

## THE DEACONESS ORDER (1960)

'Order', as an ecclesiastical term, is used in many ways and with varying degrees of precision. The usage in Methodism relates most closely to the idea of a religious society living under rule. In the widest sense the Methodist Church itself is an 'Order.' In a narrower sense the word connects a body of workers, having their own distinctive function, place and discipline. Thus, in fact, if not in name, the ministry is an Order, as a body of men set apart by the Church to fulfil certain functions to which they are directed, and living under a specific common discipline. In practice, the use of the word has been limited to the Wesley Deaconess Order, as a body of women, authorized by the Church, set apart for specific functions and under a recognized discipline, including place and nature of appointment, and allowances. The members of the Deaconess Order are first accepted by the Wesley Deaconess Convocation and then received into full membership of the Order through ordination with the laying on of hands by the President of the Conference (or by an ex-President appointed by him), and by a standing vote of the Conference, before which they must appear. They are ordained not to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments but to the 'office of a Deaconess in the Church of God'. The character of their work is set out in the Order of Service used at their Ordination. The President addresses those who are to be ordained as follows: 'It may fall to your lot to preach the Gospel, to lead the worship of a congregation, to teach both young and old: you may be required to feed the flock of Christ, to nurse the hopeless, to offer friendship, even at cost, to many who, but for you, may never know a Christian friend. But in all this you must be true evangelists of our Lord Jesus Christ, translating your Gospel into the language of personal service, that it may be better understood, not reckoning your ministry complete till those whom you serve can say, 'Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'" Prayer is offered that they may receive the 'continued help of the Holy Spirit' in the 'ministry now committed to them,' and that they may receive the gifts necessary for their work. Many who offer themselves for the work are already Local Preachers and Class Leaders. Those who are not Local Preachers become so, with few exceptions, during their training. All Deaconesses lead classes as part of their normal work.

The question of ordaining Deaconesses to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments has been referred by the Conference to a Special Committee.

*(Agenda 1960, p. 312)*

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This appeared as Appendix C to Ordination in the Methodist Church 1960.