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N.B. The material in this paper is being more fully developed in a book tentatively titled *Enabling Ministries: Helping the disconnected and the unconnected to explore and organise their spiritual needs.* by Anne Ranse and Don Jamieson.

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Exploring Diaconal Ministry — Paper 5

DEACONS BAPTISING

PREAMBLE

- Deacons are ordained to ministry.
- Deacons belong to 'a full and equal order'.
- Deacons are called to a servant ministry on the margins and boundaries of life.
- Deacons model diaconal ministry which belongs to the whole church.
- Deacon's ministries may not comfortably fit into parish or diocesan boundaries.
- Deacons can help to explore ministry responses to difficult issues faced by the church.

SCRIPTURE

In the text of the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 6) seven are called aside and the action of ordaining, the apostles laying on hands, is carried out. The term 'deacon' is not used but these seven are selected and set aside for the ministry of *diakonia*. F.F. Bruce seems certain that these seven were deacons and he points out that it would be reasonable for the name to develop from the ministry undertaken, hence deacon from *diakonia*. (Bruce, 1990 p 182)

Of the seven, Stephen and Philip are recorded as undertaking other ministries. Stephen's spirited defence of the gospel message leads to his martyrdom.

This discussion paper has been produced on behalf of the household of deacons of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

It is meant to be read in conjunction with the booklet, *A New Life in Christ: The Distinctive Ministry of the Deacon* (Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn, 2007)

If you would like to respond to any points or issues raised in this paper please contact the Ven. Anne Ranse whose contact details appear on the back panel.



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In the scourging of the church that follows, Philip goes to Samaria where he evangelises. Baptism is mentioned as part of the process of Philip's ministry in Acts 8.12. Then, more specifically, when Philip is guided to the eunuch and helps him to understand the words of the scriptures, baptism at Philip's hands follows as a natural part of his ministry. (Acts 8. 26-38) There is no sense of the need for him to send back to Jerusalem for someone else to carry out this baptism. Philip's words given by God provide the catalyst for a renewed belief and baptism automatically follows.

TRADITION

Many of the early deacons, numbered amongst the saints of the church, naturally included baptism in the ministry they undertook.

Owen Cunningham, in seeking to develop an understanding of a three-fold ministry of deacons as ministry to Altar, Word and Charity, particularly refers to Philip in the New Testament and Alcuin of York as deacons who baptised. (Cunningham, 2005, pp 13-14 and p 36)

Within the Church of England the historic ordinal of 1550 as revised in 1662 in *The Book of Common Prayer* indicates the need of deacons to baptise in the absence of the priest. The ordinal published in *The Alternative Service Book 1980* indicates that the deacon may baptise when required to do so. (*For Such a Time as This*, 2001, pp.6 and 8)

The Roman Catholic Church, during the discussions of Vatican II, foresaw the re-establishment of the order of deacons as a formal and full ministry in the church, without the need to see this as transitional to becoming a priest. Within this picture of permanent

deacons the church envisaged that the role would include 'the administration of baptism, assisting at and blessing marriages, bringing communion to the dying, proclaiming the scriptures, especially the gospel, and officiating at funerals.' (Cummings, 2005, p2)

Zagano in exploring the role of a deacon today emphatically indicates that a deacon can baptise. (Zagano, 2004, p.7)

Scripture, tradition and modern developments accept that baptism can be included in the natural ministry of a deacon.

BAPTISM AND DEACONS TODAY.

A Prayer Book for Australia is quite specific about certain parts of the service being priestly and says so in the rubrics. However when it comes to the baptism itself the rubric reads 'The minister baptises by dipping the candidates in the water, or pouring water over them, saying ...' (Paragraph 23 p 59.) (Paragraph 16 p 78)

Our prayer book is seen as the particular instrument of worship at a particular time and noting the changes from 1662 to 1978 to 1995 it is very much a document which reflects the way the ministry of the church is changing to meet the needs of its members and to reflect the changing patterns of ministry. Also as it was being developed so to was the renewed concept of deacons.

Our diocese reflects this 'living document' approach, particularly in Baptism, where the former Bishop, the Rt Rev'd George Browning, encouraged deacons to model an approach to baptism which more openly involved the family, and the godparents. His encouragement was often made for deacons to try to create an event, a place, a space in which the people and God might meet and do the spiritual things together,

rather than this sacrament being seen as something which the minister does for others.

Perhaps the most important assessment of whether deacons should baptise, is seen in whether it flows as a natural part of a deacon's ministry at that moment in time. There is some logic in an expectation that a deacon working with people on the margins or boundaries should carry through with a ministry of baptism if that is part of a natural flow. Drawing people into a place where they can meet with God in a spiritually changing event needs that natural flow. This seems to be the approach Philip adopted in Acts with both the Samaritans and the eunuch.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

It is interesting that following the development of belief and the drawing of the Samaritans into a gathered group (which became church) Philip moved on and Peter and John who had a more priestly/episcopal role moved into the Samaritan situation. This further develops the concept of the deacon ministering on the margins. and the priest ministering to the gathered community. (Acts 8.4-40.)

WILL ALL DEACONS BAPTISE?

This paper does not advocate that all deacons must baptise as a part of their ministry. However it does advocate that baptism should naturally flow where the deacon's vocation leads people on the margins or boundaries toward the point of belief.

The other instance of a deacon needing to baptise would arise in a situation where death is imminent and the deacon is more readily available.