

2014 YEARBOOK
THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
CHAPTER 11
METHODIST ORDER OF DEACONS
Deacon Dr Vernon van Wyk

“I am in the midst of you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:27 GNB)

“That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served” (Mark 10:45 MSG)

1. THE ROLE OF A DEACON

The model for diaconal ministry is Jesus Christ, ‘one who serves’. Servanthood is the key to understanding the call to diaconal ministry. The servanthood that is central to diaconal ministry is a costly way of life chosen by those who know their own brokenness and their own need for God’s healing. It can be embraced only by those who have received God’s love and been empowered by the Holy Spirit. Diaconal, servanthood ministry, according to DIAKONIA World Federation (DiaconalReflections, p. 1), “... means being a healing, accepting, encouraging presence to others, enabling them to experience God’s unending, unconditional, love and forgiveness. It includes seeking justice and sharing a vision. It presumes an image of God whose love and care extends to all people. It is a call to be in a relationship with God and God’s world, to accept, support, and comfort, and to equip and encourage others to use their own gifts to fulfil their potential in service and life.”

Deacons are ordained in and act as “living icons of Christ the servant, who is the sign of hope in the Church and the world.” (From the *Diakonia of Christ*, p 109). When harnessed to the hope that Christ brings, the Deacon becomes an icon of that hope. It is in this role of a living icon reflecting Christ the servant, who is the sign of hope in the church and to the world, that the Deacon’s service emerges. In being an icon of Christ, Deacons are identifying with the suffering of the world, with the oppressed, the poor, the disenfranchised, and the abused. The diaconate calls the whole church, Presbyters, Deacons and laity, to see the suffering of the world and to be involved in mobilising the church to being a caring community. We are to bear one another’s burdens, not to make others dependent, but to express solidarity and support, to be agents of healing and hope.

2. ON BECOMING A METHODIST DEACON

The Candidating procedure is the same as for Presbyters. Christians of any age with a call to primarily a ministry of Service and wishing to candidate for this Order should, in the first instance, explore their calling with their society minister and circuit superintendent minister early in the calendar year. A clear understanding of a call to serve and of the type of service ministry that will be conducted is essential in avoiding possible role confusion. Candidates should have a strong sense of vocation to the Ministry of Word and Service (or Service only) and not a failed or thwarted sense of vocation somewhere else (e.g. Word and Sacrament). There needs to be clarity of vision/purpose for the whole Circuit, into which a vision for the diaconal appointment fits. This should be analysed and translated into specific aims and goals for the diaconal appointment. All parties are requested to ensure that only qualifying candidates are recommended to the Order. The basic Entrance Requirements for Deacons are as follows:

- Applicants must be in possession of a Matriculation (or equivalent) Certificate
- Be a Local Preacher on trial, if candidating as preaching-Deacon
- Applicants may candidate to become non-preaching Deacons, i.e. those who believe that their ministry is of a more practical nature and that for them God’s Word can be adequately proclaimed through their acts of service. A letter of recommendation from Superintendent Minister is required.
- Completed on the academic level of:
 - Higher Certificate in Theology: Introduction to New Testament (45121); Introduction to Old Testament (45111); Introduction to Theology (45241) and Pastoral Care (45371)
 - Diploma in Theology: Getting to Know the Bible (85100); Systematic Theology 1 (85240) and Practical Theology 1 (85370)

- Bachelor in Theology: Developing Skills for Theological Study (7000); Interpreting Texts (7004) and Engaging with people pastorally and ethically (7002)

To be accepted for ordination all Deacons must:

- Complete either the Higher Certificate in Theology (TEEC), or the Diploma in Theology (TEEC), or Bachelor Degree in Theology (TEEC) *plus*
- Methodist Studies – Wesley, Polity and Accounting, *plus*
- In accordance with Section 13.17 of the MCSA Laws and Discipline have completed at least 4 years of probation (together with presbyters) focusing on skills - and character formation for a ministry of Service. One further year will be allowed to enable a probationer to complete certain academic requirements and/or internship projects not yet completed (maximum 5 years).
- Be a local preacher on full plan, if seeking to be ordained for Word and Service.

3. DEACONS IN MINISTRY

The measure in which progress has been made is reflected in the growing numbers of candidates for the Order. In 2012 one Deacon was ordained at Conference in Swaziland. No Deacons will be ordained in 2013, but the Convocation of the Order have recommended eight (8) Deacons for ordination in 2014. Three (3) Candidates were admitted to the Order in 2013 and two (2) are in the screening process for admission in 2014. This will grow the numbers to 44 in active servant-ministry:

- Eighteen (18) ordained Deacons (12 female and 6 male.)
- Five (5) Supernumeraries (4 female and 1 male)
- Fourteen (14) Probationer Deacons (6 female and 8 male)
- Two (2) candidates (1 female and 1 male)

Having men and women representing all sectors of our Southern African communities is an exciting development in The Order. The scope for serving Jesus Christ in the world is limitless and the Order provides a vehicle through which persons can be trained and prepared for servant ministry. The names of all Deacons appear in the Church Directory.

4. ANNUAL CONVOCATION

The Convocation remains the highlight of the year for Deacons. Deacons function as a dispersed religious community and the time spent together in fellowship, study and training at Convocation is invaluable and affords members an opportunity for celebrating the successes and sharing the heartaches of ministry. Deacons meet at Convocation to transact the business of the Order (L & D Appendix 7), to foster and develop their calling as servant-ministers and to receive training relevant to their ministry. The Convocation was held from Monday 22 April 2013 to Friday 26 April 2013 at eMseni Christian Conference Centre. We had a full programme focusing on various aspects of Children's ministry. The Deacons went on a field visit to AMCARE in Alberton and Rev. Dr. Leon Klein conducted a Workshop on "Servant Leadership". A Rededication Service conducted by the Warden, Deacon Dr. Vernon van Wyk ended the Convocation. It was especially gratifying to have Bishop Andrew Motswenyane present for the whole Convocation.

5. ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Methodist Order of Deacons is a member of DIAKONIA World Federation. All Protestant Churches with diaconal ministries world-wide are eligible for membership. The Warden attended the very blessed Conference "Diakonia – Healing and Wholeness for the World" in Berlin, Germany from 1 – 9 July 2013. Valuable links with other Methodist Diaconal Orders in Africa were forged at the Conference.

6. FINANCES

Most of the expenses incurred for the Convocation are covered by Circuits contributing to the accommodation of their Deacons. Travelling is largely covered by donations received from the District Women's Auxiliaries. We are pleased to note that the Connexional Cash Management Scheme has contributed to the Order's funds and that tuition fees have been taken over by EMMU. The Order is most grateful for this meaningful support. However, in view in the decline in funding

and increase in membership of the Order, additional sources of funding need to be found to administer the Order. We appeal to other organisations of our Church to consider supporting the work of the Order. As the Order grows the MCSA may in future also have to consider the full-time stationing and funding of the Warden of the Order.

7. CONNEXIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Methodist Order of Deacons is managed by a Connexional Committee. The following persons are recommended to Conference to serve on this Committee in 2014:

Bishop: Bishop Andrew Motswenyane - Northern Free State and Lesotho District

Warden: Dcn Dr Vernon van Wyk – Alberton (Highveld and Swaziland District)

Ministers: Rev Dr Cedric Poole – Alberton (Highveld and Swaziland District),

Rev Ina Guy - Brackenhurst (Highveld and Swaziland District)

Deacons: Deacon Rosemary van der Merwe – Parys (Northern Free State and Lesotho District),

Deacon Gerald Dickson – Toekomsrust (Central District)

Lay members: Mr Percy Howroyd – Alberton Circuit (Highveld and Swaziland District), Mr John

Mitchley – Benoni Circuit, Highveld and Swaziland District, Mrs Maureen Mildenhall –

Representing Women's Auxiliary; Highveld and Swaziland District, Mrs Beth Kok – President of

Women's Auxiliary: Central District, Mrs J Sbo Mlangeni – President of Women's Manyano, Highveld and Swaziland District

8. RESOLUTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CONFERENCE

The Convocation requested that Conference consider the following:

(a) In terms of Laws and Discipline chapter 13, and Appendix 7 of Laws and Discipline, all Deacons in active ministry are required to attend the annual Convocation of the Order of Deacons. Such attendance incurs costs of travelling and accommodation. The Convocation requests Conference to direct all Circuits to pay these costs for all Deacons in the Circuit.

(b) In terms of Appendix 7.18 of Laws and Discipline, the Convocation of the Methodist Order of Deacons endorses the resolution of the Connexional Committee to the Connexional Executive that the MCSA address the following challenges (2012 Yearbook, p.184) and requests Conference to ensure that these are given appropriate consideration:

- The structures that place one form of ministry above another
- The perceived reluctance of circuits/societies to appoint Deacons
- Differences in stipends and other allowances
- Promoting the appointment of those called to a specifically missional ministry
- Encouraging a move towards itinerant ministry in preference to the largely non-itinerant model that currently prevails.

(c) The Convocation of the Methodist Order of Deacons requests Conference that paragraph 5.3.1.8 of the 2013 Yearbook, p. 109 be deleted in its entirety, as it is preventing poorer Circuits from engaging the services of non-stipendiary ministers, probationers and Deacons, and requests that alternative ways be found to support these ministries.

(d) The Convocation of the Methodist Order of Deacons recommends that Deacon Dr Vernon van Wyk be appointed as Warden of the Order for a further period of three years from 2015 to 2017.

9. APPRECIATION

The Order is grateful for the many acts of selfless service and ministry offered by God's servants and thanks all who support this work in prayer or in kind. The Deacons are grateful to God for His call upon their lives and for the many and varied opportunities of ministry and service that have been afforded to them. Please pray for the Deacons as they seek God's help to fulfil their vision statement: "To share Christ's love through service and to help the Church respond to the needs of the wider community."