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THE DEACON IN THE CHURCH OF NORWAY

The need to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry has received greater emphasis in recent years in ecumenical agreements and informal inter-church relations. This ecumenical imperative, to which the Porvoo communion of churches has committed itself, necessarily involves a review within each church of its own understanding of the diaconate.

In two of the four churches surveyed for this volume, the Church of Norway and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, it is apparent that there is no corporate agreement on the ministerial position of the diaconate. In the Church of Norway there is official approval for the view that the deacon is within the ordained ministry and for the opposite view, that the deacon is not ordained. By comparison with this, the situation of the Finnish deacon is even more uncertain, whilst the deacons of the Churches of Sweden and England have a clear canonical status as part of the threefold ordained ministry. The following paper identifies the areas in which the ecumenical commitment brings with it the challenge for new ecclesiological thinking. It sets the present situation of Norwegian deacons against the

background of the past, and draws attention to changing social and political factors. These are creating new challenges and opportunities, both for the deployment of deacons and the type of work they undertake in Norway itself and for deacons' work in the sizeable organisation of the Norwegian Church Abroad.

Historical context

From a traditionally Lutheran point of view, the thesis that the word and the sacrament are the constitutive elements of the church is a familiar one. On the basis of that understanding, the view has been taken that the only ordained ministry of the church must be that of the pastor/priest. This understanding implies that the deacon is a lay person in the church. Theological and historical research, as well as changes in culture and society, demand careful hermeneutical work leading to greater understanding of what the theological standpoint of one historical period might become in a totally different situation. In this kind of hermeneutical work, re-interpretation cannot always be avoided. This is of course painful and threatening for a church founded on confessional and unchangeable and absolute doctrines or statements about the nature of the church. However, among scholars in a number of Lutheran churches, there is evidence of a change in attitude towards ecclesiological questions. The Porvoo Common Statement notes:

Our times demand something new of us as churches. Our agreement, as set out in this text, about the nature of the Church and its unity has implications for the ways in which we respond to the challenge of our age.¹

The church will always strive to find the right balance between, on the one hand, its role to preserve and, on the other hand, its creative role in reinterpreting the divine revelation. In spite of the traditional Lutheran reservation on questions of canon and order, we are now experiencing an increasing emphasis, at least in the Nordic countries, on the status of *diakonia* and diaconal work in the law which regulates the life of our churches. Despite a certain openness toward the regulation of *diakonia* in general, there is a profound hesitation when it comes to the question of the provision of regulations for the ordained ministry of deacons. In the Church of Norway Act of 7 June 1996, No. 31, the regulation of the ministry of deacons is accentuated less than in the previous act. On the other hand, diaconal work is emphasised much more. In 1987 the General Synod of the Church of Norway adopted a Comprehensive Diaconal Programme for the Church of Norway.² How to implement the programme is still the key question. It is easy to make fine statements. It is much more difficult to come to an agreement about how to implement them, especially when this challenges our traditional understanding of ministry. The Church of Norway as a Lutheran Church has traditionally focused on the Ministry

¹ *Together in Mission and Ministry*, The Porvoo Common Statement, London 1996, para 14, p. 10.

² *Comprehensive Diaconal Programme for the Church of Norway*, Church of Norway National Council, Oslo 1997.

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of the Word as the only necessity for the life of the church.³ To bring *diakonia* as the deeds of the church into the centre of the life of the church has therefore become a long and hesitant journey. One of the results of ecumenical dialogue is a renewed focus on the ordained ministry. There seems to be an ecumenical consensus that any description or analysis of ministry in the Church, the ordained ministry included, must start with ecclesiology. All God's children are called to serve. At the same time, churches look upon 'the renewal of the diaconate as an opportunity for unity and joint mission'.⁴

Many of us are children of a tradition based on the German evangelical use of the term *diakonia* for its social work. The renewal of diaconal work – Inner Mission (*Innere Mission*)⁵ – from the mid- and late nineteenth century in Germany, became an inspiration to the pastors and church scholars of that time in Nordic countries too. Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808–1881), who looked upon himself as a reformed Lutheran, strove to

³ *Confessio Augustana*, Article 5.

⁴ *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*, The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, ACC Publications, London 1996, p 24.

⁵ The history of organised *diakonia* (the Church's social outreach) in Germany dates back to 1848, when a programme of the Inner Mission to fight spiritual and material poverty was presented by Johann Hinrich Wichern at the Wittenberg Church Convention. The 'Central Committee for Inner Mission of the German Evangelical Church' was then founded. After World War 2, the '*Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland*' (the Relief Agency of the EKD) was founded in 1946 under the leadership of Eugen Gerstenmaier. By organising foreign aid and reanimating ecumenical contacts, this organisation helped considerably to alleviate the famine in post-war Germany, settling refugees and displaced persons and fighting youth unemployment. Every parish was integrated into this work. Both pillars of *diakonia* – the Inner Mission and the Relief Agency – were amalgamated into regional organisations from 1957 onwards. They were united with the Social Service Agency of the EKD in 1975 as '*diakonisches Werk*'

build a society on an evangelical foundation. Wichern 'resisted the use of the formal title "deacon" for the brothers of his community in Hamburg... (he) had long been the most celebrated advocate for a more general *diakonia* exercised by the whole church'. Even so, he emphasised that a 'true and full awakening of the church's *diakonia* is dependent upon the renewal of the apostolic diaconate'⁶ and wished to reserve the title 'deacon' for this special apostolic diaconate. In spite of the lack of canonical regulation, the houses of deacons and deaconesses spread throughout Germany, operating outside the official ministry of the church. They saw themselves as the inheritors of the diaconate of the early church. This diaconal revival and the renewal represented by the ministry of deaconesses gave a more official role to women in the life of the church.

Before the Reformation, there were deacons and archdeacons in the Church of Norway, mostly occupied in the liturgical life of the church. The reformers did not omit the deacon's ministry from the new church constitution, but they did not pay much attention to the ordained ministry of deacons either. In the Norwegian Church Order of 1607, there are several paragraphs about the deacon and his tasks in the church. He was called to serve the poor and crippled, he was charged with the collection of money in the local congregation for the help of the poor. The deacon did also have liturgical functions, leading the singing, reading the introit, the collect, the epistle, the gospel and the

⁶ Collins, John N. *Diakonia, Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, Oxford 1990, pp. 9ff.

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creed. He assisted at the Eucharist, at baptisms, confession, wedding ceremonies and funerals. The deacon was obliged to dress in a black gown.⁷ As far as we know, no liturgy for the ordination of deacons is extant from the time of the Reformation, but we do know that the practice of installation of deacons continued (perhaps without ordination) after the Reformation in the Church of Norway. From Germany we know that on Luther's initiative, the Elector of Saxony drew up a church canon in 1535 providing for the ordained ministries of priest and deacon (*Priester- und Diakonenamt*).⁸ It may be that a lack of formal external signs such as ordination robbed the diaconate of its distinctive identity in the post-Reformation Church in Norway.

Even if there was an aspect of the renewal of the diaconate of the early church in the re-establishing of the diaconate from the mid- and late nineteenth century in Germany and the Nordic countries, the main motivation seems to have been a reaction against the decay, dissolution and radical forces in society at that time. Modern thinking had invaded Europe after the revolutions, and the industrial revolution caused major changes in society, including urbanisation and its consequences such as poverty, alcoholism, illiteracy and epidemics. The establishment in church and society was afraid of the influence of this under-

⁷ Palle Burle, Zur Frage des Diakonates aus skandinavischer Sicht in *Diakonia in Christo*, Freiburg 1962, pp. 516ff and Georg Hansen, *Degnen*, Studie i det 18 aarhundredes kulturhistorie, København 1954, p. 26.

⁸ Hellmut Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melancthon*, Göttingen 1962, p. 186.

mining development. Those who initiated the 'modern' movement of deacons and deaconesses looked upon them as adequate implements at a time when the church had a weakened influence over the people's thinking and daily lives. Radicalism was far from the thoughts of the founders of modern *diakonia* in the Protestant churches.

A characteristic feature of the Church of Norway today is that it incorporates a variety of autonomous organisations and institutions. Rooted as they are in the nineteenth century Evangelical revival of the pietist heritage, most of them have no formal links with the church leadership on any level, though the clergy working in these organisations and institutions are ordained in the Church of Norway. The organisations have a large number of local branches based on 2,700 prayer houses, which are unpretentious halls used for revival meetings and other activities. In most places the members of these organisations regard their activities as part of the wider parish work. In some places meetings in prayer houses take place at the same time as Sunday services and include the celebration of the Eucharist without ordained clergy. The *Diakonhjem* in Oslo, where deacons have been trained since 1890, is a child of the Inner Mission lay movement and many of the students come from a Low Church background. There has always been a tension in the institution between those who look upon diaconal service as a lay ministry in the church, and those who are working for the development of the ordained ministry of deacons, in order to make it clear that *diakonia* belongs to the central commission of the church.

As institutions providing both training and practice developed, nursing quickly became the main subject in the training and work of deacons and deaconesses. In Norway, deaconesses and deacons working in the congregations became the forerunners of the home-nursing offered by the state and local community. In 1974 there were about 250⁹ parish nurses employed by the local parish boards or by the 'diaconate' acting as an autonomous legal entity. Most of these nurses were consecrated collectively by the principal of the house when they had finished their training at one of the mother-houses. Today there are no such nursing deaconesses left. There are no longer any parish nurses employed by the church, and consecration no longer takes place in the mother houses. They were never seen as part of the ordained ministry of the church, and their consecration was more or less a private affair carried out by the mother-houses without any clear status in the church. It has to be recognised that the tradition of parish nurses became a vanguard in the struggle for renewal of the diaconate in the church. Together with the parish nurses, many pastors and lay members of the congregations did engage in a national movement for a renewed *diakonia* of the church.

Before the development of the Scandinavian-type welfare state¹⁰, the private church institutions grew up. They were influenced by the needs of society, not by any hermeneutical reflection on

⁹ NOU 1979: 15, *Diaconal service in the local community*, p. 22.

¹⁰ The Scandinavian model of the welfare state is based on overall taxation and is universal, which means that every citizen is covered by the welfare system consisting of health care, education, social services and social security.

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the theology of *diakonia*. Government funding determined in which direction the so-called diaconal institutions and organisations would develop. Almost all diaconal money was provided from public funds.¹¹

We can assert that, without this having been planned in any way, *Diakonhjemmet* was caught up in the wave of modernisation that swept through the health care system. The institution was open and it adapted to the needs in the market of health and social services.¹²

The deacon was generally regarded as a male nurse even though the training did also consist of subjects such as theology and social science. At *Diakonhjemmet* and among the deacons there was a certain movement opposing this development, but they did not succeed in their attempt to free the deacon's ministry from its predominating association with nursing. They proposed that there should be a separate education programme for those who wanted to be parish deacons. The leadership of the institution did not have the will to put this idea into practice because a) there were no official posts for deacons in the parishes at that time and b) the institution's own hospital needed trainees and trained male nurses. In 1978 only 50 deacons were working as parish deacons. The other deacons (about 430) worked in various social contexts, for example in family counselling, prisons, missionary work. The biggest group of deacons was

¹¹ NOU 1979 p. 20.

¹² Stave, Gunnar, *Mannsmot og tenarsinn, Diakonhjemmet 100 years of history*, Samlaget, Oslo 1990, s. 116.

made up (as it is today) of heads of health and social institutions.¹³ At that time only men could become deacons. At *Diakonhjemmet* women were allowed only to study to become nurses; they were neither consecrated as deaconesses nor called deaconesses.

Among the deaconesses there was an even stronger association with nursing. The dominant focus on nursing became the strait-jacket of *diakonia*. The Church of Norway is still struggling with this tradition. Bishop Eivind Berggrav had good reason for wanting to release the term *diakonia* from an exclusive reference to nursing activity¹⁴. *Diakonia* is important for the congregation, he said, but the deacon as a male nurse is not needed. The term deacon could not be used in the diaconal work of the church while the title deacon was already used by male nurses and, later on, also by social workers trained at *Diakonhjemmet*.

The so-called diaconal institutions arose mainly from a reactionary movement, not as a radical answer to the injustices of the contemporary social context. In Norway, some historians have concluded that the sudden initiative among Lutherans in the second part of the nineteenth century to establish hospitals was a reaction to Roman Catholic success in building hospitals in quite a number of cities throughout the country. The Roman Catholic Church was banned in Norway, from the Reformation until 1842. Regardless of the motive, however, diaconal institutions were organised in a patriarchal way, as a family with the

¹³ NOU 1979, p. 26.

¹⁴ Eivind Berggrav, *Church and diakonia*, *Diakonos* no. 8, 1950, p. 114.

priest as the father of the house and, in the mother-houses, the directress as the mother of the house, a 'house-paternalism'. The deacons and deaconesses were the children of the house and really treated as such by their 'parents'. Obedience and reverence were the ideals inculcated during the apprenticeship and after consecration. Submission and compliance were dominant factors in the process of socialisation, in order to obtain the right kind of subservience. Today, one hundred to one hundred and fifty years later, some of the same attitudes and practices can still be identified, although there have been changes. The pastors still have a tendency towards a 'parish-paternalism', speaking on behalf of the church, in spite of the fact that deacons are those who are responsible for the projects about which they are speaking.

1. DEPLOYMENT

In 1994 the General Synod of the Church of Norway declared that, 'The General Synod finds it natural that the biggest parishes must have both a catechist and a deacon. To secure the service of catechism and *diakonia* in the Church of Norway in all parishes, the General Synod finds that the Government should grant money needed for the employment of one catechist and one deacon per 10,000 church members. That means 380 catechists and 380 parish deacons'¹⁵

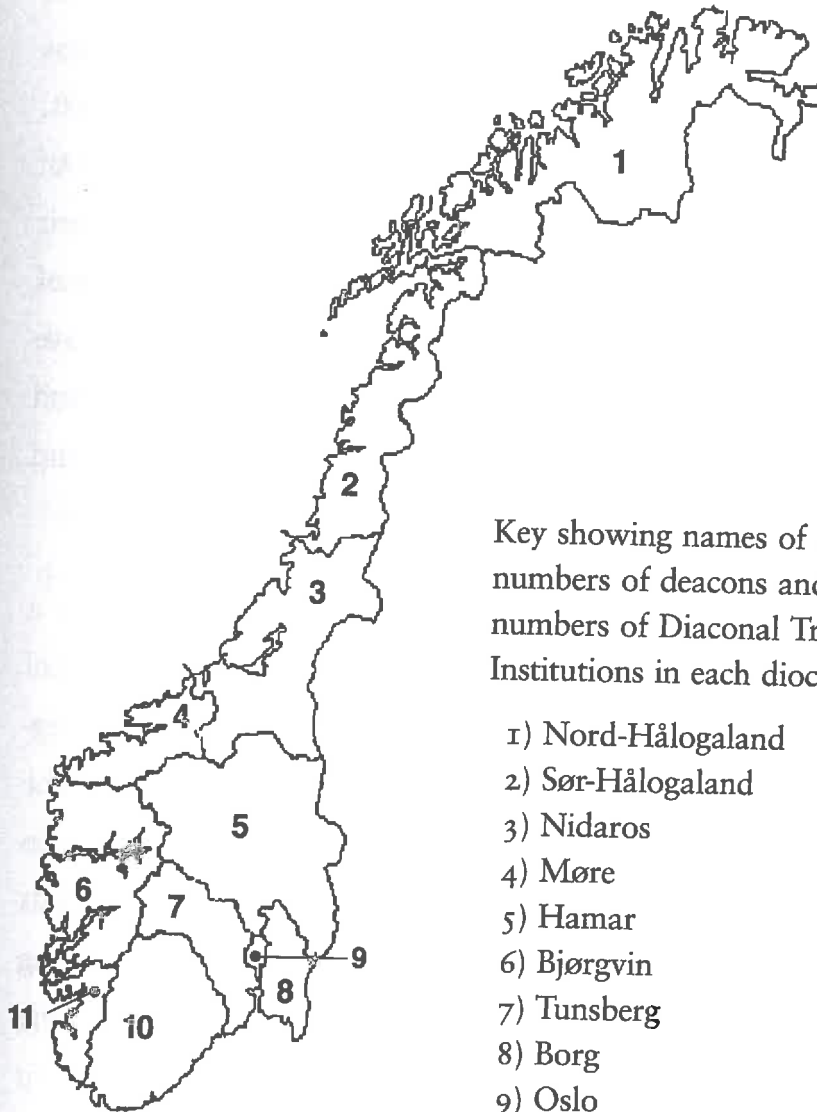
¹⁵ The Synod of the Church of Norway, 1994, Doc. pp. 29-30.

Numbers of deacons

Today there are 237 posts for parish deacons, compared with about 1,200 posts for parish priests. This means one deacon to each 16,900 church members and one priest/pastor to each 3,300 church members. An average parish congregation with about 7,000 members will have two pastors but only one deacon, if it has a deacon at all. Compared with the former situation in which only men could become deacons, today more than 70% of parish deacons are women. The proportion of female deacons to male deacons is increasing.

The Dioceses of the Church of Norway

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Key showing names of Dioceses, numbers of deacons and the numbers of Diaconal Training Institutions in each diocese

1) Nord-Hålogaland	13	①
2) Sør-Hålogaland	17	
3) Nidaros	24	
4) Møre	12	
5) Hamar	17	
6) Bjørgvin	9	
7) Tunsberg	26	
8) Borg	21	
9) Oslo	42	④
10) Agder	20	
11) Stavanger	26	

- ① The Practical Theology Seminary (University of Oslo) in Tromsø;
 ④ 1) Diakonhjemmet College, The School of Theology and Diaconal Ministry, Oslo; 2) Lovisberg College in Diakonia and Nursing, Oslo; 3) Hospital and College of Parish Nursing (Menighetssøsterhjemmet), Oslo; 4) Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo.

The deacons currently in post have been in ministry on average for about five years, though approximately 50% have been in ministry for only one to three years. Only twenty deacons (less than 10%) have been in ministry for more than ten years. There are no statistics available on the civil status and age of deacons. All those currently in ministry have completed their diaconal studies in Norway, some of them after many years of work as nurses, social workers or teachers. When deacons leave their posts in the church, they mainly go to work in church and public health and social care organisations and institutions and are no longer under the bishop's supervision.

Every diocese must have a diaconal adviser, who must be a deacon, i.e. a total of 11 posts. The Church of Norway National Council also has a deacon as a diaconal adviser. Some congregations have non-ordained diaconal co-workers alongside the deacon or instead of an ordained deacon. These co-workers do not have the training required for deacons. Some are trained as nurses, others as social workers. Some of them are studying *diakonia* alongside their work. After completing the training, most of them are ordained as deacons.

The Norwegian Seamen's Mission/Norwegian Church Abroad, which is the official representative of the Church of Norway abroad, does not have a tradition of specific posts for deacons. For many years, this organisation has been an autonomous organisation, though seeing itself as representing the Church of Norway abroad. There have been several deacons in this field, working as assistants to pastors, in exactly the same way as lay

co-workers. Change is coming, and for the first time in history two candidates were ordained deacon in August 1998, to officiate as deacons in the Norwegian Seamen's Church (NSC). This is a result of co-operation between NSC and the Norwegian Association of Deacons, and NSC has offered posts for deacons in two Seamen's Churches. The experience from this project will be evaluated by a group consisting of representatives from both organisations. This development is a result of the acknowledgement that NSC, as the Church of Norway's official representative, has to reflect the church at home in its service to Norwegians abroad. It is also a fact that much of the work done by NSC is in fact diaconal service.

As mentioned above, in the Church of Norway there are a number of independent organisations and foundations engaged in missionary, diaconal and evangelistic work in Norway and abroad. Some deacons are employed by them specifically as deacons. Exact figures are not available, but approximately 20 deacons are in such posts. Deacons, like pastors, are free to choose to work in these organisations, not necessarily with the title of deacons and pastors, because both the church and the autonomous organisations regard this kind of work as a natural and important part of the life of the church. The episcopal oversight which these organisations receive is rather informal and depends on the initiative of the bishop in the region where they are working. Only the Norwegian Seamen's Mission is under the formal jurisdiction of a bishop (the bishop of Bjørgvin).

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Some state hospitals have posts for deacons alongside those for pastors. These deacons are under the supervision of the bishop of the diocese. The main tasks they undertake are bereavement counselling, spiritual counselling and liturgical functions. There are also some posts for deacons in prisons, involving spiritual counselling and the rehabilitation of offenders, where they aim to make the way back to normal life in society as easy as possible by establishing contact groups in the parish congregations who are prepared to help with the reintegration process.

Main tasks undertaken by deacons

In accordance with the Church of Norway Act of 7 June 1996, No 31, s. 24, the General Synod has established the 'Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons'¹⁶ which describes the different aspects of the deacon's ecclesial role. According to section 2 in the Service Arrangements for deacons, the deacon's main areas of work are as follows:

'The deacon is in charge of the diaconal work in the parish.' The main task of the deacon is to plan and promote the care of fellow human beings, to encourage community spirit, particularly in respect of people in need.

¹⁶ *Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons*, Church of Norway National Council 1996.

The ministry of the deacon involves:

- a. Planning and implementing the parish programme of diaconal work in accordance with the current official Comprehensive Diaconal Programme for the Church of Norway.
- b. Preventative work for and visiting of people in need of help, care and support.
- c. Strengthening the caring community and promoting diaconal attitudes and actions in the parish and local community.
- d. Recruitment, guidance and training of volunteers.
- e. Bereavement counselling.
- f. Liturgical functions in church services and at the Occasional Offices.
- g. Visiting people at home with the sacrament of Holy Communion.
- h. Officiating at funerals by agreement between the deacon, the vicar and the bishop.
- i. Spiritual counselling.
- j. Co-operating with local voluntary and public bodies,
- k. International diaconal work.

In the context of Anglican/Lutheran comparisons, it may be useful to make some specific mention here of the liturgical functions of the deacon (item f). According to section 2 in the

Service Arrangements for deacons, the General Synod has provided guidelines for the deacon in the liturgy (General Synod Case 12/96). These guidelines indicate that the deacon has duties in the preparation of the High Mass (the service held every Sunday at 11 a.m., with the Holy Communion) and of other services, with a special responsibility to arrange for fellowship (*koinonia*) and the participation of all visitors in the service. The deacon has special responsibility for the diaconal dimension in preaching, and is authorised to preach, especially in services where diaconal tasks are emphasised. The deacon ought to take part in the preparation of the intercessions regularly and may lead them. In the Holy Communion the deacon assists the pastor. The deacon is authorised to visit people at home with the sacrament of Holy Communion, consecrating the elements in their homes.¹⁷ This inconsistency in relation to the presidency at the Eucharist is mainly motivated from an instructive point of view and is not without precedent. In his letter to the Smyrneans, in a section in which he also admonishes Christians to think highly of deacons, Ignatius writes, 'You should regard the Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorises'.¹⁸ Ignatius does not identify who may be authorised, and it has been noted that 'considering the importance of deacons within Ignatian ecclesio-

¹⁷ According to the *Qualifications Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons*, section 2g, the deacon 'visits people at home with the sacrament of Holy Communion'. This was passed by the General Synod in 1996. It was made clear then that the meaning of this wording was that the deacon should consecrate the elements at the person's home. In the guidelines for the deacon in the liturgy (General Synod case 12/96), section 3.2.1, it is laid down that the deacon must 'use the prescribed liturgy for such an occasion' (trans. author)

¹⁸ Ignatius, Smyrneans 8.



Administering the Holy Communion.

logy, we cannot exclude the possibility that 'the person authorised' to celebrate the Eucharist may on occasion have been a deacon'¹⁹ Barnett also makes the point that Ignatius does not specify that the authorised person should be the holder of any particular office. He concludes that 'in view of the functional nature of the office, the respected place of the deacons, and particularly the liturgical function already possessed by the deacon, it is entirely conceivable that the bishop would have authorised a deacon to preside at the Eucharist when he was unable to be present at this early time'.²⁰

¹⁹ Echlin, Edward. *The Deacon in the Church Past and Future*. Alba 1971, p. 22.

²⁰ See James M Barnett, *The Diaconate, A Full and Equal Order*, Trinity Press International 1995 (rev. ed.), p.52.

The deacon in the church of Norway officiates at funerals but not at marriages. The question of whether the deacon may or should conduct marriages has not come up for discussion.

2. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Almost every deacon is in a full-time post, whether in a parish, hospital, prison or independent organisation.

Contracts and financial status

There is a Tariff Agreement between the Church of Norway Employers' Association and the Norwegian Association of Deacons. This document regulates the working conditions of parish deacons, their salary, pension conditions, appointment, disciplinary procedure (notice of termination of employment, if they are not living and acting according to what is expected of a deacon), hours of work, annual leave entitlement, insurance.

The deacon's employer is the board of the local church district (the association of local parishes). There is no church tax system in Norway as there is in Sweden and Finland, but the local church boards have three funding sources: grants from the local commune, grants from the state government, and the offerings of the church and other contributions from church members.

According to the funding method for parish deacons' posts, 100% of the salaries are paid from the local church board.

According to government regulation, the state government refunds 50% of the salary costs to the local church board in state grants.

Regulations governing the deacon's ministry

According to the Church of Norway Act²¹ sections 9, 23 and 24, both the local parish and the diocesan council are responsible for the development of the diaconate and diaconal work. In 1987 the General Synod established the Comprehensive Diaconal Programme for the Church of Norway. In accordance with the general plan, the parishes are required to initiate local programmes for diaconal work.

The purpose of the local diaconal programme is to serve as a link between the overall normative diaconal programme and the concrete work schedule developed by the individual employee. A programme which has been developed locally is therefore a programme which has been adapted to local needs and local characteristics and which is also based on a realistic assessment of the resources available in the parish.

²¹ *Church of Norway Act*, Oslo 1996.

3. SELECTION AND FORMATION

Selection criteria

Candidates for the diaconate must have received prior professional training in an approved area and have passed the examinations required for that, according to the Qualification Requirements of the General Synod, section 3, see below. Any Christian person qualified to study at a university or an academy, is allowed to follow the training programme required to become a deacon in the Church of Norway. There is direct admission to the diaconal training institution, without candidates having to ask the bishop for his permission to start diaconal training. Employment will take place subject to ordination and licensing by the bishop.²² Before ordination the candidate is given an ordination interview by the bishop. The bishop examines the candidate and tries to get a picture of him/her in order to decide if the candidate is fit for lifelong service as a deacon in the church or not. The bishop may have reports from the training institution or other references about the candidate.

The Church of Norway does not practice ordination *in vacuo*. Prospective deacons must have a job to go to, before the bishop will ordain them, and it has to be a job recognised by the bishop as a post for a deacon, though subsequently the deacon (and the pastor) does not cease being a deacon (or a pastor) even if he/she leaves active church service. Only a few deacons have ever been ordained for service outside the official church

²² *Service Arrangements for deacons*, section 4.

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structure. The authorities of the training institution do not make any recommendation for ordination. They just give the candidates a certificate that confirms they have completed their training. During the time of study, candidates have periods of practical training where they shadow a deacon in his/her daily work in the congregation. The deacon assesses the candidates' professional competence, and their suitability for further study and for future work as a deacon.

Discernment of vocation

The local church board advertises the vacant posts for deacons. Any qualified person may apply for the post. A local committee (with a representative from the Norwegian Association of Deacons²³) arranges the selection process, according to agreed procedures. For example, before employment, there is an interview in which the applicants are examined. According to the Service Arrangements for deacons, section 4, 4: Terms of Employment, employment will take place subject to ordination and licensing by the bishop. The bishop is the one who looks carefully at the applicant to see whether they are called to the diaconate and suitable to be recommended for the post.

²³ The Norwegian Association of Deacons, with about 525 members in 1999, is a 'trade union' for deacons and candidates for *diakonia*. Pastors in Norway are organised in the same way.

Education

The Service Arrangements describe in section 3 the Qualification Requirements for deacons. Deacons must go through an educational programme of at least five years of full-time study at higher education level.²⁴ The main pathway to becoming a deacon is to study health or social studies or education and to combine this with theology and practical diaconal training. Theologians may also become deacons if they undertake practical diaconal training.

Three church academies give practical diaconal training and education in Christian Studies suitable for qualifying deacons. In total there are about 60 *diakonia* candidates per year. With just a few posts for deacons in the Church (240), only a small proportion of the candidates are ultimately ordained. Those who are not ordained go into public social work and health care or take up posts as social workers or nurses in the institutions owned by the many autonomous church organisations. A new External Practical Theology Seminary is being established by the University of Oslo under the Department of Church Affairs and located at the University of Tromsø in the north of Norway. Here deacons will be trained together with theologians and catechists. It is hoped that this establishment will solve the problem of recruitment to church posts in the north. There is an over-production of *diakonia* candidates in the south of Norway. Nevertheless, there are big problems in getting qualified

²⁴ *Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons*, Oslo 1996, section 3.

people to the posts for deacons in the north. It is important to understand that the institutions/colleges and universities educate *diakonia* candidates, but it is the bishops who make them deacons by ordination.

4. AUTHORISATION

Terminology

According to the Service Arrangements, section 5, the term of authorisation for deacons is 'ordination'²⁵. In 1987 the Government agreed new liturgies for ordination. There are quite similar rites for the ordination of deacons, catechists and pastors. The rite for the ordination of catechists has the same structure as that for the ordination of deacons and priests and is carried out by the bishop.

When the Synod in 1995 debated the Porvoo Common Statement, there was a discussion about how to fit the catechist into the threefold ministry. The solution, mentioned in the documents, was either to transfer the office of catechist to the pastorate or to the diaconate. The problem is still unsolved. The rites mentioned above are not at the moment available in English translation. Some would use the word 'consecration' about the deacon's ordination, but the official English translation of the Norwegian

²⁵ *Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons*, 1996, section 5: 'The deacon is to be ordained for ministry according to the prescribed liturgy. The admonition and the vow in the ordinal determine the ministry and life of the deacon. The deacon is subject to the bishop's supervision.'

word '*vigsling*' in the English translations of documents published by the Church of Norway National Council is 'ordination'.²⁶

In the Norwegian discussion about the diaconate, there is a certain divergence in the understanding of the place of deacons and whether they are within the ordained ministry or not. When the new ordinals were established in 1987, it was intended to give room for both the view that the deacon was within the ordained ministry and the view that the diaconate is outside the ordained ministry. The Bishops' Conference in 1983 declared that the rites for the ordination of bishop, catechist, deacon and priest do not presuppose a definitive decision about the understanding of the ordained ministry in the Church of Norway.²⁷ At that time, there was no synod to decide on church matters. The Bishops' Conference had the authority to make decisions about the liturgies of the church. Many years of discussion in the Liturgical Commission (1965-1984) about the ordained ministry ended with a close finish on the question of the diaconate. Five bishops opposed the inclusion of the deacon in the ordained ministry and four voted for inclusion. The Bishops' Conference, which had the final word, wanted to make a decision that would not split the church in its understanding of the ordained ministry. Since 1983 it has been legal to assert that the deacon is within the ordained ministry and also legal

²⁶ See footnote 25

²⁷ The Bishops' Conference, autumn 1983.

to say that the deacon is not within the ordained ministry.²⁸ In the Norwegian response to the Faith and Order Paper, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, there was a certain hesitation about the understanding of the ordained ministry presented in that document. The BEM document reads:

Although there is no single New Testament pattern, although the Spirit has many times led the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs, and although other forms of the ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it. Historically, it is true to say, the threefold ministry became the generally accepted pattern in the Church of the early centuries and is still retained today by many churches. In the fulfilment of their mission and service the churches need people who in different ways express and perform the tasks of the ordained ministry in its diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal aspects and functions.²⁹

In their answer to the BEM document in 1985, the Norwegian bishops said: 'The traditional threefold ministry with Bishop, Priest and Deacon is foreign to our way of thinking. According to the Lutheran tradition there is only one ministry expressed by the service of Word and Sacrament. We are afraid that

²⁸ The term 'legal' is appropriate here in the sense that the 1987 liturgies of ordination resulted from discussion which intended to leave room for both interpretations of the deacon's position. They were passed by the Storting (Parliament) and have the same legal status as the Church Act.

²⁹ Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No. III, *The Forms of the Ordained Ministry*, M22.

a too strong emphasis on the threefold ministry in the sense of the Lima Document, will repress the plurality of the service of the Church.³⁰

Ten years later, when the Porvoo Declaration was ratified by the Synod, there was no official reaction or hesitation to the presentation of the ordained ministry in the Porvoo document, which was exactly the same as in BEM. There appears to be a more favourable development in attitudes towards the question of the ordained ministry, among bishops and in the church in general.

Accountability

According to the Service Arrangements, the deacon is in charge of the diaconal work in the parish. (See details in section 2.) Deacons have independent responsibility for the performance of the tasks of their post. However, they are obliged to co-operate with the other employees of the parish and must carry out their ministry in accordance with the rules of the Church of Norway.³¹ According to the Church of Norway Act, s. 27, there is a doctrine commission in the church which has the responsibility for making decisions, if questions arise about the clergy (including deacons) and whether they live and teach according to the Evangelical Lutheran Confession.

³⁰ The Bishops' Conference, autumn 1985, Case 17/85: (translated from Norwegian).

³¹ Section 7, *Service Arrangements for deacons*.

The Church Act is a part of the civil law of Norway and there cannot exist any contradiction between the Church Act and the civil law. In the Church Act, s. 38, there is a direct link between the civil legislation and the Service Arrangements for deacons, s. 9, in the requirement that in questions of professional confidentiality the deacon is obliged to abide by the current regulations in the civil law.

The deacon is subject to the bishop's oversight (*episkopé*). The bishops meet regularly with the deacons in the diocese, sometimes as a group and also on an individual basis. The board of the Norwegian Association of Deacons also has regular meetings with the bishops, where information is exchanged and where strategies on a structural level are discussed.

RELATIONSHIP AND STRUCTURES

For a long time the popular image of the deacon was that of a male nurse. Today there is not much left of this former understanding of the deacon in Norwegian society. According to the Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons, the deacons of the Church of Norway are now seen as church workers concerned with a plurality of tasks and challenges and involved in the lives of all kinds of people in church and society. Together with pastors, church musicians and other ministers, deacons are facilitating teamwork in the variety of activities which take place in the local parish.

Appraisal and support

In every diocese, there is a group of experienced deacons and priests who have been specially trained to offer qualified supervision. All new deacons have the right to receive supervision. The bishop has these supervisors at his disposal and he is the one who is responsible for the programmes offered for the training of supervisors. On the national level, there is a board consisting of representatives from the Bishops' Conference, the Deacons' Association, the Pastors' Association and the Catechists' Association, which is responsible for the training programme for church supervisors. This board has to ensure the quality of the programme and to evaluate its effectiveness. The Associations are still responsible for the certification of the supervisors.

The Deacons' Association supports its members, both on a national and a regional level, in a variety of ways. There may be problems of unprofessional treatment of a deacon by the local employer or the deacon may not be competent. The Association has to act as advocate for the deacon, to negotiate with the employer and to find solutions with which both parties can live. The Association has set up Ethical Rules for deacons and tries to secure a professional standard among deacons by having discussion with the Church of Norway National Council and the Colleges about the training programmes offered for deacons. The Deacons' Association also negotiates salaries for deacons and other important service conditions to enable deacons to provide as high a standard of service as possible in the congregations in which they work.

Deacons self-understanding

On the surface, the self-understanding of deacons may seem similar in the Nordic countries, but under the surface there are quite obvious differences between deacons and deaconesses' self-understanding. The Norwegian Association of Deacons became an independent organisation for deacons as early as 1915. Before that, it was a branch of the *Diakonhjem* (the father house). This is one of the reasons why deacons in Norway have been occupied for quite a long period with the question of the deacon's status in the church more than with the status of the diaconal institutions. Deacons in Norway have been seeking the church's recognition for decades.³² Until about 1970 the director of the training institution consecrated the *diakonia* candidates on behalf of the Bishop of Oslo. Since 1970 ordinations have been conducted by the local bishop or a priest with episcopal power of attorney. Today, in accordance with the ordinals, it is a commonly held view that ordination is the prerogative of the bishops. After the ratification of the Porvoo Common Statement, Bishop Odd Bondevik in the diocese of Møre maintained that from a primarily traditional Lutheran view, pastors may ordain new pastors and deacons. The Bishops' Conference has also created some confusion on this issue. In practice, however, it is the bishops who ordain, in accordance with the ordinals.

In the ordination liturgy (section 6, Admonition and Vow), the service of the deacon is described thus, when the bishop says:

³² Gunnar Stave. *Mannsmot og tenarsinn*, Oslo 1990, p. 217.

As the Lord now entrusts you with the ministry of the deacon,³³ I require and admonish you; that in witness and spiritual counselling you proclaim the Word of God clear and complete, as given to us in the Holy Scripture and in accordance with the confession of our church; that you care for the life and welfare of your neighbour, work to improve the conditions of the weak, and carry them to God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving; that you yourself with all your heart also try to live in accordance with the Word of God, and through study and prayer try to reach deeper insight into the Holy Scriptures and the truth of the Christian faith.³⁴

After this section, the bishop asks the ordinand if he/she is willing to promise before God and in the presence of the congregation, to act in accordance with the admonition by the help of God's grace. After having assented to that question and shaken hands with the bishop, section 7 follows with the laying-on-of-hands and a prayer for the newly-ordained deacon.

From most deacons' point of view, the 1987 ordinal is structured in a way that makes it quite clear that the deacon does belong to the ordained ministry of the church.³⁵ Most bishops and many scholars in theology would also say this. There is however quite a strong resistance to the acceptance of the

³³ This is paralleled in the ordination of priests with the phrase 'entrust you with the ministry of the priest'.

³⁴ Translated from the liturgy of ordination of deacons in the Church of Norway.

³⁵ The General Assembly of the Norwegian Association of Deacons decided unanimously in 1996 to use the terms 'ordained' and 'ordination' in the statutes of the association, in place of the earlier text 'vigslet'. They intended thereby to make it clear which view the organisation takes: it regards the deacon as an ordained minister of the Church in the same way as the priest.

ordained ministry of deacons, from those who assert that this is not good Lutheran tradition. Others would say that those who are defending a mono-presbyterian ordained ministry are doing this to defend their own position of power and influence. There may for instance be pastors who are afraid of losing their unique position in the congregation, and others who are afraid of getting a more clerical church.

How does the church perceive deacons?

From traditionally perceiving deacons as male nurses, the Church of Norway has now moved to regarding them as important co-workers in the parishes, despite the hesitation in recognising them as ordained ministers in the church. The structure of the deacon's ministry is laid down in the church by the ordination liturgy, by the Qualification Requirements and Service Arrangements for deacons, the Regulation for the liturgical tasks of the deacon and so on. Deacons and pastors have the same involvement officially in the appointment of bishops.³⁶

Experience shows that more and more parishes are asking for money to establish new posts for deacons. Research undertaken in 1993³⁷ showed that 45% of parish pastors wanted a deacon if they could get a new post in the parish team.

³⁶ *Regulation for nomination and appointment of a bishop*, Royal Resolution 6 June 1997, paragraph 3.

³⁷ Rød, Jan Olav; *Soknepresten og menighetsdiakonen : en studie av diakonisyn og holdninger til diakoni hos norske sokneprester*, Hovedoppgave i kristendoms-kunnskap, 1993.

Decisive work for the further incorporation of *diakonia* and the diaconate into the nature and life of the church also depends on the attitude of the deacons. They must obtain adequate knowledge and participate in pushing forward the reform process needed so that the new knowledge and interpretations can be implemented as far as the ordained ministry of deacons is concerned. Otherwise there will be no changes. In the Norwegian context, a few theologians have until now dominated the debate about the diaconate. Many scholars in theology have done a great deal for the renewal of the ordained ministry of deacons. However, they are not in the deacons' shoes and therefore do not feel the same need for speed in the reform process as the deacons, who are experiencing the problems caused by the unclear situation. For this reason, deacons must take an active part in the reform process.

As the Porvoo Common Statement declares, 'the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it.'³⁸ To make these statements a reality, it is vital for the process that deacons assume their legitimate role. They must also allow themselves to aspire to power and influence and try to interpret the issues through their own eyes and present their interpretations not only to their own little world but to the whole church. Those who stand to gain most from changes must take the role of the locomotive in the reform process. Otherwise those who benefit from maintaining the *status quo*

³⁸ Together in Mission and Ministry, *The Porvoo Common Statement*, London 1996, para 32 j, p. 20.

will define the further process or lack of process. As we read in the Porvoo Common Statement: 'Our times demand something new of us as churches. Our agreement, as set out in this text, about the nature of the Church and its unity, has implications for the ways in which we respond to the challenge of our age.'³⁹

What are the expectations laid on deacons by the church, employers and parish congregations, other deacons, clients and other members of society?

Officially the Service Arrangements and the ordinal say a great deal about what kind of expectations the church has of the deacons in general. When it comes to the daily life in the local parish, there can be tensions between the official expectations and the real life of the parish and its needs and expectations.

As part of his Master's degree in Religion in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo in 1993, Deacon Jan Olav Røed,⁴⁰ made a study of Norwegian pastors' attitudes to the work of deacons. He asked parish pastors to which groups they thought the deacons should give priority in their work in the parish. The pastors wanted deacons to give highest priority to people in mourning, the lonely and the elderly people of the congregation. The sick and suffering and people with marriage and family problems were also given high priority. What is common for people in these categories is that their problems

³⁹ *Together in Mission and Ministry*, para 14, page 10.

⁴⁰ Røed, Jan Olav, *The pastor and the parish deacon: a study of positions and attitudes about diakonia among Norwegian pastors*. Master's degree in Religion, Oslo 1993.

can be defined as the kind of life crises which most of us are going to experience sooner or later in an ordinary life cycle. Røed categorises these problems as middle class problems. At the bottom of the pastors' priority he found people suffering from drug and alcohol abuse or psychological problems, the physically disabled, the new poor and the homeless, that is, according to Røed, the marginal groups.

The pastors' priorities reflect, Røed supposes, the actual priorities of the deacons themselves, as well as the views of most church people today. From being to a great extent a pioneer movement, *diakonia* today seems to be the express image of a middle class *diakonia*, a *diakonia* without risk. Even if deacons want to be of service to the marginal groups, there is always a temptation for them to give priority to tasks that are uncontroversial and rewarding within the inner circle of the church.

7. THE WAY AHEAD

Many facets of the deacon's ministry are formally well organised in the Church of Norway, although it was a retrograde step when the Act of 31 May 1985 on the Deacon in the Church of Norway was abolished in 1997 and the new Church Act came into force. The Deacon Act of 1985 made provision for about 130 new posts for deacons throughout the country. Since 1997 the Storting has given no priority to new posts for deacons.⁴¹

⁴¹ See Report to the Storting, no. 1, 1997/1998 and no. 1, 1998/1999 (The State Budget).

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The financial basis for deacons' posts has become more uncertain because of the new funding system, in which the local parish today gets a certain amount of money from the municipal and national governments, instead of the former system in which the municipal government guaranteed the funding of all church posts in the local congregation (apart from the pastors' posts, which have always been guaranteed by the national government). To a certain extent, the Church of Norway has expressed, through its official documents⁴² a need for more posts for deacons. On the other hand, the National Council of the Church of Norway does not campaign very actively in the attempt to acquire more funds to create new posts for deacons. Nor does the church leadership seem to be in any hurry when it comes to the question of whether the deacon belongs to the ordained ministry of the church or not. The bishops and the Church of Norway National Council do not feel the same concern as deacons do about the precarious position of many deacons' posts in the church.

⁴²The General Synod of the Church of Norway, 1994, Doc. pp. 29-30.

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