

Structural Change in Ministry

(A report on behalf of the Standing Committee.)

Introduction

1. At the Synod last year, a presentation was made about the future shape of ministry within the Diocese. Subsequently, by resolution 29/03, the Synod encouraged the Standing Committee and its Mission Taskforce to consider such proposals further. It specifically encouraged consideration of matters such as the permanence of ministry (including whether “ordination” as a minister is temporary or permanent), the ministry of deacons, and proposals for lay stipendiary workers.
2. At the request of the Standing Committee, the Mission Taskforce considered these proposals and, in particular, options for structural change of ministry within the Diocese.
3. The following is the substance of the Mission Taskforce’s report to the Standing Committee, together with the comments about the Standing Committee’s response to the Mission Taskforce’s recommendation.

The Need

4. The existing pattern of ordained ministry does not give sufficient elasticity or flexibility for the Mission. Alternative patterns of ministry (eg lay stipendiary workers) have evolved to meet the need for greater flexibility. The present pattern uses specific promises in ordination - relating to a particular view of the role of ordained ministry. Except in the case of women, we ordain deacons with a view to them becoming priests and incumbents.
5. Though there are many other ministries than incumbency that are needed in the modern parish, we have refused to ordain deacons who are suitable for other paid ministry (eg youth workers) unless they are to become incumbents. We need suitable recognition for these ministries by both the church and the society. The present pattern is good for recognition but poor in flexibility.
6. Candidates need a clearer, more transparent career path to make reasonable choices in their preparation for ministry. Theological colleges, selectors, and training advisors need a simpler more coherent pattern of ministry to prepare and advise candidates appropriately.

The Options

7. Given the possibly undesirable and politically impossible option of changing the threefold orders of the Anglican Church of Australia, three other options for a structural change in ministry have been canvassed. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. There are

two important criteria to consider in each option: flexibility and recognition.

A new order of ministry

8. The option of creating a new order of ministry has been discussed widely. This would give us the greatest flexibility as the new order could be constructed in any way that we wished. However it has some problems in recognition.

9. The new order could be called "pastors" or "ministers". "Minister" is preferable as "pastor" is used so widely in a therapeutic sense within the community at large as well as in church circles. "Minister" is a wider term with greater elasticity. "Pastor" has a particular emphasis that would not cover all the ministries contemplated eg evangelist. "Minister" is also a word that the community understands and has recognition value. However much of our legislation and liturgy already uses "minister", so it would involve considerable work to make this change, whereas pastor is not in our liturgy or legislation and so would be easier to insert into our system.

10. Any new order of ministry would need community recognition. This would mean the creation of sufficient standards in the theology, morality, and competency to accredit somebody as an Anglican minister of the Diocese of Sydney. Thus the "minister" would need the same tokens of community recognition (be called the Rev, listed in the year book, etc).

11. However a new order of ministers would have no provincial, national or international Anglican recognition. It would therefore not be recognised by Provincial or General Synod. It would not enable somebody to move from this diocese elsewhere. It would in particular mean that our women ministers like our women deaconesses of yesteryear would not be accepted as episcopally ordained.

Expansion of the Order of Deacon

12. Alternatively we could retain the use of the word deacon, and ordain people to this existing order of ministry, but widen the scope of its work and limit the expectation of it leading to incumbency (or ordination to the presbyterate). This would solve most of the recognition problems. The person would be a minister in any sense that a deacon is now a minister both liturgically and legally. They would be recognised by both the community and the Anglican world. It would make movement out of our diocese simpler. It would certainly make more sense of the role of women deacons if there was a permanent diaconate, which comprised more than women.

13. The problems lie in the flexibilities and career consequences of such an expansion. What standards (theological, moral, ministry competencies) are we now going to set for the wider group - especially as there will be a diversity of ministries with a consequent diversity of

theological and competency requirements? The diaconate has built into it the Anglican ambiguity over the indelibility of orders that a new ministry order could avoid in its founding legislation. However time limited licenses and the creation of an easy way to resign one's orders may make this less of a problem.

14. The Ordinal assumes that deacon will not be a permanent role. In it we pray that the deacons will by "... the testimony of a good conscience, and continuing ever stable and strong in thy Son Christ, may so well behave themselves in this inferior office, that they may be found worthy to be called unto the higher ministries of thy Church; ...". The final rubric states "if he be found faithful and diligent, he may be admitted by his Diocesan to the order of Priesthood". Not unreasonably the expectation is that having been made a deacon, the next step on the way to incumbency is to be ordained a priest and unless there is some major impediment that such an ordination will follow as a matter of course.

15. The ordinal does have a diversity of activities in mind for the Deacon "to assist the Priest in Divine Service, and specially when he ministereth the holy Communion, and to help him in his distribution thereof, and to read holy Scriptures and Homilies in the Church; and to instruct the youth in the Catechism; in the absence of the Priest to baptise infants; and to preach, if he be admitted thereto by the bishop. And furthermore, it is his office, where provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish, to intimate their estates, names and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortations they may be relieved with the alms of the Parishioners, or others". This is not exactly the diversity of ministries that we may have now in mind but it does go toward legitimising the idea of a diverse diaconate - especially as the ordinal itself does not assume that all deacons will do all the tasks mentioned (eg preaching). What it does do is place the ministry of the word and sacraments at the heart of what a deacon does be it as a youth worker or a children's worker a school a hospital or a prison chaplain, or the music minister or parish evangelist. That helps avoid ordaining everybody including the cleaner and the gardener.

16. The problem of the expectation for deacons to become priests and/or incumbents could be met by raising the prerequisites for ordination to the presbyterate and appointment to incumbency. Thus we could require all who are to be ordained priest to have finished their Masters, the After College Training program, demonstrated their ability to be pastorally responsible for a congregation and pass a theological review. Prerequisites like this would help people see that there is a different ministry in being a deacon to being a presbyter, that there is a clear career path to follow if one wishes to become and incumbent, and to make the training of future incumbents a more intentional.

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17. However delaying ordination to the presbyterate increases pressure on the issue of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper.

Expansion of "Lay Stipendiary Worker"

18. As third alternative is to lay the path where people are already walking by leaving the ordination process where it is and expanding the scope and recognition of lay stipendiary workers (LSW).

19. At the moment there are a large number of parochial workers whose ministry is predicated solely upon the rector's approval. There are also diocesan LSW who have been trained and screened and commissioned within diocesan systems. The Archbishop is not under as much pressure to appoint these people to incumbency as he is with those who are already ordained. The LSW do a great diversity of Christian work. And at the level of flexibility is great as there are no structure or requirements and so there is great capacity for innovation and evolution.

20. However there is no clear recognition in this work or a clear career path to follow. There is not recognition in the community. There is very little recognition in the church community. There is no Anglican recognition outside of the diocese. While there is a friendly rector there is a job but beyond that there is only insecurity. It makes training for the future very difficult.

21. The title itself "Lay Stipendiary Worker" is an unmanageable mouthful, and will need changing if we are to persist with this as the main way of encouraging a wider ministry. There is also very little quality control over the theology morality or ministry competencies. It is relatively simple to make change in this area as it is only by licence that LSW are appointed. However as it is the flexible market sensitive evolution of modern ministry it may be doubted that central standards or licensing will have much effect. Churches can employ pretty well whomever they want and can organise superannuation etc without any reference to the Diocese.

Mission Taskforce's Recommendation

22. Having considered the 3 options referred to in this report, the Mission Taskforce considered that the second option, namely the expansion of the order of deacon, is to be preferred.

23. Accordingly the Mission Taskforce recommended that a motion be moved at the forthcoming session of the Synod by which the Synod might request that the Archbishop, by licence, broaden the range of ministries for which people are made deacons and that he put in place such additional arrangements as are necessary to create this as a permanent diaconate by -

- (a) developing new selection standards for deacons and making it easy for people to resign their orders when no longer employed as a deacon, and
- (b) breaking the nexus between being made a deacon and being ordained priest by making new requirements for ordination to the presbyterate which reflect the character of that ministry as distinct from the Diaconate.

Standing Committee's response

24. The Standing Committee adopted the Mission Taskforce's recommendation. A motion in the form recommended by the Mission Taskforce will be moved at the forthcoming session of the Synod for the Synod's consideration.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

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Diocesan Secretary

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