

# THE METHODIST DIACONAL ORDER (1993)

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## Resolutions

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### **1. Introduction**

#### 1.1 The 1988 Conference adopted the following resolutions :

The Conference resolves that the Wesley Deaconess Order shall be called the Methodist Diaconal Order and its members deaconesses or deacons according to gender. . .

The Conference resolves that the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who are received into full membership of the Order shall be ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God. . .

The Conference instructs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare a form of ordination to the diaconate. . . and report to the Conference of 1989.

#### 1.2 The 1989 Conference received this report from the Faith and Order Committee:

The Conference of 1988 made a number of decisions regarding the Methodist Diaconal Order. In the judgment of the Committee, these

decisions could have far-reaching implications of a theological and constitutional nature.

The Committee therefore recommends that it be empowered by the Conference to give careful attention to these matters, in consultation with other appropriate bodies.

The Conference therefore adopted this resolution :

The Conference instructs the Committee, in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, to consider the theological and constitutional implications of the decisions of the Conference of 1988 in relation to the Methodist Diaconal Order, and to report to the Conference.

- 1.3 The Faith and Order Committee set up a joint Working Party with representatives of the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Law and Polity Committee. This report is the result of three years' deliberation and consultation, not least with the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order.
- 1.4 What are the "far-reaching implications of a theological and constitutional nature" suggested by the apparently straightforward decisions of the 1988 Conference? The central theological issue is raised by the expression, "ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God". Throughout the greater part of the Christian world (including the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion) the meaning of that expression would not be in doubt. The reference would be to ordination to the first of the three "major orders of ministry" (the diaconate, the presbyterate, the episcopate – whose members are generally known, respectively, as deacons, priests and bishops).
- 1.5 Does the resolution of the 1988 Conference represent a decision that men and women be ordained to such an order of ministry? If so, what are the constitutional implications of that decision? If not, what other meaning can be attached to ordination "to the diaconate in the Church of God"? It is, of course, impossible to know what was in the minds of all who voted in favour of the 1988 resolutions, but the other questions cannot be evaded. Deacons and deaconesses either belong to an order of ministry, theologically comparable to the diaconate in the churches which have a three-fold ministry, or they do not.
- 1.6 If the former is true, there is a case to be made for amending Clause 4, the Doctrinal Clause, of the Deed of Union (see Appendix), which appears to recognize explicitly only one order of ministry, the presbyteral; from a constitutional point of view deacons and deaconesses are regarded as lay people. If, however, ordination to the diaconate in Methodism is understood as something entirely different from ordination to one of the three historic orders of ministry, there is theological work to be done to determine what that "something different" actually is.

1.7 The history of the diaconate from New Testament times onwards is complex, and it is not possible to do justice to it in this report. Nevertheless, some account of it needs to be offered if we are to deal responsibly with the questions now before us.

## 2. The New Testament and 'Deacons'

2.1 The most significant aspect of the New Testament material is that the key noun, *diakonos*, and the related abstract noun, *diakonia*, and the verb, *diakoneo*, are used most frequently in generalised ways conveying a range of agency and service. It might be noted that, as is also true of contemporary pagan usage, this range is broader than the narrow conceptions of service, or even 'waiting on tables', often claimed for the fundamental idea behind 'deacon'. Only a few passages require specific attention for our purposes.

2.2 Phil. 1.1 supplies the earliest, clearest reference to 'deacons' in a (semi)-official sense. Paul addresses 'all the saints who are in Philippi together with (the) bishops (or overseers) and deacons'. Since this pairing is not mentioned elsewhere in this or Paul's other letters, a clear picture of their function is not attainable, and they may have been a local development in Philippi. Neither can we relate them to that other group, the elders, who appear in some other New Testament writings but not in the genuine Pauline letters. The fluidity of Paul's understanding of ministry prevents us from speaking of defined 'orders' in his churches during his lifetime.

2.3 This fluidity is apparent in Paul's other uses of the term which range from denying that Christ was a 'deacon', that is, an agent, of sin (Gal. 2.17) to affirming the state as the 'deacon' of God (Rom. 13.4). Among these Paul can also speak of himself and his fellow-workers as 'deacons' of the new covenant or of God through their ministry (eg. 2 Cor. 3.6; 6.4).

2.4 The description of Phoebe as 'deacon of the church in Cenchrea' (Rom. 16.1) is ambiguous. Apparently wealthy enough to offer some form of patronage (v.2), she may have been noted for her service within the church, or, perhaps more probably, acted as an agent of the church at least in visiting Paul and travelling on to the church in Rome; the term may carry a developing technical note but says little about any more specific function within the church. So too Epaphras, Tychicus (Col. 1.7; 4.7), and, less clearly, the house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16.15) fulfilled functions of '*diakonia*' for Paul within the church.

2.5 These hints of an emerging technical use of the term 'deacons' in the Pauline churches are confirmed by the probably post-Pauline 1 Timothy, where, alongside the continuing general usage, we find specific instructions to 'deacons' (3. 8-13), here again in conjunction with the bishop/overseer, to whom they were perhaps assistants of some sort. The character demanded of 'deacons' is no more than that which might be expected of any good Christian – a firm grasp of the faith and being of tried and good standing. Again this tells us little about their functions. The parallel injunction to seemliness enjoined 'on the women likewise'

(v.11) may refer to women deacons or the wives of the men just addressed. Later (ch.5) the letter addresses the elders (male and female) alongside widows and younger men and women; mention of the double honour (? or honorarium) due to elders who preside well (v. 17-18) suggests they at least are approaching a formal status, but one which is not specifically related to the bishop/overseer and deacons of ch.3.

- 2.6 The most ambiguous passage is Acts 6. 1-6, the appointment of the seven who are to free the apostles for 'prayer and the *diakonia* of the word' by taking on the '*diakonia* at tables'. Although this passage soon came to be seen as the origin of the diaconate, the seven are nowhere named deacons, while both they and the apostles have separate functions, both of which are called '*diakonia*'. In fact, once appointed, the most prominent of the seven, Stephen and Philip, engage in preaching; Luke's account may reflect his awareness of different roles within the life of the church but gives us little on which to reconstruct them or to relate it to the later diaconate.
- 2.7 The lack of clarity in the New Testament on the origins of the diaconate is only one aspect of its lack of precision concerning formalised ministry in general. All this suggests a diffuse and uneven development under the impact of local experience or needs and of the influence of Jewish or Graeco-Roman models.

### 3. The Diaconate in the Early Church

- 3.1 Although the New Testament evidence suggests a diffuse and uneven development, writings from the following centuries show the office of deacon gradually taking on a precise meaning, distinct from that of bishop or presbyter. The period from c.100 to c.600 A.D. has been highlighted as a time of special importance for the diaconate, both in terms of the number of deacons and the range and significance of their work.
- 3.2 The earliest Christian documents outside the New Testament reflect the process of transition from a fluid understanding of various ministries towards the threefold office of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The later hierarchical order of ministry cannot properly be read back into the early Christian communities. Clement of Rome (96), for example, refers to leaders of the church at Corinth as 'bishops and deacons', but also as 'presbyters'. However, while he seems to employ the terms 'bishop' and 'presbyter' interchangeably, his use of 'deacon' appears to denote a different kind of leadership. Ignatius of Antioch (who died around A.D.107) is the first to distinguish the threefold order. Within the local church, the bishop presides in the council of presbyters that rules the community. Ignatius refers to the deacons as specially entrusted with "the ministry of Jesus Christ" and sees them as representing Christ, "just as the bishop has the role of the Father and the presbyters are like God's council and an apostolic band" (*Trallians* 3). But in documents of this period, much is unclear, including the relationship between bishop and presbyter and the relation of presbyter and deacon, since sometimes deacons seem to have been part of the ruling council. This lack of clarity

reflects diverse patterns of church life that would gradually coalesce into new structures. Some early documents reflect Phil. 1: 1 and 1 Tim. 3: 8-13 by pairing together the bishop and the deacon as overseer and servant of the Church. We should note that the deacon is the servant of the *Church*, rather than of the bishop, though naturally at times deacons assist the bishop as the leading officer of the congregation.

- 3.3 Just as the orders of ministry in early Christian communities are more fluid than later practice would suggest, so too the function of the deacon is less clearly demarcated than in later times. The deacon as the one entrusted with “the ministry of Christ”, and as the servant of the Church has already been mentioned. But what, more specifically, was the role of deacons? Ignatius says “they do not serve mere food and drink, but minister to God’s Church” (*Trallians* 2). This may refer to the part deacons soon took at the Eucharist – Justin Martyr in c. 150 refers to the deacons as the distributors of the consecrated bread and wine. But for Ignatius and other early Christians the agape or fellowship meal was closely connected with the Eucharist. Thus the deacon’s involvement in the liturgy expresses a servant ministry for the spiritual and physical nourishment of the Church. This linking of the spiritual and material becomes a hallmark of the deacon’s work in the early Church.
- 3.4 The deacon’s practical, administrative role was to coordinate pastoral care and act as the bishop’s special helper. *The Shepherd of Hermas* assigns to deacons the responsibility of care for widows and orphans (in a passage which may date from c.96, but more probably from c.150). In Rome by c.250, the city was divided into seven quarters looked after by seven deacons, under the influence of Acts 6. As the churches grew in size and wealth, the role of administering church property to ensure care for the poor grew in significance. The deacon’s role as assistant to the bishop (rather than servant of the Church) became much more marked. The *Pseudo-Clementines* (c.200) describe deacons as the “eye” of the bishop to search out the needs of the people; Hippolytus (c.215) describes the deacon as the bishop’s servant. The Syrian *Didascalia* (c.225-250) says that as no-one can approach the Father except through Christ, so the people should deal with the bishop via the deacon. Bishops used the skills of deacons in a wide variety of ways. Cyprian (d.258) and others sent deacons as emissaries to fellow bishops. The British Church was represented at the Council of Arles (c.314) by three bishops and a deacon. Athanasius was chief deacon – archdeacon – of Alexandria when he took his stand against Arius at Nicaea (325). Because the deacon stood so close to the bishop, it was common for the chief deacon to succeed the bishop, as Athanasius did in Alexandria in 328.
- 3.5 The deacon also played an important role in the liturgy. At the early Eucharists, the bishop presided, and deacons took the bread and wine to those present, and to the absent. Hippolytus, writing c.215, reports that they brought the people’s offerings to the bishop, as part of the oblations at the Eucharist. Thus almsgiving had a place in the offertory of the Mass, and brought together the liturgical and practical aspects of the deacon’s work. The *Didascalia* expected the deacon to keep the people in order, and to guard the door. By c.380 we read of the deacon

announcing the stages in the rite and reading the Gospel (a role taken from the lector). Tertullian, c.200, reported that deacons, like presbyters, could be authorised by the bishop to baptise. Hippolytus describes them as assisting with the oils of exorcism and thanksgiving at baptism; blessing the Paschal candle at the Easter Vigil; catechising at weekday non-Eucharistic assemblies; blessing non-Eucharistic bread at fellowship meals in the bishop's absence. However, deacons were certainly put in charge of rural congregations. And sometimes deacons presided at the Eucharist, probably in the absence of the bishop or presbyter: the lines between the offices were not always firmly drawn. Such eucharistic presidency by deacons seems to have happened during the the Diocletian persecution, but it was forbidden by the Councils of Arles (314) and Nicaea (325).

- 3.6 The first conclusive evidence that women were ordained deacon comes from the East. The Syrian *Didascalia* lays down careful guidelines for their work. They were to minister to women in situations where the presence of a male deacon would cause a scandal: to care for the sick, and to take part in the baptism of women and instruct them afterwards. It has been suggested that the emphatic character of this teaching was an attempt to restrict the lively activities of women deacons. Later documents give women work similar to that described in the *Didascalia*: a scaled down version of the male deacon's role. Female deacons are the women's route to the ear of the bishop. In Monophysite and Nestorian congregations women gave the Eucharist to women and read the Scriptures in public. The word "deaconess" (diakonissa) first appears in the fourth century. The office of female deacon began to decline from the early fifth century: the nature of the diaconate was changing; her role at baptism became redundant as adult baptism fell into disuse. The growth of women's religious orders soon gave women new opportunities for a spiritual vocation, but traces of work by female deacons can be found until the eleventh or twelfth century.
- 3.7 By the end of the third century, deacons had a strong and distinctive identity. Church growth had made the deacon's role extremely important. The prestige of the deacon in administration and liturgy led to the creation of other orders, such as subdeacon and acolyte, who took on aspects of the deacon's work. By c.250 the idea of "grades" of ministry is present, though without the idea that these are steps through which to progress.
- 3.8 However, the diaconate was to become no more than a stepping-stone to the priesthood. This process began in the fourth century. The rapid expansion of the Church after it became the official religion of the Empire accelerated important processes that were already underway. First, the bishop and the presbyter in a sense exchanged roles: the bishop delegated presidency of the Eucharist in the local church to the presbyter; the presbyters surrendered their corporate oversight of the church to the bishop, who translated this oversight into a regional and personal office. Secondly, in assimilating the structures of the Roman Empire, the Church turned "grades" of ministry into "career structure" for clergy. All this threw the status of the diaconate into uncertainty. The growing

importance of the presbyter in the local church created tension with the deacon. The Council of Nicaea passed canons restricting deacons' activities. By c.500 deacons became assistants to presbyters in the local church, as once they had been assistants to the bishop.

- 3.9 Thus the hierarchy of bishop, priest and deacon was established (the word priest (*hierous*) comes into wide use at this point). But it took time to dislodge deacons from their former place. They continued to act as assistants to bishops, administering church property. Archdeacons sometimes succeeded their bishops without going through the step of becoming priests. Gregory the Great was made bishop and Pope in 590 as a deacon. In the East the separate identity of the diaconate proved more durable: there was less pressure to ascend the clerical ladder. In the West, however, the idea of the diaconate as a stepping-stone to the priesthood eventually became the norm, although the office could still be permanent.

#### **4. The Diaconate in the Medieval West**

- 4.1 The role of the diaconate in the medieval West was influenced by the currents of popular piety that swept the Church. The strong focus on the sacraments as channels of grace enhanced the role of the priest, who by his acts brought this sacred power to the people. The deacon, unable to pronounce absolution or celebrate Mass, became a probationer at the altar: it was common to be ordained priest within weeks of being ordained deacon. Deacons were not permitted to touch the consecrated bread and wine directly, and so did not distribute the bread, but only the chalice. Their place at the altar cost them their practical role of distributing alms to the needy: it was not thought right to mix proximity to such holy things with worldly concerns. Instead, responsibility for charity became widely dispersed. Religious orders and pious individuals provided almshouses and hospitals. Because it was a mark of piety to give to the poor, and a mark of holy asceticism to live on charity, religious beggars became numerous. Charity was extremely important but was no longer the responsibility of deacons. Their role was liturgical. They could preach, with the bishop's permission – a sign of the way their office was in practice being assimilated to that of the priest.

#### **5. The Reformation and the Diaconate**

- 5.1 For Protestants, new thinking about the priesthood of all believers and the Eucharist led to a rejection of the idea of a holy priesthood consecrated to offer the sacrifice of Christ anew. However this did not necessarily lead to a renewal of the diaconate. Lutherans and Zwinglians recognised only one pastoral office, a ministry of Word and Sacrament, though assistant pastors were sometimes called deacons. In England, the diaconate continued chiefly as a preparation for priesthood. The Reformed tradition was to make the most positive attempt to rethink the order (see 5.3), and may have influenced the English Ordinal of 1550, which gave the deacon a special ministry to the poor of the parish.
- 5.2 Reform of social welfare was an important part of the Reformers' agenda. In fact it was a concern for Protestants and Catholics alike. By

1500 lay Christians had come to take a prominent part in organising poor relief. The power of the State was growing, and across Europe there was a drive to centralise and rationalise the provision of care, placing responsibility in lay hands. The priesthood of all believers made all vocations holy, and most Protestants looked to Christian rulers to order social welfare (there was no notion that the State might not be Christian). Religious orders were dissolved and their assets taken over by the State. This is not to say that charity played a small part in Reformation piety. A “common chest” or poor box stood in church to receive gifts for the poor, and almsgiving became an important part of Protestant worship because of the Reformers’ concern to put something in place of the “offertory” of the Mass. But the funds were usually administered by civil officers.

5.3 Calvin’s concept of the diaconate integrated the reform of ministry and the reform of social welfare. He gave the diaconate a distinctive place as a permanent office, and established social welfare as an essential ministry of the Church and not simply a responsibility of civic authorities. He had been influenced by Martin Bucer’s work in Strasburg, where deacons were parish officers who cared for the sick and the poor. Calvin made deacons one of the four orders of ministry, in addition to the three presbyteral offices of pastor, teacher, and elder (elders, though lay people, formed part of the presbyterate in Calvin’s thinking because of the role in moral guidance and discipline). His exegesis of the New Testament led him to set out a twofold diaconate: “administrators”, men who collected and administered funds for the needy; and “nurses”, widows who provided practical care. The male deacon was superior, though only for order’s sake, not inherently. Widow deacons were not ordained. Geneva (to Calvin’s regret) never had widow deacons: their role was carried out by men. But female deacons were present in other Reformed communities until the seventeenth century, particularly in the Rhineland. Calvin insisted that deacons were not servants of the presbyters but of the Church. However, they were inferior to presbyters because worship (the imperative of the first part of the Ten Commandments) ranks above love (the imperative of the second). Thus Calvin dispensed with the liturgical role of deacons but strongly affirmed their work as a ministry of charity.

## **6. The Diaconate in Protestantism to the Nineteenth Century**

6.1 In the Church of England, the diaconate continued to function primarily as a preparation for priesthood, though Fellows at Oxford and Cambridge often met their obligation to enter Holy Orders by becoming and remaining deacons. When John Wesley began to ordain ministers, he followed the familiar pattern of ordaining initially to the diaconate. Though this practice stopped with Wesley’s death, a service for the ordination of deacons remained in the Methodist service book until 1846. In the Reformed tradition in Europe and the New World, the purpose and effectiveness of the diaconate as Calvin had envisaged it diminished. There was confusion over the relationship between elder and deacon and over the deacon’s role after the advent of boards of church trustees to handle finance. Among British Independents (later Congregationalists) and Baptists the title ‘deacon’ was applied to lay leaders. Since each

local congregation was independent and, for example, ministers were called to serve by the local congregation, such deacons had considerable influence.

- 6.2 The revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a storm of practical activity that was diaconal in character if not in name. Numerous voluntary societies were formed to carry forward the mission of the Church, concerned not only with the proclamation of the Gospel but also with social welfare. Commitment to these societies stood alongside church membership. However, while such activity was encouraged by the churches, Christians took part essentially as individuals. That this was a *diaconal* ministry was not usually recognised, theologically or institutionally. This fact serves to remind us that continuity is more than a matter of words: diaconal service has continued to be offered in the Church even though it has not always been explicitly described in those terms. The new city mission movement of late nineteenth century Methodism represented an attempt to reach the unchurched by adapting church life to the urban setting. It took on board the concern for social relief which voluntary societies had been addressing.
- 6.3 However, nineteenth century Britain saw the renewal of the diaconate in different branches of Protestantism, most notably in orders of deaconesses, as part of the drive to meet the needs of the urban poor. In Scotland, Thomas Chalmers briefly revived the work of deacons for this purpose. Theodore Fliedner's community of deaconesses at Kaiserwerth, Germany, proved influential. Founded in 1836, it inspired diocesan institutes in England, which were formally organised in 1871. The Church of Scotland created an order of deaconesses in 1888. Methodism saw the start of the Wesley Deaconess Order and its counterpart in the United Methodist Free Churches.
- 6.4 The advent of deaconesses in late nineteenth century Britain was also influenced by the Oxford Movement, which revived interest in the celibate life, lived in community. As in medieval times, when new religious orders such as the Franciscans were devoted to the care of the poor, this revival embraced not only a commitment to the spiritual life but to social welfare. Methodism itself was prepared to experiment with new forms of Christian service. The Wesley Deaconess Order was one consequence of this, as were the "Sisters of the People" at the West London Mission and the "Sisters of the Children" in the National Children's Home. The ethos of the early itinerant ministry has also been likened to that of a religious order: the framework of a common vocation, discipline and association was not alien to Methodism.
- 6.5 The growing emancipation of women in the late nineteenth century made it important to find ways to recognise and channel women's work in the Church. From a modern perspective, the social context from which the Wesley Deaconess Order emerged had positive and negative implications for the order. On the one hand, the deaconesses' lifestyle and pioneering role set them apart, and led to the development of a strong sense of

vocation and community. On the other hand their talents were directed into a “safe” form of women’s ministry that did not encroach on presbyteral territory.

## **7. The Diaconate in British Methodism to 1978**

- 7.1 The Wesleyan Order of Deaconesses was founded by the Reverend Dr Thomas Bowman Stephenson in 1890. Dr Stephenson had visited the deaconesses at Kaiserwerth in 1873 and he used this model for the formation of the Wesley Deaconess Order. In his book “Concerning Sisterhoods”, Stephenson laid down two principles about religious orders as he conceived they may be applied to British Methodism. First, there must be vocation but no vow. Second, there must be discipline but no servility. He envisaged the Order as “a soul-converting agency . . . the strong arm of the Church”. Stephenson set out three “great fields of usefulness” which would lie before the Sisters. First: moral and spiritual education, in connection with orphanages and industrial schools both at home and overseas. Second: ministry to the sick. Third: evangelistic visitation.
- 7.2 The United Free Methodist Churches had an order based on similar lines to the Wesleyan Order, founded in 1891 by the Reverend T.J.Cope with its headquarters at Bowron House, Wandsworth. In the Primitive Methodist Church the Reverend J.Flannigan, founder of St. Georges Hall in the Old Kent Road, began to train Sisters, and later the appointments came under the general care of Home Missions.
- 7.3 At Methodist Union the three Orders merged to form the Wesley Deaconess Order of the Methodist Church. 25 deaconesses came from the Primitive Methodist Order, 57 from the United Methodist Order and 290 from the Wesleyan Order.
- 7.4 The Book of Offices (1936) included a service for “The Ordination of Deaconesses”. The Wesleyan Order had previously used the word ‘Consecration’ defined as “the act of devoting to a sacred use.” The Book of Offices states that “we are met together for the ordination of women to the office and work of a Deaconess in the Church of God.” Later on the liturgy lists the services which may be required of a deaconess, including: preaching, leading worship, teaching, feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, caring for the needy, giving hope to the hopeless and befriending all. In all of this the deaconesses must be “true evangelists” of Jesus Christ, “translating your gospel into the language of personal service . . . not reckoning your ministry complete till all can say, Now we believe . . . “ The deaconesses are also reminded in the service that they are members of an Order “whose members must be jealous for its good name, honouring and helping one another, ready at all times to take up each other’s work, and loyally to carry it on.”
- 7.5 In 1942 the Methodist Conference adopted various resolutions concerning the Wesley Deaconess Order in an effort to improve the connexional status of the Order. Among these were resolutions on the following: candidates must intend life service; ordinands are to be

presented to the Conference and by resolution of the Conference to be admitted to full membership of the Order; continuity of service should be assured; stations of deaconesses are to be printed in the Minutes of Conference; ordained deaconesses in the active work are to be members of the Representative Session of the District Synod. In the Conference report of 1956 there was an indication of how the work of the Order had changed over the years. For many years the deaconesses had worked in the large city missions and their main tasks were visiting, leading class meetings and much large social work with the poor in the community. In 1956 half of the deaconesses were working on housing estates, in rural areas, Circuit churches, with Home Mission caravans, in youth work, in Chaplaincy, in welfare work and overseas with the Methodist Missionary Society. In 1965 Convocation agreed that as ordination to the office and work of a deaconess was for life, it was no longer necessary for deaconesses to resign from membership of the Order on marriage. Until now the Order had insisted upon celibacy.

- 7.6 In 1967 Methodist Conference agreed to the closure and sale of the college at Ilkley, where the Wesley deaconesses had been trained since 1902 and in 1968 approved the move to unite the training of deaconesses with the training of presbyteral ministers at Handsworth College in Birmingham. In 1970 Handsworth College closed and the deaconesses transferred their training to the ecumenical Queen's College in Birmingham. The Order bought a large house near the college which became the administrative headquarters of the Order, providing accommodation for staff and students.
- 7.7 In 1971 the Methodist Conference received the report of a working party on "The Place of the Wesley Deaconess Order in the Methodist Church of Today". This working party concluded: "we believe that the church needs and will continue to need the service of such a group of trained dedicated servants of Christ as form the Wesley Deaconess Order." In 1973 the Conference agreed to admit women to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and a large number of deaconesses offered as candidates for presbyteral ministry. It now became necessary for the distinctive role of the diaconate to be clearly defined. Many deaconesses had been used as substitutes for presbyters, they had been in pastoral charge appointments with dispensations to administer the sacraments. Now women could enter the presbyteral ministry the diaconate needed to establish its distinctive role in the ministry of the whole people of God. This did not happen, and the number of candidates offering for diaconal service continued to decline.
- 7.8 In 1978 the Conference accepted the recommendation of the Division of Ministries that recruitment for the Order should cease forthwith and that a Committee of the Division should consider the present role of the diaconate and redefine the place of diaconal ministry in Methodism for the future.

## **8 The Methodist Diaconal Order**

8.1 The years following 1978 were painful and difficult for members of the Order but a good deal of hard thinking about ministry was being done and eventually in 1986 the Conference directed the Division of Ministries:

to invite those who believe themselves called to lifetime diaconal service to present themselves as candidates for membership of what is currently known as the Wesley Deaconess Order.

The Conference also directed the Division to arrange suitable selection and training processes and, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to consider “the liturgical form that would accompany reception into full membership of the Order”.

8.2 As mentioned above (1:1) the 1988 Conference adopted the following resolutions :

The Conference resolves that the Wesley Deaconess Order shall be called the Methodist Diaconal Order and its members deaconesses or deacons according to gender . . .

The Conference resolves that the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who are received into full membership of the Order shall be ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God . . .

The Conference instructs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare a form of ordination to the diaconate . . . and report to the Conference of 1989.

8.3 *The Ordination of Deacons and Deaconesses*, prepared by the Faith and Order Committee, was adopted and authorized by the 1989 Conference. It was first used during the Conference of 1990.

8.4 Since recruitment started again in 1986, what is now known as the Methodist Diaconal Order has enjoyed considerable renewal. Over sixty candidates have been accepted for training and there is a renewed sense of purpose and vigour among the deaconesses and deacons.

8.5 The theological and constitutional issues raised in section 1.4 of this report remain to be resolved.

## **9. Ecumenical Perspectives**

9.1 We have noted the limited nature of the New Testament evidence on patterns of ministry and the diversity of understandings of diaconal ministry over the centuries. Our survey has also revealed that the Church has often shaped its patterns of ministry in response to perceived need, as when the Seven were appointed (Acts 6) and when John Wesley overcame his reservations and allowed lay men and women to preach. We have seen that various forms of diaconal ministry have been exercised at different times and in different places, and we now move towards an understanding of diaconal ministry in Methodism in our time.

9.2 British Methodism is by no means alone in experiencing a rejuvenation of the diaconate:

Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. (World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Commentary 31)

Churches, including some within the Anglican Communion and the Church of Rome, though they have inherited a transitional diaconate, largely perceived as a stepping-stone to the priesthood, are increasingly recognizing vocations to a permanent diaconate. David Hope, the Bishop of London, has remarked that, where this has happened,

the re-establishing of a permanent and distinctive diaconate has rightly restored the work and office of a deacon as a different yet complementary aspect of ordained ministry within the historic three-fold order of the Church. (*The Deacon's Ministry*, ed. Christine Hall, Gracewing, 1991, p. xiii)

9.3 *Lumen Gentium*, one of the most significant documents to emerge from the Second Vatican Council, acknowledged the shortcomings of the transitional model of the diaconate and looked forward to the restoration of a permanent diaconate. "It pertains to the territorial bodies of bishops...to decide, with the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, whether and where it is opportune for such deacons to be appointed." (*Lumen Gentium* 29). It is estimated that there are now about 15,000 permanent Roman Catholic deacons worldwide, all of whom are men, including 300 in the United Kingdom.

9.4 Many Churches of the Anglican Communion have in recent years been involved in deliberations about the ordination of women to the priesthood, and these deliberations have to some extent overshadowed consideration of the diaconate. Nevertheless, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America has approximately 1400 permanent deacons, most of whom are non-stipendiary. The Church of England continues to have transitional deacons (male) and semi-permanent deacons, women who wish eventually to be ordained to the priesthood but who cannot yet be so ordained, though the decision of the General Synod in November 1992 was a step towards the removal of this category of deacons. There is, however, within the Church of England a vigorous movement in favour of a permanent diaconate, and there are over 30 permanent male deacons and about 100 female deacons who do not intend to seek ordination to the priesthood.

9.5 Some united or uniting churches have permanent diaconates. The Uniting Church in Australia and the United Church of Canada are examples. In Britain, the United Reformed Church, when it came into being in 1972, inherited 'elders' from the Presbyterian tradition and 'deacons' from the Congregational tradition; thereafter they have all been known as 'elders'. Those who had been deaconesses in the Presbyterian Church of England continued to serve, though no further recruitment took place and there are no longer any active deaconesses in the United

Reformed Church. Church Related Community Workers, who are not ordained, exercise diaconal functions: at present there are fourteen of them in the United Reformed Church.

9.6 The Church of Sweden, like the British Methodist Church, has a permanent diaconate which is quite distinct from the presbyterate. In other words, those to be ordained presbyters are not first ordained to the diaconate.

9.7 Within the Orthodox Churches there are both transitional and permanent deacons and though the former are in the majority, there appears to be renewed interest both in the place of women within the diaconate and in the extension of the permanent diaconate. The Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation held in Rhodes in 1988, which brought together official representatives of all the Orthodox Churches, declared:

The apostolic order of deaconesses should be revived. It was never altogether abandoned in the Orthodox Church though it has tended to fall into disuse . . . Such a revival would represent a positive response to many of the needs and demands of the contemporary world in many spheres. This would be all the more true if the Diaconate in general (male as well as female) were restored in all places in its original, manifold services (diakonai) . . . It should not be solely restricted to a purely liturgical role or considered to be a mere step on the way to higher 'ranks' of clergy. (Quoted in Hall, op.cit., pp.191f)

9.8 The United Methodist Church in the United States of America and elsewhere has transitional deacons, though in recent years the possibility of abandoning this practice in favour of the establishment of a permanent diaconate has been under review. At the General Conference in 1992, a proposal to this effect was very narrowly defeated.

9.9 The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas at the time of writing has provisional legislation before its synods to amend the Deed of Church Order with regard to both presbyteral and diaconal ministry. Of particular relevance to our present concerns is the proposed clause:

There shall be two orders of ministry in full connexion with the Church, viz. Presbyters who shall be set apart for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and Deacons who shall likewise be set apart for other spheres of Christian Service as the Conference may determine.

9.10 At a consultation of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 'Towards a Distinctive Diaconate', held in Perth in May 1992, the Bishop of Brechin is reported to have said that

the revival of the diaconate is emphatically not a way of shunting up a siding the question of the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate, but is a trans-denominational and international phenomenon which . . . does not go away when women are admitted to the presbyterate. (Quoted in *Distinctive Diaconate News*, October 1992)

The fact that British Methodism is considering theological and constitutional issues regarding the Methodist Diaconal Order at a time when so much attention is being paid to the diaconate in many churches of widely varying traditions throughout the world may be seen as one manifestation of that 'trans-denominational and international phenomenon' to which the Bishop referred.

## 10. Theological Issues

10.1 In this section we seek to express a theological understanding of the diaconate in Methodism. Previous Methodist writings on the subject provide little direct help. *Ordination in the Methodist Church*, adopted by the Conference of 1960, claims that

the Reformation Office of 'deacon', closely corresponding to the New Testament 'diaconos', is held among us by the various kinds of 'stewards', who are called to perform their stewardship to the glory of God and the building up of the Church. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983*, pp.127f).

It may seem strange to us that the report makes no reference to the Wesley Deaconess Order, but sees diaconal ministry simply in terms of the ministry exercised by various kinds of stewards. We may also be rather less confident about the 'close correspondence' between the New Testament deacon and the Reformation office of that name, since our knowledge about the former is so limited. It is, of course, true that stewards share in diaconal ministry, as does the whole Church, but diaconal ministry in Methodism is also exercised by others, not least by those who are ordained to the diaconate.

10.2 The Statement on Ordination, adopted by the Conference of 1974, was largely, though not exclusively, concerned with presbyteral ministry. The section on the diaconate was rather tentative about the continuing role of the diaconal ministry, reflecting the general uncertainty that prevailed at that time. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983*, pp.144-146).

10.3 More helpful is the report, *The Ministry of the People of God*, adopted by the Conference of 1988, which includes in paragraph 088 the following sentence about the Methodist Diaconal Order:

. . . three factors – ordination, life-long commitment and availability for stationing – indicate a parallel with the ordained ministry, from which it will be distinguished by being diaconal rather than presbyteral. (*Agenda 1988*, p.851)

10.4 It is, however, not immediately obvious what is distinctive about diaconal ministry, as an Anglican writer, Dr Robert Hannaford, admits:

There is a sense, of course, in which the sacred ministry as a whole and indeed the entire Church must be diaconal in character if it is to serve as a sign of Christ... What room can there be then for a separate diaconal order? We must tread carefully, for in maintaining the distinctiveness of the diaconal order we do not want to appropriate

exclusively for it what belongs to the Church as a whole. (in Hall, op.cit., p.31)

Words of caution were also included in the British Methodist Conference's response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

. . . we take very seriously the concern that a separate diaconate might lead to a devaluation of the ministry of the laity. (*Agenda, 1984, p.573*).

10.5 Certainly, any account of ministry which depends upon an analysis of functions to be performed would be hard pressed to find anything distinctive about the diaconate. In a Methodist context, there is nothing that deacons and deaconesses do that cannot be done by a presbyter or (at least in an emergency) by a lay person. Presbyteral ministry includes elements of service (diakonia) as does the ministry of the whole people of God. But a purely functional view of diaconal ministry is, in the end, as unsatisfactory as a purely functional view of presbyteral ministry. The three important features of both diaconal and presbyteral ministry identified in "The Ministry of the People of God" are much more concerned with *being* than with *doing*. A person *is* ordained; *is* committed for life; *is* available for stationing.

10.6 The Statement on Ordination, adopted by the Conference of 1974, was, as we observed in 10.2 above, largely concerned with presbyteral ministry. It does, however, adopt a position on the meaning of ordained ministry which is as relevant to diaconal ministry as to presbyteral. This may be called the 'representative' view of ordained ministry.

10.7 The Statement rejects an entirely functional view of ministry.

Unquestionably there are functions to fulfil, associated by long tradition with the ordained ministry and written into the ordination service....But it would be inadequate to confine the special calling to a collection of functions. For one thing, they are largely shared with people who are not ordained... For another, some ordained ministers are not in a position to carry out all the functions, but their ordination is not questioned on that account. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983, p.135*)

10.8 The Statement continues:

To find a further category, we go back to the rediscovery of the significance of the whole people of God . . . They are called, all of them, ordained and unordained, to be the Body of Christ to men. But as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented and it is their responsibility to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world. (pp.135f)

- 10.9 It is worth noting that the Anglican, Hannaford, makes extensive use of the concepts “focus” and “representation” when he offers a theology of the diaconate; for example, he writes: “the deacon represents the Church’s identification with the servant ministry of Christ . . .” and “the diaconate focuses in a particularly sharp way the question of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom.” (Hall, op.cit., pp.36, 35).
- 10.10 We have already observed in section 9 the widespread renewal of diaconal ministry in many parts of the Church. It is also worth noting that though these renewed diaconates take a variety of forms, there is often a good deal of common ground in the various Churches’ theological understandings of the diaconate. We offer four examples:

First, from the United Methodist Church’s ordination service for deacons:

My sisters and brothers,  
 every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ  
 in a ministry of service to the world . . .  
 God has called you to a special ministry  
 that will exemplify this servanthood  
 in the Church and in the world.  
 In the name of Jesus Christ  
 you are to serve all people.  
 You are to represent to the Church  
 the ministry of servanthood in the world . . .

Will you, in the exercise of your ministry,  
 represent to the People of God  
 their own responsibility to serve others?

Second, from the Roman Catholic Church:

At the turn of the first century the martyr bishop St Ignatius of Antioch described it (the diaconate) as nothing less than ‘the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve’(Ad Magnesios,VI,I). The diaconate can thus be seen as a sacramental sign of the character of the Church as servant. (*Permanent Diaconate*, the Bishops’ Conference of Great Britain, published in *Briefing*, 1987, p.424)

Third, from the Church of Sweden:

The special task of the diaconate is underlined in the Order for Ordination of 1987: with Christ as example, to “be a sign of mercy in the congregation and society...When the ministry of the deacon is renewed in our own time its commission is the ancient one: not to free fellow-Christians from but to inspire and strengthen them to be sensitive as fellow human beings and untiring in serving others.(*Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, The Bishops’ Conference, Uppsala, 1990, English translation, p.33)

Fourth, from the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission:

Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life...They exercise a ministry of love within the community. (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, paragraph 31)

- 10.11 It would be foolish to believe that the definitive statement on the meaning of diaconal ministry, or presbyteral ministry, or the ministry of the whole Church, has yet been written or will ever be written. All such statements are provisional and the Church's understanding is constantly being enriched. Nevertheless, theological reflection, employing the concepts of representation and focus which have been a feature of recent thinking, and Methodism's own experience of diaconal ministry suggest that the ministry offered by deacons and deaconesses, though functionally similar to the discipleship expressed by all members of the Body of Christ, is distinctive in the following ways:
- 10.12 **Deacons and deaconesses are a 'focus' for the servant ministry of Christ; through their ministry of caring, the incarnate servant Christ is revealed. They are a 'focus' for the servant ministry of the Church, making visible God's calling to the Church to be a servant in the world. Their servant ministry challenges the Church to respond to this calling. Part of their role is to interpret to the Church the needs and aspirations of the world. Deacons and deaconesses offer Methodism and the wider Church the discipline, spirituality and commitment to community that is part of working out their personal vocation in the context of being a religious order.**
- 10.13 None of this need detract from the ministry of the whole people of God; indeed, it has been argued above that diaconal ministry as a focus and representation of the servant ministry of the whole Church is a means of enabling and enriching that total ministry. It should, however, be emphasised that all specific ministries are rooted first in the total ministry of Christ himself and second in the ministry of the people of God. Diaconal ministry particularly focuses the servant ministry of Christ and the Church just as presbyteral ministry particularly focuses the priestly and prophetic ministry of Christ and the Church.
- 10.14 We turn now to two further issues. The first is the liturgical role of members of the diaconate. As we have seen (3.5 and 4.1 above) the liturgical functions of deacons sometimes overshadowed their work of service. In some churches where the permanent diaconate has been revived the liturgical role of the deacon has been emphasised as well as the model of servant. In Methodism, it has not been necessary for members of the Wesley Deaconess Order or of the Methodist Diaconal Order to be leaders of worship, though many are in fact local preachers. The ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (see 10.10 above) refers to the inter-dependence of worship and service, however, and it may be that, as the ministry of Methodist deaconesses and deacons

further develops, new insights may be gained into appropriate ways of diaconal involvement in the Church's worship.

- 10.15 Second, in this report there has been reference both to "orders of ministry" and to "religious orders". It is possible to distinguish between the two, though they are not mutually exclusive. A person may be a member of an order of ministry and of a religious order, though equally a person may be a member of one without being a member of the other.
- 10.16 Throughout most of Christian history, and in most branches of the Church, one, two or three "major" orders of ministry have been recognized. Ordination, by the laying-on of hands and prayer, has been the means by which a person has been deemed to have been admitted into an order of ministry, though sometimes different terms have been used, such as "consecration" for bishops. Once ordained, a person *is* a minister (deacon, presbyter, bishop). Although he or she may be debarred from acting as such under the Church's discipline, the reality of the ordination or its permanence is not in doubt; and if subsequently such a person is permitted to exercise ministry again, no further ordination takes place. Ordination has been regarded as being for life; and indeed in churches with a three-fold order of ministry, subsequent ordination to another order of ministry is not regarded as obliterating earlier ordinations: the presbyter is both presbyter and deacon; the bishop is bishop, presbyter and deacon.
- 10.17 Orders of ministry have traditionally been deeply involved in the day-to-day life and the organization and government of the institutional Church. In Methodism ministers (presbyters) have been responsible for a good deal of Church government, through the Ministerial sessions of the Synod and the Conference and through the Representative sessions, where, in the case of the Conference, they constitute half the membership.
- 10.18 Religious orders and orders of ministry sometimes, but not always, have characteristics in common. The members of religious orders may be ordained, but in some orders need not be: many religious communities include lay brothers or sisters alongside the ordained. Although some religious orders have been conspicuous in Church government, others have not. Members of religious orders have generally had a very strong sense of loyalty to those orders and a strong sense of unity and fellowship within them. For most of its history, the Wesley Deaconess Order exhibited the marks of a religious order. Its members felt much more closely bound together than has been the case with presbyteral ministers. Convocation, not the Conference, was the setting for ordination, and loomed much larger in the life of most deaconesses than the Conference. Three factors that were important in the rise of the Wesley Deaconess Order contributed to the Order having the ethos of a religious order; namely, (i) the vigour of voluntary associations and city missions in concern for the poor; (ii) the influence of the monastic ideal via the Oxford Movement – an ideal not dissonant with the disciplined, coordinated style of Methodist itinerant ministry; and (iii) the social context of women's ministry in the nineteenth century Church.

- 10.19 It is worthy of attention that, as the deacon's liturgical role became increasingly important in the middle ages, the charitable work of religious orders blossomed; and that, in the nineteenth century, voluntary associations and new diaconal orders sprang up to meet the needs that Protestant churches had not been meeting through the diaconate. (See 6.2 above.) This suggests that the servant ministry of Christ finds forms of expression that have not always been formally recognized as diaconal but which compensate for changes and limitations in the Church's ministry. Waves of renewal in the formal diaconate, at the Reformation, in the nineteenth century and at the present time, may be seen as responses to the leading of the Spirit which re-focus identification with the servant ministry of Christ.
- 10.20 Members of the Methodist Diaconal Order still preserve many characteristics and self-perceptions of a religious order, and yet are increasingly perceiving themselves, and being perceived by others, also as members of an order of ministry. Their Ordination Service undoubtedly uses language that is appropriate to an order of ministry, and takes place during the Conference rather than at Convocation. It also includes elements of admission and welcome into full membership of a religious order.
- 10.21 There is reason to believe that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both an order of ministry and a religious order, in which the servant ministry of Christ to the world is focused and represented, and indeed that this is not a new phenomenon. It was true of the Wesley Deaconess Order, though not always recognized or explicitly stated. The existence in Methodism of that which is both an order of ministry and a religious order should be acknowledged and welcomed as a significant contribution not only to Methodist life but also to the developing ecumenical understanding of diaconal ministry.

## **11. Constitutional Issues**

- 11.1 If it is accepted that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both a religious order and an order of ministry and that therefore Methodism has in fact two orders of ministry rather than one, there are constitutional consequences. To agree that it is not appropriate to regard deaconesses and deacons as lay people, or to imply that there is only one form of ordained ministry, the presbyteral, means that what is said about ministry in the Doctrinal Clause, Clause 4 of the Deed of Union, needs attention.
- 11.2 The assumption in the Deed and throughout Standing Orders that there is only one order of ministry and that all Methodists except presbyteral ministers are lay people will need to be corrected. In the judgment of the Faith and Order Committee, the Doctrinal Clause, which seems to divide the Church into ministers (presbyters) and lay people, will need revision, a procedure which is possible though difficult. Though this is a daunting prospect, constitutional and legal formulations, important as they are in inhibiting rash and ill-considered change, should not be allowed to prevent the Church from expressing its developing understanding of ministry.

- 11.3 But how thoroughgoing a revision of Clause 4 is necessary to deal with this problem? It must be admitted that this clause, which has remained unaltered since Methodist Union, leaves unsaid much that Methodists today would wish to say about ministry, not least about the ministry of the whole people of God. But Clause 4 supplies, not a full doctrinal statement, but doctrinal standards by which doctrinal statements issued from time to time by the Conference are to be tested. Consequently many elements of Methodist doctrine receive no attention in Clause 4. As with the historic creeds only those points at which contentious views are to be excluded are mentioned. Provided that references to ‘ministers’ and ‘ministry’ in the doctrinal standards are understood to be references to presbyters and the presbyterate, and provided that the Clause is amended so as to remove the words ‘ministers and laymen’, which appear to exclude the diaconate, it does not greatly matter that there is no explicit reference in this context to the diaconate. It will, however, eventually be necessary to introduce new references to diaconal ministry in other parts of the Deed and in Standing Orders.
- 11.4 Moreover, Clause 4 is an historic document which could not be changed until 1976 and in fact has not been changed since then, and it does not seem advisable to seek to effect more than the bare minimum number of changes necessary to deal with the problem confronting us. The modest changes which are proposed in resolution 2 and which amount to the straight omission of three words and substitutions in the case of one word and one phrase, would not only address that problem but would also overcome two other difficulties which the Deed presents.
- 11.5 First, as well as appearing to exclude diaconal ministry, Clause 4 is the only part of the Deed of Union or of Standing Orders where non-inclusive language is perpetuated (“ministers and laymen”, paragraph 3; “of men”, paragraph 8). Second, the phrase “itinerant and lay” in paragraph 9 appears to exclude ministers in local and sector appointments
- 11.6 It is therefore proposed that three words be deleted from Clause 4 and that two substitutions be made. If this proposal finds favour, three difficulties with the Clause will have been resolved with minimal change to an historic text.
- 11.7 In 11.3 it was said that references to ‘ministers’ and ‘ministry’ in the doctrinal standards should be understood to be references to presbyters and the presbyterate. This, of course, is not intended to deny the ministry to which deaconesses and deacons are ordained or the ministry of the whole Church. It recognizes, however, that the word ‘minister’ is the one which springs most readily to Methodist lips to describe a presbyter. If the recommended changes to the Doctrinal Clause find favour, it will be desirable to modify the definition of ‘minister’ in Clause 1 (xix) of the Deed of Union (probably at the Conference of 1995) to read as follows:

‘minister’ when used in relation to the Methodist Church means a person ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments and admitted by the Conference into full connexion, or a person

recognised and regarded as such under the provisions contained in this Deed.

11.8 We turn now to the need for further constitutional changes. It is sometimes assumed that, once it is recognized that deacons and deaconesses belong to an order of ministry and are not, therefore, lay people but diaconal ministers, it will be right for them to be aligned with the presbyteral ministers for most if not all purposes. This does not necessarily follow. Each separate issue must be considered carefully.

11.9 For instance, is it the case that deacons and deaconesses should be members of the Ministerial Sessions of the Synods and the Conference? Much care must be exercised in discovering the attitude of the deaconesses and deacons themselves to such a development; but there is at least a case for regarding the Ministerial sessions as Presbyteral sessions (in some ways akin to the diaconal Convocation), where presbyteral ministers consult together about matters of common concern and discipline. On this basis, deacons and deaconesses would not need to attend such meetings.

11.10 The Representative Session of the Conference, however, is another matter. At present, members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who attend it do so as lay representatives. It would clearly be extraordinary and unjust to insist that the only members of the Conference should be presbyteral ministers and lay people, or, to put it the other way round, to make deacons and deaconesses the only body of people excluded from membership of the Conference. One possible way of dealing with this matter could be to set aside a certain number of Conference places for members of the Diaconal Order, presumably either by reducing the number of ministerial (presbyteral) representatives, or by reducing in equal numbers ministerial and lay representation. The latter would abandon the principle that the Conference consists in equal numbers of ministers (presbyters) and lay people. The former might be preferred inasmuch as it would preserve something of this principle by making the Conference consist of equal numbers of ministers (diaconal and presbyteral) and lay people. There could well be other and better ways of dealing with this matter. It needs to be settled eventually, as do other issues, such as the Presidency and the Vice-Presidency of the Conference, but it is mentioned now, without a recommended solution, as an indication of the sort of issue that needs to be addressed if the principal contention of this report is accepted. Much work remains to be done before firm proposals for changing the Deed of Union and Standing Orders can be brought to the Conference, other than the proposal for modest amendments to Clause 4 of the Deed.

## **12. Recommendations**

12.1 The Faith and Order Committee and the other bodies involved in the preparation of this report recommend that the Conference should, by adopting resolution 1, express its concurrence with the main thesis of this report, namely that the Methodist Church recognizes and has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal.

- 12.2 Second, it is recommended that Clause 4 of the Deed of Union be amended so that it does not appear to suggest that all Methodists must be either laypersons or ministers (of the word and sacraments) and thereby to appear to exclude diaconal ministry.
- 12.3 Third, it is recommended that the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, be directed to consider what further constitutional changes to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders will be needed if resolution 2 is confirmed by the Conference of 1995, and to recommend amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

## APPENDIX

Clause 4 of the Deed of Union is set out below. Italics indicate the words which resolution 2 below seeks to delete. The words proposed for substitution are printed in capital letters.

4 Doctrine The doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church are as follows:

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church *both ministers and laymen* are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.

The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.

Christ's ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have a principal and directing part in these great duties but they hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. These ministries are shared with them by others to whom also the Spirit divides his gifts severally as he wills.

It is in the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God who bestows the gift of the Spirit the grace and the fruit which indicate those whom He has chosen.

Those whom the Methodist Church recognises as called of God and therefore receives into its ministry shall be ordained by the imposition of hands as expressive of the Church's recognition of the minister's personal call.

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of *men* PERSONS but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised.

*The preachers itinerant and lay* ALL METHODIST PREACHERS are examined tested and approved before they are authorised to minister in holy things. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.

The Methodist Church recognises two sacraments namely baptism and the Lord's Supper as of divine appointment and of perpetual obligation of which it is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves.

## RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the Report.

The Conference amends Clause 4 of the Deed of Union as follows:

- (i) in the second substantive paragraph delete "both ministers and laymen";
- (ii) in the seventh paragraph for "men" substitute "persons";
- (iii) in the eighth paragraph for "The preachers itinerant and lay" substitute "All Methodist preachers".

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, to bring proposals for further changes to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

*(Agenda 1993, pp.223-244)*