whole congregation in its servant ministries." The deacon's role in enabling the service ministry of the laity in the congregation is explicit in the diocesan process leading to ordination. In the Arizona guidelines,

A congregation considering the calling of one of its members to the Office of Deacon must first engage in a period of study on the Diaconate. . . . Following such study the congregation must commit itself to grow in diaconal ministries in its community, neighborhood or area, and therefore to call a Deacon in order to be enabled in these ministries.¹⁶

This plan intends that any deacon ordained in a congregation will have the specific gifts needed to enable lay ministry in that place. With this goal in mind, both aspirant and congregation are participants in the diocesan process that leads to ordination. Similarly, according to the Rev. Canon Miller M. Cragon, Jr., in Chicago,

We do not accept individual applicants. The parish to which the aspirant belongs must go through some sort of discernment process to determine why the parish should have a Deacon. . . . With the obvious possibility of moves, it is expected that the deacon who has been raised up by the parish will remain indefi-

¹³"The Diaconate in the Diocese of Ohio: A Proposal," 14 September 1988, p. 5.

¹⁴"Deacon Formation in Maryland," 1986, p. 2.

¹⁵"The Permanent Diaconate in Southern Virginia," p. 4.

¹⁶"Guidelines for a Diaconate Program, Diocese of Arizona," 1986, p. 1.

nately as the parish deacon. Part of the evaluation of the application for postulancy, therefore, becomes a review of the parish statement with the applicant to try to make sure there is a proper fit.¹⁷

These criteria for selection of aspirants reflect an understanding of the deacon's calling to stimulate and encourage the service ministry of others. Prior to beginning its 1987 program of training for the diaconate, the Diocese of New Jersey stated that its Vocational Diaconate Committee would "seek to recruit those persons who have existing and recognized ministries in the area of outreach. Such ministries include . . . evangelism (especially in inspiring lay ministry or programs of evangelism in the workplace)."¹⁸ A similar understanding of the diaconate is expressed by Bishop Roger J. White of Milwaukee.

The primary motivation for the [diaconal] ministry has to be an established servant ministry and an ability to enthuse, lead, and direct others in that servant ministry, as the deacon brings the cares and concerns of the community and of the world so that they may be addressed with a servant response by the parish.¹⁹

In Southwest Florida the guidelines for diaconal ministry state that "In very practical terms, we believe the renewal of the diaconate in the Church will come through people who are called by congregations and by God to do diaconal ministries which are: 1. Work to enlist and enable lay persons to engage in various servant ministries. . . ." ²⁰ These dioceses offer evidence in their aspirancy processes of an understanding of the deacon as an enabler of lay ministry.

b. Training of Aspirants

Several dioceses call for specific training to help deacons to enable and draw out the ministry of the laity. Indianapolis requires every applicant to have "[s]kills training in small group leadership to prepare the deacon to serve as an enabler of other Christians' ministries."²¹ The guidelines for the

¹⁷The Rev. Canon Miller M. Cragon, Jr., to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 24 September 1988.

¹⁸"Starting Again: The Second Class; Basic Documents of the Vocational Diaconate Program 1986- " (Diocese of New Jersey), p. 2.

¹⁹The Rt. Rev. Roger J. White to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 5 October 1988.

²⁰"Guidelines on Diaconal Ministry in the Diocese of Southwest Florida," November 1982, p. 1.

²¹"The Process Leading to Ordination to the Diaconate in the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis," 7 February 1987, p. 13.

Diocese of Olympia require training in “[t]hose skills related directly to enablement and empowerment of the Baptismal Ministry a. Leadership skills b. Training of others.”²² The Oklahoma manual for the diaconate states that the three summer field projects in the training program are meant to give the student an opportunity to “practice facilitative skills for enabling ministries of others.”²³ The Pennsylvania proposal guidelines for training note that “[a]s much as possible, instruction will avoid the use of straight lectures and will involve students in active participation in accordance with models of teaching which they themselves will use with lay people in their future ministry.” The Pennsylvania guidelines also call for a parish-based field education experience in which the student receives training in “development of community servanthood.”²⁴ These dioceses obviously see the deacon as one who *helps* the laity to exercise ministry. Their diocesan training requirements reflect that understanding of diaconal ministry.

c. Deployment of Deacons and the Ministry of the Laity

Several dioceses express by their deployment policies a view of the deacon as one who enables lay ministry. Bishop John F. Ashby notes that in Western Kansas “The deacons are deployed primarily in social ministry in the diocese. . . . I think the deacon’s ministry is distinguishable from lay ministry in that the deacon is the leader, the center, the trainer, the motivator, of lay ministry in the congregation and/or community.” Bishop Ashby points out that diaconal ministry is distinguishable from lay ministry, even though some of the specifics of ministry may be the same. He adds that “sometimes a deacon does the same thing that lay people do. That’s not a confusion of ministry but simply a similarity of function.”²⁵ Bishop William C. Wantland writes that, in the Diocese of Eau Claire, “Deacons are seen as ordained clergy, and while many tasks they do may be done by the laity (and the same is true of priests), they are seen liturgically, functionally, and sacramentally as neither laity nor priests, but deacons, with unique ministry in these areas.”²⁶ The guidelines for the Diocese of Maine note that “deacons are called not only to *do* servant ministry, as are we all by virtue of baptism, but also to *model* it for the whole Church, and *enable* it in others.”²⁷ Similarly, the Rev. Bruce T. Brown explains that, in

²²“Diaconal Training in the Diocese of Olympia,” 7 June 1988, p. 3.

²³Excerpted material from “Manual on the Diaconate in Oklahoma,” p. 4, appended to the letter from Hill to Slocum, 23 January 1989.

²⁴“Proposal for a Program of Preparation for the Vocational Diaconate for the Diocese of Pennsylvania,” 6 April 1988, pp. 2, 3.

²⁵The Rt. Rev. John F. Ashby to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 3 October 1988.

²⁶The Rt. Rev. William C. Wantland to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 22 September 1988.

²⁷“The Deacon Formation Program in the Diocese of Maine,” p. 1.

the Diocese of the Rio Grande, "We don't so much think of the ministry of Deacons as distinguished from lay ministry . . . [but] as symbol of the servant ministry of all baptised Christians. . . . We hope the Deacons serve to stimulate lay ministry."²⁸

The deacon's leadership role in relation to the servant ministry of the laity is explicit in the Diocese of Bethlehem. The Ven. Richard I. Cluett writes, "The ministry of deacons is to lead the ministry of the laity in this Diocese. They are to use a ministry of leadership, bottling, coordinating, and enablement of the ministry of lay persons."²⁹ The guidelines for the diaconate in Bethlehem likewise assert that "An extremely important aspect of the diaconal ministry is that of teaching the Church about the servant ministry of all the faithful . . . in effect being the servant teachers of the servants of God."³⁰ This aspect of diaconal ministry is discussed in the Kansas guidelines with respect to preaching by the deacon. As the Kansas guidelines explain, "Since the deacon is the icon of servant ministry and since the deacon functions to raise up servanthood within the community, diaconal sermons should emphasize servanthood." The Kansas guidelines add that "The deacon *models* servant ministry for the congregation and *encourages* involvement in servant ministry in the world, both individually and corporately, of all the members of the parish, as a part of the fulfillment of the baptismal covenant."³¹

What is the place of the diaconate in relation to the laity in the "ordering" of the church? Is there a necessary competition between these forms of ministry? This question is answered in the negative by the Diocese of Michigan, which notes in a pamphlet on "Deacons" that "a good deacon is able to call forth more ministry from all of us if he or she is conscientious about identifying how individuals, parishes and the larger Church are better able to serve."³² The Diocese of Connecticut understands the diaconate to have a proper share in the total ministry of the church, with each order of ministry serving in a complementary way. This balancing of ministries is understood in the specific context of the needs for ministry in the church and the world. As the Connecticut guidelines explain,

Each order of the Church provides a particular form of ministry necessary to the harmonious life of the Church. The revival of the diaconate would be helpful to the laity, episcopate, and presbyte-

²⁸The Rev. Bruce T. Brown to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 9 November 1988.

²⁹The Ven. Richard I. Cluett to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 7 October 1988.

³⁰"The Diaconate in the Diocese of Bethlehem," p. 2.

³¹"Guidelines for the Sacred Order of Deacons in the Diocese of Kansas," 1986, pp. 3, 4-5.

³²"Deacons" (Diocese of Michigan), p. 3.

rate by restoring this balance, and by relieving certain burdens now assumed, or absorbed, by the other orders."³³

With respect to this complementarity of ministry, it is significant that Kansas, Maine, and the Rio Grande mention baptism relative to the call for ministry that all Christians share.

Different dioceses understand the "distinguishability" of the deacon's ministry differently. Bishop Donald P. Hart of Hawaii writes,

The deacons are enablers of lay ministry and each of them is asked to involve lay people in the servant ministry which they carry out. They are not distinguishable from lay ministry in function. What distinguishes them is that they are under holy orders and accountable in a way which the laity are not."³⁴

The Rev. Andrew Fairfield of Alaska finds "considerable fuzziness in the relationship between the diaconate and other lay ministries," with the exception of the deacon's "unique functions" in the liturgy that "distinguish them from those in lay ministries."³⁵ In contrast, the Rev. Canon M. Sue Reid sees deacons as distinguishable in function.

The deacons are seen as icons for Christian servanthood. They do not 'do' the tasks that lay people would normally do. They act as organizers, as communication links between the church and the world to inform the church of the world's needs.³⁶

Another view of the distinguishable nature of the deacon's ministry is offered in an ordination sermon by the Rev. Earl H. Brill, director of the Deacons' Training Program in North Carolina. With respect to "the question most frequently asked of deacons and of those preparing for that office: What can you do as a deacon that you can't do as a lay person? The answer is NOTHING. . . . What deacons take on is not privilege, but obligation." Brill adds that deacons serve under discipline, they are accountable for their service, and

they are also promising to assist us—all of us, bishops and priests as well as lay persons—to discover and exercise our own servant ministry. Sure, we can do that without deacons, but we won't. We

³³"A Diaconal Ministry for Connecticut," p. 1.

³⁴The Rt. Rev. Donald P. Hart to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 2 November 1988.

³⁵Fairfield to Slocum, 27 September 1988.

³⁶The Rev. Canon M. Sue Reid (Diocese of Indianapolis) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 14 November 1988.

know that what is everybody's business is nobody's business. And frankly our track record for servant ministry is not all that distinguished.³⁷

Different dioceses express the deacon's role as enabler of the laity in different ways. Some dioceses, however, did mention specific areas of ministry responsibility that are being entrusted to deacons. The Ven. Peter A. Landskroener explained that, in Rhode Island,

a majority of the deacons have been involved in laity teaching and/or training programs. This teaching/training role of the deacons is about to be expanded to a Diocese-wide Lay Eucharistic Ministry training program which will be conducted by (some of) them. Down the road we hope to do the same thing for the Lay Visitation Ministry.³⁸

Kansas and West Tennessee also mentioned the deacon's role in training lay eucharistic ministers.³⁹

The true test of the complementarity of ministries is in the actual settings of ministry. Although some dioceses expressed concern about possible difficulties, no specific incidents were mentioned in which lay people experienced conflict or interference due to the ministry of a deacon. Canon Cragon reported that, in the Diocese of Chicago,

There have been some difficult situations with the new deacon and the priest as the relationship was altered by ordination, but I am not aware of any problems concerning the laity. In fact, the deacons may have stimulated more lay ministry among the people, but data on this will be hard to discover.⁴⁰

The Role of the Deacon

Some bishops believe the deacon has no role in the ministry of the Episcopal Church today. Bishop John S. Spong of Newark writes, "I think it [the diaconate] should be a lay office and be abandoned as part of Holy

³⁷Earl H. Brill, "Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Four Deacons," 4 October 1987, pp. 2-3.

³⁸The Ven. Peter A. Landskroener to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 10 October 1988.

³⁹"Guidelines for the Sacred Order of Deacons in the Diocese of Kansas," p. 4; the Rev. Canon Frank M. Cooper IV (Diocese of West Tennessee) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 30 November 1988.

⁴⁰Cragon to Slocum, 24 September 1988.

Orders.”⁴¹ Bishop C. FitzSimons Allison of South Carolina states that “here we do not need them.” He asks, “What would they do that lay readers, lay eucharistic ministers, lay catechists are not doing?”⁴² Similarly, Bishop John H. MacNaughton of West Texas writes, “Other options (Canon II clergy, properly licensed lay people, non-stipendiary priests, etc.) are more suitable and carry fewer liabilities for our ministry.”⁴³ These dioceses are among the seventeen survey respondents that do not consider aspirants for the diaconate.

On the other hand, many dioceses see a real need for the ministry of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church. Thirty-nine of the seventy-three dioceses that consider aspirants expressed an understanding of the diaconate in terms of a ministry of servanthood.⁴⁴ For example, Bishop George L. Beynolds of Tennessee writes, “I see the diaconate as a servant ministry in the life of the Church today. It is a focused and informed ministry, distinguished by ordination and by commitment to servanthood.”⁴⁵ Bishop William E. Swing of California explains, “My understanding of the diaconate in the Church today is that folks who are ordained deacons should witness to the servanthood of Christ.”⁴⁶ Eight dioceses that consider aspirants mentioned the deacon’s role as an “icon” of servanthood or lay ministry.⁴⁷ For example, Bishop Craig B. Anderson of South Dakota writes, “Principally, I see deacons as icons of servant ministry. Deacons model for all of us the role of servant in and outside the church.”⁴⁸

Bishop Richard F. Grein discussed in a sermon the Church’s need for the diaconate to model servanthood and outreach ministry. “Usually when lay people want to do ministry,” Bishop Grein asked, “what do they think about doing?”

⁴¹The Rt. Rev. John S. Spong to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, undated response received 19 November 1988.

⁴²The Rt. Rev. C. FitzSimons Allison to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 27 September 1988.

⁴³The Rt. Rev. John H. MacNaughton to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, undated response received 23 September 1988.

⁴⁴Dioceses whose respondents mentioned the deacon’s role as “servant” include Albany, Arizona, Bethlehem, California, Central Florida, Connecticut, East Tennessee, Eastern Oregon, Florida, Hawaii, Kansas, Lexington, Maine, Maryland, Milwaukee, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northwest Texas, Northwestern Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Quincy, San Diego, South Dakota, Southeast Florida, Southern Virginia, Spokane, Springfield, Tennessee, Upper South Carolina, Utah, Virgin Islands, West Missouri, West Tennessee, West Virginia, Western Louisiana, Western Michigan, and Western North Carolina.

⁴⁵The Rt. Rev. George L. Reynolds to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 2 November 1988.

⁴⁶The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 23 November 1988.

⁴⁷Dioceses whose respondents mentioned the role of the deacon as an “icon” of servanthood or lay ministry include Albany, Eau Claire, Indianapolis, Kansas, Louisiana, Northern Indiana, South Dakota, and Utah.

⁴⁸The Rt. Rev. Craig B. Anderson to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 10 November 1988.

Altar Guild, acolytes, chalice bearer, lay reader, vestry—all of them institutional ministries. The laity don't think as much about going out and doing servanthood kinds of ministry—a diaconate kind of ministry because the primary ministry of the Church is seen in the role of the priest. And so when that is reflected to them they think about doing institutional ministries. I would claim that until we renew the diaconate we are not going to renew the ministry of the *laos* as a serving people to the world.⁴⁹

Representatives of twenty-one dioceses that consider aspirants mention the deacon's role as one who enables and stimulates lay ministry.⁵⁰ For example, Bishop A. Theodore Eastman of Maryland states that "the deacon is not the one who does ministry for lay people, or in place of lay people. Rather, the deacon is one who serves by calling lay folk into service, and by helping to train and empower them for their ministry."⁵¹ Bishop Roger J. White of Milwaukee writes, "My understanding of the role of the diaconate in the ministry is to hold up before the Church the servant ministry of Christ, both by enabling that to happen in the lives of other people in the Church and also by being an example of that servant ministry."⁵² Bishop Leigh A. Wallace, Jr., of Spokane also understands the deacon's role in terms of stimulating the church's servant ministry. He notes that "all Christians are called to be Christ servants in the world. The unique place of the deacon is in challenging, empowering, and enabling this ministry for everyone within the church."⁵³

Four other dioceses place special emphasis on the deacon's role as enabler of the servant ministry of *all* Christians. The Pennsylvania guidelines for the diaconate training program state that "the goal of deacons is to enable all church members—priests, deacons, and laity together—to share in the Church's ministry of servanthood."⁵⁴ Albany, Florida and

⁴⁹"Typescript of Remarks by the Rev. Richard F. Grein Concerning the Renewal of the Diaconate made at the Convention of the Diocese of Kansas, September 24, 1977," p. 4. This sermon was preached prior to Bishop Grein's election as Bishop of Kansas and his subsequent move to New York. This text was appended to the survey response of the Ven. Frank Cohoon of Kansas, 30 September 1988.

⁵⁰Dioceses whose respondents mentioned the deacon's role as an enabler of the servant ministries of others include Alaska, Arizona, Bethlehem, Connecticut, Eau Claire, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Milwaukee, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Rio Grande, Southern Virginia, Southwest Florida, Spokane, Springfield, Western Kansas, and Wyoming.

⁵¹A. Theodore Eastman, text of an introduction to a diocesan film about the Diaconate in Maryland, appended to the survey response of the Ven. Nancy B. Foote of Maryland to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 12 October 1988.

⁵²The Rt. Rev. Roger J. White to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 5 October 1988.

⁵³The Rt. Rev. Leigh A. Wallace, Jr., to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, 17 November 1988.

⁵⁴"Questions and Answers about the Diaconate" (Diocese of Pennsylvania), p. 4.

North Dakota also emphasize the deacon's role as one who calls all members of the church to servanthood.⁵⁵

Fifteen dioceses mention the deacon's role as one who interprets the concerns of the world to the church and extends the ministry of the church to the world.⁵⁶ Landskroener of Rhode Island notes that deacons "can go to the margins of society, or wherever there are needs and minister to those needs. Of equal importance is that the deacons, in turn, can bring these needs to the Church's attention enabling it to respond as a whole."⁵⁷ Bishop Anderson of South Dakota connects the deacon's liturgical ministry in the parish with the deacon's servant ministry both in and beyond the parish. He explains that "the deacon is intentionally a person in and of the world. As a consequence, the deacon brings the needs and concerns of the world to the liturgy each Sunday as he/she reads the Gospel, leads the Prayers of the People, sets the table and dismisses the people into the world."⁵⁸ Seven dioceses mention the role of the deacon as a "bridge" or "link" between the church and the secular world.⁵⁹ According to the guidelines for the Deacons' Training Program in North Carolina, "The deacon is a liaison between the Church and the world, one who bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular."⁶⁰

An Emerging Consensus

In view of the survey responses, I see an emerging consensus that recognizes and encourages the ministry of deacons. Many dioceses see the deacons not as a barrier but as a catalyst and enabler for lay ministry. Many dioceses see the deacon as a servant who models, represents, and leads the servant ministry of the whole church. Many dioceses see the deacon as one called to be the bridge between the concerns of the world and the outreach ministry of the church. These dioceses perceive not only a place but a real need for the diaconate in the total ministry of the Episcopal Church today.

⁵⁵The Rev. Robert Limpert (Diocese of Albany) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, undated response received 11 October 1988; "The Formation of Deacons in the Diocese of Florida," 1987, p. 2; the Rev. Sandra A. Holmberg (Diocese of North Dakota) to the Rev. Robert B. Slocum, undated response received 21 January 1989.

⁵⁶Dioceses whose respondents mentioned this aspect of the deacon's role include Connecticut, East Tennessee, Lexington, Maine, Milwaukee, Nebraska, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Southeast Florida, Southern Virginia, Springfield, Upper South Carolina, Virgin Islands, and Western Michigan.

⁵⁷Landskroener to Slocum, 10 October 1988.

⁵⁸Anderson to Slocum, 10 November 1988.

⁵⁹Dioceses whose respondents mention the deacon's role as a "bridge" or "link" between the Church and the secular world include Central Florida, Indianapolis, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rio Grande, Southeast Florida, and Western New York.

⁶⁰"Deacons' Training Program" (Diocese of North Carolina), June 1987, p. 1.

Table 1

Diocesan Survey on the Vocational Diaconate

[key: Y = yes, N = no, C = policy under consideration, X = diaconate not encouraged,
[—] = no response, (response date in parenthesis)]

Diocese Name (Response Date)	How Many Deacons?	Consider Aspirants?	Want Survey Results?
1/Alabama (12/5/88)	1	N, C	—
2/Alaska (9/27/88)	5	Y	—
3/Albany (10/11/88)	19	Y	—
4/Arkansas (9/21/88)	0	Y, X	Y
5/Arizona (9/23/88)	7	Y	—
6/Atlanta (9/29/88)	3	N, C	Y
7/Bethlehem (10/7/88)	3	Y	Y
8/California (11/23/88)	"40-50"	Y	—
9/Central Fla. (11/18/88)	45 (approx.)	Y	—
10/Cent. Gulf Coast (9/22/88)	0	N	—
11/Cent. New York (10/20/88)	1	N	Y
12/Central Pennsylvania (11/22/88)	15	Y	—
13/Chicago (9/24/88)	33 (approx.)	Y	Y
14/Connecticut (10/6/88)	17	Y	—
15/Dallas (2/1/89)	3	Y	—
16/Delaware (9/23/88)	1	N	—
17/East Tennessee (10/11/88)	8	Y	Y
18/Eastern Oregon (11/22/88)	4	Y	—
19/Eau Claire (9/22/88)	4	Y	—
20/Florida (10/3/88)	4	Y	—
21/Fond du Lac (9/21/88)	2	Y	—
22/Fort Worth (10/5/88)	8 (approx.)	Y	Y
23/Georgia (9/22/88)	6	Y	Y
24/Hawaii (11/2/88)	16	Y	—
25/Indianapolis (11/14/88)	4	Y	Y
26/Iowa (10/10/88)	3	Y	—
27/Kansas (9/30/88)	22	Y	—
28/Kentucky (9/23/88)	7	Y	—
29/Lexington (1/17/89)	15	Y	—
30/Long Island (2/8/89)	15	Y	Y
31/Los Angeles (10/5/88)	1	N, C	—
32/Louisiana (9/20/88)	7	Y	—
33/Maine-1 (11/22/88)	17	Y	—
Maine-2 (2/16/89)	17	Y	—
34/Maryland (10/12/88)	11	Y	—
35/Massachusetts (10/3/88)	2	N	—
36/Michigan (10/20/88)	43	Y	—
37/Milwaukee (10/5/88)	35	Y	Y
38/Missouri (9/21/88)	0	—	—

39/Montana (11/18/88)	0	Y	—
40/Navajoland (9/27/88)	1	Y	—
41/Nebraska (1/19/89)	20	Y	Y
42/Nevada (10/11/88)	9	Y	Y
43/New Hampshire (10/18/88)	1	N	—
44/Newark (11/19/88)	12	N	—
45/New Jersey (10/3/88)	32	Y	—
46/New York (1/21/89)	4	N, C	—
47/North Carolina (10/10/88)	10	Y	Y
48/North Dakota (1/21/89)	1	Y	Y
49/Northern California (1/27/89)	3	—	Y
50/Northern Indiana (9/27/88)	2	Y	—
51/Northern Michigan (10/19/88)	0	Y	Y
52/Northwest Texas (11/15/88)	9	Y	—
53/Northwestern Penn. (11/29/88)	5	Y	—
54/Ohio (11/18/88)	3	N, C	Y
55/Oklahoma (1/23/89)	26	Y	—
56/Olympia (10/12/88)	16	Y	Y
57/Oregon (9/27/88)	25	Y	—
58/Pennsylvania (9/30/88)	22	Y	Y
59/Pittsburgh (12/3/88)	15	Y	—
60/Quincy (11/29/88)	3	Y	—
61/Rhode Island (10/10/88)	17	Y	Y
62/Rio Grande (11/9/88)	20	Y	—
63/Rochester (10/21/88)	3	Y, X	—
64/San Diego (9/27/88)	6	Y	Y
65/San Joaquin-1 (11/26/88)	4	Y	—
San Joaquin-2 (2/9/89)	2	Y	—
66/South Carolina (9/27/88)	0	N	—
67/South Dakota (11/10/88)	14	Y	Y
68/Southeast Florida (11/28/88)	24	Y	Y
69/Southern Ohio (9/27/88)	6	Y	—
70/Southern Virginia (10/26/88)	4	Y	Y
71/Southwest Florida (9/23/88)	12	Y	Y
72/Southwestern Virginia (9/30/88)	3	N	Y
73/Springfield (9/24/88)	2	Y	—
74/Spokane (11/17/88)	17	Y	—
75/Tennessee (11/7/88)	3	Y	—
76/Texas (10/3/88)	2	N	—
77/Upper South Carolina (9/22/88)	0	Y	—
78/Utah (11/28/88)	7	Y	Y
79/Vermont (1/31/89)	9	Y	—
80/Virgin Islands (10/6/88)	2	Y	—
81/Virginia (9/28/88)	1	N, C	—
82/West Missouri (9/28/88)	19	Y	Y
83/West Tennessee (11/30/88)	9	Y	—

84/West Texas (9/23/88)	2	N	—
85/West Virginia (10/4/88)	0	Y	—
86/Western Kansas (10/3/88)	4	Y (bp's initiative)	—
87/Western Louisiana (5/18/89)	4	Y	—
88/Western Michigan (4/3/89)	5	Y	Y
89/Western New York (9/27/88)	18	Y	—
90/Western North Carolina (12/12/88)	17	Y	Y
91/Wyoming (9/23/88)	2	Y	—

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