

Report of the Task Group on the Review of the Ministry of Deacon

The ninth Assembly of the uniting Church in Australia meeting in Adelaide in July 2000 resolved (00.22.02) to establish a Task Group to review the ministry of deacon within the Uniting Church in Australia, with the following terms of reference:

1. PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The overall purpose of the review is

- to clarify the Uniting Church's understanding of the ministry of deacon
- to assess the church's experience of the ministry of deacon
- to seek ways of further enhancing the ministry of deacon
- to further the diaconal ministry of the church
- to bring a report to the 2003 Assembly.

The review will include consideration of:

1. the vision of the diaconate expressed in section 3.6.2 of the 1991 report 'Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia';
2. the Church's objectives in diaconal ministry, and what changes are needed for the Church to meet those objectives more effectively;
3. the education and training of deacons;
4. deacons and the process of ministerial placement;
5. support structures for deacons;
6. the accountability of deacons;
7. how the ministry of deacon is enabling the Church to develop its theology and praxis of service in a needy world;
8. how deacons contribute to the wider life and mission of the whole church, including the participation of deacons in Synod, Assembly and ecumenical bodies;
9. other factors and issues which the review group believes are relevant to the purpose of the review.

Among documents to which the review group refers shall be:
the Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church on Australia 1991;
the Constitution and Regulations of the Uniting Church in Australia 1999;
the interim rules for the course of study for the ministry of deacon 1992;
the services of induction and ordination of deacons.

The review group shall arrange for research and consultation as appropriate, within the constraints of the annual budgets approved by the Standing Committee. Among those consulted shall be:

- deacons
- those with whom deacons have been and are in ministry
- ministers of the Word

- candidates for the ministry of deacon
- Synods
- Presbyteries (not necessarily all presbyteries)
- Ministerial Education Commission working group on the ministry of deacon
- Assembly agencies
- theological colleges
- community service agencies

The review group **shall be appointed** by the Standing Committee in 2000 and will include:

- one nominee of Diakonia UCA;
- one member of the Assembly Task Group on Ministry 1988-1991;
- one Synod Secretary;
- one nominee of the Ministerial Education Commission;
- One member of the Standing Committee;
- Up to two others;
- One of whom shall be designated by the Standing Committee as chairperson and at least three Synods are to be represented in the membership.

The review group is to bring its **report and recommendations** to the tenth Assembly in 2003, and may make progress reports to the Standing Committee. The **budget** is expected to be around \$25,000 for the period November 2000 to May 2003, and is to allow for two or three meetings per year of the review group, commissioning research and processes of consultation. The provision of administrative support may be negotiated with the National Secretariat.

Membership of the Review Task Group:
Rev Paul Walton (Chair, Qld); Stu Cameron (SA); Rev Shirley Maddox (NSW); Rev Alison McRae (deacon, Vic); Rev Myung Hwa Park (NSW, until March 2001); Rev Tracy Spencer (deacon SA); Michelle Cook (Qld, from December 2001).

Methods chosen to address the Terms of Reference

In order to explore the Uniting Church's experience and understanding of the ministry of deacon over the last ten years, the review task group conducted a wide consultation within and beyond the church. The consultation used several different strategies to ensure maximum accessibility for those wishing to participate in the exploration.

All deacons and deacon candidates received lengthy questionnaires; all presbyteries and synods received invitations to make a written response; a general invitation was issued through Uniting Church mailings. Specific requests for written reflections were sent to selected Assembly Commissions and Task Groups, including UAICC and Uniting Care Agencies. Each Theological College was asked to contribute from their experience. Focus groups were held in every Synod with groups of deacons, deacon candidates, those with whom deacons engaged in their

the wider community and within the church building up the faith community. (1991 Report pp 41-42 and 1994 Report para. 103)

Christ is already present and active within the world the church serves. The culture 'outside' the church can be seen no longer as godless territory. The church must listen to the communities it is part of and order its life in a manner which enables it to enter into God's transformation of these communities. There can no longer be an understanding of the church and the world as 'us and them'. In Tim Winton's phrase: 'It's us and us and us'. (Cloudstreet, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1992, p. 402)

This is not for the sake of the church itself but for the sake of the coming kingdom of God. When it acts in this way the church 'is like an arrow sent into the world to point to the future.' (Moltmann, J. Theology of Hope, London: SCM, 1967, p. 328). A remote community in which a deacon had been working described its experience as 'the walls of the church being pushed down from the inside'.

In structuring its orders of ministry to include a renewed diaconate the Uniting Church recognises that diakonia is an ecclesiastical concept, affirming what the church is to be and how it is to understand its identity. It is to be a church at mission responding as God calls people out to life within the world.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (World Council of Churches, 1982) affirmed that

'deacons represent to the church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life.' (p. 27)

To be a witness in the world the church must take seriously its calling as a communion of baptised believers sharing in the eucharist (leitourgia), sharing in the common faith (martyria) and sharing in service in solidarity with poor and disadvantaged people and for the rest of creation (diakonia). Together, these three motifs are the foundation of Christian life and of the vocation of the Church are expressed locally and universally through the gifts (charismata) of its members. The ability of the church to be a living koinonia (fellowship) in which the gifts of the members are recognised and set free for service (Basis of Union para. 13) determines the manner in which it is possible for the church to represent Christ's diakonia in and for the world.

Our mission grows out of the life of worship, just as our worship is shaped and informed by the call to be engaged in God's mission within the world. The witnessing church will need to find a true rhythm of Christian

involvement in the world and to be a community which is gathered for worship and scattered for everyday life in the world; a community rooted in worship as the body of Christ and a sign and instrument of grace available for the whole community.

The role of the deacon in leadership of worship is to remind the congregation that worship and service are interwoven, that service without worship can easily become no different from secular social work. Thus deacons have a liturgical role appropriate to their calling and ministry (1991 Report p 42). Many deacons lead the prayers of the people or deliver the word of mission. Deacons preach, although this is not one of their major responsibilities. Deacons have a sacramental ministry usually, but not only, within the context of their ministry with people who would not normally be part of a regular faith community – for example, in a prison, among a group of women in a neighbourhood house, among people with a mental illness, in chaplaincy in a school or hospital, or in very remote parts of the country. The Assembly has developed helpful protocols in this area which are to be followed by deacons and ministers of the Word; these protocols were approved by the 1997 Assembly (Minute 97.16.06).

The Uniting Church is not alone in renewing its ministry of deacon as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. Since 1980 many churches both Protestant and Roman Catholic have examined or moved to a renewed form of diaconal ministry.

Deacons in the Uniting Church, through their national association, Diakonia UCA (DUCA), are members of World Diakonia, a federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities founded just after the end of the Second World War in one of the early expressions of the ecumenical movement. Their conference held in Brisbane in July 2001 brought together deacons, deaconesses and diaconal ministers from all over the world in an expression of the strong international and ecumenical understanding of diaconal ministry and its distinctive place within the Christian Church. Moving stories were shared by those who work with the least and forgotten; by those who work for peace in places of conflict or for reconciliation in places divided by racial and political tensions; by those who offer a ministry of hope to people suffering from AIDS or who are drug addicts or who work with refugees or prisoners.

Ecumenical and international understandings of the ministry of deacon are embodied in reports from consultations between denominations and within denominations. For example: in The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity, 'The Hanover Report' of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission following the Porvoo Statement, 1996: 'The renewal of the

church's diaconate at this time presents a unique opportunity for deepened unity and joint endeavour in the life and mission of the Anglican and Lutheran, as well as other churches.¹

These ecumenical statements have shaped and will continue to shape the renewal not only of the ministry of deacon but of the Uniting Church, just as the renewal of the ministry of deacon in the Uniting Church and the documents associated with it have influenced developments ecumenically and internationally.

3. TERM OF REFERENCE 1:

TO CLARIFY THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE MINISTRY OF DEACON

In the *Basis of Union* in 1977, the UCA announced its intention to 'so order its life that it remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into ... a renewed diaconate'. However, there were a number of issues to be addressed before that intention could be realised, including:

- whether the diaconate was to be an ordained ministry;
- the relationship of deacons with ministers of the word;
- the relationship of deacons with congregations,
- the roles of deacons and lay people in the serving ministries of the church;
- where deacons would serve;
- deacons and the sacraments.

At the 1988 Assembly, it became clear that it was not possible to renew the diaconate in isolation from the ministries of all baptised people. A research study was commissioned on 'changing patterns of ministry including the ordained ministry, from the basis of the one ministry of Christ' (Standing Committee minute 88.63.v), with a report to the 1991 Assembly. The renewed diaconate was established (1991) on the basis set out in the 1991 *Report* (section 3.6.2) and clarified by decisions of subsequent Assemblies, particularly the 1994 Assembly.

¹ *The Porvoo Common Statement* (1996) was signed by the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches. See also *The Windsor Statement on the Diaconate*, October 1997, in which the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the British Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England took part; members of the United Reformed Church also took part.

Specific issues concerning deacons and ministers of the Word in baptism and holy communion were addressed in the *Protocol for Baptism and Holy Communion* (1997) and theological understandings of the distinctive ministry of ordained persons within the community of all baptized people was clarified in the *Affirmations on Ordination* (1977).

Those developments are summarised in the Timeline below.

1.1 Timeline of the Diaconate in the UCA

1971—Basis of Union: Para. 14 (c): 'The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which women and men offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of humanity in the face of changing needs. The Uniting Church will so order its life that it remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate: in these circumstances it may decide to call them deacons and deaconesses, whether the service is within or beyond the life of the congregation.'

1979 Assembly: resolved to 'declare the intention to renew the ministry of the diaconate in terms of section 14(c) of the *Basis of Union*' (79.22.3.a), and to 'request the Commission on Doctrine to prepare a statement on ordination to the ministry of the Word and to the diaconate in the light of the Scriptures and the *Basis of Union*' (79.22.8.a).

1982 Assembly: a report on the diaconate is brought, and commended for study. The ministry of deaconess is 'recognised' (82.53.10.a), opened to men as well as women (82.53.10b; 82.53.11) and a constitutional change is sought, to speak of the 'ordination' rather than 'commissioning' (82.53.12) of deaconesses.

1985 Assembly: resolved to 'remain open to a renewed diaconate' (85.54.1), and commissioned 'a report to the next Assembly providing a proposal for such a renewed diaconate' (85.54.2).

1988 Assembly: resolved not to implement the Lavender report with regard to the establishment of a renewed diaconate, but established a task group to conduct 'a study of the changing patterns of ministry and what is and will be required to equip the whole people of God for their ministry and mission in a changing world, in the light of the gospel ... [and] present to the Standing Committee a fresh proposal on the Diaconate ...' (88.27.5).

1991 Assembly: resolved 'That the diaconate be renewed in the terms outlined in the *Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia* (Section 3.6.2)' (91.13.4). One ordination was recognised

with two accreditations, to the ministry of deacon or ministry of the Word, (91.13.5).

1992: Betty Matthews (WA) is the first deaconess to be accredited as a deacon. In December 1992, the first candidates who had trained for the diaconate are ordained and accredited.

1994 Assembly: resolved 'to reaffirm the mutuality and equality of the ministry of the Word and the ministry of deacon' (94.15.02), and 'to recognise ordination as the setting apart of persons for ministry as ministers of the Word or as deacons, and to understand ordination to these ministries as two distinct ordinations' (94.15.03.a).

1997 Assembly: approved protocols for Baptism and Holy Communion which set out the circumstances and conditions under which ministers of the Word and deacons may celebrate the sacraments and endorsed Affirmations on Ordination which established the place and tasks of ordained ministers (both ministers of the Word and deacons) in the Uniting Church.

2000 Assembly: **resolved 'to establish a review of the ministry of deacon within the Uniting Church in Australia' (00.22.02).**

1.2 THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MINISTRY OF DEACON AS SET OUT IN DOCUMENTS OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

The documents embodying those decisions of the Assembly which shape the Church's current understanding of the ministry of deacon are:

- Constitution and Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia
- Minutes of meetings of the Assembly 1997-2000
- Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia (1991)
- Report on Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia: A Report from the Assembly Commission on Doctrine (1994)
- Protocol for Baptism and Holy Communion (1997)
- Affirmations on Ordination (1997)
- Services of Ordination and Induction

The ministry of deacon was renewed in the terms outlined in the report on *Ministry in the Uniting Church* (section 3.6.2) by resolution of the Assembly in 1991 (91.13.4) and further clarified in 1994 and 1997. The current understanding of the Uniting Church with regard to the ministry of deacon is indicated below.

Ordination of deacons

Through ordination the church authorises people as ministers of the Word, or deacons, and sets

them apart to devote themselves to the particular ministry to which they are called by God.'

(Affirmations on Ordination 1997)

The role of the deacon

'The diaconate, then, will necessarily lead the church in identifying the causes of social inequality, injustice and division, and in facing those who perpetuate oppressive structures while standing in solidarity with the disadvantaged.'

(Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church 1994, para. 104).

'Deacons in the Uniting Church are called:

- to be, along with the scattered members of the congregation, a sign of the presence of God in the everyday world;
- to be especially aware of the places in the community where people are hurt, disadvantaged, oppressed, or marginalised and to be in ministry with them in ways which reflect the special concern of Jesus for them;
- to recognise, encourage, develop and release those gifts in God's people which will enable them to share in the ministry of caring, serving, healing, restoring, making peace and advocating justice as they go about their daily lives.'

(Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.41)

'The distinctive role of the deacon is to hold up service as central to all Christian ministry (Mark 8:34-38; Luke 4:16-21; John 13:3-15; Philippians 2:7; Matthew 20:26-28) ... The deacon's mandate is to give embodiment to our Lord's teaching that the greatest shall be servant of all and lead the church in implementing this teaching.'

(Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.40)

Relationship with the worshipping community

'together with lay preachers, deacons reflect in the gathered congregation, in a disciplined and informed way, on what it is like to bear witness and what it costs.'

(Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.40)

'It is not proposed that deacons will do all the necessary serving tasks on behalf of the Uniting Church or deprive members or Ministers of the Word of opportunities for serving ministries.'

(Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.43)

Relationship with Ministry of the Word

'The ministry of the minister of the Word is launched from the presence of God in the gathered congregation ... shares in this rhythm of coming and going from the gathered congregation but

beginning in the gathered congregation... The ministry of the deacon is launched from the presence of God in the community among disadvantaged people... The deacon shares the rhythm of Christian life coming and going from the gathered congregation but beginning in the community.' (Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.45)

'Ministers of the Word have a general precedence in presidency of holy communion, but in communion celebrations in the deacon's sphere of ministry, the deacon will have precedence in presidency.' (Protocol for Baptism and Holy Communion 1997, para. 2.8)

'Uniting Church ministers of the Word and deacons have a non-hierarchical relationship. Each of these ministries has its own primary sphere of activity and orientation and offers leadership to the church in distinctive ways. The sacraments should never become the occasion for asserting the pre-eminence of one ministry over the other.' (Protocol for Baptism and Holy Communion 1997, para 2.8)

The current Services of Ordination of a minister of the Word and of a deacon are identical in most respects, except, e.g., where the order of vows is changed to reflect the different emphases of these ministries. Adaptation may be made in the Service of Induction for a deacon to reflect the nature of the placement.

Relationship with other churches

'Taking the ecumenical context seriously also means that we are willing to embody God's purpose for our common life in new forms of order, even if it means that we seem to other churches to have gone past the present boundaries of Christian unity, as we did with the ordination of women... We hope [that the renewed diaconate will] contribute to the ecumenical renewal of the ministry of Christ.' (Ministry in the Uniting Church 1991 p.16)

In these decisions the Uniting Church has established the parameters of the ministry of deacon and indicated its relationship with the ministry of the Word, with the ministry of all baptised people, and in ecumenical relationships.

1.3 PRESENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE MINISTRY OF DEACON IN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

In the light of the understanding of the ministry of deacon set out in official documents of the Uniting Church this report now turns to the understanding of the people of the Uniting Church about the ministry of deacon as it was revealed in the research conducted by the Task Group.

The research indicates that the ministry of deacon is understood primarily in the following terms:

- It is a transforming influence on church and community
- It links congregations and community
- It has a role in renewing the *diakonia* of the whole church

The following quotations from focus groups, letters and responses to questionnaires are examples of typical responses. They demonstrate these understandings and the experiences which inform them.

Transformation of church and community

Deacons, congregations, presbyteries and those who experienced the ministry of deacons reported that the ministry of deacon was able to transform elements of the community and to renew ministries within the church.

'It is when congregations become involved in the life of their local and regional neighbourhoods that there will be growth and opportunities for the lives of individuals, families and communities to be transformed by the love and power of Jesus Christ.' (A Synod Task Group)

Linking congregations and communities

The experience of transformative ministry by deacons includes linking congregations with issues and communities of need beyond the congregation.

'Deacons can get into other organisations and make an effort to get known in the wider community, like with the primary school setting up the brekky program. Without that the community wouldn't know we existed.' (A Parish Mission)

Renewing the *diakonia* of the whole church

The ministry of deacon was understood to engage the renewal of the *diakonia* of the whole church. The ministry of deacon was a catalyst for increased awareness in congregations and presbyteries about issues of justice or people in need and in many places lead to other people becoming involved in advocacy and service for disadvantaged and marginalised groups of people.

'They (*deacons*) remind us of justice and rights, a community

development emphasis, a reminder of the needs of the people who form a particular focus of their ministry, a more relaxed and broader vision.'
(*A Presbytery*)

'When a deacon is in placement in a congregation the people often begin to discover their own diaconal ministries and to become more outward looking'
(*Deacons*)

1.4 **Changes in the Uniting Church's understanding of the Ministry of Deacon Since 1991**

Communications to this task group indicate that understanding of the ministry of deacon has increased since the ministry was renewed in the Uniting Church in 1991.

Synods

In general, synod based councils and committees appear to have a reasonable understanding of the ministry of deacon as expressed in documents in the UCA. Some synods have developed protocols to assist presbyteries and congregations in the placement of deacons. However, most felt unable to prioritise finance for what often appear to be non-traditional ministries and another had a limited understanding of the range of placements available, concentrating them for example in chaplaincy.

Presbyteries

Responses from most of the presbyteries who replied to the Task Group's invitation showed a high level of understanding but seemed to lack confidence that their understanding was adequate to enable them to make creative use of this ministry. Presbyteries have developed better understanding while receiving candidates and making placements, sometimes at cost to the candidate or deacon. Presbyteries with deacons express appreciation for the contributions deacons have made to their life. Significantly, presbyteries that have never had a deacon may display poor understanding of the ministry of deacon; for example, anecdotal evidence shows that some are still unaware that deacons may preside at the sacraments.

Some rural presbyteries have a perception that diaconal placements are not suited to their needs, even though between a half and a third of all deacon placements in all synods are rural. Frequently lack of financial resources rather than lack of understanding of the ministry was presented as the main difficulty.

Congregations

While there is still some confusion about the roles of deacon and minister of the Word, congregations which have experienced the ministry of a deacon express appreciation of the ministry they have received. These

congregations report being affirmed and enlarged in their own diakonia by the presence of a deacon among them. Some expressed pride in the presence of their deacon in their local community and in the ways in which the deacon has enabled them to discover their own diaconal identity.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that congregations which have never experienced the ministry of a deacon have little understanding of it.

Uniting Church Agencies

Responses from some parish missions and other church agencies indicated good understanding of ministry of deacon. However, our consultations suggest that the stance of the CEO heavily influences the agency's understanding of the ministry. Especially where senior staff are not members of the UCA, an astonishing ignorance of the UC understanding of this ministry and its relationships with the serving ministries of other people was in evidence.

Conclusion

Through the decisions of its Assembly, the UC has established the parameters of the ministry of deacon and indicated its relationship with the ministry of the Word and with the diaconal ministries of all baptised people. These have been set out in official documents, which do not appear to be widely known in the church. This is of concern because they guard the integrity of the ministry set out guidelines for its practice. While these documents may not be well known we believe in the Uniting Church there has been significant embracing of the vision of the ministry of deacon by those who have had direct experience of it.

4. **TERM OF REFERENCE 2**

TO ASSESS THE CHURCH'S EXPERIENCE OF THE MINISTRY OF DEACON

The research of this Task Group indicates that the church experiences of the ministry of deacon in four main ways:

1. When it makes placements of deacons
2. When it provides for the supervision and accountability of deacons
3. When deacons participate in the life of the church and the community
4. In the initial and continuing education of deacons

2.1 **The Church's Experience of Deacon Placements**

The church's experience of the ministry of deacon is reflected in its placement of deacons.

In 2001 there were 89 deacons in the UCA of whom 77 were in positions recognised as placements by the Uniting Church, 7 were retired, 4 in other placements or doing further study. Only 1 was without placement. There were 22 deacon candidates in training across Australia.

In 2001 of those deacons in placements, one third were in congregations; one third in chaplaincies and UCA welfare agencies, and the remainder in a variety of church agencies and commissions or retired. Very few deacons were without placement or in placements they considered inappropriate to their calling. The largest amount of time spent out of placement was before the first placement. Less than a quarter were part time. Between a third and a half the deacon placements in each synod were in rural contexts. Twenty percent of placements were within UnitingCare agencies or institutions.

The following table shows in more detail where deacons were placed in 2001 and indicates the wide variety of those placements.

Table 1. Types of Ministerial Placements for Deacons in 2001

Type of Placement	Number of Deacons in placement	Total
Congregational *– - specialising in Family work - specialising in pastoral care - specialising in aged care - specialising in community development - limited to 'traditional' MOW roles	3 14 1 10 2	30
Chaplaincies * – (non-UCA institutions) Universities Prison Mental Health services Hospitals Lifeline	2 4 1 4 1	12
Chaplaincies – (UCA institutions) Aged Care Schools	7 2	9
UCA Agency / Parish mission as Deacon, staff, project worker etc	9	9
Ecumenical (inc. overseas Partner Churches)	5	5
<i>Frontier Services</i>	4	4
<i>Presbytery Placement</i>	4	4
<i>UAICC</i>	3	3
<i>Synod</i>	2	2
<i>Theological Education</i>	2	2
Placements outside the jurisdiction of the church e.g. Counselling services	2	2
Without Placement to pursue further study	2	2
<i>Without Placement</i>	1	1
<i>Retired</i>	7	7
Total Deacons in 2001		92

* a number of deacons are also involved in ITIM chaplaincies for small proportions of time

The following table sets out the distribution of deacon placements within synods in 2001.

Table 2. Distribution of Placements in Each Synod in 2001

Synod	No. of male/ female deacons	No. in rural (non-capital city) placements	No. in part-time placements	Total no. of Deacons
NSW	7/9	7	4	16
Northern	2/0	1	0	2
Qld	3/8	6	2	11
SA	6/6	4	2	12
Tas	0/0	0	0	0
Vic	8/28	15	7	36
WA	2/10	6	3	12
Totals	28/61	39	18	89

Note: in 2001, there were 22 Deacon candidates in training across Australia

Table 3. Deacon Placements in Presbyteries Responding to the Review

No of presbyteries responding to review	Number of presbyteries who have ever had a deacon	Number of presbyteries who currently have at least one deacon
25	15	14

Note: 25 of the 50 UCA presbyteries responded to an invitation to comment on their experience of the ministry of deacon.

Chaplaincy

A significant proportion of deacons are engaged in chaplaincies—both in UCA agencies and in non-church institutions—where they encourage links to develop between their work in chaplaincy and the congregations to which they relate. One noted that when s/he began in an institutional chaplaincy there were sixteen people in the congregation meeting next door. Ten years later there were eighty one, of whom only ten had any previous affiliation with that congregation. The other seventy one were all new and had come into the church because of their involvement with the ministry of the chaplain.

Uniting Care Agencies and Institutions

One quarter of deacon placements are within institutions such as parish missions, Frontier Services, UCA schools and in UnitingCare agencies such as hospitals, welfare and aged care organisations.

Deacons work in a variety of roles, including service delivery, chaplaincy, theological reflection, policy and program development, community development, counselling and liaison with congregations and wider community. Some UC Agencies were doubtful about their capacity to fund a

deacon placement stating that government funding requirements would necessitate deacons having other qualifications in addition to a theology degree. Other agencies indicated little understanding of the Uniting Church ministry of deacon.

Placements in Congregations

All the congregations which had experienced the ministry of a deacon and answered the task group’s invitation to make a written response or participate in a focus group spoke highly of the contribution to the congregation’s life made by the deacon.

In nearly every case they spoke of being encouraged and empowered to engage in serving ministries in the local community. Many valued the deacon’s ability to identify and clarify community needs, assist the congregation in deciding whether or not this represented a gospel imperative for them and if so how a response might be planned and carried through. Many spoke appreciatively of the deacon’s skill in recognising and calling forth their gifts and pointing them to appropriate training programs. They also spoke of the connections with the community that the deacon facilitated.

Parish missions which operate within a limited geographical area and have

strong connections to one or more congregations are more likely to have a deacon in placement than congregations in large towns or city suburbs.

A number of respondents indicated their understanding that deacons can only be placed in cities but the survey revealed that 29 of the 79 serving deacons are in placements outside the capital cities and a significant number of these are in smaller rural towns.

It is sometimes suggested that deacons are inappropriately placed in congregations, especially rural ones, yet only two deacons in 2001 were in positions which they felt stifled core elements of the diaconal calling and placed heavy emphasis on the deacon in the placement fulfilling 'traditional' minister of the Word roles. Deacons in congregational placements see them as providing opportunities to promote the *diakonia* of the whole church. One wrote:

'N is a small rural congregation who have a vision for reaching out to their community. Already this is being accomplished through the opportunity shop and meals on wheels ... Into this largely tourist centre they called a deacon as their congregational minister ... This is an exciting and challenging time ... as the congregation ... starts to explore the possibilities of a diaconal church.'

Deacons frequently wrote of the linkages they seek and encourage between their work in chaplaincy and the congregations to which they relate. A chaplain told a moving story of a psychiatric patient whose healing was assisted when a congregation began to let her know of their concern. The elements from communion at the local church were brought to her, a resurrection symbol was given.

'Knowing that a whole group of people that she had never met were concerned about her had a definite part in her healing. She moved from the state of saying over and over that she was Satan's child to knowing

that she is actually God's child, dearly loved.'

A few people indicated their confusion about the distinction between the minister of the Word and the deacon and questioned the need to have two ordained ministries.

Placements beyond the jurisdiction of the church

Very few deacons work in situations which are not funded by the UCA. Of these, all but one has been recognised as a UCA placement. Presbyteries and Synods urged greater involvement of deacons in community based placements.

Funding deacon placements

Lack of funding was felt to inhibit placement of deacons in UnitingCare agencies and in some presbyteries. One presbytery stated that there would be a significant number of placements, if finance were available.

Placements Process

Sixteen of thirty two respondents to the questionnaire sent out to deacons suggested that those involved in making placements display a lack of understanding of the ministry of deacon. For example, one deacon reported that over an eighteen month period it appeared that both the synod and the presbytery saw all opportunities as minister of the Word placements despite obvious areas of diaconal ministry present in them.

'The assumption seemed to be that ministers of the Word can do anything a deacon might do, but a deacon can never do what a minister of the Word was expected to do.'

Replies from synods indicated that they had a satisfactory understanding of the ministry of deacon which they may not have been able to translate into effective placement procedures.

Continuity of Ministry

Continuity of ministry emerged as a significant concern among deacons, Parish Missions and congregations who had experienced the ministry of a deacon. Innovative ministries initiated by deacons tend to end when the deacon changes placement. It is rare for another

deacon with similar or complementary skills and experience to be found for the placement. There is frequently a prolonged vacancy between the conclusion of the work of one deacon in the placement and the induction of the next. In these circumstances the ministry languishes and any opportunity for the deacon formerly in the placement to pass on knowledge to the next deacon is lost.

Funding for innovative ministries is usually for a limited period, assuming that the ministry will become self supporting but it is difficult to see how ministry with marginalised and disadvantaged people can achieve this goal.

Congregations often tend to see what the deacon does as an optional extra to what is done by the minister of the Word and are reluctant to commit their own funds to this work when outside funding runs out.

2.1.1 **Assessment of the Experience of the Uniting Church with respect to Deacon Placements**

There is some evidence that diaconal ministry is perceived to have low priority in the placement process. Many seem to assume that a deacon can only be placed in a situation where there is enough money to support a minister of the Word doing worship and pastoral care and a deacon doing non-traditional, outreach ministries. In fact, diaconal ministry is as much part of the ministry of the congregation as worship and pastoral care. It may well be that lay people, lead by the deacon, can take up more responsibility for worship and pastoral care, while the deacon assists supports and encourages them in developing their diaconal ministries in the community in a more intentional way.

Despite these perceptions about the lack of understanding of the ministry of deacon by synods, presbyteries and UC agencies, the current placement profile suggests that placements in presbyteries and UC agencies have not been inhibited. This outcome can be put down to hard work by placements committees and some presbyteries. The perception that there is limited funding for diaconal ministry may not be as confining as it first appeared.

Although 20% of deacons had experienced some time without placement (most commonly immediately after completing theological college studies) it is rare for a deacon to experience a long period out of placement. Contrary to popular belief, most deacons are in placement at any one time.

Creative steps need to be taken to ensure continuity of innovative ministries in terms of both skills and funding arrangements. The 1991 *Report* envisaged deacons placed in clusters of congregations, in presbyteries, or in team ministries with ministers of the Word.

2.2 **The Church's Experience of Support and accountability of deacons**

A majority of deacon respondents reported being disappointed at some time with the level of appropriate support from groups within the church. Fifty percent of deacon respondents suggested that those involved in placements lacked understanding of the ministry of deacon and were unsupportive, but others reported good support during the placement process. A number of presbyteries recognised a lack of structure surrounding the support of the ministry of deacon and some related it to their own struggle to fill presbytery minister placements.

Regardless of the place or nature of the placement, in the polity of the Uniting Church every minister is answerable to the presbytery where she or he is enrolled in matters of faith and discipline (Reg. 2.4.4) and must present an annual report about the conduct of the ministry. Some deacons reported regret at the level of interest shown by presbytery members in their reports.

The importance of deacons, whatever their placement, being closely connected to a congregation was emphasised in the 1991 *Report*, both for the nurture of the deacon and for the well being of the congregation as it engages with this ministry beyond its borders. This connection occurs through reports, prayers, and from time to time by hearing the deacon preaching. Such a connection is also required by the regulations of the Uniting Church (Reg. 2.4.3).

From answers to the deacon questionnaires it is clear that deacons are aware of who immediately supervises their ministry. For example, where a deacon is employed in a Uniting Church agency the CEO or agency board is recognised as the body to whom the deacon reports. Presbytery responses indicated that the system for accountability was the same for all ministers (i.e. to the presbytery and to the employing body). The most common way of ensuring accountability was through reports and meetings.

Deacons found their best support among other deacons and through the activities and gatherings of Diakonia UCA (DUCA). They reported high levels of support from their congregations, professional supervisors, colleagues, friends and family. Some ministers of the Word were reported as having good understanding of the ministry of deacon and offering good support to deacon colleagues while others were suspicious of the ministry of deacon and personally unsupportive. Fifty percent of deacon respondents were disappointed in the level of support offered by their presbyteries. Deacon candidates reported lack of understanding of and support for the ministry of deacon by some candidates for the ministry of the Word and even some active antagonism to it from them.

2.2.1 Assessment of the Uniting Church's Experience of the Accountability and Support of Deacons

Lines of reporting are clear. Deacons find satisfactory levels of support among colleagues, congregations with whom they are in ministry, friends and professional supervisors. Many experience support from their presbytery and synod but half of all those responding to the questionnaire would have welcomed more support from their presbyteries.

Presbyteries are aware of their responsibilities in accountability and support for deacons and recognise and regret the limits of their ability to do all that they would wish to do. Nevertheless in many cases they are providing significant levels of support for deacons and congregations and agencies where deacons are in placement.

2.3 The Church's Experience of Deacon Involvement in Church and Community

The role of ministry of deacon as agent of transformation and linkage for church and community requires the ministry to be involved and accepted in UCA, ecumenical, and general community forums.

2.3.1 Involvement in the Uniting Church

The participation of deacons in the organisational life of the church is an indicator of their involvement and acceptance in the church more generally. Deacons have a high rate of participation in many areas of the organisational life of the church as indicated in the following table:

Table 4. Deacon Involvement in Church Committees in 2001

Committee	Number of deacons
Parish/congregation	30
Presbytery	28
Synod	26
Assembly	16
Ecumenical	19
Other	5

* The total number of respondents was 32

2.3.2 Assessment of the Uniting Church's Experience of the Involvement of Deacons in its Life

This translates into good acceptance and integration of the ministry of deacon in all areas of the Uniting Church's life. A third of deacons perceived presbyteries and synods to be unreceptive to their involvement in activities of the wider church and reluctant to accept their gifts but this perception is not borne out by these figures.

2.3.3 Ecumenical relationships

The ecumenical implications of the renewal of the ministry of deacon in the Uniting Church were fully discussed in the *Protocols for Baptism and Holy Communion* (1997).

Alone among the churches represented at the international and ecumenical World Diakonia Conference held in Brisbane in Brisbane in July 2001,

Uniting Church makes provision for its deacons to preside at Holy Communion. However it is not the only denomination to do so. There is at least one other Church whose deacons have authority to preside at celebrations of the eucharist: the Moravian Church of England and Ireland which is at present engaged in negotiations towards closer ties with English Anglicans.

The pioneering nature of this provision was recognised in the report *Ministry on the Uniting Church in Australia* 1991. It was recognised that the Eucharist is an evangelical opportunity and means of grace which people should not be denied. Most often the celebration occurs within the scattered groups of people with whom the deacon is in ministry, but may also happen within the gathered congregation in certain circumstances.

Among the responses received by this task group there were many affirmations of the value of deacon presidency at Holy Communion in the context of their ministries. While experience has not borne out fears of 'ecumenical isolation', some deacons reported that tensions over presiding at Holy Communion within the Uniting Church have had a significant impact on them. Notably, no concerns were raised within the Uniting Church or ecumenically regarding the sacrament of baptism and the ministry of deacon

A letter from the Christian Unity Working Group of the Uniting Church reports one of its members as having said that UCA practice in authorising deacons to preside at celebrations of the sacraments 'isolates us ecumenically'. Another remarked that it is 'bizarre ecumenically and theologically indefensible' and went on to say, 'In the wider ecumenical scene, both historically and geographically, it challenges the single clear distinction between deacons and presbyters (and bishops), namely that a deacon's ministry does not and never had included such presidency. Thus all ecumenical discussion requires a careful explanation and is, in our experience, usually regarded as a curiosity at best and a major stumbling block to understanding and mutual acceptance at worst'.

On the other hand, some deacons reported that being able to preside at celebrations of the eucharist was helpful in ecumenical arenas as it enabled ecumenical colleagues to locate the deacon within the category of 'minister'.

Nearly two thirds of deacon respondents were involved in some way with ecumenical organisations. They reported relatively good acceptance of their ministry, especially once the UC understanding of the ministry of deacon was explained. Some did experience continuing ecumenical resistance, but this was usually with ecumenical colleagues who were inimical to the Uniting Church and the ordination of women rather than the ministry of deacon per se.

2.3.4 Assessment of the Uniting Church's Ecumenical Experience of the Ministry of Deacon

This consultation found that fears of ecumenical isolation have not been realised. Ecumenical colleagues of deacons have largely accepted the ministry of deacon, including its liturgical and sacramental role. The indications are that at the local level, once some education is provided, the UCA understanding of deacon has not given rise to the feared ecumenical difficulties, but has resulted in good working relationships.

The experience of the Christian Unity Working Group indicates that a gap still exists between the understanding and acceptance of the renewed ministry of deacon among people engaged in official ecumenical dialogues and those engaged together in ministry at the local level.

2.3.5 Community Experience of the Ministry of Deacon

Deacons are heavily involved in groups and decision making forums in their local and wider communities. Nearly two thirds of deacons found community groups to be very receptive to their ministry. Most stated that community groups had never rejected them.

Table 5 Deacon Involvement in the Community

Community	Numbers of deacons Involved
Community groups	27
Local Council	10
State Government	4
Federal Government	3
Organisations	4
Issues networks	10
Other	3

* The total number of respondents was 32

2.3.6 Assessment of the Uniting Church's Experience of the Acceptance and Integration of Deacons into the Community

Deacons have taken up opportunities to make significant contributions to the communities where they are in ministry. Acceptance of them has been good.

2.4 The Church's Experience of Education for the Ministry of Deacon

2.4.1 Initial Education

The Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) an Assembly body, establishes the rules which govern courses of study undertaken by candidates for the ordained ministries of the Uniting Church. These are interpreted by each accredited theological college and embodied in courses taught there. Each college undergoes periodic re-accreditation by the MEC. MEC Rules: Courses of Study for Ordained Ministry (para.4) state that,

'The Ordinand Courses shall be taught in ways that are appropriate to the particular ministry and which involve interaction between experiences of ministry and the academic disciplines ... The courses should reflect an awareness of the specific nature and inter-relatedness of each ordained and specified ministry in the Uniting Church and the ministries of all persons.'

While course requirements for the ministry of deacon parallel those for the ministry of the Word and include

foundational studies (e.g. biblical studies, theology, church history, UCA polity and history); supervised field education; and ministerial formation, there are some deacon specific subjects required by the MEC. One of these is the national diaconal preessional course. As they develop their core curricula each college fulfils these requirements for their own students using means appropriate in their situation. Like ministers of the Word, deacons are required to undertake continuing education for ministry after ordination.

In responses to the questionnaire, deacons and deacon candidates indicated that they found deacon specific courses and field education opportunities were the most helpful during their education followed by theology and pastoral studies.

Most deacon candidates were pro-active in ensuring that their courses included diaconal perspectives. This included constructing or choosing assignment topics related to diaconal ministry as well as helping design creative field education placements. Deacon candidates also raised diaconal issues during lectures and undertook independent guided study modules designed by deacon candidates themselves on deacon specific topics.

They reported that more deacon formation occurs during appropriate placements, conversation with serving deacons and the diaconal preessional than within the formal college time-table.

Field Education

There was uneasiness among deacons, deacon candidates and college faculty about the scarcity of intentional diaconal field education and suitable field education placements and supervisors. College faculty commented that the church doesn't often consider the potential of the diaconate in exploring new initiatives, for example in church planting. The unsatisfactory nature of shorter term field education placements for deacons in congregational settings was recognised. In such placements the time is often too short to connect with the congregation and complete a meaningful diaconal project.

Support

Despite many stories of support and encouragement from faculty members, some deacons perceived a lack of understanding of the ministry by faculty and lack of acceptance and support for deacon candidates from some members of faculty and fellow students who were candidates for the ministry of the Word.

Each college had a designated faculty member responsible for the oversight of deacon education. Five of the twelve deacon candidate respondents didn't know who they were, despite the fact that they were clearly identified in the college handbook.

College faculty were aware of the difficulties encountered by deacon candidates. In response to concerns that courses did not take enough account of the presence of deacon candidates it was pointed out that in many classes candidates for ordination were in a minority. In addition classes contain women and men, people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities and so on, all of whom add their own gifts, interests and needs to the student mix. While making deacon specific emphases more difficult to achieve it could be hoped that this diversity might add to the richness of the experience of deacon candidates.

In one conversation faculty mirrored a suggestion from some deacon candidates, in hoping that ways could be found to hold up the functions and insights of diaconal ministry for all candidates for both ministries and in this way help them all to move beyond preoccupations about status, especially when focussed on presiding at Holy Communion as a sign of doing 'proper' ministry.

2.4.2 Continuing Education

Twenty four of the thirty two deacon respondents indicated that they needed or had taken part in further education since ordination. The majority of these courses were self-funded, with a substantial minority being funded by the employing body. Most were undertaken at non-church educational institutions.

Table 6. Continuing Education Undertaken by Deacons

Course	Number of Respondents who had engaged in this type of further education
Counselling and pastoral care	10
Domestic Violence	5
Masters Degrees	5 (MA(x2), MSoc, MTh, MMin)
Mental Health issues	4
CPE	4
Community Development	4
Mission planning	3
Spirituality and retreat	4
Religious education	2
Multi-cultural and Indigenous	2
Management	2
Biblical studies	1
Ethics	1
Divinity	1
Theological	1

2.4.3 Assessment of the Church's Experience of Educating Deacons
Incorporating education for the diaconate into the curriculum of colleges originally set up to educate candidates for the ministry of the Word has not been trouble free. Additionally in recent times some colleges have become more ecumenical and some now receive many students who are not candidates for ordained ministry in any denomination. This cultural and theological diversity can offer deacon candidates an enriched experience while at the same time making it difficult for faculty to speak directly to the interests and needs of each group.

Nevertheless it remains important for deacon candidates to receive education in which the significance of diaconal ministry in the church is recognised and the education and formation of deacon candidates are carried out effectively.

Many deacons and deacon candidates continue to feel that during their initial theological education the educational needs of candidates for the ministry of the Word were taken as the norm and those of candidates for the ministry of deacon were less well regarded.

There is still some lack of understanding of the ministry of deacon among faculty and incoming candidates for the ministry of the Word.

The continuing education needs of deacons are diverse and are mostly met by courses in institutions outside the Uniting Church.

2.5 Deacons' Assessments of their own experience of the Ministry of Deacon
A group of Victorian deacons ordained before 1991 made these assessments of the development of the ministry over the last ten years.

- 1 The work of deacons is now more clearly focussed and opportunities more clearly recognised.
- 2 There is a clear focus on outreach beyond the gathered congregation in service of people in the community, particularly vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged people.

- 3 There is less confusion about where deacons might serve.
- 4 Deacons now serve in a wider variety of placements.
- 5 The renewal of the diaconate has forced deacons to clarify what diaconal ministry is, claim their identity and be intentional about it.
- 6 Ministerial training is more focussed on formation for diaconal ministry.
- 7 People in non-diaconal placements are now more likely to recognise their own diaconal elements.

Other deacons present added the following points:

- 8 Being known as a deacon gives opportunity to be different and do things differently.
- 9 It is no longer productive to keep arguing the validity of diaconal ministry. People discover what diaconal ministry is when they encounter it enfolded in the form of a deacon doing diaconal ministry.

5. TERM OF REFERENCE 3 TO SEEK WAYS OF FURTHER ENHANCING THE MINISTRY OF DEACON

In the research conducted by the Task Group a number of matters were identified which enhance or hinder the ministry of deacon and/or the ability of deacons to engage in this ministry.

3.1 PLACEMENTS

3.1.1 Recognition of prior skills and learning in making placements

Many deacons have skills and learning from education and employment before they became deacons. While being a deacon is different from being a teacher, social worker, nurse etc., nevertheless the deacon brings those skills with them. Deacons learn new skills during each placement and as a result of intentional continuing education.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced when placement committees and deacons have an open dialogue regarding prior learning and experience, and future vocational opportunities.

3.1.2 Continuity in placements

Focus groups with deacons and with people and groups who had experienced the ministry of a deacon indicated that continuity of ministry is a concern.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced when strategic planning processes in congregations, presbyteries and synods take into account the gifts and skills deacons offer and the value to the church and community of the ministries they engage in and make medium to long term strategic decisions about where these ministries can be put in place and supported.

3.1.3 Financing deacon placements

In the past some deacon placements have been financed by special funding for a limited time with the intention that in this period the ministry will become self-supporting. When the funding runs out the ministry ends unless other funding can be found. It is difficult to envisage how a ministry among disadvantaged people could become funded by the clients of the service.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced when long term funding for innovative diaconal ministries can be put in place.

Securing funds from the public for particular ministries is one possibility. Synods and presbyteries may need to make available people with skills in public relations and fundraising to secure funds from businesses, philanthropic foundations and community groups to support the work of deacons among disadvantaged people in particular localities.

The ministry will be enhanced when synod funding for deacon

placements arises out of longer term strategies for the mission of the church.

Placement Process

Some congregations tend to regard the employment of a deacon as an optional extra to the ministry exercised by a minister of the Word and are reluctant to explore the possibilities of their own diaconal ministries by calling a deacon. A number of respondents also spoke of the need for congregations to be made aware during the placement process that when a deacon is appointed they can expect that the ministry of the congregation will develop a different emphasis. This is especially true when a deacon is called as the only ordained person in a congregation.

In order to help address this issue several synods have devised processes within the current regulations to facilitate the placement of deacons, for example:

- Check the perceptions of the congregation about diaconal ministry before introducing the name of a deacon.
- Help the congregation define their expectations especially with regard to tasks, time commitment, boundaries, accountability, leading worship, exercising pastoral care.
- Set down the expectations in writing before the placement is agreed to.
- Build in review processes involving an independent facilitator to occur after six months and then at twelve monthly intervals.
- Ensure that when deacons are placed in chaplaincy or non-congregational positions they are connected into a congregation which will provide loving support in these outreach activities.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced when specific processes are designed and implemented to facilitate appropriate placements.

Placements outside the jurisdiction of the church

Uniting Church Regulations make it possible for ordained persons to exercise ministry in positions outside the jurisdiction of the church. The 1991 *Report* assumed that some deacons would work in placements in community

organisations (p 43). In fact this has not become common. One deacon who had been a social worker questioned whether the limitations of that role can be reconciled with the call and role of a deacon. Regulations about levels of professional skill in government funded programs often require qualifications beyond a degree in theology. Nevertheless a small number of deacons have been able to work in such placements.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced when congregations, councils of the church and deacons are alert to such possibilities and take advantage of them when they occur.

Placements in UC agencies

Despite the difficulties noted by UC agencies that are dependent on government funding for their programs, their ministries will be enhanced by having deacons on their staff, in at least the following ways:

- Liaison with and leadership for the church's service ministry, particularly among the group with whom the agency works
- Leadership in theological reflection on the work of the agency
- Offering pastoral care to staff, volunteers and clients of the agency

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as UCA agencies value the theological leadership that deacons can offer.

3.1.7 Variety of placements

Some deacons raised concerns about the limited range of appropriate placement types available to them, for example a concentration in chaplaincy.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as the church's imagination and boldness of vision allow recognition of a wide range of placements for deacons.

3.2 SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Responses from deacons indicated that they were able to find support in a number of ways: among other deacons

and through Diakonia UCA (DUCA) activities and gatherings, within congregations, among family and friends and through professional supervision. Some indicated disquiet and disappointment at the level of support available from presbyteries and synods.

Diaconal ministry is ministry on the margins of the church and so deacons frequently find themselves in vulnerable positions outside the usual structures of church life.

Diaconal ministry will be enhanced as presbyteries, together with deacons, develop ways of meaningful engagement with the ministry of its deacons. In return their own ministries will be enhanced as the deacon's insights and perspectives are fed into the church's life.

3.3 EDUCATION

3.3.1 Initial Education of Deacons

Theological College staff, deacons and deacon candidates agree that it is not easy to provide appropriate education for deacon candidates when, in some classes, students for any ordained ministry are in a minority and in most classes candidates for ministry of the Word outnumber deacon candidates.

The ministry of deacon is enhanced as:

- deacon candidates and designated staff persons are encouraged to develop significant relationships.
- college staff are proactive in designing assignment tasks and essay topics which take diaconal elements into account
- college staff give appropriate attention to the formation of a diaconal identity in deacon candidates
- deacons and deacon candidates take up study opportunities in diaconal ministry in other denominations and/or countries.

3.3.2 Field Education

College staff, deacons and deacon students acknowledge the difficulty in finding suitable field education placements for deacon candidates. Effective education occurs when there is

time and opportunity to make connections with the community and the congregation.

Education for diaconal ministry is enhanced as field education placements provide opportunity for significant diaconal experience, there are realistic expectations about what can be achieved in field education and appropriate time is provided for engagement in ministry.

Field Education Supervision

Deacons and deacon candidates spoke of the difficulty of finding field education supervisors.

Diaconal ministry is enhanced as deacons or people who have had significant exposure to diaconal ministry make themselves available as field education supervisors, and as appropriate and accessible training is provided for supervisors.

3.3.3 National Deacon Education Coordinator

Deacons and deacon candidates noted the great value of deacon-specific courses in addition to the more general biblical and theological studies they share with other students.

Most colleges have only a few deacon students at any time. Course offerings vary from state to state. Providing specialist staff or staff time to teach such courses has financial implications. Deacon intensives taught every two years at a central location are well received. The 1997 Assembly agreed to:

'explore ways in which the appointment of a Deacon Education Coordinator may be made to assist all colleges to prepare annual events and to keep an up-to-date listing of resources, and to report to the Standing Committee (the need for the position to be reviewed after five years by the Ministerial Education Commission) (Section 7); (97:32:07 (c)iv).'

Some of the tasks such a deacon educator might undertake are to:

- co-ordinate national initiatives in deacon education including the present national preessional course;
- support and resource existing staff in the provision deacon specific courses, particularly with regard to content and deacon formation;
- engage in research, particularly in the theology of *diakonia* and nature of diaconal leadership;
- be available as a resource person for the Assembly, MEC, synods and presbyteries on deacon issues, especially as they relate to the four phases of ministerial education;
- keep an updated bibliography and list of resource materials for diaconal ministry and deacon formation issues;
- liaise with other international and ecumenical diaconal ministry training bodies;
- spend time during the teaching year in each of the theological colleges on a rotational basis.

Diaconal ministry will be enhanced when a national deacon educator is appointed to promote, oversee and co-ordinate deacon education nationwide.

3.3.4 Continuing Education

Like all others engaged in a specified ministry of the Uniting Church, deacons are required to engage in continuing education. Research shows that some engage in professional post-graduate degrees, others access professional development courses offered by bodies other than the church. We note the positive initiative taken by DUCA in 2002, when it instituted the first of its biennial national continuing education programs.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as:

- *Funds for professional development are made available*
- *Church-based Continuing Education for Ministry programs address issues of diaconal ministry and theology*
- *Support and encouragement is given to DUCA continuing education programs and to deacon attendance at these programs.*

3.3.5 Education of candidates for other ministries

It is clear from the research that a number of candidates for the ministry of the Word have a poor understanding of the ministry of deacon and some even display distain for the ministry and antagonism towards deacon candidates.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as candidates for the ministry of the Word receive information and effective orientation towards the ministry of deacon in formal and informal ways during their own education.

3.3.6 Education of the church

Congregations which have experienced the ministry of a deacon generally have a good understanding of the ministry. In New South Wales at least, many, if not most congregations have no direct experience of a deacon. In the early years of the Uniting Church serving deaconesses in that state were encouraged to undertake bridging courses leading to ordination to the ministry of the Word and a number did so. Consequently in this state experience of the ministry of a deacon is rare and relatively recent and anecdotal evidence suggests that knowledge and appreciation of the ministry is low in many congregations there. Effective education of congregations about the ministry is essential.

For a number of years pamphlets and brochures about the ministry of deacon have been available and presentations have been made in various church councils. From time to time, people have had difficulty accessing brochures and other information.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as the work of deacons is publicised in the church press, as brochures are made available and distributed and as DUCA is encouraged in continuing to promote the ministry of deacon.

3.3.7 Migrant ethnic congregations and the ministry of deacon

None of the brochures exists in a language other than English. The Task Group's research shows that the ministry of deacon as it is understood in

the Uniting Church is almost unknown in migrant-ethnic congregations. Many migrant ethnic congregations have traditions of care for poor and disadvantaged people from their home churches and are aware of those needs among their own people in Australia and the needs of such people in the wider community. Few have paid workers in this area.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as the ministry of deacon becomes more widely known in migrant ethnic groups. One important step will be the production of documents about the ministry of deacon into community languages.

3.3.8 UAICC and the ministry of deacon

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress has received a number of deacons in placement, but has rarely presented candidates for the ministry of deacon.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as opportunities for indigenous people to enter the ministry of deacon are made known and taken up.

3.3.9 Ecumenical dimensions

In 1991, when the proposal was made to the Assembly that deacons should have authority to preside at Holy Communion with people with whom they were in ministry, it was argued that there were no ecumenical precedents for this move. Nevertheless it was accepted, that the renewal of the diaconate in the terms envisaged by the Uniting Church required it. In fact, the UCA is not the only church in which deacons have authority to preside at the eucharist. Deacons in the Moravian Church in Britain and Ireland have that authority. That circumstance is taken seriously in the Fetter Lane Common Statement of the Church of England and the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland which states '... we acknowledge that in our churches ... the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are duly administered' (para ii) and 'We acknowledge one another's ordained ministries ... and look forward to a time when our churches are united and our ministries interchangeable;' (para. v).

The ministry of deacon is enhanced as those given authority to speak for the Uniting Church in ecumenical forums appreciate the rationale for the Uniting Church's decisions and take care to represent its position faithfully.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as ecumenical dialogue groups consult with deacons through the deacons association DUCA when matters which impinge on the Uniting Church's ministry of deacon are under discussion.

The ministry of deacon will be enhanced as deacons are appointed to ecumenical dialogue groups

6. TERM OF REFERENCE 4

TO FURTHER THE DIACONAL MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

4.1 **Renewal of the Ministry of Word and the Ministry of Deacon**

The diaconal ministry of the church does not consist in the ordained ministry of deacon alone, but in a response of the whole church to the saving love of God. *Ministry in the Uniting Church* (1991) says:

'All are called to priestly and serving ministries by virtue of their membership on Christ'. (p. 12)

Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia (1994) speaks (para. 71) of 'an explosion of interdependent ministries' generated and justified by the call to mutuality in 1 Corinthians 12 and identifies the ordination of presbyters (*sic*) and deacons as a calling to a kind of oversight which 'seeks the full expression of all ministries in the body of Christ'.

Together with the *Protocol for Baptism and Holy Communion* (1997) and *Affirmations on Ordination* (1997), the Reports of 1991 and 1994 set out the vision for renewal and the means for implementing renewal not only of the

ministry of deacon but also for renewal of the ministry of the Word. They recognise that renewal of one ministry requires renewal and increased flexibility in the other.

The 1991 *Report* (para. 3.6.2.1(I) on p.45) sets out the relationships and distinctions between the two renewed ministries. Paragraph 3.6.3 (pp. 46-50) sets out a vision for a renewed ministry of the Word. It identified ministers of the Word as 'bearers of the tradition which derives from Christ and the apostles' (p. 47) and envisions enhancement of the ministry 'as more ministers of the word are set free in more flexible structures to pioneer new forms of ministry and congregational life' (p. 48). The *Report* called for the traditional roles of the minister of the Word to be supplemented by focus on the minister of the Word as evangelist, equipper and pioneer (pp. 48, 49). These recommendations are taken up in the 2002 edition of the Regulations in paras. 2.4.2 (d), (e), (h), (I).

The *Report* went on to say:

'Ministers of the Word must have qualities of discernment, wisdom and humility if they are to model Christ's presence ... In such a spirit they ensure that the gifts of the baptised are respected, affirmed and developed through appropriate forms of service, both within the church as an institution and in the wider community as a sign for the whole community'.

The diaconate of the whole church will be furthered as it continues to renew the ministry of the Word as well as the ministry of deacon in the ways set out in its Reports, Protocols, Affirmations and Regulations.

4.2 **Diaconal Ministry and the Christian Life**

The ministry of deacon in the life of the church draws attention to the central place of service in the life and mission of the church, reminding the church that serving ministries are not an optional

extra in the Christian life but lie close to its heart.

The diaconal ministry of the church will be furthered as more deacon placements are established and filled.

4.3 Theological Reflection in Agencies and Institutions of the Church

Many agencies of the church engage in diaconal ministry in the name of Christ. The multitude of organisations that come together under the umbrella of UnitingCare (the largest non-government provider of caring services in Australia), Frontier Services, child care facilities, schools, to name but a few, all respond to the call to follow the example of Christ and care for poor, sick, disadvantaged, homeless people, children, and those pushed to the margins of society.

A parish mission reported that they are unable to employ a deacon long term because of their dependence on restricted government funding. However they would welcome someone who could work for three months from time to time to help do some theological reflection. Their staff are so busy with day to day matters that there is no space for that kind of intentional reflection even though some had theological expertise to do it. They suggested a deacon for the role.

Deacons are employed in Uniting Church agencies in a variety of tasks, but they are not social workers in another guise. One synod task group wrote:

'There are certainly overlaps between social work and diaconal ministry ... The differences lie in the focus ... A social worker is primarily concerned with the nature of transactions between people and systems ... The deacon is primarily concerned with the nature of relationships between people, and between people and God. A deacon brings the experience and learning from their ministerial formation/training and the application of theological reflection ... the deacon intentionally embodies and

expresses the loving kindness and inclusiveness of God, listening to [them] ... and where appropriate helping them to explore the spiritual dimension of their life – thus assisting in gaining wholeness.'

The diaconal ministry of the church will be furthered as service providers connected with the Uniting Church employ deacons and undertake serious and regular theological appraisal of their goals, practices and resources in the light of the gospel.

4.4 Placement of Deacons in Congregations

The church is not only at work through its agencies but also where groups of people from a congregation or from several congregations are engaged together in serving ministry in the community. In such places a deacon offers leadership, encouragement, theological insight, helps to develop skills and identify emerging needs, and by example encourages them to stand in solidarity with disadvantaged people. The deacon's training and experience helps congregations focus their intentions and activities. The deacon's role in worship encourages them to recognise what they do as work of the Kingdom and to hold up to God all that they are doing in God's name.

The diaconal ministry of the church is furthered as deacons offer their wisdom and experience, encouraging congregations look at their communities in the light of the gospel, identify areas of need, assess the gifts and resources available, discern whether meeting this particular need is a gospel imperative for them and support congregations as they implement the decisions arising from such reflections.

The diaconal ministry of the church can be furthered when groups of congregations share resources so that a deacon

can be called to encourage, resource and co-ordinate their diaconal ministries separately and together.

4.5 Recognition of Serving Ministries in Daily Life

The *Basis of Union* Para. 7 affirms that through baptism the people of God are initiated into Christ's life and mission in the world and the 1991 *Report* made much of the ministries of baptised people in daily life (paras. 3.2 and 3.3). The 1994 *Report* identifies a special responsibility of deacons and presbyters (*sic*) to call members of the church into the exercise of their discipleship and their distinctive ministry, in accordance with their gifts (para. 77). The church is not only at work where an ordained person does important tasks in the community in the name of the church and where members are engaged together in a serving ministry in the community but also, and perhaps even more often, where lay people are at work day by day. They are renewed and refreshed as they gather to celebrate the grace of God's reconciling love for the world, to remember who they are as the people of God and to be sent out again, Sunday by Sunday, as God's servants and agents. This rhythm of coming in and going out is affirmed by the presence of the ministry of deacon in the Uniting Church and has significant implications for the nature and content of the Word preached and prayed in every congregation.

The diaconal ministry of the church is furthered when lay people are encouraged to regard their whole lives—daily work, family life, leisure activities—as the arena for their praise of God and the expression of their discipleship.

The diaconal ministry of the church is furthered when congregations recognise and affirm, through prayers and in commissioning, the daily work of their members as their ministry offered in grateful response to all God's goodness.

4.6 Church Committees and Councils

Deacons serve on committees in all areas of the life of the Church, bringing to those deliberations their experience of working among disadvantaged and marginalised people so that the Church is constantly reminded of its *diakonia* should it ever be inclined to forget.

The diaconal ministry of the church is furthered when deacons serve on the committees and councils of the church, their presence a reminder that diakonia is not an optional extra but lies close to the heart of discipleship.

4.7 Presence of Ordained and Lay Members in Community Forums

Deacons and baptised people serve on community committees and councils, in networks, working groups and lobby groups in solidarity with disadvantaged and marginalised people, their presence and actions signs of the presence of God, pointing to God's preferential option for the poor and embodying the presence of the church.

The diaconal ministry of the church is furthered as ordained and lay people serve in community activities.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Deacon Review Group conducted a wide consultation, employing a number of strategies, including questionnaires, focus groups, invitations to councils of the Church, agencies and theological colleges to make response, as well as general invitations for responses. The documents specified in the terms of reference were consulted, among other papers. A researcher engaged by the Review Group coded the material in a qualitative format in order to develop a profile of the major themes. The Group also took care to measure current experience against the hopes for the diaconate expressed in the 1991 *Report on Ministry*.

Our research has shown that the ministry of deacon

- is a transforming influence on Church and community;

- links congregation and community;
- has a role in renewing the *diakonia* of the whole Church.

In structuring its ministry to include a renewed diaconate, the Uniting Church recognises that *diakonia* is a basic ecclesial reality, affirming what the Church is to be and how it is to understand its identity. The Church is on mission, responding as God calls people out to life in the world.

It has become clear that the Church's diaconal ministry is rooted in the ministry of the whole people of God; baptism is the basis of all Christian ministry. The Church's life of worship (*leitourgia*), witness to the common faith (*martyria*) and sharing in service with poor and disadvantaged people and for the rest of creation (*diakonia*) all flow out from the springs of baptism. Deacons have a representative ministry, which includes encouraging diaconal gifts in others.

Deacons 'exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life' (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, p. 27); the Church's mission grows out of the life of worship, just as worship is shaped and informed by the call to God's mission in the world. The gathered congregation, grounded in worship, is called to be a sign and instrument of grace available for the world.

If certain steps are taken, this vision may be further realised in the Church. These steps include:

- the valuing of the whole of life as the arena for the praise of God and the expression of discipleship;
- the acceptance and articulation of the vision of the diaconate outlined in the Uniting Church's previous decisions;
- the promotion of the ministry of deacon across the Church, and deacon placements arising out of long-term strategies;
- the valuing of the theological leadership of deacons, not least in the councils of the Church;
- the appointment of a national deacon coordinator.