



Diaconal Studies

*Lived Theology for the
Church in North America*

Edited by
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STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This Study Guide is intended for members of the diaconate, and others who champion *diakonia*, who are interested in studying and discussing the theology, practice, history and mission of diakonia in the church and the world. The powerful text, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America* offers a rich array of viewpoints on these topics. In the book, twenty-one authors tackle a variety of diaconal subjects in four sections:

- › Part 1: Diakonia for the Life of the World
- › Part 2: Liberating Diaconal Praxis
- › Part 3: Diaconal Leadership and Spirituality
- › Part 4: Diaconal Studies and Formation

As I said in the foreword to the volume:

This book, lifting up [the] sacred [diaconal] vocation and vision, is welcomed as blessing. Sadly, diaconal studies is often overlooked in our seminars and theological enterprises. *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America* provides resources for correcting that absence. The inspiring stories presented in this volume tell us about individuals of courage and commitment. The theologies expressed here stretch us intellectually, prayerfully, and emotionally. The writers describe historic and present-day world-changing ministries of liberation and transformation. We need this work to help us reclaim our focus in diakonia and to redirect the church and all its people to the “diakonia of all believers.” The church is not the church without diakonia.

The Study Guide follows a simple format for group discussion:

- › *Précis* – of each of the 21 chapters
- › *Video Introduction*
- › *Quotes* – from the chapters
- › *Discussion Questions*

It is imagined that the study would be done over a period of days or weeks, doing one of the four parts each time. The larger group (virtually or in-person) would gather with a period of prayer. Each time, smaller groups would be assigned one chapter from a section, where they would:

- › Begin with introductions
- › Follow the one-page worksheet for their assigned chapter
- › Develop a Report Back for the larger group by:
 - Deciding what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion to *briefly* share with the larger group
 - Writing a short prayer that captures some of the themes of your discussion to share in the larger group

The session would conclude with the sharing of the report backs and prayers in the larger group.

I hope you have a prayerful, motivating, and challenging study that leads to transformation and moves the church and world toward justice, compassion, and love.

With respect and blessing,

Ted Dodd

President of DIAKONIA of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC),

Vice President DIAKONIA World Federation (DWF), and Diaconal Minister of The United Church of Canada.

The book's website is darrylwstephens.com/diaconal-studies/diaconal-studies-the-book/.

Précis

In response to global and ecumenical impulses, including *Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia*, Craig L. Nesson contends that it is time to establish diaconal studies in North America as an academic discipline and ecumenical field of research beyond denominational training programmes. This chapter proposes a path toward revitalising the church through diakonia. First, diakonia as a guiding theological paradigm turns the church inside out in responding to the needs of the world. The diaconal paradigm has emerged prominently in ecumenical research over recent decades. Second, diakonia provides impetus for a transformed theology of ministry that places the diaconate of all believers at the forefront of the church’s mission. Diakonia by the baptised in daily life orients the ministry of deacons, pastors, and bishops in relation to this universal diaconate. The recovery of diakonia as a central paradigm makes the vocations of deacons and deaconesses, often marginalised by existing church structures, central to a transformed theology of ministry. Third, scholarship on the revitalisation of the church in North America can be advanced by the establishment of diaconal studies as a distinctive field of research within the academy, following the pattern in other global contexts and as demonstrated by the chapters of this book.

Page 4-5, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3KCUubsd4o>

Quote

A comprehensive concept of diakonia encompasses five dimensions: care, transformation, empowerment, advocacy, and conviviality.¹ Care involves an orientation to life that issues forth in words and actions of concern for others that affirms their wellbeing. Transformation analyses the causes of suffering and strategises how these conditions can be changed. Empowerment involves subsidiarity, letting those who are afflicted claim their own dignity, raise their own voices, and exercise their own power. Advocacy involves building coalitions, holding those in authority accountable, and focuses collective action on changing the circumstances and structures under which others are suffering. Conviviality involves building life-giving relationships with others, especially with those different from us, through hospitality, mutuality, and cooperation.

¹(Wanda Diefelt and Beate Hofmann, “Towards a Comprehensive Concept of Diaconia,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Ampony et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2021), 53–61.)
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Discussion Questions

- › In what ways is *diakonia* being revitalized in your church/denomination? What might further that revitalization?
- › Which of the five dimensions are emphasized in your diaconal association/community? In your own ministry?

“Emergent Diakonia in Response to Changing Contexts”

Sandra Boyce

Précis

Sandra Boyce offers a global perspective in demonstrating how diaconal ministry needs to be seen with fresh eyes. Throughout history, diaconal mission and ministry has responded to particular contexts. What form should diaconal ministry take in a post-Christendom, post-pandemic, technological world that is always on the edge of or engaging in conflict and war? What forms of diaconal ministry are needed to respond to this context? Far from being a secondary, subservient ministry—described as a lowly, humble ministry—diakonia needs to be seen as core to the church’s mission and ministry. This chapter looks at expressions of diakonia in four different eras—the early church, nineteenth-century Germany, twentieth-century Australia, and our contemporary era—and the ways that context shapes priorities for mission and ministry. Particular forms of diakonia emerged in response to historical and social contexts. This responsiveness suggests a fresh theological framework is needed in our time and place.

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Quotes

Far from being a secondary, subservient ministry—described as a lowly, humble ministry—diakonia needs to be seen as essential to the church’s mission and ministry.

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Diaconal studies and formation can resource the church in the task of reimagining mission and ministry and contextualising missional engagement in our time and place. Diaconal ministry is often offered from the margins, beyond the church walls. It should not equate to “out of sight, out of mind,” disconnected from the church. Diaconal ministry is a public expression of the church’s mission in the world, reflecting the radical missional values of God’s reign. It is the work of diakonia to speak less and listen more to the voices of those on the margins and to partner with them to create a more just and peaceful world.

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Discussion Questions

- › How is the diaconate perceived in your church/denomination?
- › What are some ideas you have for refreshing a theological framework for diakonia in yourself? In your community/association? In your church/denomination?
- › How would you assess the balance of speaking and listening in your diaconal ministry?

“Ecumenical Convergence on the Diaconate in North America”

Mitzi J. Budde

Précis

Mitzi J. Budde explores a convergence in ecumenical understandings of the diaconate. The chapter begins by examining the 2023 Proposal for Exchangeability of the Diaconate between The Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which adopted an ordained diaconate in 2019. This ecclesiological change in the ELCA’s order of ministry has opened new opportunities for diaconal exchangeability under full communion, establishing a solid precedent for other ecumenical relationships, especially the full communion agreement between the ELCA and The United Methodist Church. This chapter describes theological and ecclesiological similarities and differences in the diaconate of these three denominations, imagining how each church’s diaconate might be enhanced by mutual recognition and reciprocity. Finally, the author suggests that ecumenical convergence will offer creative new opportunities for diaconal formation and ministry.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTTbHYRDGml>

Quotes

Deacons are bearers of the Word and witnesses to the Holy Spirit at work in the church and the world. Denominational voices describe deacons in complementary terms. For Episcopalians, deacons are “animators and leaders,”¹ “grass roots change agents,”² “wise fools, ... and agents of hope.”³ Lutheran deacons are “catalysts ... equipping the baptized people for service, in order that the church becomes a diaconal church at the heart of its identity and mission.”⁴ United Methodists describe deacons as “emissary-servants,”⁵ “entrepreneurs, en fleshed representatives of Christ ... and embodied mission.”⁶ For the Greek Orthodox, a deacon is “herald, mediator, minister, prophet.”⁷

¹Susanne Watson Epting, “Common Vows and Common Mission,” *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 76.

²Association for Episcopal Deacons, “Former Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori Joins AED’s Board,” (June 2023), https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/uploads/2/6/7/3/26739998/kjs-joinboard.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=bishop_katharine_jefferts_schori_joins_aed_s_board&utm_term=2023-07-10.

³Kevin J. McGrane, “The Deacon as Wise Fool: A Pastoral Persona for the Diaconate,” *Anglican Theological Review* 100, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 782–83.

⁴Craig L. Nesson, “A Lutheran Theology for Diakonia in North American Contexts,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Ampony et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2021), 279–88 (282).

⁵Benjamin L. Hartley, “Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology,” *Quarterly Review* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 372.

⁶Margaret Ann Crain, *Advancing the Mission: The Order of Deacon in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Wesley’s Foundery, 2021), 132.

⁷John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009), 106–16.

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Discussion Questions

- › What do you see/feel in the theological and ecclesiological similarities and differences in the diaconate in our communities/associations?
- › What images of the diaconate are operative in your church/denomination?
- › What images of the diaconate shape your ministry?

Précis

Benjamin L. Hartley engages the World Council of Churches document *Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia* and the exegetical work of John N. Collins to explore multiple meanings of diakonia. This chapter responds to this ecumenical document, first, by placing it in the context of similar documents generated by the World Council of Churches in the recent past, and then by offering biblical reflections on diakonia that are germane to the aspirations of the document. Diakonia is understood both as religiously motivated social service and as a Greek term in the New Testament for ministry as a go-between or emissarial activity. The author warns that this unresolved tension in the understanding and practice of diakonia could be a barrier to ecumenical relations if not recognised and explored.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYsINK4FLWQ>

Quotes

Fifteen years ago, Anglican theologian and ecumenist Paul Avis introduced an issue of the journal *Ecclesiology* by stating that “the diaconate is at the same time the most problematic and the most promising of all the ministries of the Church.”¹ As someone who has written occasionally about the diaconate for the past twenty-five years, I believe that remains the case today.²

¹Paul Avis, “Editorial: Wrestling with the Diaconate,” *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009): 3

²Benjamin L. Hartley and Paul E. Van Buren, *The Deacon: Ministry Through Words of Faith and Acts of Love* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 1999); Benjamin L. Hartley, “Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology,” *Quarterly Review* 19, no. 4 (1999): 372–86; Benjamin L. Hartley, *An Empirical Look at the Ecumenical Diaconate in the United States*, Monograph Series No. 16 (Providence, RI: North American Association for the Diaconate, 2003); Benjamin L. Hartley, “Connected and Sent Out: Implications of New Biblical Research for the United Methodist Diaconate,” *Quarterly Review* 24, no. 4 (2004): 367–80. To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Methodist diaconate in 2021, I wrote three blog posts which may be accessed here: <https://missionandmethodism.net/2021/06/02/umc-deacons-at-25-rethinking-deacons-education/>.

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At a personal level, a more apostolic understanding of a minister’s vocation may guard against an unhealthy victim complex, whereby one perceives oneself as a burned-out servant of the people more than a sent emissary of God. I believe that the old understanding of diakonia and the attendant “servant leader” language is especially vulnerable to such a distortion of ministry—especially if it is left ambiguous whose servant one is.¹ Instead, what is emphasised in the revised understanding of diakonia—and, of course, elsewhere in the New Testament—is that one can be radically free to perform menial and self-sacrificial missionary service precisely because of the “high calling” and close emissarial relationship and friendship one can have as a diakonos or minister of Jesus.

¹Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Mitch McCrimmon, “Why Servant Leadership is a Bad Idea,” 16 August 2010, <http://www.management-issues.com/opinion/6015/why-servant-leadership-is-a-bad-idea/>. See chapter by Yip in this volume.

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Discussion Questions

- › In what ways do you identify diakonia as promising? As problematic?
- › Hartley posits an unresolved tension between the understandings of diakonia that stress servanthood and that emphasize emissary or go-between models of ministry. In what ways is this tension reflected in your church/denomination? In your ministry?

“Strengthening Diakonia for a Thriving Church”

Margaret Ann Crain

Précis

Margaret Ann Crain asks about the mission of the church and the kind of leadership needed to accomplish its purposes. Central to the issue is ordination: what does it mean, and what difference does it make that deacons are ordained? In 1996, The United Methodist Church created an order of ordained deacons parallel to and distinct from the order of elder, whose focus is building up the church. Diaconal leaders help the church to love the world with the compassionate heart of Jesus and to confront the powers of the world. The ordained deacon particularly challenges the church to undertake the mission of transforming the world. Through denominational documents defining the complementary and distinctive order of deacons and illustrations of ministries by United Methodist deacons, this chapter argues for the centrality of the ordained deacon to the church and its participation in the *missio Dei*.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLV6A5OiTH4>

Quotes

The purpose of the church is to form people who love God and love neighbour and who participate with God in bringing God’s realm into this world.¹ In other words, the mission is to incarnate the prayer, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” The transformation is toward a just society. A recent United Methodist document states that deacons enable “the church to engage the world with a heart of compassion and a prophetic longing for God’s justice to prevail.”² This grand vision echoes the expressed mission of this church to seek the transformation of the world. The UMC understands that its mission does not stop at the doors of the church. Diakonia is essential to this mission and central to being the church.

¹Neighbour must be understood to include the whole created order. See chapter by Moore in this volume.

²Commission on the General Conference, The United Methodist Church, “Advance Daily Christian Advocate, Volume 2, Section 2, Reports and Proposed Legislation” (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2020), 1013, https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/general-conference/2020/documents/ADCA-English-Vol-2-Sec-2.pdf.

Pages 64-65, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

What are some of the unresolved issues preventing its full realisation?

First, diaconal leaders in every expression of the church lack critical mass; there are too few of us. ...

The second barrier to the full potential of diaconal ministries is a misunderstanding of the terms deacon and diaconal and their connection to service. ...

Third, residual patriarchal systems continue to limit the power of diakonia. ...

A fourth barrier limiting diakonia in the white-majority mainline denominations is systemic racism and the dominance of white culture. ...

A fifth barrier for a strong diaconate is lack of missional imagination and financial commitment.

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Discussion Questions

- › In what ways does your diaconal community/association love the world? Confront the powers of the world? In what ways do you address the world in your diaconal ministry?
- › How does your church/denomination understand the connection between mission and diakonia? How do you understand this relationship?
- › What barriers do you see to the realization of diakonia in your church/denomination?

“Christian Diaconal Practice Through the Lens of Human Dignity”

Ignatius Swart

Précis

Ignatius Swart considers how unequal relationships of power and privilege can faithfully be met by a diaconal practice based on the Gospel values of justice and human dignity. Endemic inequalities and consequent divisions between privileged and disadvantaged communities create an unavoidable tension between members of the “Church for the Poor” as those seeking to do good and members of the “Church of the Poor” as the recipients of such goodwill. This chapter considers inclusive, faith-based community revitalisation, the notions of “bridging” and “linking” social capital, and the transformational potential of community development through diaconal practice.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hrU-RBdg5A>

Quotes

Valuable conceptual insight can be found in the intentional shift in contemporary diaconal studies “away from traditions of conceptualising diakonia as humble service” and as “paternalistic charity” to a mode of relating that fundamentally respects those in perceived need of help as human beings and subjects in their own right.¹ This paradigm shift is intentional in its aim of leading diaconal practice to a new mode of relating to those human beings at the centre of its calling: people in perceived need of help or assistance of whom the most poignant group could be considered people living in contexts of endemic poverty.

¹See, for example, Stephanie Dietrich, Kari Karsrud Korslien, Kjell Nordstokke, and Knud Jørgensen, “Introduction: Diakonia as Christian Social Practice,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 2; Stephanie Dietrich, “Reflections on Core Aspects of Diaconal Theory,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, 13–26; Ignatius Swart, “The Transformative Power of Diakonia: Theological Reflections from South Africa,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Ampony et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2021), 62.
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Service remains defined as what “middle- or upper-class Christians, unilaterally give or do to and do for” the other. As such, it is a mode of relating that comprises a “one-way street in which the agency of ‘the other’ disappears into thin air,” as if “the ones receiving Christian service have no moral agency, no power, no creativity of their own—only ‘need.’”¹ By implication, the mode of diaconal practice at play not only displays no sensitivity for the violated human dignity of those it claims to serve but even sustains that violation.

¹Susanne Johnson, “Remembering the Poor: Transforming Christian Practice,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), page 211
Page 80, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussion Questions

- › In what ways does your ministry setting reflect the “Church for the Poor”? In what ways does it reflect the “Church of the Poor”?
- › How, in your diaconal ministry, have you been guilty of violating human dignity? How do you work toward maintaining human dignity?

“Liberating Diaconia in a Brazilian Perspective”

Dionata Rodriguez de Oliveira

Précis

Dionata Rodriguez de Oliveira demonstrates how diakonia in the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil has always been present, based on the traditional tripartite understandings of communion, ministry, and proclamation. Diakonia has suffered, however, the profound impact of this land’s exploitation since its invasion in 1500 by the Portuguese and Spanish crowns. Assessing the church’s history of mistakes and successes in this work, three key concepts stand out. The first is the necessity of a diaconal theological methodology rooted in practical theology and liberation theology. Diaconal methodology seeks to free both oppressor and oppressed from their yoke of captivity, empower the oppressed, and allow the people served to be active and involved participants in the transformation process. Finally, the purpose of diakonia is to transform the reality of pain into abundant life, not merely to assist in the maintenance of suffering.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SleQoiUYUgw>

Quotes

For the Brazilian context, transformation, mediation/reconciliation, and empowerment reflect the essential features of diaconal work. Transformation is at the heart of diakonia. Without a focus on transformation, diaconal actions fall short of their potential. If a so-called diaconal practice does not involve transformation as its central objective, one should question it as a genuine act of *diakonia*.

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Mediation/reconciliation and transformation go hand in hand when it comes to thinking about diakonia. Mediation is the process led by a person or group which provides the necessary measures for those who are in a difficult situation to overcome it.

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Empowerment is another vital aspect of diakonia. It recognises the uniqueness of each person, autonomy over one’s own decisions, and the affirmation of each one’s intrinsic abilities and gifts. ...Empowerment is not about control but rather provides support to effect change and development.

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Discussion Questions

- › How does your diaconal ministry reflect transformation? Mediation/reconciliation? Empowerment?

Chapter 8

“A Theology of Diakonia at the Margins”

Norma Cook Everist

Précis

Norma Cook Everist invites exploration of the theology of diakonia and an ecclesiology for a diaconal church. This world is broken by war, inequity, violence, and the climate crisis. In Christ’s incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection and by the power of the Spirit, Christians are called to serve in the world as the real presence of Christ. This chapter presents a theology of marginalisation and diakonia. Jesus was a diaconal minister. Diakonia is not just an optional addition but is essential to the life and work of the church. Central to diakonia is ministry among the marginalised. Throughout the ages, diaconal ministers and diakonia have often been marginalised by the church because the people served were seen to be of less worth. When the baptised are equipped for diakonia, ministry is multiplied. Christians work for justice and reconciliation. The chapter concludes with a Diaconal Litany.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6TqsjzkRwk>

Quotes

Throughout the centuries, the church has been tempted to turn away from people in situations it cannot bear to watch and reluctant to claim its diaconal calling. There is something at stake in forgetting—disregarding—those who are marginalised and keeping the marginalised marginalised. The church has often marginalised diaconal ministers, those who serve on behalf of marginalised people. We are called to remember and to act! Deacons do that.¹

“For diaconal ministers, there is the added burden of some people not trusting, or understanding, the very office of diaconal ministry.” Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 11.

Diakonia is in essence caring about becoming an inclusive community. We engage in diakonia with people who are marginalised.
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Diakonia is in essence caring about becoming an inclusive community. We engage in diakonia with people who are marginalised.

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Discussion Questions

- › Cook Everist boldly states: “Jesus was a diaconal minister.” What stories or biblical passages indicate this for you?
- › To what extent has your diaconal ministry been marginalized or misunderstood by the church?
- › How do you engage with people who are marginalized? What have you learned standing with those who are marginalized?
- › How do you build inclusive community in your diaconal ministry?

“Diakonia Toward Koinonia Among LGBTQIA+ Persons and the Church”

Leo Yates Jr.

Précis

Leo Yates Jr. encourages us to recognise how the Spirit of diakonia connects individuals and communities with Christ’s ministries. The Spirit also inspires deacons, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and other ministers to reconcile, heal, affirm, seek justice, empower, support, equip, educate, advocate, and provide care and encouragement to LGBTQIA+ persons, among others, who have been outcast and marginalised. These examples of diakonia were modelled by Christ the Servant in his ministry and are leadership gifts to the diaconate for leading and supporting the church. When applied, these activities are diaconal pathways of compassion and justice that can support LGBTQIA+ persons who have been deprived of community (koinonia); moreover, these diaconal activities can bridge persons to grace and wholeness. In this chapter, readers will glean from stories of affirming churches who have benefited from these diaconal pathways so relationships among LGBTQIA+ persons can be restored in order for the church to fully experience koinonia.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orxTTQjjRXo>

Quotes

Deacons were often the first to see the needs of the community. Learning about the needs of those who have been neglected, ignored, or treated with hostility by the wider community and society, deacons have always been the bridge, ministering and supporting these persons and communities.

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Koinonia is better experienced by the church when queer persons and their families are seen as equals and provisions are made to support their presence and participation within the body.¹ Advocating for and educating about the importance of *koinonia* encourages deacons to show faith communities how the church can be a place of welcome and hospitality for our queer siblings in Christ. Healing the harm and rebuilding trust are crucial to this work. For the sake of expanding sexual and gender diversity, the church can re-examine its practices and policies to achieve better *koinonia*—the love of Christ within our communities. Amen.

¹GALIP Foundation, “Affirming Denominations,” www.gaychurch.org/affirming-denominations/.
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Discussion Questions

- › Yates says “LGBTQIA+ persons, among others, ... have been outcast and marginalised.” How have you and your ministry setting been able to “reconcile, heal, affirm, seek justice, empower, support, equip, educate, advocate, and provide care and encouragement to LGBTQIA+ persons” and others who have been marginalized?
- › What aspects of your diaconal ministry reflect Yates assertion “deacons have always been the bridge,” i.e. supporting the needs of persons and community?
- › How have you been an advocate and educator for inclusive *koinonia*?

“De-Subjugating the Servant Image as a Theo-Diaconal Intervention”

Man-Hei Yip

Précis

Man-Hei Yip argues that de-subjugating the servant image is both urgent and necessary for the reconceptualisation of diakonia in the age of the new normal post-COVID-19. Problematizing the concept of servanthood, including the sacrificial language deposited in the diakonia of Jesus, entails subverting the narrative of Jesus as a submissive and subservient servant in Christian discourse. Such a process of theological imagination disassociates itself from unrealistic speculation and is attentive to the complexity by which communities continue to be haunted by the history of slavery. The task of theological imagination serves as an intervention that, on the one hand, stops us from making totalising claims about the particularity of the peoples that perpetuate the subjugation of others and, on the other hand, helps reconceptualise diakonia in a broader framework that informs appropriate diaconal practices. Creating sites of memory honours and affirms the humanity of the oppressed that sets forth a path toward healing and reconciliation.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2MZtIEjKdo>

Quotes

De-subjugating the servant image is both urgent and necessary for the reconceptualisation of diakonia in the age of the new normal, post-COVID-19. This chapter contends that problematising the concept of servanthood can subvert and destabilise the narrative of Jesus’ identity as a submissive and subservient servant in Christian discourse and reconceptualise service within a broader framework that considers, respects, and takes heed of people’s memory for the task of healing and reconciliation.

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Diakonia and other *diakon*-words in Greek have been understood as “humble service” because these services were normally related to menial tasks. In his important work, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources*, John N. Collins re-engaged the concept of diakonia and found that most sources, including non-Christian materials in the Hellenic contexts, referred to the diakon-word group as “messenger,” “emissary,”² or “go-between.”³ Collins made clear that these words did not refer to service of humble origins.⁴

¹John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 104–5.

²Collins, 195–226. ³Collins, 77–95. ⁴Collins, 194.

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Diakonia invites us to hold space for unveiling the darkness that destroys and devalues bodies that are different from our own. Such an enlarged vision of diakonia attests to the diaconate of all believers regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, and language. This vision can reshape diaconal practice in a world in need of healing and reconciliation.

Page 132, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussion Questions

- › What is your response to Yip’s desire to subvert “the narrative of Jesus as a submissive and subservient servant”?
- › John Collins suggests that images such as “messenger,” “emissary,” or “go-between” are more appropriate images than servant. How would that impact your understanding of your diaconal ministry?

“Developing a Trauma-Informed Diaconal Praxis”

Darryl W. Stephens

Précis

Darryl W. Stephens investigates how those of privilege can participate in a liberative praxis. Contemporary ecumenical diakonia is focused on liberation and empowerment of the poor, suffering, and oppressed. Most North American diaconal actors are not poor, however, and attempts at solidarity are laden with power differentials. Exploring points of connection between trauma-informed response and diaconal praxis, this chapter presents a model to assist diaconal workers attempting to serve as ambassadors of God’s reconciliation in the world. Through an interdisciplinary approach—drawing on trauma studies, theology, and ethics—the practice of bearing witness becomes a tool for ecumenical diakonia, together with responsible interfaith encounter (*diapraxis*) and community building (conviviality). The resulting trauma-informed ethic provides guidance for diaconal workers bearing witness to individual victim-survivors, equipping both parties to participate in social change movements for justice, healing, and reconciliation.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzjxtxrDs7c>

Quotes

What has *diakonia* to do with trauma? With advances in trauma studies over the past thirty years, we now know that trauma is one of the most pervasive and widespread causes of broken relationships and estrangement from community. If, as Paul claimed, “God ... has given us the ministry [*diakonian*] of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18), reconciliation and repair among individuals and within communities broken by trauma are central to the diaconal vocation of all Christians. This work becomes liberative when compassion is wedded to social analysis and empowerment. As illustrated in recent ecumenical thought, diaconal workers strive to join in solidarity with persons who are suffering, enhancing their moral agency and the flourishing of each member of the community. Thus, the theology and practice of *diakonia* must become trauma informed.

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Ecumenical diaconal praxis goes well beyond individual acts of mercy. The holistic and prophetic nature of ecumenical diakonia is rooted in justice: “We cannot understand or practice diakonia apart from justice and peace. Service cannot be separated from prophetic witness or the ministry of reconciliation. Mission must include transformative diakonia.”¹

¹WCC and ACT Alliance, *Called to Transformation*, 33.

²Stephanie Dietrich et al., “Introduction: Diakonia as Christian Social Practice,” in *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Dietrich et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 2.

³WCC and ACT Alliance, *Called to Transformation*, 16–17, 32.

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Discussion Questions

- › What are the sources of your personal power and privilege?
- › How “trauma informed” do you feel as someone engaged in diaconal ministry?
- › How would you assess your integration of service, prophetic witness and the ministry of reconciliation?

“The Diaconal Spirituality of Activism in the Philippines”

Norma Dollaga

Précis

Norma P. Dollaga, a United Methodist deaconess, advocates for the importance of diaconal ministry during times of economic turmoil and tyranny by witnessing how deaconesses in justice ministries in the Philippines demonstrate a spirituality of activism. This chapter celebrates the lives and commitments of four colleagues in diaconal ministries: one who served as a deaconess for twenty-four years and then became ordained to serve in ministry with the poor; another who first served as a deaconess and later in clergy work that was deeply engaged in ministry with migrants; a deaconess coworker engaged in seeking justice for the victims of the war on drugs of former President Duterte; and a deaconess who was martyred for embracing revolutionary spirituality. Their stories, recorded through personal conversations with the author—together with her own story, provide testimony of relevant, risk-taking diaconal response, manifesting the meaning of church in such a time as this.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBQ7WHl2jsc>

Quotes

Diaconal ministries can go beyond the church premises, wherever needs arise. The skills and talents of a deaconess can help empower communities for the improvement of their situation. Diaconal ministry is not a job that stops after office hours. Being a deaconess, like other forms of diaconal work, is a lifetime commitment and vocation, in which time, resources, talents, and life itself contribute to the continuing struggle for the realisation of God’s reign here on Earth.

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“One, the deaconess [diaconal] ministry can contribute something in making our country [the Philippines] a better place—not only for us but for many generations to come. Second, diaconal ministry is relevant as long as it relates to the issues of the people struggling for a better and friendlier tomorrow. Third, diaconal ministry can facilitate a relevant education process, which will create a condition that will eventually move the learners/participants to be involved in specific concerns or issues, until the victims themselves become human rights advocates.”

Dollaga quoting Deaconess Rubylin Litao, Page 154, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

The spirituality of diaconal work begins with the collective affirmation:

“Until Oppression Exists No More!”

Page 156, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussion Questions

- › Whose story would tell if you were asked to name someone who has been a diaconal mentor for you?
- › How are you contributing to the “realisation of God’s reign here on Earth”?
- › How is your diaconal community/association working at making your setting a better place? Relating to people who are struggling? Facilitating an education process to motivate people to action for justice?
- › How would you describe the spirituality of diaconal work?

“Reclaiming the Lessons and Legacies of the Earliest Episcopal Deaconess”

Valerie Bailey

Précis

Valerie Bailey reflects on how the 1970 Deacons’ Canon created an opportunity for both confusion and clarity about diaconal theology in The Episcopal Church (US). Existing deaconesses hoped that the new canon would bring clarity to a diaconal theology of ministry, new possibilities for pension benefits, and access to holy orders. Women ordained under the 1970 Deacons’ Canon were adamant about the diaconate as a transition order, as exemplified by the irregular ordination of eleven women deacons to the priesthood in 1974. This chapter examines questions of hierarchical power and service, confusions that still linger within The Episcopal Church’s understanding of the diaconate. Influential leaders included Frances Zielinski of the Central House for Deaconesses, who wanted to redefine and strengthen deacons as models of servant leadership; James W. Montgomery, ninth Bishop of Chicago, who favoured perpetual deacon status for women; and some of the earliest women ordained under the 1970 Deacons’ Canon, whose vocational self-understanding and lived experiences shaped their diaconal theology.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XilaUPvoW4>

Quotes

Diaconal theology may focus on service, but how is this complicated when deacons became part of the hierarchy?

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The Lambeth Conference of 1968 marked a major turning point for the diaconate [in the Anglican communion]. Before 1968, diaconal theology was defined in the negative—either not ordained or not a woman or not Catholic. Lambeth 1968 recommended that the diaconate combine service of others with liturgical functions and proposed opening a permanent diaconate to men and women either in secular occupations or full-time church work, and to men selected for the priesthood.¹ This resolution also recommended that the ordinals be revised to remove the reference to the diaconate as an inferior office and continued to uphold the *diakonia* element in the ministry of priests and bishops.

¹The Lambeth Conference Resolutions Archive from 1968 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), Resolution 32:1968, Page 165, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussing the self-supporting clergy organisation, Zielinski described the theology of the diaconate: “The deacon has a ministry of liturgy, a ministry of the Word, and a ministry of Service. It is the latter from which the diaconate takes its peculiar identity, and which separates it from being just a ‘mini-priesthood.’”² Is it possible that Zielinski helped direct diaconal theology in the late twentieth and early twentieth-first century toward a ministry of liturgy, word, and service?

²“National Ordination Group Disbands.” Episcopal News Service: The Archives of the Episcopal Church, 15 February 1977. https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=77044. Page 168, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussion Questions

- › In what ways does confusion linger in your denomination? Diaconal community/association?
- › How does defining diakonia in the negative affect a theology and communicating of diakonia?
- › How is the diaconate defined in your denomination?

“Women Shaping Diaconal Theology in The Episcopal Church”

Daphne B. Noyes

Précis

Daphne B. Noyes interprets the life of Adeline Blanchard Tyler (1805–1875), the first deaconess of The Episcopal Church (US), as a model for diakonia. Spurred by her life circumstances—a combination of pain and privilege—she used her God-given skills to minister to those in need, bringing into their lives hope that springs from faith and love. Tyler’s focus on service and justice parallels the call of today’s Episcopal deacons, insofar as it encompassed work in schools, military hospitals, a women’s refuge, and a children’s hospital. She was sustained by close relationships with supporters of her call and by a determination to serve despite challenges of ill health, Civil War disruptions, and gender bias. Tyler’s story illuminates an early chapter in the ongoing challenge to keep diakonia central to the church’s identity. Her determined commitment overcame embedded institutional barriers in her era and serves as inspiration for deacons who face similar challenges today.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAqXfrMMqsg>

Quotes

A twenty-first-century person with an interest in diakonia might be forgiven for assuming that the lives and ministries of nineteenth-century deaconesses are irrelevant—that a now-obsolete Christian ministry of women in The Episcopal Church has earned its place on the ash heap of history... Their easy dismissal can be attributed to the paucity of histories of the deaconess movement, the eventual extinction of their order [in the Episcopal church], and the prevalence of incorrect information.

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The crucial role of community for those engaged in a life of diaconal service is now recognised in the canons of The Episcopal Church: “Deacons canonically resident in each Diocese constitute a Community of Deacons, which shall meet from time to time.”¹

¹“Of the Life and Work of Deacons,” in Constitution and Canons, Together with the Rules of Order (The Episcopal Church, Adopted and Revised in General Conventions, 1785–2022), Title III, Canon 7, Section 2.
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In 1970, when women were allowed entry into the Sacred Order of Deacons for the first time in The Episcopal Church, the order of deaconess was abolished. As a result, all deaconesses were declared to be deacons, a change that many deaconesses met with resistance. Their reason for holding steadfast to the order to which they were called is made clear by the concluding Collect from the Ordinal then in use, which describes the diaconate as an “inferior order,” praying that deacons “may be found worthy to be called unto the higher Ministries in thy Church.”¹ For deaconesses, there could be no higher ministry than theirs.

¹“The Form and Manner of Making Deacons,” The Book of Common Prayer (1892), 513.
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Discussion Questions

- › Who is someone in diaconal history who inspires you? What examples from your church do you have of the history of women in the church being rendered invisible?
- › What role does community play for your diaconal community/association?
- › In what ways has the diaconate been seen as an “inferior order”?

Précis

Jessica Bickford recognises the last 100 years as the most rapidly changing era in history. From technology, medical advances, and cultural and social constructs, today’s world is very different than that of previous generations. For some, change is exciting and exhilarating. For others, change evokes anxiety when we are asked to try something new or conceptualise a different method. When change occurs—whether chosen or imposed—it can feel as if we are Alice falling down the rabbit hole to Wonderland. Things may appear similar to the way they did before, but what was up is now down and what made sense no longer does. With the changing make-up of North America society and the decrease in parochial numbers, the church finds itself in its own version of Wonderland, facing an identity crisis. As the church transitions to find its place within our current societal context, opportunities emerge for new forms of leadership and organisational structure that involve the role of the diaconate in implementing innovations to convert a hierarchal approach to a grassroots methodology.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7lshMFeTNQ>

Quotes

It is important to highlight that this chapter is written from a white colonial perspective. Within the Canadian context, descendants of white colonial settlers are in the process of reconciling relationships with the indigenous communities as well as communities of colour. These ethnic expressions of faith and church communities are vast and unique. One cannot presume that the representation of church within this chapter speaks for these communities and their understandings of church.

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It is time for the church to become radical, not necessarily in the sense of new and innovative, but in the sense of returning to its roots. In other words, the church must get back to the roots of Jesus Christ’s message and ministry. Circumstances must be created that return the church to the beginning of the Christian story, peeling away religious infrastructure and personal expectations. To determine the role of the church at this juncture, diaconal studies is imperative. By discerning the church’s role through a diaconal lens, a foundation of service and social justice can be laid.

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The challenge now is to discover how to implement a diaconal model of ministry of love and service in this infrastructure. To do this, we must change two main factors: decision making and priorities. First, we must examine how we communicate and make decisions to hear all voices, concerns, perspectives, and needs. ... Second, we need to balance the need for sustainability with diaconal values: reaching the marginalised; hospitality; reconciliation and making amends; authentic partnerships with other community groups; and providing space for spiritual exploration and expression.

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Discussion Questions

- › In what ways do you see your role as a member of the diaconate as a change agent? Bickford suggests that we must change “two main factors: decision making and priorities”; what would be your priorities?
- › What is the focus of reconciliation in your context? How do you honour and respect diversity of perspectives in your ministry?
- › What does becoming a radical church mean for your diaconal ministry?

“Reclaiming Spirituality in Diaconal Work in Germany”

Johannes Eurich

Précis

Johannes Eurich views diakonia as the helping care of fellow human beings in the spirit of neighbourly love. This involves the professional help, support, and accompaniment of people in emergency situations or with special needs, emphasising the spiritual motivation of the help. In the beginning of modern diakonia in the nineteenth century in Germany, Christian faith played a major role. Since then, professional orientations, which often guide diaconal action without reference to spiritual aspects, have taken hold alongside Christian understandings. Christian faith can still play a formative role in the self-image of employees as well as in the diaconal institutions of Germany, but this is also subject to general social developments. Through diaconal faith formation events (faith courses, religious education, retreats, and so on), attempts are being made to awaken and reclaim a greater awareness of the Christian tradition and to open access to the spiritual dimension of helping.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ataZSgit5E8>

Quotes

The “real” Christian life does not take place primarily in the meditative realm of worship, as much as this is a constitutive part of it, or under monastic models, as helpful as these may be, but in everyday life and the locations where the believer is placed.¹ There is no false opposition between the spiritual, on one side, and the everyday, on the other. The same applies to diakonia.² Christian spirituality is realised in one’s professional action as a social worker, nurse, therapist, assistant, and so on. God is present and works through the Spirit in the everyday accomplishments of professional action. All helping can be a medium of the Creator’s devotion.³

¹Barth, Hans-Martin. *Spiritualität. Ökumenische Studienhefte/Bensheimer Hefte* 74. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, page 51

²Barth, 51. See also Dietrich von Oppen, *Der sachliche Mensch. Frömmigkeit am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1968).

³Günther Thomas, “Behinderung als Teil der guten Schöpfung? Fragen und Beobachtungen im Horizont der Inklusionsdebatte,” in *Behinderung—Profile inklusiver Theologie, Diakonie und Kirche*, eds Johannes Eurich and Andreas Lob-Hüdepohl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 87.

Page 199-200, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

A spiritual attitude of mindfulness can help to perceive the neighbour, pay attention to vital signs, and look for possibilities to support the affirmation of life. This attitude of mindfulness becomes even more important as technical procedures shape medical and nursing contexts, overshadowing direct contact with the patient. Communal forms are also helpful for practising spirituality, which can also be rediscovered in diakonia.¹

¹Axel von Dressler, *Diakonie und Spiritualität. Impulse aus der Welt der Kommunen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).*

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Discussion Questions

- › Eurich critiques the dualism of spirituality and the everyday; how has the conventional wisdom that the two sides are very different affected you in your diaconal ministry?
- › How, as a member of the diaconate, do you keep your Christian faith vibrant? Your spirituality vital?

“Diaconal Studies in an Interdisciplinary PhD Programme in Norway”

Annette Leis-Peters

Précis

Annette Leis-Peters describes the development of an interdisciplinary PhD programme in diakonia, “Diaconia, Values and Professional Practice,” at Diakonhjemmet University College in Norway. This programme serves as a platform for communication and collaboration with scholars from other disciplines, enriching practitioners, scholars, and the field of diaconal studies. This chapter: 1) describes the Nordic context for diakonia and diaconal studies, 2) looks at the history of the origin of the PhD programme, 3) enquires about decisive preconditions for the emergence of the PhD programme, and 4) gives a short overview of the content and the PhD project of the programme. The chapter concludes by discussing future opportunities and challenges of interdisciplinary PhD programmes related to diaconal studies.

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Video Introduction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LJYy3-Tyo&list=PLga4j8_-54dr8Zc31QqRLujjLVSimucPe&index=10

Quotes

Diakonhjemmet University College developed from the Norwegian Home of Deacons (Det norske Diakonhjemmet), established in 1890.¹ At that time, Norway was one of the poorhouses of Europe. Poverty, diseases, and misery accumulated in the bigger cities as many people from the rural areas migrated there. Kristiania, as Oslo was called until 1925, was thus a hotspot of social hardship. The Norwegian Home of Deacons was founded as a Christian politicians have asked for more civil society involvement in publicly funded welfare services since the 2010s. For diaconal institutions, though not as much for congregations, this was a motivation to redefine their role as a more active contributor to the welfare system. response to the many social needs piling up in the city. The idea was that well-trained men could reach out to people in need in the slums of Kristiania, which were too dangerous for deaconesses. In addition to theology, the male deacons required preparation in health care, social work, and administration. The diaconal institution established a training hospital that was not primarily designed to provide health care on site but to serve as a place for diaconal training. The practical learning in the hospital equipped the deacons to meet difficult health and social challenges in their work on the margins of society.

¹See chapter by Dyrstad in this volume

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In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, each congregation is required by law to employ a deacon.

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Discussion Questions

- › What do you think are the essential elements of a diaconal studies programme? Diaconal formation training?
- › What do you know about the history of your diaconal community/association?
- › How would it change things for the church and world in your context if every congregation employed a member of the diaconate?

“A Norwegian Case for Formation in the Diaconia Curriculum”

Kristin Husby Dyrstad

Précis

Kristin Husby Dyrstad provides a Scandinavian historical perspective on diaconal studies by investigating curricular changes in Norwegian diakonia education in the 1970s and 1980s. The author looks at the case of Diakonhjemmet, the Deacon’s Home, in a transition period marked by significant developments within the welfare professions, the higher education system, and the Church of Norway. Exploring archival sources, the author finds that the educational institution terminated traditional formative elements without replacing them with new ones. This Norwegian case study shows that it is important to emphasise programme coherence and to balance intellectual, practical, and formative aims when new deacons are trained and programmes of diaconal studies are developed.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8x6FK4o4GM>

Quotes

Along with the knowledge and skills of theology, health, and social care, the formation of diaconal identity has traditionally been emphasised in Norwegian diakonia education. The students in previous generations lived together in a community, sharing meals, devotionals, studies, hospital practice, celebrations, and everyday life. ... A former student in his eighties remembers how the old deacons proudly received their deacon badge and were conscious that they were deacons.¹ He described the educational institution as a Home “with a big H.”² Today’s master’s students live in private homes. Some of them will be ordained, others not. They have various educational backgrounds combined with the diaconal.

¹The deacon badge, a Johannite cross, was introduced in 1899 to place deacon service in a historical tradition and to protect against “false deacons”: persons without diaconal education. The Johannite cross had been used by the ancient Crusaders who practised nursing and Christian acts of love in the Holy Land. Harry Moen, *Kallet og Tjenesten: Streif fra den Mannlige Diakonis Historie i Norge* (Oslo: Det norske Diakonforbund, 1977).

²In-depth interview with a male deacon trained at Diakonhjemmet in the 1960s, conducted by Kristin Husby Dyrstad, 31 March 2022. This citation and all other citations from the Norwegian source material are translated by the author.

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What can future diakonia education in Scandinavia, North America, and other contexts learn from this Norwegian case? When the Norwegian Association of Deacons celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2015, Dag Rakli, a former student and teacher from Diakonhjemmet, asked whether the current space for formation could have been larger if formation had been defined as an overarching concept in diakonia education all the way along.¹ After exploring historical sources, my conclusion aligns with his view and that of the Carnegie research proposal that higher education institutions should define their educational mission to include formation in addition to the intellectual and practical aims.² Like theological preparation for pastoral ministry, preparation for diaconal ministry involves questions of meaning, purpose, and identity to a larger extent than preparation for most other occupations.

¹Dag Rakli, “Diakoni og Dannelse,” in *Det Norske Diakonforbund—Gjennom 100 År*, ed. Leiv Sigmund Hope (Oslo: Det Norske Diakonforbund, 2015), 30.

²Sullivan and Rosin, *A New Agenda for Higher Education*; see also Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 5.
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Discussion Questions

- › How was the intellectual, practical, and the formative balanced in your diaconal education program?
- › What do you remember from your diaconal formation studies and program?
- › How were questions of meaning, purpose, and identity addressed in your diaconal formation?

“Investment in Diaconal Flourishing in The Episcopal Church”

Lori Mills-Curran

Précis

Lori Mills-Curran highlights how The Episcopal Church’s denominational practices concerning the (ordained) diaconal order do not fully support the effective realisation of the people’s diakonia. Of most concern are theological assumptions about diaconal identity that undergird diaconal practice: specifically, that this order needs little organised support for its work; that the provision of supports can be left to each diocese; that deacons may be expected to fund their ministry supports from personal wealth; that diaconal support needs are quite similar to those of priests; and that certain social resources on which deacons have relied in the past will remain available to the next generation of deacons. Also of grave concern is a shadow legacy of unexamined racist and sexist influences on diaconal identity, which may extend invisibly to diaconal practice today. This chapter invites The Episcopal Church to consider how these factors influence Episcopal diaconal identity itself and how they continue to be interpreted in ways that subject deacons to unique vocational stresses, attenuate their effectiveness, discourage vocations, and ultimately impede diakonia.

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Video Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn5D9NSjSOU>

Quotes

Whether fulfilling the responsibilities of this baptismal call to serve the world earns grace or is the fruit of it, there is ecumenical agreement that pursuing it is a responsibility of all the baptised. In recent years, the ecumenical world has increasingly utilised the Greek term *diakonia* to denote this work.

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While Episcopalians are usually startled to learn that most deacons across the globe are compensated professionals, Episcopal deacons are normally non-stipendiary volunteers, educated locally without seminary-based educational requirements. Any argument that urges professional compensation for deacons must grapple with the question of educational preparation.

Footnote #5, Page 240, *Diaconal Studies: Lived Theology for the Church in North America*

Discussion of the economic impact of the diaconate on earning capacity, or even trying to claim ministry expenses, was often deemed inappropriate in diaconal circles, indicative of poor commitment.¹ Some deacons now worried that their prophetic voice might be muted if they became financially entangled with the church in any way.

¹This implicit shaming of deacons about financial concerns fragments the diaconal community and is deeply resented by deacons of lesser means.

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Discussion Questions

- › What vocational stresses and discouragements have you experienced along your diaconal journey?
- › What system and structure impede diakonia in your church?
- › What is your diaconal theology and understanding of grace?
- › How are the diaconate in your church compensated? How does this impact the practice and perception of the diaconate? What are your opinions about educational preparation for the diaconate?

“A Competency-Based, Mentor-Assessed Path for Diaconal Formation”

Julie Ann Lytle

Précis

Julie Anne Lytle offers a case study of diaconal formation. This chapter describes the contexts influencing theological education and diaconal formation in The Episcopal Church and introduces an innovative competency-based, mentor-assessed model that prepares deacons for the whole church. Four currents within theological education influenced the development of the Deacons Formation Collaborative at Bexley Seabury Seminary: the expansion of competency-based education theological education, the introduction of competencies for ministry and discipleship, shifting diocesan financial and human resources, and the seminary’s embrace of a wider understanding of theological education for laity, deacons, priests, and bishops. The goal is to provide a cost-effective, student-directed, time-flexible model that enables students to prepare in their contexts for their contexts. It also encourages a common diaconal theology, consistent formation requirements across The Episcopal Church, and collaboration which responds to the needs of dioceses with few postulants and/or limited resources.

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Video Introduction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gAb5UV_FJU

Quotes

Potential students struggle to balance a desire for theological education, the likelihood of a move to a residential campus and the losses it can spawn (especially home, income, and community), and the probability of significant debt. Competing educational philosophies heighten tensions between those who prefer teacher-led, content-oriented instruction and those who favour learner-centred, application-oriented engagement. Increased sensitivity to the influence and impact of dominant cultures on marginalised communities also begs for better integration of contextual analysis and cross-cultural resources. Meanwhile, an ever-expanding list of new digital technologies feeds many post-pandemic users’ increased comfort with using computers to connect with family, church, and work and prompts school administrators to explore distributive learning. These currents fuelled the development of an innovative new model of theological education and diaconal formation.

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Anecdotal references critique seminaries as “ivory towers” ill-equipped to prepare diaconal postulants for their home contexts and rebuff them for attempting to “sell” what they have (courses designed for preparing priests) instead of developing programmes with a diaconal lens. Although I had an eight-year history of collaborating with and supporting deacons as executive director of the Episcopal Province of New England, many archdeacons and deacon directors initially were reluctant to explore seminary-based collaborations because I was perceived as a seminary representative. This hesitation shifted to openness about potential collaboration as dioceses became more confident in Bexley Seabury’s commitment to tailor resources for each order.

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Discussion Questions

- › What competencies do you see as fundamental for those in diaconal ministry?
- › What strategies has your diaconal association/community used to encourage diaconal vocations?
- › In what ways are there tensions between traditional seminaries and diaconal formation programs in your context?
- › How are the diaconate in your church compensated? How does this impact the practice and perception of the diaconate? What are your opinions about educational preparation for the diaconate?

Précis

Mary Elizabeth Moore summons us to recognise that the heart of the diaconate is liberative service, a calling for all Christians and a calling for deacons to inspire, lead, and support their service of all. This chapter explores a theology of liberative service, marked by compassion, justice, and peace. These features are not general and vague but far-reaching and particular. To be compassionate is to extend loving attention and care to every being in God’s creation through the practice of eco-diakonia. To be just is to ensure thriving for people living in poverty or slavery and those facing mental illness, racial discrimination, and the vulnerabilities of political violence and ecological destruction, as well as to ensure thriving for oceans, forests, and wildlife. To sow peace is to cultivate communities of reconciliation, reparation, and restoration. Through theological analysis and vocational narratives, the chapter offers imaginative theology and missional direction for diaconal ministries, proposing educational approaches for diaconal studies.

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Quotes

The focus of this chapter is on liberative service, expressed in transformative values, actions, and social structures. Liberation requires solidarity and mutuality among humans and other beings aimed toward enduring liberation. Practices of solidarity and mutuality have been emphases of diakonia since the late 1970s.¹ Diakonia is not service in which people with power do works of charity or benevolence for those with less power; it is rather liberative service enacted by peoples and communities

¹See, for example, the preparatory consultation and publication before the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983: World Council of Churches, *Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia: Report of a Consultation* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), esp. 1–8.

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In recent years, global conversations have expanded on the meaning of diakonia, reflected in works by people in the Global South, Asia, and the Pacific, who write extensively about “eco-diakonia.”² Abednego Nkamuhabwa Keshomshahara offers a plea for eco-diakonia, recognising that “eco” deals “with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings” and “diakonia” calls people “to render social services to the needy on behalf of God while at the same time advocating for vulnerable people by negating the causes of miseries in the world.” Eco-diakonia thus “deals with protection, care, cure and advocating against any harm coming to God’s creation.”²

²Dietrich Werner et al., eds., *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia: Concepts and Perspectives from the Churches of the Global South* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2022), <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/free-book-resources/>.

²Abednego Nkamuhabwa Keshomshahara, “The Ecclesial Mandate of Eco-Diakonia in the Mission of God: An African Lutheran Perspective,” in *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia*, eds. Werner et al., 25. Keshomshahara is a bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. See also: Mathews George Chunakara, “Eco-Justice and Eco-Diakonia—An Imperative for Creation Care: Perspectives and Initiatives from CCA,” in *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia*, eds. Werner et al., 356–68. CCA is the Christian Conference of Asia.

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Discussion Questions

- › How in your diaconal ministry do you offer compassion? Work for justice? Sow peace?
- › What areas/issues, from your context, are crying out for liberation and transformation?
- › How is your diaconal community/association addressing issues related to “eco-diakonia”?