

An (extended) short history of the diaconate

Deacons in the early church

From the very earliest days of the church deacons were understood to occupy a special place in the Christian Community, set apart along with the bishops and presbyters (priests) for a special role modelled on that of Christ himself. The first definite reference to deacons in this sense – perhaps as early as 53 A.D – occurs in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, which is addressed to "all the holy ones at Philippi, with their bishops and deacons in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:1)

Some hold that the very origin of the diaconate is recorded in the New Testament in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. There we read of a dispute which arose in the church of Jerusalem between Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Christians, the former complaining that some of their widows 'were being overlooked in the daily distribution of bread'.

Variations in Greek and Hebrew traditions may have been at the core of this problem, but the fact seems clear that some widows were not being supported adequately. At face value, this is a simple social problem – resources were not being fairly distributed. At a deeper level, it is possible to see in this story that something much more important than a free lunch is at stake. These meals would have included some readings and teachings so the conversation was crucial for the Greek-speaking widows.

The apostles were concerned that they did not have enough time to attend to the ministry of the word of God as well as 'wait on tables'. They perceived their priority to be the ministry of the word of God – travelling, preaching, baptising. The responsibility of 'waiting on tables' may well have had deeper connotations than literally the delivery of food rations. For those who were socially isolated the responsibility of 'waiting at table' could well mean the bringing not only of food but also of news and the gospel message, of the word being preached at public meetings, of sharing in prayer and understanding of faith.

At the very core of the matter was the taking of bread and wine – to share in the great eucharist / thanksgiving feast of the church. The first 'deacons' were those who brought the 'bread of life' to those who were socially isolated. This is why the seven were selected carefully as men 'known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.' They were appointed as the early church's first teachers, as well as social workers where the need arose. Among them was one Stephen, "a man filled with grace and power", who for his courage in proclaiming the Good News of Christ soon became the first Christian martyr (cf. Acts 6-7).

While these seven early Christians were not deacons in the developed sense, the account in Acts accords with the understanding of the diaconate as it

emerged and evolved in the church. 'Deacon' comes from a Greek word – *diakonos* – which means a servant or steward. It occurs frequently in the New Testament and is sometimes applied to Christ himself.

By the time of the Pastor who wrote 1 Timothy (circa 70-80), the most qualified of the dedicated, enrolled Widows (and possibly the better off, owning their own homes) were being selected as Deacons in parallel to the male Deacons.

As early as AD 60-70, Deacon Phoebe (Romans 16:1) of the church at Kencherae (one of the two seaports of Corinth) and her sister deacons were essential in being able to visit women (those already Christians and those asking for more information) in their homes and in the baptism of women to preserve their modesty.

Deacons soon came to be understood as ministers in more than a material sense – "not servants of food and drink, but ministers of the Church of God". As St. Ignatius of Antioch put it around 100 A.D., the deacon's task was nothing less than to continue "the ministry of Jesus Christ". According to Bishop Ignatius, "the deacons represent Jesus Christ, the Bishop represented God and the presbyters the council of the apostles".

In the early church deacons worked alongside the bishop. St. Ignatius specifically mentions two functions of this sort; administrative responsibilities with regard of written communication and ministry of the word, and also acting in an ambassadorial role from one local church to another. At that time deacons worked more closely with their bishops than with the presbyters in order to serve the Church of God. Bp Ignatius referred to a deacon as his "co-slave" in the service of God in Christ.

In addition, deacons often rendered assistance – on the bishop's behalf – to the poor and needy of the community. The deacons responded to whatever needs there were – thus writing, teaching catechumens and the newly baptized, being legates, and probably many other activities as well as responding to material needs.

The special relationship between deacons and bishops was emphasised, among other places, in a third century Christian document which speaks of the deacons being ordained "for the ministry of the work designated by the bishops as being necessary to the Church's ministry". Similarly, the theologian Karl Rahner says that central to all that deacons did was the fact that they were "to help those who direct the church".

In early post-apostolic times, a threefold pattern of ordained ministry gradually became accepted as the universal normal in the Church. (Acknowledged in 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' [BEM] 1982, M19)

Decline of the Diaconate

In the Roman Church, even as the diaconate flourished, the causes of its eventual decline began to appear. This happened in the fourth century but the process itself was a complex one which extended over many centuries. No single reason suffices to explain what happened, except perhaps, it appears that both priests and deacons experienced a kind of identity crisis. There were problems and failings on both sides, and the principle reason of argument appears to be in confusion of roles. The ensuing negative attitude toward the diaconate came especially from presbyters who, increasingly exercising many episcopal functions (e.g., Eucharistic presidency), saw no reason why the deacons were not subject to them, and did not assist them as they also assisted the bishops.

As the presbyterate became increasingly associated with Eucharistic presidency, presbyters like Jerome (probably concerned because at the time, presbyters were barred from being consecrated as bishops) demanded to know why deacons had so much power – "After all, deacons could not preside at Eucharist, and presbyters were really the same as bishops". Very often the chief or first or 'arch' deacon (still a deacon at this time) became the next bishop, even in Rome. This happened as late as Gregory the Great in 590. The rules concerning the age of ordination, insured that those ordained young (at 25) remained deacons until the age of 30.

From the Didascalia, a third century document of the church in Syria, we hear that as Ignatius had likened male deacons to Jesus Christ the female deacons were likened to the Holy Spirit. Women Deacons were essential for the baptism of women (done in the nude) and for visiting and teaching women and children in their homes. The Deacons were allowed to teach more theology, like Christology, than the basics to which the enrolled Widows were limited, bringing Communion to them, taking responsibility for them and their offerings when they arrived at church, making sure they were in their appropriate groups in the basilica and relaying liturgical directions to them.

St John Chrysostom began his ministry at Antioch where his aunt was a deacon. When he moved to Constantinople, he found Olympias had been ordained as a deacon by his predecessor, the patriarch Nectarius, who was advised by her "even in ecclesiastical affairs", as was Chrysostom when he arrived.

The "Apostolic Constitutions", compiled from several documents towards the end of the fourth century, give the greatest amount of information about the order or office of women in the diaconate. The deaconess is included under the term "cleros" (clergy) but the later strands show the tendency to limit her ministry. The Canon XV of the council of Chalcedon (451) lowered the age of ordination to forty (probably to comply with actual practice).

By the late fourth century women Deacons were largely taken for granted at least

as far west as Greece, in Constantinople, Asia Minor, Jerusalem, Gaza, Greek-speaking Syria and Syriac-speaking Syria. They were so well-known that often their title was abbreviated in inscriptions as 'DIAK' which sometimes meant 'diakonos' (the same form was used for both men and women deacons) or as 'diakonissa' (deaconess). 'Diakonos' was used for the women in official documents as late as the 14th century.

In the early fifth century in Syria, male deacons worked with the 'Sons of the Covenant' (dedicated brothers) and female deacons worked with the 'Daughters of the Covenant' (dedicated sisters) in caring for needy men and women in separate institutions. But there are extremely few references to women in the diaconate in Rome. Was this because the seven powerful deacons there in charge of the traditional seven regions (hills) of Rome were identified with the 'seven men' of Acts 6:3?

As early as the patristic age, the very meaning and purpose of the three orders came to be organised in a new way. One's role in the Eucharist came to be the factor which governed one's place within the church. Deacons came to be assistants of priests, as they were of bishops, and primarily at the altar.

It seems that the failure to comprehend and appreciate the special value of the diaconate in its own right eventually resulted in its demise. That, however, was a long time happening. Part of the process, evident by the fourth century, was that ever more emphasis came to be placed on the liturgical role of deacons, at the expense of the ministry of the word and the ministry of charity. By the fifth century, it seems, most deacons did very little. By this time, too, the idea had begun to gain currency that the diaconate was no more than an introductory stage in orders, a step on the way toward ordination as a priest. Its value as an integral part of the three fold nature of orders – deacons, priests, bishops – was obscured. By the Middle Ages the office of deacon was, according to Rahner, close to being a "legal fiction".

The church's care for the needy in both East (Basil's Rule) and West (Benedict's) became increasingly the responsibility of the communities of Religious brothers and sisters. The Deacon became the Deacon-Abbess and soon it was forgotten that the Abbess was a Deacon. We have documentary evidence that in the ninth century in the East, a sister, e.g., Irene Chrysobalantou, had to be ordained as a Deacon before she was installed as Abbess. In the West, the service for the blessing of an Abbess for the Canonesses of the old foundations resembled the service for the ordination of a Deacon.

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In the eastern church the diaconate did not decline, the practice of a distinctive diaconate continuing throughout to today's church but with a predominantly

liturgical and less significant caritative function. The Greek Orthodox Church has recently agreed to consider women back into the diaconate.

Deacons from medieval times.

Medieval deacons were in major, not minor orders and came to be bound to celibacy. Deacons had a mainly liturgical function, assisting the priest at the Eucharist, preaching and baptizing. They also acquired administrative responsibilities on behalf of the bishop. Generally the diaconate became extremely attenuated, a transitional period on the road to priesthood. Permanent deacons did exist, often in academic posts, and archdeacons were really deacons (as they still are in the Orthodox tradition), administering discipline on behalf of the bishop.

It was not uncommon in the early years for a deacon or arch deacon to be consecrated directly as bishop, or even as pope! Gradually the practice developed of ordaining an arch-deacon as priest in order for him to be consecrated bishop. An early example of this is Thomas Becket in 1162.

So it remained for many centuries. There were deacons in the Western church, but they were men on their way to becoming priests. Few people imagined it being any different.

At the Reformation, the English Church continued, uninterrupted, the historic threefold ordained ministry and the diaconate remained transitional to priesthood. After the Uniformity Act of 1662, it was common for men to be ordained deacon then priest on the same day or within a few days, in order to license them to the sole charge of a parish.

In the 19th century, with the emergence of a new sense of professionalism among the clergy and growing awareness of huge pastoral needs in large urban parishes, the diaconate was taken more seriously. As a consequence, the diaconate was developed as a probationary year during which the priest learned his priestly duties under supervision. In one sense, this strengthened the diaconate giving it professional identity. On the other hand, the move affirmed the 'transitional' model. It was the development of the deaconess orders which pointed to the possibilities of a distinctive professional diaconal ministry.

Deaconess movement out of Germany

Diaconal ministry found new expression in Germany in the 19th Century. Male deacons were the first to be restored in Hamburg by Wichern, who formed the 'Inner' or 'Home' Mission and trained deacons for it. This eventually developed into over a dozen Schools for training Deacons (at first men only but now some are mixed) and many institutions.

Pastor Klönne advocated copying the apostolic life of the early Church and reviving the office of Deaconess. One key centre for this development was Kaiserswerth, a small town on the Rhine. Industrialisation had begun to leave a devastating legacy of poverty, over-work, neglect of children, child labour, lack of education, insanitary conditions and ill-health. To this predominantly Catholic town in 1822 came a young protestant minister, Theodore Fliedner, as pastor to the small protestant congregation. He and his wife Friederike determined to confront the dire needs of the time.

“I was sick and you visited me”

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”

These gospel texts undergirded their tireless work to raise money to bring change. Fliedner visited the Netherlands and England to see the “Church, School, Poor and Prison Situation.” He then integrated the ideas and initiatives of many other Christians of his day into a vision which was to make history: unmarried women would unite in a sisterhood, wear the traditional bonnet of the married women of the northern region of the Rhine, go through professional training and with this address the social problems of their time as nurses and teachers.

Fliedner’s idea was to send them out two by two into the parishes, one to nurse and one to teach. But both his first wife and his second wife and also the sisters themselves realized they needed a base to return to when ill or exhausted or between posts (and later when too elderly to be active). The Deaconess Mutterhaus (Motherhouse) was founded in 1836 next to Kaiserswerth market. Soon the sick were being cared for here. Deaconesses helped prisoners and women ex-convicts. They assisted the sick and poor in the community and took care of children. The kindergarten initiative begun in 1837 by Froebel was adopted by Kaiserswerth.

Of equal significance to Kaiserswerth was the Diaconal Sisterhood at Zehlendorf who had a ‘Homehouse’ rather than a ‘Motherhouse’, a salary (a small percentage of which was donated to the Homehouse) instead of pocket money, and assignment by consultation instead of ‘sending’ by the Pastor. In time, many of them worked as visiting nurses living in the towns where they worked rather than in the Homehouse.

The Deaconess movement generally, and perhaps Zehlendorf in particular, made a significant contribution towards the emancipation of women.

The idea of a sisterhood of unmarried women spread throughout the protestant world in a surprisingly short time. This diaconal activity gave a new image to nursing, social work and education within and outside the church parish.

Fliedner’s most famous student was Florence Nightingale. In 1851 she passed her nursing exam in Kaiserswerth and became one of the most important pioneers

in modern nursing. Nursing developed into an esteemed women's profession. Kaiserswerth today still has its 'Florence Nightingale' hospital and educational institutes for diaconal / nursing care. The continuing Mutterhaus with its sisterhood of deaconesses and associates still contributes to the professional 'Diakoniwerk' in the town, though hospital management within the Diakonie Institute is no longer the direct responsibility of the sisterhood.

The dove, which brings the olive branch to the Ark of Noah, has been the symbol of the Diakonie Institute of Kaiserswerth for more than 150 years. It is a sign of hope, a symbol of the challenge to help humankind.

Across Germany and in the Lutheran and Protestant traditions worldwide, Diakoniwerk prevails. In recent history, governments have accepted increasing responsibility for social work, nursing care and education, but deaconesses and also male deacons make up a significant proportion of the social and nursing workforce, often supported from state taxes. In most countries and regions it is no longer expected that deaconesses will remain unmarried.

In some Lutheran dioceses, (eg Sweden, Norway) deaconesses and deacons are now accepted as minor orders, sometimes entitled to wear clerical dress, and in a few places even a deacon's stole is permitted in the Eucharist. The Lutheran tradition in most places still recognizes only one (major) Order, that of Pastor (the equivalent of Presbyter).

Diaconal work in Britain

Deaconesses became an integral part of the churches' response to poor health and social conditions in 19th century Britain too. The Methodist Church, Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland, and the Church of England all commissioned deaconesses to the work of social relief, education and nursing care. Deaconesses were not at that time permitted to marry.

In 1993 the Methodist Church restored its original Wesley Deaconess tradition to form the Methodist Diaconal Order, a connexionally recognised Order of Ministry for men and women in itinerant ministry and committed as a religious order. (*Link to MDO web-site*)

In 2002 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland made the decision to ordain its deaconesses and deacons. The argument for Ordination was in part to correct an historic situation dating back to the 1880's when deaconesses were not ordained but 'set apart', as they could not be seen to have a higher authority than the elders, who were all men.

Deaconesses in the Church of England

Elizabeth Catherine Ferard was the first deaconess in England, receiving her

licence from Bishop Tait of London on 18th July 1862. Following a visit to Kaiserswerth, Bp Tait encouraged Elizabeth to go. She spent at least three months there observing and learning. In 1861 she and a group of women dedicated themselves 'to minister to the necessities of the Church' as servants in the Church. She founded a community of deaconesses which was also a religious sisterhood, the (Deaconess) Community of St Andrew, working first in a poor parish in the King's Cross area of London and at the Great Northern Hospital. When the parish was razed for the St Pancras railway yards, they moved to Notting Hill in 1873. The women had to become Deaconesses before they could be full members of the Community. Some women who were trained there went to other dioceses as independent deaconesses and one, Sr Edith, was invited to New Zealand to begin deaconess work there in 1893 (now the religious Community of the Sacred Name).

The existing sisters are mostly quite elderly and most of them no longer occupy St Andrew's House, which is now the world headquarters of the Anglican Communion. Revd. Dr. Sr. Teresa, CSA, is still resident and serves as chaplain to the staff of the Anglican Communion Office; she is well-known for her term on General Synod, (where she helped to forward the move towards women as bishops) and her long years of international work across diaconal communities. She is still in active ministry contributing towards discussions and papers on diaconal ministry.

Prior to the ordination of women as Deacons, many deaconesses ministered within parish communities throughout England. They were distinctive in their navy dress and cassocks, the typical 'uniform colour' of many (though not all) deaconesses across the world. Most (744 in 1987, and a few more later on) became fully recognized in the order of deacon following the acceptance of women as deacons.

DIAKONIA World Federation

After World War II, a number of Deaconess movements across Europe sought to encourage initiatives towards reconciliation. Although initially many painful memories provided obstacles, the Dutch, the Swiss and the Scandinavian communities worked together to build bridges, initially without the German communities. Diaconal Communities and Associations around the world were invited to come together as a federation, the founding conference being in Copenhagen in October 1947 with DIAKONIA legally established under Dutch law. In 1949 DIAKONIA met in Zollikerberg in Switzerland and in 1951 the German Communities were included. The DIAKONIA World Federation now has 70 member groups representing 20,000 diaconal workers within a wide range of traditions. The Federation is organised into three geographical regions and meeting on a world basis every four years. (see section on DIAKONIA World Federation)

Restoration of the Diaconate in Rome

In the Roman Church, revived interest in the permanent diaconate dates back at least to the time of World War II. Priests imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps, reflecting on the difficult situation of the church, speculated that permanent deacons – married or single men with a formal, stable commitment to the work of the church – could have accomplished much good. Also in southern Germany, “Circles” [Kreis] of Catholic social workers were discussing their work and their connection with the church. Interest in the idea continued after the war, when it was taken up by theologians and scholars, especially in Europe, and discussed in a number of articles and books.

The idea was very much in the air by the time of Vatican Council II. Among the reasons for restoring the diaconate advanced during the council, was that this step would help alleviate the shortage of priests in various parts of the world. Many Catholics had been dispersed into or had migrated into traditionally Protestant (Evangelical) areas where there were no Catholic churches or clergy. Deacons, it was reasoned, would be able to perform many of the functions of priests and would help create and sustain a sense of Christian community among people who rarely saw a priest.

This consideration may be valid and even compelling in particular situations. However, it is not a satisfactory rationale if it is taken to imply that the diaconate is merely an expedient, a temporary solution to a problem for which there would be no particular need or reason if there were enough priests to go around. On the contrary, the central fact about the diaconate is that it is an integral part of the three-fold nature of Orders, with its own intrinsic reason and right to exist, quite apart from the circumstances of a particular era and place which may give it special timeliness.

Deacons in Vatican II

The Council’s principal statement on the restoration of the permanent diaconate appears in the Constitution on the Church.

"Deacons....receive the imposition of hands not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service." For, strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity. It pertains to the office of a deacon, in so far as it may be assigned to him by the competent authority, to administer Baptism solemnly, to be a custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, in the name of the church to assist and to bless marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and the prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services. Dedicated to works of charity and functions of administration, deacons should

recall the admonition of St. Polycarp: "let them be merciful, and zealous, and let them walk according to the truth of the lord, who became the servant of all".

To date the permanent diaconate has developed mainly in affluent parts of the world. Unfortunately the renewal of diaconate has been slow in the third world where there are few training programs.

Recent history in the Church of England

The Lambeth Conference of 1968 recommended

(a) That the diaconate, combining service of others with liturgical functions be open to:

- (i) men and women remaining in secular occupations
- (ii) full-time church workers
- (iii) those selected for the priesthood.

(b) That Ordinals should, where necessary, be revised:

- (i) to take account of the new role envisaged for the diaconate;
- (ii) by the removal of reference to the diaconate as an inferior office;
- (iii) by emphasis upon the continuing element of *diakonia* in the ministry of bishops and priests.

(c) That those made deaconess by laying on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the diaconate.

(For, 221. Against, 183.)

(d) That appropriate canonical legislation be enacted by provinces and regional Churches to provide for those already ordained deaconesses.

In 1974 the Advisory Committee for the Church's Ministry (ACCM) produced a report that was unable to find a convincing theological rationale for the diaconate and recommended abolishing it altogether (and said it did not know what a permanent diaconate might be, despite 112 years of the ministry of deaconesses). The 1977 debate in General Synod declined to follow this advice.

In 1980 the Ordinal in the Alternative Service Book presented a new slant to the office and work of a deacon compared with the Book of Common Prayer. It gave greater emphasis to service and caritative function in the community and a sense of the deacon acting on behalf of the whole body.

The (then) Deaconess Community of St Andrew called an ecumenical consultation at the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine in 1981. Many of those present then have become the leaders of the distinctive diaconate movement in the Church of England.

In 1986 the Church of England commissioned further work which resulted in the report: 'Deacons and the Church' (1988). By 1987 about 700 women (many deaconesses or Accredited Lay Workers) had been ordained as deacons with no

immediate prospect of becoming priests. There was suddenly an urgent need to understand the order theologically and at the ministerial level to develop diaconal ministry in a new professional way. The report recommended the setting up of a distinctive diaconate for both men and women. The opening of priestly orders to women and the first ordinations in 1994 somewhat eclipsed the report. One unfortunate and confusing development was to see the distinctive diaconate developing as a place for women in those dioceses where a significant proportion of parishes refused to accept women as priests.

Renewal of the Diaconate in the Church of England

In the 1990's much change affected the Church; not only women in priestly orders but also developments in ecumenical theology, changes in society's norms, an enhanced awareness of missiology, developments in lay ministry and new theological insights from New Testament research. During these changing times emerged a small but committed group of men and women to the ministry of deacon. The Diaconal Association of the Church of England, once well-subscribed by women deacons, became a smaller association for those whose calling was distinctively diaconal, despite their support for women colleagues in priestly ministry.

Meanwhile the ground-breaking and scholarly work of John N Collins shed new light on the New Testament use of language and in particular the Greek 'diaconal' terms. Fresh translations of old sources and new understanding of linguistic intention led Collins to redefine the way in which the early church might have understood 'diakonos' and how this might influence the way in which we think of deacons / diaconal ministry then and now. 'Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources' (Oxford University Press) was published in 1990.

Collins work indicated that 'diakonos' did not carry the menial connotations which the church had grown accustomed to associate with deacons / servants. His arguments re-interpret 'diakonia' (service) as a highly valued responsibility. The Deacon (Diakonos) may be thought of as:

- A bearer of a message, a spokesperson, an envoy, a go-between who is entrusted with important tidings
- An agent, an ambassador, a mediator, a person given a commission on behalf of someone in authority – fulfilling a vital task
- An attendant to a person or household, on whose behalf one performs various tasks.

Collins work significantly influenced thinking on the diaconate amongst those with an interest in its renewal.

In 1996 the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (related to the Porvoo process) produced the Hanover Report: 'The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity'...

“The renewal of the church’s Diaconate at this time presents a unique opportunity for deepened unity and joint endeavour in the life and mission of the Anglican and Lutheran as well as other churches.”

DACE contributed to ecumenical discussions on the diaconate through a series of Windsor Consultations on the diaconate, including ‘Raising the Dust’ in 1996 leading to the ‘Windsor Statement’ of 1997...

“ The Diaconate is a growing movement whose voice is audible around the world – from catholic and reformed traditions. We are discovering a converging vision for this ministry – an agent for change, transcending boundaries and barriers.”

The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) were partners in these consultations with Roman Catholic and Orthodox representatives. A Church of England Windsor Consultation on the diaconate was also held in 1998 with Reader representation.

In 1998 General Synod asked the House of Bishops to set up a Working Party on the renewed diaconate. Two members of DACE were invited onto the working party. Their report, ‘For such a time as this’ was brought to Synod in 2001.

This potentially land-mark report rapidly became the victim of other agendas. The report sought to bring ‘biblical, theological and ecumenical perspectives to bear on a ministry that many believe has not yet realized its full potential’. It presented what some saw as well-presented theological arguments for the foundational ministry of Diakonia as a timely agent for mission, but what others dismissed as lacking in theological basis.

In a heated Synod debate with no deacons called upon to speak, the report became an opportunity for the house to consider the whole issue of categories of ministry. The report was sent back to Ministry Division for a re-make. It may return to Synod in 2007.

Some dioceses have taken their own initiatives following the report, including Salisbury. ‘The Distinctive Diaconate’ was published by Salisbury in 2003.

In 2002 John N Collins published ‘Deacons and The Church – Making connections between old and new.’ (Gracewing).

Ian Shield in ‘Full Dozen’ found that in 2005 there were 116 women who continue to exercise their ministry solely as deacons. Of these, 55 were ordained after the priesthood authorisation in November 1992. (It is not easy to establish how accurate these figures are or how many distinctive male deacons exist as no central records are kept and most diocesan offices categorise transitional and distinctive deacons together.) Some deacons minister in areas where women

priests are still not accepted. Most, however, are supportive of women priestly orders and work in partnership with them.

DACE continues to work towards the restoration of the diaconate as a full and equal order of ministry, with its focus on Christ the Servant, Christ who entered our world and our pain in order to befriend us and lead us to Life.

“ A renewed diaconate...operating as a catalyst for Christian discipleship, in the mission space between worship and the world, can help the Church to become more incarnational. In worship the Church gathers to receive and to celebrate its identity, to be renewed in the Spirit, and to be send forth in the name of Christ and in the power of the same Spirit to bring God's reconciling, healing grace to a world full of brokenness. We have not been good at doing equal justice to these two vital movements of the Church's life: sending and gathering. The re-envisioned diaconate can help to hold them together.”

'For such a time as this' p 30

Material has been collated from a variety of sources, including 'Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources' (Oxford University Press) 1990. 'For such a time as this', the report to General Synod on the Diaconate 2001, and a yet to be published history of women in the diaconate by the Revd Dr Sr Teresa Joan White, CSA.

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