

CHAPTER 10

ORDER OF DEACONS

Deacon Ernie Nightingale

INTRODUCTION

An extract from the ordination liturgy for Deacons reads as follows, “Acting as agents of God’s love, deacons are to bring to the Church the concerns and hopes of all people. You are required to feed the flock of Christ, to nurse the sick, to care for the poor, to rescue the fallen, and to teach and preach the Word of God.... Above all, remember that Jesus Christ is the pattern of your calling; as He washed the feet of His disciples, so you must wash the feet of others.”

Deacons are enablers who model the servant ministry of Christ and help others to grow in fields of ministry and service. Deacons are authorised by Conference to represent Christ to the world in service and Word.

THE ROLE OF A DEACON

There is still uncertainty and confusion in the wider Methodist Church about the place and role of a deacon and this unfortunately leads to gifted and committed persons not being given adequate opportunities to exercise their calling in helping the Church respond to the needs of the wider community.

Deacons are mandated by Conference to;

- Recover the “*diakonia*” (*service, especially toward people in distress*) of the whole Body of Christ
- Imaginatively explore new possibilities for ministry, especially to those who are outside the church
- Be used as agents for an outward-focussed ministry
- Exercise leadership in mobilising the church to being a caring community of saints
- Proclaim the Word of God through teaching, preaching and service.

Deacons can bring an extra dimension to the ministry of a church and persons wishing to candidate for this Order should, in the first instance, explore their calling with their society minister and circuit superintendent minister. A clear understanding of a call to serve and of the type of service ministry that will be conducted is essential in avoiding possible role confusion.

ON BECOMING A METHODIST DEACON

All applications to candidate for the Order of Deacons must be processed through the office of the superintendent minister who will liaise with the Warden of the Order. The application procedure is available from EMMU, the Warden of the Order or the MCSA web-site. Applicants must be matriculated and have a deep sense of God’s call upon their lives. Applicants may candidate to become non-preaching deacons, i.e. those who believe that their ministry is of a more practical nature and that for them God’s Word can be adequately proclaimed through their acts of service. Those intending to be preachers must be on full-plan before being considered for ordination.

Deacons-in-training undertake both academic and practical studies and follow a syllabus set by EMMU and The Order that prepares them for ordination. Candidates over the age of 55 years are required to pay for their training.

There is no prescribed uniform for a deacon although most choose to wear the distinctive deacons' clerical collar in order to facilitate mission and pastoral opportunities especially in a context where there has been little or no contact with the MCSA.

ANNUAL CONVOCATION

The Convocation remains the highlight of the year for deacons. Deacons are members of a dispersed religious order (a group of people who make a life-long commitment to support and nurture each other in a shared discipline of the religious life) that follows its own Rule of Life.

Deacons meet at Convocation to transact the business of the Order (L & D Appendix 7); to foster and develop their calling as servant-ministers and to receive training relevant to their ministry. The Convocation met in Botha's Hill, near Durban, and this year was graced with the presence of the Presiding Bishop.

Attendance at Convocation is mandatory for all deacons. Circuits engaging deacons are required to pay towards the cost of travelling and accommodation. Candidates for the Order are required to attend Convocation prior to appearing before the Synod to share their testimony and call to diaconal ministry.

Convocation nominated Deacon Dr. Vernon van Wyk to become the Warden of the Order for the term 2012 – 2014.

CHALLENGES FOR THE MCSA

The changing demands of modern-day society and the growing needs of communities makes it imperative that the MCSA, through its various structures and organisations, is able to respond appropriately to the spiritual and social needs of such communities. For this to happen, Circuits and/or local Societies need to recognise the place for ministry and mission outside of their normal church structures and make provision for the appointment of a deacon.

The current proliferation of large shopping malls that attract thousands of people to them on a daily basis becomes fertile soil for ministry for a deacon appointed to work there. The growing prisons population is another under resourced ministry of the church that could be filled by a deacon. The challenges of working and ministering in informal settlements are huge and needs can best be met if opportunities for ministry are made available.

The Order of Deacons requests the MCSA to take seriously the appointment of more deacons in Societies and Circuits.

DEACONS IN MINISTRY

Many deacons have roles that include some aspects of chaplaincy. Their ministry is centred on local nursing homes, aged-care facilities, children's institutions or hospitals. They care for marginalized people and bring their concerns to the attention of the local church.

Deacons fulfil a meaningful role in exercising pastoral care and have specific ministry functions in their home-base church.

Some deacons are appointed to work in a Circuit context where an emphasis is placed on fieldwork and ministry to indigent communities. Whilst recognising the value of such appointments funding for those employed in Circuits remains problematic.

Societies employing non-stipendiary deacons need to ensure that all out-of-pocket expenses such as travelling, telephone and stationery costs are adequately reimbursed.

CONNEXIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Appreciation is expressed to the following members who serve on this Committee: Bishop Mike Vorster (chair), Revs. P Crundwell, S Bosman, Mesdames M Whitehead, A Orpwood, Deacons K Marsden, D Catchpole and E Nightingale (Warden). Deacon Kathy Marsden will step down from the committee this year and will be replaced by Deacon Vernon van Wyk. The other members are nominated for re-election to the Committee.

APPRECIATION

The Order is grateful for the many acts of selfless service and ministry offered by God's servants and thanks all who support this work in prayer or in kind.

Resolution to Conference

L & D Appendix 7 – Question 16: “Whom do we nominate to the Connexional Executive for appointment as Warden of the Order?”

The Convocation nominates Deacon Dr. Vernon van Wyk to become the Warden of the Order for the term 2012 - 2014.