



## DEACONS IN PLACE

### Deacons are people who have

- ✦ experienced a call from God;
- ✦ explored and tested that calling;
- ✦ undertaken approved and appropriate training and
- ✦ been ordained.

### HOW DEACONS MINISTER

With an eye to the ministry of God as expressed in the concept of the Trinity, the church seeks to explore the specific role of deacons in relationship with that of priests, bishops and the laity. Thus a complementary style of ministry is seen to be developing among all who serve God and community, in a way which mirrors the ministry of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. James Barnett refers to the Diaconate as 'a full and equal order' in both title and text of his book *The Diaconate: A full and equal order*. (revised edition, Trinity Press, Pennsylvania 1995)

### WHERE DEACONS MINISTER

Deacons are particularly called to minister to people

- ✦ who may be marginalised,
- ✦ who might well be on the boundaries and

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fringes of life and experience,

- ✦ who may be beyond the the current sight of the church or,
- ✦ who may be beyond its capacity to reach.

These people are never beyond the sight of God. The church is being stirred to find models of ministry which reach out in love, advocacy and service to them.

This diaconal ministry role is not exclusive to deacons, as many lay people minister in these roles as well. When deacons are ordained they become models and encouragers of diaconal ministry.

## WHERE THE DEACON FITS IN

Bishops are primarily called to lead and shepherd people in the church. Priests are primarily called to lead and care for the gathered communities. Deacons are primarily called to minister to people who rarely fit within the comfortable boundaries of parishes and dioceses. This raises issues which can be uncomfortable for both deacons and the gathered church.

Deacons may be called to serve

- ✦ older people confined to homes or aged care facilities,
- ✦ groups of homeless people,
- ✦ people with mental health issues,
- ✦ street kids and
- ✦ numerous groups who wander the world's stage but largely go unnoticed or unnoted by church, community and government.

## ISSUES AND DILEMMAS

The renewal of the diaconate raises uncomfortable issues for some members of the church. There is uncertainty as to the effect deacons will have on other orders in the church.

As a church we are constantly being faced with contentious ministry issues. The renewal of the diaconate fits with ministry issues such as

- ✦ the movement of women into priestly and episcopal roles,
- ✦ ministry to and by homosexual people, and
- ✦ the role of church in politics, and
- ✦ the discontent of people who feel 'pushed away' by the church.

These issues tax the minds of the church and not all solutions will sit comfortably with all members of the church. The development of the diaconate may well be a less uncomfortable area for the church to explore issues of change and new models of ministry that may then be applied to other dilemmas.

## The Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

The Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn has taken a leading role in promoting diaconal ministry to the Anglican Church of Australia. This is due in no small part to the leadership of the former diocesan bishop, the Rt. Rev. George Browning. He helped in the development of diaconate in Brisbane and then encouraged it in this diocese. Other figures who have played major roles were Jeffrey Driver and Stephen Pickard who both now serve as bishops in Adelaide.

The prominent role of St Mark's National Theological Centre, both as a major theological training resource

and as a main player in the theological training of deacons for the Australian Church, is another factor.

The appointment of the Ven. Anne Ranse as archdeacon to the deacons has been instrumental in keeping the issues of diaconate in front of senior staff and parishes. Archdeacon Ranse has become the person to whom deacons in many Australian dioceses look for comfort, care and encouragement. Anne has also been able to effectively encourage debate on many diaconal issues in the Australian church.

## SERIES OF PAPERS

This is the first in a series of short papers that seeks to encourage the exploration of issues raised by the renewal of the diaconate in the church of today.

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

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