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**RESEARCHING THE DIACONATE :  
AN ANGLO-NORDIC PROJECT (1997-2002)**

The material in this book is drawn from the findings of phase 1 of the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project (ANDREP), which has a team of researchers from academic institutions, diaconal training institutions and church organisations in Finland, Norway, Sweden and England. The four country-specific chapters result from a preliminary investigation into the situation of the diaconate in the Church of Sweden, the Church of Norway, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of England. Sven-Erik Brodd's overview of the diaconate from an ecumenical perspective covers ecumenical developments in the Church world-wide in the last fifty years. The totality of work undertaken under the auspices of ANDREP between 1997 and 1999 has enabled the research team to establish the project framework and to identify areas for research which will be undertaken in phase 2 of its work.

The initial impetus for ANDREP came from a variety of sources. First, some of the contributors of the 1995 Lärkkulla conference<sup>1</sup> wished to continue to collaborate in areas of

<sup>1</sup> See the Preface of this book.

common research interest. They were motivated by an awareness that the development of the diaconate in the Church is a very extensive phenomenon and that it demands research, reflection and interpretation. Another important factor at the preliminary appraisal stage for the project was the availability of a research team of people committed to the task and able to ensure that the range of the project's work would not be confined to descriptive history or to some form of theoretical theology but would involve the application of ecclesiological principles to the life of the Church and its engagement with its social context. The committee which has steered the project through phase I of its life<sup>2</sup> includes lay and ordained members, among them representatives of the orders of bishop, deacon and priest. Members are engaged in academic teaching, doctoral supervision and research, in the education of deacons at undergraduate and postgraduate level, in pastoral ministry and in the development of diocesan and national church strategies for deacons' work and conditions of service. Involvement in all these areas has been more than sufficient to ensure that theology and its application in praxis are able to proceed hand in hand.

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<sup>2</sup> The Steering Committee has so far met in Uppsala (January 1997), Chichester (November 1997), Stockholm (March 1998), Lahti (September 1998). It is due to meet in Farfa Sabina, Rome, in early September 1999.

### Project Aim

The principle that the diaconate is integral to the nature of the Church and to the ministry of Christ himself within his own Body is basic to the project's work. In consequence, it has also been presumed, the diaconate is worth researching and developing for its own sake. Concern is expressed more than once in this book about the way deacons are used in their respective churches. This is not the result of a narrow aim to ensure that the diaconate continues to flourish for the sake of those who have already been admitted to it, or even because existing deacons are doing good work. The concern expressed is related rather to the argument that a proper use of the diaconate is rooted in a proper understanding of the nature of the Church and, as a direct consequence of this, the place given to deacons in the life of the Church must be consistent with ecclesiological insight.

Arising out of the above principle, the project has a twofold aim: to identify and undertake research in areas of current interest and concern which relate to the diaconate, and to test and apply findings in relation to the education of deacons and to ecumenical deliberations and ecclesiastical policies. Though the project is not influenced only by the Porvoo Common Statement, the four churches whose deacons have been the subject of research are all in the Porvoo Communion. The project steering committee has borne carefully in mind the commitment made by all the signatories to Porvoo: to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry.

## The Project Method

By means of an agreed inventory format (annexed as Appendix A), a review was undertaken on the state of the diaconate in each of the four churches concerned. The findings from this were set within the context of the history, the current policy and developing practice of the four churches and their international and ecumenical involvement. The empirical data collected was supplemented by an attempt to assess the self-understanding of deacons, and to gauge how the different churches perceive them and what church and society demand of them. The use of the same inventory format in all four countries made it possible to arrive at a comparative view of the deacon's ministry in the churches concerned and to assess to what extent common elements in their history had affected the diaconate in similar ways in different places.

At the outset, a significant practical difference emerged. The three Nordic Churches can provide specific data on deacons centrally: the Church of England cannot. Consequently, in England, primary research was required. A search through a variety of information sources was undertaken to locate deacons, in order that they might be surveyed directly by questionnaire. The results of the survey were analysed using SPSS (Statistics Package for the Social Sciences).

Country findings were brought to the regular meetings of the project steering committee for comparison and discussion as the project proceeded; a consultant from the Orthodox Church

assisted in this task, and an editorial group of four committee members was charged with the work of assembling and preparing the material for publication.

## Project Outputs

### *Phase 1 (1997–1999)*

This book, completed at the end of phase 1, is the first major collective output of the project. In parallel with the research undertaken to prepare it, and as another output of the project, a series of exchanges of visiting lecturers and professors, and of student placements, took place between the participating countries.

The research team hopes that other churches, outside and within the Porvoo Communion, may decide to undertake a review of the diaconate in their own churches, using the same or a similar inventory format for ease of comparison. Interest in this has already been shown within the Porvoo Churches, and the Co-Chairmen of the Porvoo Contact Group consulted ANDREP in 1998 about the possibility of extending the number of project partners or inviting other churches to be corresponding members. It was not possible to extend the number of partners immediately without seriously delaying the completion of phase 1, but an extension of the project's remit is expected in phase 2.

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*Phase 2 (1999–2002)*

Several areas have been identified for further research in phase 2, and preliminary papers on them have been prepared for the steering committee's next meeting near Rome in September 1999.

These areas include the relationship of the diaconate to ecclesiology, contributors to this volume having already noted that the nature of the Church is the proper starting point for the search for a better understanding of the diaconate. It quickly became apparent in phase 1 of the project that two of the churches (Norway and Finland) were corporately ambivalent about whether the deacon is an ordained minister or not: some research into the nature of ministry and the inter-relatedness of ministries is clearly demanded here, as is a comparative study of past and present rites for the ordination or commissioning of deacons in the different Christian traditions.

Following logically from this, a particular question posed by the shared history of the Church of England-Lutheran context is that of the relationship between *caritas* and *diakonia* as perspectives on the diaconate, and of the nature of the deacon's liturgical role in relation to the social role which has been so strong, though in different ways, in all four churches involved. With this is linked the need to reflect on the role of the deacon as a voice of prophecy and challenge within ecclesiastical and social structures.

Finally the research expects to turn in phase 2 to a detailed comparative study of principles for the formation and education of deacons, and to the identification of an appropriate spirituality for deacons and appropriate support structures for them.

The above work during phase 2 is expected to result in the publication of a second volume and a series of conferences and consultations, staff and student exchanges and other related events.

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