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THE DEACON IN THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN

For many years the Church of Sweden has been reconsidering the meaning of *diakonia* and diaconate. As it has a very vague history to fall back on, it has to go beyond its own history and explore the history of the early church and world-wide ecumenical experiences, in order to try to integrate all this into theological and pastoral models which fit its present cultural and sociological context.¹

In the Church of Sweden theologians have tried to define the diaconate from various concepts of *diakonia*, which is not what the early church did. This attempt has not proved successful and has been too dependent on the nineteenth century view of *diakonia*. Today, the starting point for a definition of the diaconate is ecclesiology (the teaching on the nature of the

¹This is one of the most prominent traits in the many pieces of research commissioned by the Church of Sweden in recent times: *Tjänsten åt nästan*. 1969 års diakonitrednings betänkande, Stockholm 1972; *Vigd till tjänst*. Betänkande av Svenska kyrkans diakoninämnds vigningsutredning, Stockholm 1983; *Eckerdal, Lars*, "Genom bön och handpåläggning". *Vignings- jämte installationshandlingar – liturgiska utvecklingslinjer*, SOU 1985:48; *Diakonens ämbete*. Betänkande av den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningen om diakonatet, SKU 1995:1. See also Andréén, Åke, *Diakonater i världens kyrkor i dag*. *Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur och den fortsatta utvecklingen*, Uppsala 1994 (Tro & Tanke 1994:7)

Church, the meaning of the people of God, God's household), not a definition of what *diakonia* is.² This is obvious in, for example, the Church Ordinance of the Church of Sweden, adopted by the General Synod in June 1999.

The two factors, ecumenical outlook and new ecclesiological insight, seem to be the main factors which have paved the way for the permanent diaconate, episcopally ordained and an integral part of the threefold ministry of bishops, deacons and priests.

A History of the Diaconate in Brief

Even though one of the earliest Swedish Reformers, Olaus Petri (1493–1552), was a deacon³, little is known in Sweden of the *diakonia* and diaconate of the Middle Ages. The critique which the reformers made against the late medieval diaconate was that the deacons served at the altar instead of serving the poor and needy. The reference was to New Testament teaching but in Sweden there was no attempt to introduce a diaconate which concentrated on charitable work. Generally speaking, it is of course known that charitable work was being done in the monasteries and by the religious orders which ran hospitals and other institutions. In Sweden, as in the whole of the Western Church, women deacons were no longer clearly visible as such, though the vestiges of the female diaconate of the early church

² Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Diakonater. Från ecklesiologi till pastoral praxis*, Uppsala 1992 (Tro&Tanke 1992:10), Grönqvist, Vivi-Ann (ed), *The Theology of Diakonia*, Uppsala 1999 (Samariterhemmet's skriftserie nr 2).

³ Olaus Petri was ordained deacon in 1520 and not ordained priest until 1539. On Olaus Petri, see Ingebrand, Sven, *Olavus Petris reformatoriska åskådning*, Lund 1964.

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could be found in monasteries and religious orders, exercised by nuns and sisters.⁴ It is also known that there were transitional deacons, ordained as a first step to priesthood, and permanent deacons, who had, for example, the duty to preach *ad populum*.

After the dissolution of the religious orders and monasteries at the end of the sixteenth century,⁵ the responsibility for charitable work was taken over by the parish, then a combined social and religious entity. This situation remained up to the pietist and rationalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, a monolithic socio-religious society developed, that is a society in which church and politics grew into one uniform Christian society. The "Christian civil authorities" were expected to take responsibility for social welfare. Charitable work was, in principle, seen as a basic element in the everyday life of every Christian person. However, in the Churches rooted in the Lutheran-Melanchthonian Reformation, diaconal activities declined and became underdeveloped. The Churches expected the Christian society to take care of the poor and needy and interpreted *diakonia* as an expression of the personal piety of the individual believer. This eventually proved to be a misconception when the Church in reality became disestablished and the State more pluralist and, later on, secularised.

⁴ Hedqvist, Vilhelm, *Den kristna kärleksverksamheten i Sverige*, Strängnäs 1893.

⁵ Ivarsson, Gustaf, *Johan III och klosterväsendet*, Lund 1970.

The Swedish reformers appear to have accepted the late medieval concept of the priesthood as the fundamental office in the church, and a specific liturgical diaconate was not regarded as necessary. From the historical point of view, the Reformation period posed the same problem with the diaconate as the Middle Ages did. Though relatively little is recorded, it would be incorrect to maintain that the diaconate disappeared totally after the Reformation⁶. In 1550 the Swedish Archbishop Laurentius Petri (1499–1573)⁷ referred to those men who are in offices below the presbyterium, *infra gradum presbyteralem*, which indicated that deacons were in place. In the Church Ordinance of 1571, there is one reference to “bishops, priests, teachers, deacons,.....”. What was meant by that is unclear because the Church Ordinance contains no rite for the ordination of deacons. On the other hand, however, copies of the Church Ordinance have been found which include a rite for the ordination of deacons written in by hand. In 1572 the Bishop of Linköping, Martinus Gestricius, wrote that there were various grades (*gradus et officia*), an ecclesiastical hierarchy (*hierarchia ecclesiastica*) in the one ordained ministry of the church, these grades or offices being bishops, priests and deacons. We do not know the situation in all of the dioceses, the exception being the diocese of Västerås. In the record of clergy for that diocese

⁶ For the following paragraphs, the author is indebted to Cnattingius, Hans, *Diakonats och venia concionandi i Sverige intill 1800-talets mitt*, Stockholm 1952 and Askmark, Ragnar, *Ämbetet i den svenska kyrkan*, Lund 1949.

⁷ On Laurentius Petri, see Kick, Remi, *Tel un navire sur la mer déchaînée. La communauté chrétienne dans l'oeuvre de Laurentius Petri, archevêque d'Uppsala (1531–1573)*, Lund 1997.

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there were two offices, namely priests and deacons. It can probably be concluded that ordinations to the diaconate were not performed in that diocese after about 1645. However, what can be said is that the diaconate at that time was transitional in character, deacons normally remaining in *ordo diaconorum* for a year and a half and thereafter being ordained to the priesthood. Some men however remained as deacons. Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius (1581-1646) was assisted by seven deacons. Archbishop Laurentius Paulinus Gothus (1565-1646), then Bishop of Strängnäs, wrote in a dissertation of 1609 that the office of deacon belonged to the church by divine right (*de jure divino*). His successor in Strängnäs, Johannes Matthiae, in his *Idea boni ordinis in ecclesia* of 1644, states that the diaconate is an office with its own vocation and ordination. What is important to emphasise here, is that the office of deacons was not charitable in character but a liturgical-pastoral order which was considered inferior to the order of priest and bishop.

Ordination to the diaconate in the Church of Sweden ceased to be performed in the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus the dominant model for ordained ministry became the two-fold model of bishop and priest. For example, according to Olaus Moretius, a professor of theology, in his *Disputatio theologica de ministerio* of 1624, the idea was that the diaconate had been absorbed into the priesthood. The deacons in the New Testament were, according to Moretius, of two kinds: (1) those who served the poor and had the responsibility for the funds of the church. (2) those who assisted the bishops and presbyters. The

tasks of both categories had now been taken over by priests in various positions. When this particular idea became accepted in the Church of Sweden it was integrated into the ordination oath in the rite for the ordination of priests. When the oath took the form of vows, the candidates to priesthood still promised to take diaconal responsibility. One of the consequences was that the priests took charge of the charitable practices in the parishes. Until the first half of the twentieth century the parish lived in symbiosis with what, after 1862, had become the civic community. Before that the parish ("socken") had been the only local administrative entity in the country. The priest's ordination vow to take diaconal responsibility remained until 1987 when it was deleted from the ordination rite, because of the importance given to the diaconate as a permanent order.

In most Protestant traditions, including the Church of Sweden, the nineteenth century was characterised by the revival of *diakonia*. The social and political unrest and the growing poverty, caused by industrialisation and urbanisation, demanded new forms of action. Influenced by the German Mother House type of diaconal service, a new form of charity through religious communities was introduced. The identification of *diakonia* with charitable works (*caritas, philanthropia*) was to cause problems later on,⁸ and the confusion between communal life and the holding of office in the church became troublesome. The problem was that vocation to an office in the church (to

⁸ Brodd, Sven-Erik. *Diakonia through Church History. Five Ecclesiological Models*, in Grönqvist, Vivi-Ann (ed.) *The Theology of Diakonia*, Uppsala 1999 (Samariterhemmet's Skriftserie nr.2)

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the office of deacon) became totally integrated into a vocation to communal life. From the 1950s onwards it became clear that the distinction between these two vocations had to be maintained.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, women have made up the vast majority of deacons (deaconesses) in the Church of Sweden. There were four Mother Houses for women, which later turned into seminaries and diaconal institutions: Ersta (Stockholm 1851), Samariterhemmet (Uppsala 1882), Vårsta (Härnösand 1912), and Bräcke (Göteborg 1923). There was just one institution for men, founded in 1898 and located, from 1905, at Stora Sköndal, Farsta (outside Stockholm). The male deacons were rarely numerous and were often employed in the secular structures as social workers. They also held posts as parish clerks.

The Mother House concept of diaconal work never legally nor canonically became integrated into the official Church. To a certain extent the Mother House communities were independent of the official church structures. However, they were superintended by priests, and the boards of the institutions quickly came under the chairmanship of bishops. They also received financial support from the official church structures.

Although they co-operated increasingly with the Church authorities and were appreciated by society at large, because of the state-church system, and in view of the statements made by conservative theologians that social matters were not the responsibility of the Church, the diaconal revival had to be pursued by

organisations which were not officially integrated into the Church of Sweden.

This Mother House type of diaconal service and the deaconess model profoundly influenced the concept of the diaconate in the Church of Sweden for more than a century, from the 1850s to the 1960s. The deaconesses undertook nursing, teaching and pastoral tasks in the parishes but also in the wider community. The Mother Houses founded hospitals, schools and social institutions of various kinds.

The revivalist movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century also created a framework for the discussion about new forms of the diaconate. The revivals caused enormous disruption in church life. The teaching authority of the priests and bishops was undermined by lay preachers who lacked authorisation by the *magisterium* of the Church of Sweden. In discussion about the problems related to this, the idea of a diaconate which could serve as a link between the revivalist movement and the church, combining lay responsibility and activity with Church Ordinance, frequently occurred.⁹ It is possible to distinguish various ideas which lay behind the aim to integrate the evangelical movements into the church structure and to avoid the split which eventually came. The debate started during the 1850s and was partly a parallel to the debate about the introduction of the charitable type of diaconate.

⁹ For what follows, see Martling, Carl Henrik. *Diakon, veniat, assistentpräst? Till frågan om den kyrkliga lekmanaförkunnelsen förr och nu*, Lund 1971.



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A picture of 1883 shows the main activities of the deaconesses at the time: comforting the sick, education and cultivating personal piety.

To those who wanted an ordained diaconate it was seen as a way of integrating lay preachers into the hierarchical church. They saw deacons as teachers and preachers, ordained or installed. The deacon's external vocation from the church was to them of vital importance. According to some of the proposals made, it was important to combine preaching, catechising, distribution of the Eucharist (the pre-consecrated elements), visitation of the sick, and home visiting. It was a male diaconate which was envisaged, and the idea was that it should be a complement to the priesthood.

Another idea was to introduce a lay diaconate in the parishes, on a voluntary basis. This idea was predominant throughout the 1880s but never became a reality. Although the idea of a preaching and teaching diaconate was not put into practice during the nineteenth century, the shortage of priests during the first half of the twentieth century forced a new form of deacon into being.

During the ten-year period from 1925 to 1936, 36 (as they were referred to) pastoral deacons (*pastorsdiakoner*) were ordained in the Church of Sweden. Their main tasks were to assist the priests in preaching and pastoral counselling. These deacons were episcopally ordained but never canonically integrated into the church. They lived on voluntary subsidies in very straitened circumstances and could therefore be considered as being the victims of harsh church-political controversies.

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The Church of Sweden does not practise transitional ordinations. The diaconate is always a permanent one, though quite a number of deacons have chosen to study theology and thereafter be ordained to the priesthood. In the mid-1950s bishops in two dioceses, however, ordained as deacons candidates who were ultimately destined for priesthood, thus introducing a transitional diaconate. The opposition, not least from the diaconal institutions at that time, became too strong, therefore the bishops ceased ordaining transitional deacons.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the Church of Sweden has realised that *diakonia* is not merely voluntary service. It is not optional but belongs to the core of the Church's being. Nor is *diakonia* social welfare in a general sense, it is an indispensable element in the nature of the Church and hence an essential function of the Church. It is possible to detect an ongoing integration of diaconal work within the Church's pastoral work. At the congregational level, *diakonia* is seen as care for people, not only social care but also care for their education. During the last ten years, the integration of the diaconal and liturgical life of the Church has also been taking place. The diaconate has thereby been manifested as part of the ordained ministry of the Church.

There is also a growing awareness that the preaching of the Gospel is not only a verbal matter but that it must be acted out in service. The teaching and the deeds of the Church go together and form the witness of the Church. During the 1950s and 1960s there was a certain tension between Church and

State concerning the character of the diaconal work of the Church of Sweden. The Social Democratic Party in power wanted the social work then done by the Church to be integrated into the public social welfare system. At the time, the *diakonia* of the Church was very much associated with the concept of 'charity', whereas social welfare came to be understood in Swedish society in the context of human rights. The compromise then was that big diaconal institutions were taken over by the authorities while the Church undertook work which was complementary to that of the public welfare institutions and public hospitals.¹⁰ The diaconal institutions thus became unable to compete with the work of public bodies. Today, this tension no longer exists, and the diaconal institutions are taking new initiatives in different areas of social work. For example, the rehabilitation of addicts and the running of hospices for the terminally ill.

Today, *diakonia* is not interpreted merely as a supplementary activity but as an alternative way of caring for human beings and social systems. The Christian character is apparently not seen by the public authorities as a hindrance but a positive contribution to the benefit of the whole person and for the whole society.

After 1942 the diaconate was transformed into an office in the church, and in 1987 the church acknowledged the diaconate as an integral part of the threefold ministry. This is clear in the

¹⁰ Hjortskull, Anders, *Från kärleksverksamhet till läkande miljö. Diakonins ställning i kyrka och samhälle 1951-1975*, Lund 1982.

distinction made between priests, deacons and laity in the *pre-notanda* to the ordination rites. In 1987 the remaining theological differences between male and female deacons were finally abolished. Whilst it is possible for female deacons to use the title deaconess and this is still quite common in popular usage, in the 1999 Church Ordinance there is just one designation for the office: deacon.

Discussions about the nature and functions of the diaconate will certainly continue despite the 1999 canonical regulation of the diaconate and the canonical regulation of the threefold ministry.

1. DEPLOYMENT:

Statistics on deacons in the Church of Sweden are readily accessible. Most deacons are female. Although the diaconate may have until recently consisted of a rather aged body of deacons, largely due to there having been very few vocations to the diaconate during the 1960s and 1970s, the situation today is more balanced. There are at the moment more candidates for the diaconate than there are posts available for them, a situation which should be seen in the light of the fact that only 50% of all parishes in the Church of Sweden have created posts for deacons.

The Church of Sweden employs 26000 people in various posts, including 3400 priests, 900 deacons (there are also ordained

deacons in other posts), 1500 parish assistants/teachers/youth leaders, 2000 church musicians, 3800 porters/caretakers/vergers, and 2200 workers at cemeteries.

Numbers of deacons

There are about 1300 deacons (1996 figures), compared with about 3000 priests. Table 1. The development in numbers of deacons in parishes *Source*: Refer to note 11.

1971 :	292	1983 :	562
1975 :	384	1986 :	671
1975 :	445	1996 :	1027
1980 :	489	1998 :	1020

According to statistics available, in 1996 there were 138 deacons in charge of various sectors of work in parishes, such as diaconal work and education (114 women, 24 men). 857 additional people were employed as deacons (764 women, 93 men). In non-ordained posts as diaconal assistants 193 (1998, 185) were employed by the parishes. The last group has no formal training as deacons, and according to the agreement between the Union of Employees in the Church of Sweden (*Svenska kyrkans personalförbund*) and the Church of Sweden they are paid less than deacons. According to the Church Ordinance a non-ordained person cannot hold a post as deacon. If the question were ever to arise, it would probably also be the case that

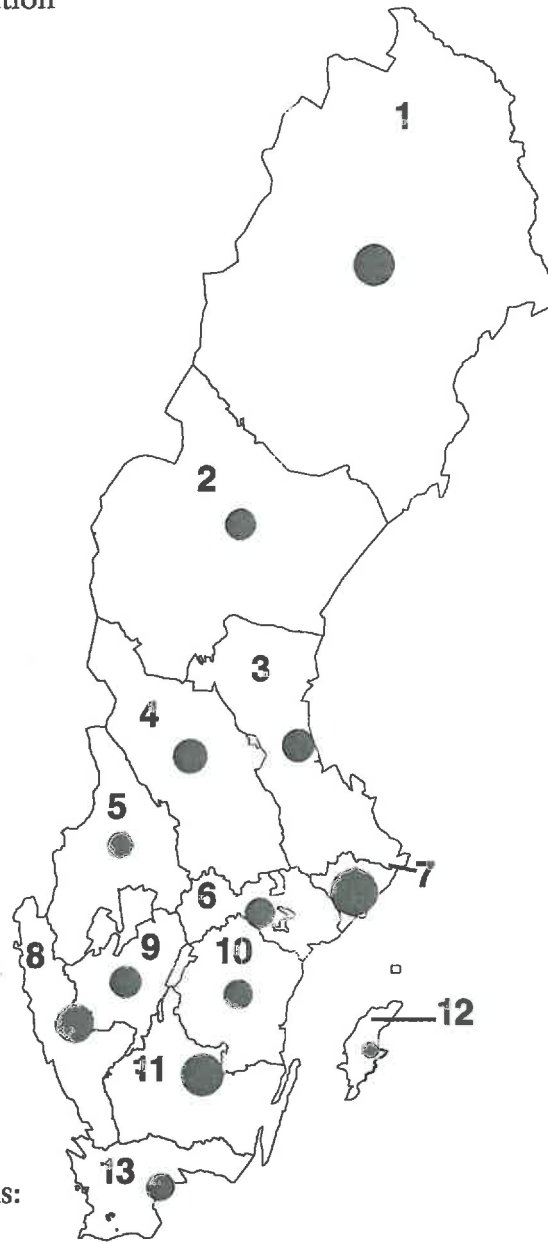
a priest could not hold a post designated for a deacon. There are also about 90 deacons working in hospital chaplaincies. A large number of deacons (about 240) hold paid posts outside the Church, mainly in various kinds of social service (*samhällstjänst*). Deacons have hitherto been allowed to be ordained for work outside the church; this practice is now being questioned, and today most bishops do not ordain deacons unless they have a post in the church to take up immediately after ordination.

Map showing the Dioceses of the Church of Sweden¹¹ Diaconal Training Institutions and Deployment of deacons

● Deacons per 1000 population



- 1) Luleå
- 2) Härnösand
- 3) Uppsala
- 4) Västerås
- 5) Karlstad
- 6) Strängnäs
- 7) Stockholm
- 8) Göteborg
- 9) Skara
- 10) Visby
- 11) Växjö
- 12) Visby
- 13) Lund



Diaconal Training Institutions:
Uppsala – Samariterhemmet,
Stockholm – Ersta and Stora Sköndal,
Göteborg, – Bräcke.

¹¹ Source: *Svenska kyrkans statistik*, Jonas Bromander, Church of Sweden Research Department, Uppsala

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Main tasks undertaken by deacons

In general, deacons are responsible for various aspects of congregational life. The exact nature of their responsibilities depends on the individual parish. Deacons may even be employed as teachers, administrators or youth leaders, independently of the fact that they are ordained. The vast majority of deacons' activities seem to involve individual counselling (1994: 63%)¹². Deacons are also engaged in youth work, performing devotions and taking part in the liturgy (1994:60%) and leading various group activities in the congregation (1994:40%). They are engaged in visiting homes (1994:77%) and other types of outreach (1994:52%). Theologically educated deacons also offer confirmation classes and other educational activities. The impression created by the statistics is that the main tasks derive from the nineteenth century view of the charitable type of diaconate but at the same time, for example, nursing has disappeared and new activities have been added.

Thus, the main areas in which the activity of deacons is focused are: care of the elderly, work among children and candidates for Confirmation, group and individual counselling of people in distress, work with families, young people and refugees. Social work among addicts and the socially deprived has a lower priority by comparison.

¹² For the following statistics, see Bäckström, Anders, et al. *För att tjäna. En studie av diakoniuppfattningar hos kyrkliga befattningshavare*, (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1994:1), Uppsala 1994.

During the 1980s deacons became more and more liturgically active. A greater awareness of the relationship between the diaconate and the Eucharist has led to deacons being active in the Mass. In 90% of the parishes which have a deacon, 90% today take part as deacons in the Eucharistic liturgy, 60% are vested in alb and stole, and sometimes the dalmatic, or alternatively, in the case of women deacons, wearing the deaconess habit. 80% distribute the Holy Communion. In the Mass the deacons read the Gospel, lead the prayers of the church and administer the chalice.¹³ This is a new phenomenon about which there has been lively discussion. There is no role assigned to the deacon in the Service Book and no canonical regulation for it.¹⁴ One of the main arguments advanced against the liturgical role of the deacon is that deacons deprive the laity of their activities in the Mass. In public discussion the charitable type of diaconate has been contrasted with the liturgical diaconate.¹⁵ This is, however, totally political motivated since there is no suggestion of a liturgical diaconate to be found in the debate in Sweden.

¹³ Axner, Torbjörn, *Utvärdering av 1986 års kyrkohandbok* (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1998:7), Uppsala 1998, 27f.

¹⁴ There are, however, signs of recognition of the fact that deacons today have a liturgical role. For example, in the pastoral letter *Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, Uppsala 1990 and in the material sent out by the central church administration (Församlingsnämnden) 1996: Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Att synliggöra diakonin i mässan – om diakonatets liturgiska funktion*, Psalm och bön i diakonins värld, Svenska kyrkans församlingsnämnd, Uppsala 1996, pp. 47–53 (2nd ed. 1999)

¹⁵ Brodd, Sven-Erik, *Diakonattet. Från ecklesiologi till pastoral praxis*, Uppsala 1992 (Tro & Tanke 1992:10)

2. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

According to the 1998 statistics, 760 of the 1020 deacons working in parishes, had full time posts. 124 were working 50% of full-time equivalent, and the 24 deacons working less than that were paid on an hourly basis.¹⁶

Contracts and financial status

Deacons in parishes are employed by the local parish council or by the pastorate council, which decides on the type of post and also which applicant is appointed. The salary is also decided by the council and in their daily work deacons are, like all ministers in the parish (lay or ordained), supervised by the parish priest in charge (*kyrkoherde*). Priests have a better salary than deacons. More and more deacons who are not employed to do parish work, take part in the life and worship of a congregation as a way of exercising their office. This is done without payment or canonical regulation but as an expression of an individual deacon's awareness of their office.

Regulations governing ministry

Although the priest today is supervised by the diocesan chapter, the deacon had no such relation to the diocese until the Church Ordinance of 1999.¹⁷ There was, however, a bond between the ordaining bishop and the deacon which is expressed by the fact

¹⁶ *Svenska kyrkans statistik*, Church of Sweden Research Department, Uppsala.

¹⁷ Göransson, Göran, *Svensk kyrkorätt. En översikt*, Stockholm 1993, pp. 249, 277.

that ordination has traditionally been performed in the diocesan cathedrals. Ordination was formerly carried out by the bishop who was president of the institution which had educated the diaconal candidate. According to the new Church Ordinance for the Church of Sweden (9:1-2), this has been changed in order to create as much equality as possible between priests and deacons. In each diocese, priests and deacons together form one common body to elect their representative to the diocesan synod.

The promulgation of the 1999 Church Ordinance (32:1-16) means that for the first time in Sweden since the Reformation (except for the status accorded through the ordination rites) deacons have a canonical status equivalent to that of priests. There was no mention of deacons in the Swedish canon law of 1992, which replaced the Church Law of 1686.

The ordination rite binds the deacon to the Church. The ordination liturgy, and the interpretation of that given by the Conference of Bishops, governs the changing understanding of the diaconate in the Church of Sweden today.¹⁸ The preface to the ordination rites states:

The acts of ordination express how Christ by the Spirit, and with the People of God, and for the sake of the Gospel calls persons to lifelong service. This call is confirmed by the church's ordination. The ordinations to bishop, priest and deacon are equal in value as express-

¹⁸ *Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*. A letter from the bishops concerning the ministry of the Church, The Bishops Conference 1990, Uppsala 1992.

ing the fullness of the Gospel and the charge to the church which emerges out of that Gospel, a charge carried out both in word and deed.

Priests and deacons very much depend on the agreement made on the national level between the union (*Kyrkans Akademikerförbund*, SACO, or alternatively, *Svenska Kommunaltjänstemannaförbundet*, TCO) and the Church of Sweden. As for all Swedish employees, there are also locally agreed job descriptions.

There are also secular regulations of employment which apply to the deacons in parishes and elsewhere, for example, the security of employment law (*lagen om anställningsskydd*, LAS), and the law concerning the right of participation in decision-making (*medbestämmandelagen*, MBL).¹⁹ There is a further organisation which takes care of the specific interests of deacons, the *Svenska Kyrkans Diakonförbund* (The Alliance of Deacons in the Church of Sweden).

3. SELECTION AND FORMATION

There is a series of procedures which has to be completed before a deacon is ordained: 1) The candidate for the diaconate must have a professional training as a precondition for acceptance into the diaconal seminary. The nature of the vocational training is determined by the Church of Sweden at a national

¹⁹ *Diakonens Ämbete*. Betänkande av den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningen om diakonatet, Uppsala 1995, (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1995:1), pp. 54-57.

level. 2) A person's application for diaconal training in a seminary (approved by the Church of Sweden, which also accepts its curriculum) is sent directly to the seminary and decided by the seminary. 3) The candidate is educated in the seminary, and 4) the candidate is normally recommended by the board of the seminary for ordination to the diaconate. 5) At this point, the candidate must be accepted for ordination by a bishop. 6) The diocesan chapter must declare the candidate competent (Church Ordinance 32:1-4). 7) The candidate must further undergo an examination before representatives of the chapter (*diakon-examen*; Church Ordinance 32:5-8). 8) Before ordination, candidates who have not already secured employment in a parish must normally apply locally for a job. 9) Candidates are ordained by the diocesan bishop in the diocesan cathedral. As was the case before, only bishops can ordain.

Selection criteria

Clearly defined selection criteria are not evident, except those which relate to education. It seems, however, that most of the bishops apply the following four criteria:

(1) successful completion of diaconal training, (2) a letter of recommendation from the board of the diaconal seminary signed by the president who is always a bishop, (3) availability of a parish post for the candidate, and (4) that the ordaining bishop has conversed with the candidate to examine his/her abilities.

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There seems to be divergence from this on two points: some bishops seem to hold the view that they are ordaining on the basis of a delegation from the bishop and board of the diaconal seminary, and some bishops make exceptions from the rule that the candidate must already have a post in the church. There are, however, no canonical regulations which require bishops to take one position or the other.

Discernment of vocation (parochial, diocesan levels)

The seminary scrutinises the personal vocation of the candidates and their abilities and gives its recommendation to a bishop. This will probably change after the implementation of the 1999 Church Ordinance in accordance with current practice in the case of vocation to the priesthood. Sometimes, during the training process, it is decided that a recommendation for ordination can (or cannot) be made. During the training period, bishops maintain contact with the candidates they are to ordain. In principle the same pattern of internal and external vocation applies to the deacon as to the priest. The differences relate to the role of the seminary and the fact that after priests are ordained, they are sent for their first year to a parish by the bishop, subsequently making direct applications themselves for a post elsewhere. The appointment to a local parish is, in principle, the same for priests and deacons: the parish advertises the post and the deacon applies for it. Thereafter the parish council makes the appointment.

Education

There is a common basic one semester course (*Svenska kyrkans grundkurs*) for those who will be going into specialised training as church musicians, priests and deacons. It is an introduction to the teaching and spirituality of the Church of Sweden. As mentioned above, those who wish to join a diaconal seminary must have a professional training before being accepted into the seminary. The most commonly accepted types of professional training (*fackutbildning*) are: medical/nursing education, teacher education, education in sociology and social work, and training for lay ministry. The charitable view of the diaconate is clearly exposed here. It is also possible for the seminary to give dispensations from the prescribed preconditions of education.

The training in the seminary lasts one year and includes; theology and ethics, education studies, liturgy, pastoral care and professional leadership. The present forms of education have been criticised both by representatives of smaller parishes because they do not give the general pastoral competence they require and by those who think that the forms of education have too strong an influence on the content of the diaconate itself. According to the critics, it should be *vice versa*.

4. AUTHORISATION

The authorisation of deacons depends on the liturgical regulations, the Church Ordinance and various kinds of local agreements. There is, however, also a kind of 'given' Church of

Sweden order, based on tradition and the commonly held view of the diaconate.

Terminology (ordination, consecration, commissioning)

Before 1987 there were in the Church of Sweden a variety of terms for different kinds of inaugurations.²⁰ Today it is absolutely clear: The Church of Sweden *ordains* bishops, deacons and priests, *consecrates* buildings and objects, and *sends out* missionaries and people to undertake various kinds of lay ministries. It *receives* ordained ministers into various posts. The laying-on of hands by a bishop is reserved for ordinations. The earlier practice of installation of persons in a specific ministry by laying-on of hands by a bishop, to become a priest in charge of a parish or a missionary, for example, has been abandoned.

Formerly it was possible to ordain deacons for service in the community. This originated in the fact that deacons and deaconesses were ordained to the church as a part of a diaconal community (the Mother House and its equivalent for men). This community sent the deacons and deaconesses to work in the world. When the Mother House system came to an end, and the deacon or deaconess had no post in a parish, the ordination was interpreted by some as ordination 'to the world'.

²⁰ Eckerdal, Lars. "Genom bön och handpåläggning". *Vignings - jämte installationshandlingar - liturgiska utvecklingslinjer*, (SOU 1985:48) Stockholm 1985, pp. 343-502.

During a transitional period, from the ordination rite in the 1920s, the diaconate came to be seen more and more as an ordained ministry. The development can be followed in revisions of the manual for ordinations. In the Service Book of 1942, the ordination liturgy for the first time equates the ordination of priests and bishops with that of deacons/deaconesses. Nevertheless, the ordination rite for a deaconess differed from that for a deacon. Gradually, the whole system changed from a Mother House diaconate to the diaconate as it is perceived today: one order in the threefold ministry. According to the ordination liturgy of the Church of Sweden from 1986, the Church recognises three orders of ministry: bishop, priest and deacon. All three orders are in principle open to men and women alike. The ordination act contains prayer and laying-on of hands accordingly:

The Bishop:

In the Name of the Triune God,
by his call and in the communion of his congregation,
do we ordain these men and women as deacons.
Let us call on God in prayer:

[The ordinand kneels.]

The Bishop:

O God, we give you thanks.
In your great love for us human beings
you sent your Son Jesus Christ as saviour,
shepherd and high priest of our souls.
For our salvation he became obedient

unto death on the cross,
wherefore you have exalted him above every name.
In the world he gathers a people to serve you
that your name may be hallowed
and your will be done.
You choose among us servants for your Gospel
that people may come to faith,
the church be renewed and the creation restored.
From you we receive him who now is being ordained
a deacon.

[The Bishop and the assistants lay their hands on the ordinand's
head:]

The Bishop

O Lord, come to NN with your Holy Spirit
And take him into your service as deacon in your church.

The Bishop:

O God, we now beseech you:

Together with the congregation:

Give this your deacon steadfastness
in the service of love,
make him keen and devoted.
Give him the courage, strength
and patience he will need,
and keep him, O God, always close to you.
May he live ever more deeply in faith, hope and love.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

[The ordained candidate stands while the choir sings *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. S/he is vested in the stole over the alb, given the deacon's emblem and the certificate. Then the bishop says to the congregation:]

The Bishop:

In apostolic manner,
by prayer and the laying-on of hands in God's name,
NN has been ordained a **deacon**.
Receive him as an ambassador for Christ.

(After the offertory hymn, the celebration of the Eucharist, the Bishop presiding, begins with the Sursum corda and the preface)



Newly ordained deacons, with Archbishop Gunnar Weman, outside Uppsala Cathedral (1996)



An ordination in 1963. The change in spirituality is evident. At that time deaconesses in the Church of Sweden still had to live in celibacy and they were bound to the Mother House. Liturgical vestments were hardly known for deacons and were totally unknown for deaconesses.

Accountability (for what, to whom)

The deacon is accountable to the bishop, the diocesan chapter, the parish council and the parish priest (or equivalents in the diocese and the national church. The parish council (or equivalent employer) could formerly, as mentioned, act on the basis of secular law, without consulting the diocesan bishop or chap-

ter.²¹ Now, according to the Church Ordinance, no deacon can be given notice, be dismissed or transferred to another post before the chapter has examined this action and determined whether it is in accordance with the regulations in the Church Ordinance which refer to the oversight of the chapter and bishop.²²

The ordination rite explicitly contains vows, a profession of faith and an interpretation of the duties of the ordinands and their relationship to the Church of Christ and the Church of Sweden.

The vows are as follows:

Bishop:

Will you in the Name of the Triune God accept the office of a deacon and exercise it so that God may be glorified, the church built up and God's will manifested in the world?

Ordinand:

I will.

²¹ *Diakonens ämbete*. Betänkande av den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningen om diakonatet, Uppsala 1995, 54-57 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1995:1).

²² The Diocesan Chapter consists of the following; the diocesan bishop (chair), the dean of the cathedral, one deacon or priest, one judge and three lay people elected by the Diocesan Synod.

Bishop:

Will you hold fast to the faith of the church,
help those who are in need of your service
and take sides with the oppressed?

Ordinand:

I will.

Bishop:

Will you in your service follow the orders of our church
with Christ as your model?

Ordinand:

I will.

Bishop:

Will you so live among people
that you bear witness to God's love
and to the mystery of reconciliation?

Ordinand:

I will.

[The Solemn Assurance]

Bishop:

Affirm now your promises before God and in the pre-
sence of this congregation.

Ordinand:

I, NN, shall, with the help of God and by trusting God's grace, live in accordance with these promises.

Bishop:

May God, who has begun a good work in you, bring it to completion so that his good will be done. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

(The Creed then follows)

Before the promulgation of the 1999 Church Ordinance, the board of the seminary from which the deacon graduated acted as a form of chapter.²³ As described below, this has changed. If anything goes wrong, the bishop acts in his capacity as visitor in the diocese. The Church Ordinance also here prescribes a parallel structure for priests and deacons which puts them both under the jurisdiction of the chapter and bishop, and accountable, for their day-to-day work, to the local parish board which has employed them. The same principle applies to other forms of employment, in the diocese or in church institutions of various kinds.

If a deacon has deserted the teaching of the Church of Sweden the diocesan chapter *shall* deprive the deacon of his or her right to exercise the office of deacon in the Church of Sweden (not only in the diocese). This also applies if someone leaves the

²³ *Kyrkan och diakonianstalterna*. Förslag till riktlinjer av Ersta och Samariterhemmets samarbetsorganisationer, Stockholm 1972.

Church of Sweden or demands to be deprived of the office of deacon. If a deacon is obviously unsuitable for his or her office, which is clear when the vows given in ordination are broken or when the deacon because of sickness or similar circumstances is unable to properly exercise the office of deacon, he or she *may* be deprived of the right to exercise the office. The same rules apply to the case when a deacon has committed a crime or 'to an extensive degree has damaged the good name a deacon should have'. (Church Ordinance 32:11-13)

Since the Church of Sweden practises absolute ordinations and ordination for life, the deacon who has been deprived of his or her rights can get them back and thus recover the right to exercise the office of a deacon, if the chapter so decides. But this is possible only with the approval of the bishop (Church Ordinance 32:14).

Accordingly, deacons who are employed by a parish or its equivalent in a diocese and all deacons registered as living inside the boundaries in that diocese (employed by church organisations, living as private persons, retired, employed in the community or in other types of employment) are under the jurisdiction of the relevant diocesan chapter. Deacons employed by the national church and all other deacons (which must actually mean deacons abroad) are under the jurisdiction of the chapter in the Archdiocese of Uppsala (Church Ordinance 32:15-16).

5. RELATIONSHIP AND STRUCTURES

As a result of the changed perceptions of the diaconate in the Church of Sweden, deacons have gradually been included in the formal church organisation. From having been seen as an expression of voluntary work, the diaconate has developed into an office and lastly has been recognised as part of the threefold ministry. Earlier deacons were ordained in the habit: today they are vested in alb and stole. The way in which deacons participate in the ordained ministry of the Church has from time to time been the subject of rather confusing debates.²⁴ In the social hierarchy of a Swedish parish, the deacons have a lower status than the priest, who incidentally is also much better paid. Very often deacons seem to be more secure in their role than priests, even though in current debate the deacon is frequently perceived as the 'problem'. Thus the priests from time to time feel threatened by the concept of a social-educational-liturgical diaconate. Traditionally deacons have been seen as co-workers with priests and inferior to them. Today they are seen in principle, as equals in the threefold ministry.

Another problem sometimes arises for deacons in relation to lay people who are in leading positions in parishes. They may also feel threatened by the deacons' new role. They may fear that the canonical regulation of the threefold ministry has weakened their own position in the church and that the ordained ministry of the church thereby gains power.

²⁴ Edqvist, Gunnar & Weman, Gunnar. Mellan lekmannaskap och ämbete, in: *Med engagemang och medansvar*. Festskrift till Carl Henrik Martling, Stockholm 1990, pp. 179-199.

6. DEACONS SELF-UNDERSTANDING

There is an ongoing debate among deacons about their self-understanding. The difference between generations becomes apparent when older or middle aged deacons identify themselves as deaconesses, talk about the Mother House and try to interpret the roles of the present diaconal institutions in that direction. They do not wear the green clerical shirt of the deacon but the deaconess dress and they do not usually take part in the Eucharistic liturgy as deacons. Among the younger generations the picture is more clearly in favour of the threefold ministry and a ministry combining charitable work, liturgy, pastoral counselling and education.²⁵

Until the dissolution of the Mother House system during the 1960s and 1970s, a certain tension was noticeable among deaconesses in relation to vocation. Some women interpreted their personal vocation mainly as a vocation to communal life and charitable work, while others interpreted it more in the categories of a vocation to an office in the Church. During the 1960s there was a sharp decline in vocations to the diaconate. The Mother House institutions had been very important for the Church, not just for their approach to undertaking charitable, nursing and educational work but also for the very fact of their existence. The institutions bore witness to communities of people who lived for Christ by serving their fellow-men and women. They bore witness to people who abstained from

²⁵ Bäckström, Anders. *Diakonin och kyrkans framtid*, in: *Församlingsdiakoni i centrum*, (Mitt i församlingen 1994:9), Uppsala 1994, pp. 58-96.

marriage and private property. Today, in the Church of Sweden there are monasteries and religious communities where this kind of life is lived, but there is just one small community that is explicitly trying to form a sisterhood of deaconesses.²⁶ The number of people called to religious orders, however, does not correspond to the increase in vocations to the diaconate.

How does the "church" perceive deacons?

The main subject of discussion today in the Church of Sweden is not the question of diaconal work but that of the diaconate. The situation can be described as a development from a status of the diaconate as a religious order to an ordained ministry in the Church. The situation today differs from that of most Churches because of the total change: there is no parallel development in which the Mother House idea remains as one branch of the diaconate supplemented by the ordained diaconate. The change is total in the Church of Sweden.²⁷ This demands a brief account of the historical background.

Originally, the deaconesses belonged to sisterhoods, deaconess communities (Mother Houses), which ran institutions such as hospitals, homes for the elderly, the handicapped and the destitute. The deaconesses lived and worked in the institutions.

²⁶ Brodd, Sven-Erik. *Evangeliskt klosterliv i Sverige*, Stockholm 1972.

²⁷ *Tjänsten åt nästan*. 1969 års diakoniutrednings betänknande, Stockholm 1972; *Vigd till tjänst*. Betänkande av Svenska kyrkans diakoninämnds vigningsutredning, Stockholm 1983; *Diakonens ämbete*. Betänkande av den av Svenska kyrkans centralstyrelse tillsatta utredningen om diakonatet, Uppsala 1995 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1995:1).

The Mother Houses also sent them out to parishes where they worked as assistants to the priests, as social workers, teachers and nurses. These sisters were always bound to their institution, the Mother House, from which they received support, including financial support. Deaconesses lived in poverty, chastity and obedience.²⁸ They were seen as pious, altruistic women, doing charitable work.

In the 1960s the sisters were allowed to marry and they were appointed and employed directly by the parishes. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Mother Houses were gradually transformed into centres of diaconal education and inspiration and centres for training in pastoral care.

There is a difference between seeing the diaconate as membership of a kind of religious community to seeing it as an ordained ministry, many of whose members are married. However, this difference and the way in which it affects the deacon and the church has not yet been the subject of any research.

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

The Church of Sweden recognises various traditions, today mainly those originating from the nineteenth century. They are very often geographically defined, which means that different

²⁸ Elmund, Gunnel. *Den kvinnliga diakonin i Sverige 1849-1861*. Uppgift och utformning, Stockholm 1973 (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae 29); Koivunen Bylund, Tuulikki, "Frukta icke, allenast tro". *Ebba Boström och Samariterhemmet 1882-1902*.

dioceses are stamped to a greater or lesser degree by particular traditions. This in turn affects the expectations laid on deacons. Another decisive factor is the age of the person expressing the expectation. Through the rapid changes of the form and content of the diaconate, people who have had experience of the old system seem to be in favour of the old, individual-centred charitable type of diaconate, whereas younger generations seem to be more in favour of renewal. Accordingly, the research undertaken by sociologists presents a diverse picture.²⁹ What is obvious, however, is the difference in attitude between generations. Older people seem to idealise the deaconess and are often confused by the new style and role of deacons. Further, the element of charitable work which is still a major part of the concept of deacons in Sweden, makes the deacon appear to be a sort of ecclesial social worker to those who are social workers and municipal authorities.

7. THE WAY AHEAD

Currently in the Church of Sweden, the most burning issue is the change in church structures, most importantly the dissolution of the state church system and the new 1999 Church Ordinance, the first since 1571. The state church law of 1686 was replaced

²⁹ Alwall, Jonas and Geyer, Karl. *Kyrkofolket och diakonin. Attityder till kyrkans diakoni i tre västsvenska församlingar*, Uppsala 1991 (Tro & Tanke 1991:6); Kragh, S.E. *Handling och ord må bli ett. En prästmötesavhandling i Karlstads stift om diakoni och diakonat*, Karlstad 1990; Bäckström, Anders. et al. *För att tjäna. En studie av diakoniuppfattningar hos kyrkliga befattningshavare*, Uppsala 1994 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1994:1) *Bekännelse, Gudstjänst, Kyrkomöte*, Uppsala 1998 (Svenska kyrkans Utredningar 1998:2).

in 1992 with a new one, which also made it possible to implement a new Church Ordinance. The 1992 legislation will be replaced in 2000, when the division between church and state will be implemented. The new Church Ordinance is intended to be the basis for the life of the church in the future. After more than 100 years of discussion the diaconate seems, in these texts, to have found its form. The Church Ordinance has been approved by the vast majority of parishes, diocesan chapters, ecclesial institutions and not least by the deacons themselves.³⁰

It seems that the new Church Ordinance presupposes the pastoral letter from the bishops in 1990 and the ordination rite of 1986 and that theologically it has not gone further than that. The rite itself says very little:

Bishop:

The church is God's people, Christ's body, a temple of living stones, Christ being the cornerstone. In this people of God, where we all are called through baptism to bring the gospel to the whole world, the deacon has a special office. A deacon shall go to see, help and support those who are in bodily and spiritual need, give Christian nurture and instruction in the Christian faith, be a sign of mercy in the congregation and in society, and in all serve Christ in his neighbour. A deacon shall live as the servant of Christ and help people to be models of the love of God. The deacon shall defend the rights of human beings, take sides with the oppressed and encourage

³⁰ See *Personal, tillsyn och överklagande. Svenska kyrkans organisation*, Uppsala 1998 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1998:6); *Förslag till kyrkoordning. Huvudbetänkande från utredningen om svenska kyrkans framtida organisation*, Uppsala 1998 (Svenska kyrkans utredningar 1998:1).

and liberate the people of God to do good, thereby making the love of God visible in the world. The office of a deacon will now be entrusted to you. Meet people tenderly and with respect. Together with them seek the way God wills and let it be your endeavour to let faith, doctrine and life become one.

The ordination rite thus presents us with yet another framework. Discussion in the Church of Sweden indicates that there is growing acceptance of a new profile for deacons, including social work, education in parishes and a new role in the liturgy, especially the Mass. As deacons are gaining a firm position within the framework of the threefold ministry, the diaconate is, on the one hand, taking a central position in church life as never before. Conversely, the debate which preceded the decisions by the General Assembly shows that there is a certain hesitation about the liturgical role of the deacon. This role is not covered by the Church ordinance itself, which does not mention it at all, except where it deals with the deacon's relations to priests and bishops, and stipulates what only bishops and priests exclusively can do. It stipulates, for example, that deacons are not allowed to preside at the Eucharist. Nothing is said, however, to prevent the deacon from carrying out his or her liturgical role.

The background for mentioning this, is that the introduction to the Church Ordinance, part 7 (On Church offices and positions) says that 'the office of deacon has a charitable direction' (*'karitative inriktning'*). Although this does not exclude other

emphases and contents in the ministry of deacons (education is mentioned in the texts) and although there is a statement that the tasks of deacons depend on the local context, there is a problem concerning the charitable character. It seems reasonable to expect that this will be the focus of future debates, since exactly this concentration on the charitable task of the deacon has been shown not to be in accordance with the New Testament and the Early Church.³¹

As is probably the case for all other traditions which have been dependent on nineteenth century German theology, the way forward for the diaconate in Sweden is a way towards a diaconate which is given its main task, building up and equipping the church, so that it can become what it is: the sacrament of Christ to the world.

³¹ Collins, John. *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, New York - Oxford 1990.

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