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## **ORDAINED DEACONS AND THE SACRAMENTS IN THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION.**

This paper has been prepared for the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in order to clarify the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's understanding of the relationship between Ordained Deacons and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. The necessity for this discussion paper arises out of a number of requests, which have come from the Convocation of the Order of Deacons, to allow Deacons to preside over the sacraments (particularly the sacrament of Holy Communion).

### **2. A MODEL OF MINISTRY IN THE MCSA.**

The Triune God is the model for Church life and ministry. Understanding that the Triune God is a loving communion of three co-equal persons the Church should mirror that reality by being a community of mutual love and support "in which there is no superiority or inferiority". The British Methodist Church expresses this relational ecclesiology succinctly in the following quote:

Interdependent partners exist in a community where they lovingly interweave and also retain a distinctive individuality. The image of these three persons engaged in a dance conveys something of the dynamic involved. All Methodist people, including those in ordained ministry, are called to such a community life.<sup>1</sup>

As a principle of governance and practise the Methodist Church has affirmed the 'Priesthood of all believers'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co\\_what\\_is\\_a\\_deacon0704.doc](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_what_is_a_deacon0704.doc) (accessed 10 March 2007, 10.13am), *What is a Deacon?* 2004, (p.1).

<sup>2</sup> In particular the 'Journey to a New Land' process sought to bring about full and active participation in, and recognition of, laity in the various ministries of the Church. The desired outcome was a Church that reflected the diversity and giftedness of a wide variety of ministries and vocations, affirming the leadership role and responsibility of both lay and ordained ministers. Perhaps this can be most clearly evidenced in the important role that the Connexional Lay President plays in the structures and

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The Church is the company of the disciples of Jesus, consisting of those who confess Him as their Saviour and Lord, love one another and unite with those who serve the coming of His Rule on earth.<sup>3</sup>

The MCSA upholds the co-equal and mutually dependent role of lay and ordained ministers, yet accords a special responsibility those who are called and set aside to the ordained ministries.

Christ's ministers in the Church are stewards in the household of God, and shepherds of His flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation, and have a principal and directing part in these great duties.<sup>4</sup>

Within the ambit of the ordained ministries the MCSA recognises and ordains presbyters (persons called to the ministry of word and sacrament)<sup>5</sup>, and deacons (persons called to the ministry of word and service)<sup>6</sup>. With regards to the ministry of the laity the MCSA recognises and affirms the various, and important, ministries of lay Christians with particular clauses in its Laws and Discipline relating to Lay Preachers<sup>7</sup>, the order of Bible Women<sup>8</sup>, and the order of Evangelists<sup>9</sup>.

Together laity and clergy bear the responsibility for participating with God in God's mission of working for a "Christ healed Africa for the healing of the nations"<sup>10</sup>.

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functions of the leadership of the MCSA. The current lay leader, who serves alongside the Presiding Bishop, is Mrs Bahombisile Mkwanzazi.

<sup>3</sup> *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (para. 1.2, p.1).

<sup>4</sup> *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (para. 1.19, p.7).

<sup>5</sup> *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (para. 1.21, p.8).

<sup>6</sup> *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (para. 18.18, p.185).

<sup>7</sup> Often referred to as Local Preachers, cf. *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 10.9-10.12, pp.131-138).

<sup>8</sup> cf. *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 20.1-20.8, pp.194-200).

<sup>9</sup> cf. *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 19.1-19.25, pp.188-193).

<sup>10</sup> *The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2007 yearbook and directory*. 2007. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (p.2).

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As a result the Church's structures and models of ministry are to reflect this mutual responsibility and high calling as shaped through the 7 "continuing transformation calls" and "four mission imperatives"<sup>11</sup>.

Thus the only context in which the ministries of ordained deacons and presbyters can be rightly understood is that of the calling of all people, lay and ordained, to participate equally, yet distinctly, in God's mission in the world. The distinct ministries of deacons and presbyters thus serve to express, enable, and focus the ministry of the whole people of God. Traditionally the ordained ministry has had three primary functions:

- **Participation** in the ministry and mission of the Church as a disciple along with all other disciples.
- **Coordinating** the other disciples in their worship and mission, as a primary focus of their vocation.
- **Equipping** all disciples for mission and worship.

The following excerpt from the Methodist ordination service expresses this charge and responsibility clearly, whilst recognising the complimentary and equally valuable role of laity in ministry<sup>12</sup>.

Beloved in Christ, you are to be ordained into the Ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ. All Christians are called to share in Christ's ministry of love and service for the healing and renewal of humanity and all creation. As ordained ministers you are called to share in this ministry of the whole Church in a particular way:

By preaching and teaching the Word of God as expressed in Holy Scripture;

By rightly administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion<sup>13</sup>;

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<sup>11</sup> *The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2007 yearbook and directory*. 2007. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (p.2).

<sup>12</sup> This excerpt is taken from the ordination liturgy of the MCSA. It has been in common usage since 1999, which is the earliest copy of an ordination liturgy I was able to find in our Education for Ministry and Mission Unit (EMMU) offices.

<sup>13</sup> This form of words, which dates from 1999, only mentions ordination to the word and sacrament. In subsequent liturgies there is reference to ordination to the ministry of word and service. The first

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By leading God's people in worship and prayer;  
By leading people to faith in Jesus Christ and training them in the same;  
By your counsel, direction and vision, giving order and purpose to the life of the congregation;  
By leading in the ministry of care to the troubled in spirit, in which all may share;  
By demonstrating in your character, words and deeds the indiscriminate, forgiving, healing and transforming love of God in Christ Jesus.  
For this Ministry, let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who took the form of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.

I shall go on to discuss the distinct character of the ministry of a deacon in the heading that follows. However, the ministry of an ordained presbyter can be characterised under three headings:

- The ministry of the **word**: This includes formal and informal preaching, teaching, apologetics, theological and prophetic interpretation of the scriptures, the tradition of the Christian faith, and human experience within a given context.
- The ministry of the **sacraments**: This includes presiding at acts of celebration baptism (and of course in the wider ambit of sacramental acts, confirmation) and the Eucharist (often referred to as 'Holy Communion' in Southern African Methodist Churches).
- The work of **pastoral responsibility**: This includes oversight, discipline, direction and general pastoral care.<sup>14</sup>

All such ministry is **service**; service to God, service to the Church, and service to the world. It is the pattern of Christ's ministry and so must be evident in the ministry of every believer, and every presbyter. However, as shall be seen, the call and ordination to the ministry of word and service has some particular distinctiveness that

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combined ordination for deacons and presbyters took place in Pretoria at the University of Pretoria Studentekerk in 2003. Before that date presbyters and deacons were ordained in separate services (as is alluded to in L&D, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition, 18.18, p.185).

<sup>14</sup> *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 1.19, p.7 and 4.78-4.83, pp.38-39).

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sets it apart from the general attitude and characteristic of service shall should be evidenced in the ministries of ordained presbyters.

### **3. AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISTINCTIVE MINISTRY OF THE ORDAINED DEACON IN THE MCSA.**

By way of introduction to this distinctive form of ministry, among the ministries of the laity and presbyters, there are a number of shared and common characteristics that can be pointed out. Firstly, deacons share in the common expectation of discipleship and servant ministry that is common to all Christians. Secondly, the ministry of the deacon is a chosen expression of, and response to, God's calling upon the life of a person in fulfilling God's mission in the world. The particular emphasis that must be taken into account at this point is that the ministry of a deacon is interpedently related to the ministries of the laity and presbyters, and thus no form of ministry can have priority over the others.

However, there are distinctive elements to this ministry that set it apart from the ministries of the laity and ordained presbyters. Most notable is that the discipleship of a deacon is marked by representative selection. Whereas some Christian denominations see ordination as a deacon as a 'stepping stone' to being ordained as a presbyter, the MCSA views ordination to the ministry of word and service as a terminal expression of obedience to a distinctive calling to the ministry of word and service, and not as 'passageway' to the ordination to word and sacrament. This is a crucial theological distinction. It drives home the point made above that God has called all persons to rigorous discipleship in worship and mission, yet within that God has called certain individuals to distinctive ministries that are necessary to achieving God's mission in the world, through the Church. The logical conclusion of this theological position is that the Church could not adequately function without the ministries of lay disciples or ordained disciples. Moreover, that lay and ordained persons are called to distinctive, equal, and interdependent ministries within the Church for the adequate fulfilment of God's mission in the world. Within this view the ordination of a deacon may be referred to as a 'representative ordination'.

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Since a deacon is called expressly to the ministry of word and service, he or she is to offer visible expression of the ministry of service in a representative manner that focuses on the nature and meaning of servant ministry, and encourages other to take on the responsibility of servant ministry with greater effectiveness in their own daily lives.

Thus the deacon's primary responsibility, as an ordained minister of word and service, is to enable others through service. Of course this requires that the deacon engage in such acts of Christian service as to model the servant ministry of Christ. Sometimes he or she will need to pioneer such work, breaking new ground (for example in the AIDS hospice, or the classroom, or in an orphanage etc.) Deacons will often need specialist skills to perform this task adequately. However, the expectation of the Church is that they will work collaboratively with laypersons and presbyters, helping them to develop their gifts of service. Deacons are authorised by Conference to be public persons, representing Christ to the world in service and word. Their desire should be to constantly find ways to serve the Kingdom of God in the world through who they are and what they do. I shall develop this point under the heading that follows.

#### **4. THE DEACON AS 'EMISSARY SERVANT'.**

Among Biblical scholars there has long been a common understanding that the Greek word *diakonia* should be translated as 'ministry' or 'service'. You will find this commonly accepted translation in most English translations of the New Testament (cf. Romans 11:13, 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:5). Accordingly the related words, *diakonos* and *diakonon* that refer to the person doing *diakonia* are usually translated "servant", "deacon", or "minister". Hartley, however, points out that in contemporary biblical scholarship and theology there is emerging consensus that the word *diakon*, which is most often related to 'everyday acts of service' is not adequately understood, and so something of the distinctiveness of this form of

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ministry is lost by its adoption and common usage in contemporary Christianity<sup>15</sup>.

Whilst there is little doubt that the notion of service and ministry are clearly communicated by these words in the original Greek, there may have been a loss of emphasis of the original identity of such servants in the Greek usage of these words. In their original form they would have been seen as ‘representatives’, ‘emissaries’, or ‘spokespersons’<sup>16</sup>. Thus Hartley argues that the term ‘emissary’ is “gaining recognition as a complementary interpretation for the traditional ‘servant’ designation for *diakonos* and related terms”<sup>17</sup>.

Paul's use of *diakonos* to refer to himself (1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4, 11:23;) is one of the more obvious pieces of evidence for a more nuanced understanding of the term. In these passages, Paul emphasizes his authority as God's emissary or *diakonos*.<sup>18</sup>

Such a translation does not negate the traditional translation of *diakonos* as a servant minister, rather it adds a richer nuance to the term that helps us to better understand the theological role and function of such a person within the early Church, and so develop a clearer theology of the ministry of a deacon in the contemporary Church. Hartley gives the following commentary on such an understanding of the deacon.

As an emissary-servant from God the deacon “points” to the source and authority for his or her servant ministry. John Collins states that in

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000 (p.4).

<sup>16</sup> For examples of this see Conzelman who offers this translation in his *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, translated by James W. Leitch. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 208. John Collins argues that the more modern and limited translation of *diakon* as "service" is the result of 19th century deaconess movements in Germany and the subsequent definition of *diakonia* by H.W. Beyer in *Kittel's Theological Dictionary*. The proceedings from the 1992 symposium by the North American Association for the Deaconate document this growing recognition. Craighill, P., *Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present, & Future*, (Providence, RI: NAAD, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000 (p.4).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000 (p.4).

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ancient times emissaries (diakonoi) were often sent by a king or other high-ranking individuals to transact business on the ruler's behalf.<sup>19</sup>

This view of the deacon as an 'emissary servant' could be of some value in understanding the unique and distinct relationship that the ordained deacon has in relation to the ministry of word and service, and the ministry of word and sacrament, in the MCSA.

##### **5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DEACON AS 'EMISSARY SERVANT' AND THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH<sup>20</sup>.**

The argument made in previous points has been that a primary characteristic of the deacon's ordination is to serve as a select representative of the servant ministry of Christ. Secondly, it has been argued that a more nuanced translation of the Biblical Greek phrase *diakonos* suggests not only the characteristic of service, but more particularly the notion of a representative servant, in this context an 'emissary servant' who is sent to represent the king, bringing into focus the nature and will of the king. One of the sad realities of the Church is that the character of the ordained ministry is often reduced simply to a list of weekly functional tasks. Sadly, this reduction is then transferred to become the primary identity of the presbyter or deacon. Thirdly, and essential to the line of argument in this paper, is the notion that the ministries of laypersons, ordained presbyters, and ordained deacons are interdependent and co-equal (reflecting the triune model of service in the Godhead).

It is worth noting that while the deacon shares much of his or her ministerial functions with the lay and presbyteral ministries (e.g., visiting the sick, counselling the conflicted, teaching, preaching, encouraging) these ministries take on a richer and deeper meaning in the context of the representative and focussing emphasis of the ministry of word and service. Through ordination the deacon is recognised by the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000 (p.4).

<sup>20</sup> The thoughts in this section, and previous sections, are shaped and formed by the superb article by Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000.



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Church, and given authority, to bring into focus the true nature of servanthood in ministry.

The deacon, as a representative of God, has the noble and onerous task of making the servant ministry of Christ present to God's people, literally, the deacon *represents*, i.e. makes present, the grace of the servant Christ in the Church and world. When an ordained person performs a liturgical function, they do so in order to highlight exclusive privileges (e.g., the presbyter as the celebrant of the sacrament represents the theological position that as a minister he or she is called to serve, not to be served). This role has traditionally been reflected in the liturgy of the Church where the deacon is traditionally charged with saying the prayers of intercession in a public service of worship. As an emissary representative the deacon is the 'go between' to bring the concerns of the people to God.

Understood within this context the ordained deacon has a very particular, distinct, and necessary relationship to the sacraments of the Church.

### *Baptism*

A common misunderstanding in the contemporary Church is that ministry stems primarily from calling. Whilst a calling, and the subsequent recognition and affirmation of that calling by ordination, is essential to ministry (whether lay, or ordained), it is not the primary entry into faithful ministry; baptism is primary sign of entry into the Church, and so commences the process of discipleship in ministry and mission<sup>21</sup>. According to L&D 1.11 (10<sup>th</sup> Edition) baptism calls the believer to a life-long response of faith, with sanctification and growth in service forming a central focus of this response. Deacons represent this high calling as a reminder to all believers of their responsibility for faith filled response expressed in Christ-like service in the Church and the world. Thus, while the presbyter celebrates the sacrament, it is the deacon who enacts this means of grace as an actualised symbol of

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<sup>21</sup> cf. *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 1.11, p.4) that describes the nature and purpose of baptism a proclaiming "God's grace...", looking "...forward to life-long growth into Christ in the fellowship of the Church. It calls for the response of faith which is also a life long process".

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faith-filled change. The life and ‘representative ordained ministry’ of the deacon displays servant attitude of Christ in real terms reminding the Christian community of her call to serve.

### *Holy Communion*

In the early Church the noble responsibility of extending the love of Christ to the poor and needy at the Eucharistic feast revolved largely around the deacon’s action during the celebration. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries deacons are recorded as being responsible not only for accepting the love gifts and offerings brought during the liturgical service of the Eucharist, but also for distributing these gifts of food and clothes to the poor. As we will remember the *agape* meal that followed the celebration of the Eucharist was always a time of fellowship and solidarity in the early Church, a moment in which the love of Christ, and the unity of Christ’s body was made tangible, through sharing in a common meal.

The liturgical act of Holy Communion and the Church’s charity for those in need were seen as one single act of grace, and the role of the deacon in that celebration was of central importance. The deacon not only performed the necessary and practical function of ministering to the needs of the poor, he also embodied the unifying reality of worship as service to the world. Sadly, as the character of the Church has changed, from being a marginalised homogenous community, to the powerful Church of post-Constantinian society, so too has the character of her charity. Churches seldom enact the grace of the Eucharist as a feast of solidarity and unity in the suffering and eschatological hope of Christ with their poor neighbours (people who are known and who are part of the community), rather, the Church has objectified charity by collecting for a nameless group of people who do not sit at the same Eucharistic table. Early Methodists, of course, practised a form of *agape* meal in the ‘love feast’. It was seen as a place of solidarity, support, and Christian responsibility. The connection between the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s reign in justice was common in the early Church’s understanding of the theology of the Eucharist. The anticipated shalom of equity, justice and provision for all, that would

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be realised in the *eschaton*, at the return of Christ, is perhaps most clearly expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:26 that reads, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death **until he comes**” (NRSV, emphasis mine). The following Wesleyan Hymn also illustrates this connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the eschatological hope of the heavenly banquet:

O that all men would haste  
To the spiritual feast,  
At Jesus’s word  
Do this, and be fed with the love of our Lord!

Bring near the glad day  
When all shall obey  
Thy dying request,  
And eat of Thy supper, and lean on Thy breast.

Then, then let us see  
Thy glory, and be  
Caught up in the air,  
This heavenly supper in heaven to share<sup>22</sup>.

The hope for the coming age expressed in this Eucharistic hymn is not empty with promise. Rather, Wesley expressed this hope in tangible acts of service and ministry to the poor. Since, as Wainwright rightly points out, the Eucharist is a “representation of the Kingdom in the world; it is impossible to lock up the Kingdom in the Church, it is equally impossible to make this sacrament of the Kingdom a purely churchly event.”<sup>23</sup> Hartley suggests<sup>24</sup> that one of the most powerful moments of the celebration of the Eucharist are the prayers of dismissal and the benediction which not only anticipates the coming of God’s eschatological reign in the world, “We thank you, Lord, that you have fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all people”; but also

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<sup>22</sup> From Wesley's Hymns on the Lord's Supper, no 92, vv. 8,10,12, in Wainwright, G, *Eucharist and Eschatology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p.129.

<sup>23</sup> Wainwright, G, *Eucharist and Eschatology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p.131.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hartley, BL, 2000. Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology in *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999-2000 (pp.9-10). Hartley goes on to explain in some detail how the deacon plays an integral liturgical function in each element of the Eucharistic celebration. The preparation, the celebration, and the commissioning of the congregation all have unique theological significance, focusing on servant mission, when a presbyter and a deacon share in the liturgy of Holy Communion.

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send the gathered community into the world for service, “Go therefore in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God’s praise and glory”<sup>25</sup>.

It is primarily the deacon who can help the congregation to make the fundamental connection between worship and service. Hence, the deacons’ representative ministry, and historic connection to service among the poor and needy, is a challenge to contemporary deacons to live in the eschatological tension of the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of God’s kingdom reign. This is a unique and special responsibility that no other minister in the Church can fulfil, whether it be a lay minister or a presbyter.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND THOUGHTS.**

As is mentioned in the introduction above, this paper came about as a result of the numerous request by the Convocation of the Order of Deacons for the MCSA to investigate giving dispensation to ordained deacons to preside over the sacraments (particularly the sacrament of Holy Communion). From my own investigations into this issue the request seems to have arisen from a pragmatic concern among deacons in the MCSA that there are Christian persons, who are baptised, who are experiencing ‘sacramental starvation’ because of the lack of availability of presbyters to administer the sacrament (whether through the pressure of pastoral demand, or unwillingness to engage in pastoral care) to those who want and desire to receive it. This is a real concern in a Church that relies so heavily on lay leadership. My own experience has been that a minister in a rural setting could serve as many as 20 societies, an impossible load to bear without any assistance.

Sadly, those who do not receive the sacrament are often left unattended because they may be too ill or elderly to come to a Church service. Deacons, who are primarily engaged in the ministry of service, are often called to care for, and attend to, such persons. Yet, they feel frustrated and saddened that they cannot fulfil an important ecclesiastical function by presiding over the sacrament in crucial places and

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<sup>25</sup> *The Methodist Worship Book*. 1999. St Ives, Peterborough, p.197.

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times. What complicates matters even more is that ministers in training, who are not yet ordained (i.e., by virtue of the fact that they are not yet ordained, it must be concluded that they are lay persons, receive dispensation to administer the sacraments), are entitled to administer the sacraments whilst ordained deacons may not<sup>26</sup>.

As I have pondered this conundrum I have come to identify a number of problems, misunderstandings, and unfortunate areas of ‘theological gymnastics’ that have lead us to this point of struggle.

- Firstly, I am convinced that there is a problem with agency as it relates to ministers of the word and sacrament. There is clearly a serious need for increased agency in the Church. The Church needs to find more creative ways of licensing and ordaining persons who can preside over the sacraments without destroying the integrity of the ordained presbyteral ministry as a distinct and necessary expression of God’s mission for the Church in the world. Simply to allow deacons to preside over the sacraments would not only erode the distinctive ministry of presbyters, it will also dilute the distinct and necessary emphases of the ministry of deacons within the Church.
- Secondly, I believe that there is a general feeling that ministries of lay persons, deacons, and presbyters are not equally recognised and valued within the Church. It would seem that some persons regard deacons as ‘second class’ presbyters! This is a sad reality that shows great ignorance of the high calling and distinct theological rationale behind this Christ-reflecting ministry. It may be necessary to consider doing some training and teaching in the Church to help lay persons, and clergy (and even Bishops) to understand that ordination as a deacon is a particular response to the call to Christian discipleship in mission and worship, and that this ordination is equally valuable and valid as an expression of faithful ministry in the Church and the world. The Church

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<sup>26</sup> cf. *Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Tenth Edition*. 2000. Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, (paras. 4.39, p.30).

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cannot perform its mission fully without deacons. It may even be necessary to spend some time training our deacons in order to help them fully understand their necessary and distinct role as agents of ministry and mission in the Church.

- Thirdly, I am fairly certain that the decision to allow probationer ministers (often referred to as student ministers) to administer the sacraments with dispensation is motivated primarily by pragmatic, rather than theological, concerns. Perhaps this is not the best solution to a pragmatic need since it seems to require some theological gymnastics to sustain the position of ordaining persons to the ministry of word and sacrament, yet at the same time allowing un-ordained persons to administer the sacrament as a matter of course<sup>27</sup> consistently in the face of requests from both ordained, and lay, ministers in the Church to be granted the same dispensation under particular circumstances.
- Fourthly, I would encourage individual deacons, presbyters, and lay ministers, to consider very seriously the solemn call that God has placed upon their lives. If a deacon or lay minister is called to administer the sacraments, he or she should consider applying to train towards ordination for that form of ministry in the Church. I wish to emphasize again that each of the forms of ministry in the Church are necessary, interdependent, and of equal and immeasurable value in achieving God's mission for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. We need more deacons, more committed lay persons exercising their ministries, and more presbyters.

In conclusion, I believe that it not be advisable to make allowances for deacons to administer the sacraments in order to satisfy a pragmatic concern. I am of the mind that our theology, and in particular our ecclesiology, is clear in this regard. If we

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<sup>27</sup> While the Laws and Discipline does stipulate that dispensation is to be granted for exceptional circumstances upon request of the Superintendent and District Bishop to the Presiding Bishop, the usage of this dispensation has become commonplace. As far as I am aware all probationer ministers receive dispensation as a matter of course (with the exception of those stationed at the seminary). In some instances a probationer minister will receive dispensation to administer the sacrament even when he or she serves in a team ministry with other ordained ministers in the same society. Clearly we no longer apply dispensation as an extraordinary measure.

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require more persons to administer the sacraments let us earnestly seek ways to increase capacity among presbyteral ministry. Moreover, let us not do so at the expense of the very necessary and distinct theological expressions of representative, emissary, service that is so characteristic of the ministry of an ordained deacon.