



You're a Deacon?

What on earth are you doing in a congregation?

This resource seeks to address the relationship of Deacons and congregations, and inform the placement process for Deacons and congregations.

This is #3 in a series providing resources that may be used by Period of Discernment (PoD) candidates, PoD Panels, Selection Panels, Candidates, Formation Panels, Deacons, Placement Committees, Formation Panels and congregations.

Resources may be distributed freely in print and by electronic means but attribution of the source will be appreciated.

Prepared September 2020
Diakonia Uniting Church in Australia (DUCA)
Edited by Rev Sandy Boyce (Deacon)

Introduction

The decision to renew the diaconate within the UCA was adopted in 1991 at the Sixth National UCA Assembly meeting. Deacons were seen as an important component of living out the hopes of the fledgling church to embody justice and service.

Deacons in the Uniting Church are not 'solo ministry agents', living out their diaconal calling *on behalf* of the Church. Rather, their focus is to be part of leading the Church, the whole people of God, in living out the diaconal call which is the call for the whole Church, and to engage people in mission by personal example.

The idea of Deacons in a congregation require a change in mindset for Placement Committees, theological colleges, Deacon candidates, Formation Panels and Deacons themselves.

But perhaps more importantly, the Church itself needs to understand itself in a new way, a less institutional way, and to see the role Deacons can contribute in congregations as they live out the 'kingdom community'. The gifts of that community include life to the full, liberation from the destructiveness of evil and for justice and peace, love of neighbour and care for stranger, and an openness to learning what it means to be one world.

The importance of Deacons is in who they are as well as what they do. The Deacon is present in the places where people of all sorts live their everyday lives, as a sign of the presence of God there. Particularly among people who are marginalized, oppressed, suffering, the forgotten, the unlovely, the Deacon is a sign of the justice and mercy, judgement and forgiveness, compassion and saving grace, the suffering and victory of God. Moreover, because the Deacon, for the most part, works outside of the institutions of the church, the Deacon is a sign for the congregation, scattered as *they* go about *their* daily work and ordinary lives, of the presence of God in the world. Deacons reflect in the *gathered* congregation, in a disciplined and informed way, on what it is like to bear witness and what it costs.

In response to the Deacon's presence the members of the congregation are encouraged to tell their own stories of being God's people at witness. Ordained Deacons hold before the church the model of service among those who suffer, and call the members to engage in such service. In their ministry they model Christ the servant. The distinctive function of the Deacon is to hold up service as central to Christian ministry.

(Report of the Task Group on Ministry to the 6th UCA Assembly, 1991)

Deacons are called to ministry beyond the congregation, and also to hold up to the whole people of God the centrality of service to Christian witness and mission.

Deacons are not only 'do-ers' but are those who encourage and equip others for a ministry of service and advocacy - in the local and global community.

In the contemporary context, David Clark, a Deacon in the UK Methodist Church writes: (<https://deaconstories.wordpress.com/2019/05/01/a-diaconal-church-for-a-world-on-life-support>)

"We are living in a hugely exciting but extremely precarious world. The potential opportunities ahead are immense - a new era of health and healing, excursions into outer space, a world in which wealth creation lifts everyone out of poverty, the fulfilment of billions through universal educational provision, a planet whose resources are fully used but carefully pre-

served, and a diversity of cultures all contributing to an enrichment of what it means to be human. However, over this potentially amazing future for humankind is cast a shadow which could eventually destroy life on earth as we know it. As we have been reminded by the demonstration of thousands of school children worldwide, and Extinction Rebellion more recently, human life on our planet is living on borrowed time. Epidemics of infectious diseases threaten to outlast the ability of antibiotics to contain them. Weapons of mass destruction are no less a challenge to life on earth than they were in the heady days of ban-the-bomb marches. And economic globalization continues to make the rich richer and poor poorer. If we as Christians are to communicate the amazing offer of the gifts of the kingdom community to a world in crisis, then we have to discover a new way of being church. The foundational hall-mark of such a church must be servanthood.

As the people of God, we have to become servants of the kingdom community and servants of humankind, and even the earth itself. This kind of church will first and foremost be a diaconal church. The new narrative is about God's promise that our world can and must become a universal and inclusive community – a kingdom community. The gifts of that community include life to the full, liberation from the destructiveness of evil and for justice and peace, love of neighbour and care for stranger, and an openness to learning what it means to be one world. The diaconal church is a *new form of institution*. Its calling is to manifest the gifts of that community – through worship, education, pastoral care, organization and leadership – in new and credible ways.

A diaconal church is not only a new form of institution.
It is a new form of Christian movement.

As the latter, its mission is to enable human groups and associations of all kinds – concerned with the family, education, health and healing, welfare, leisure, business and commerce, law and order and government – to manifest the gifts of the kingdom community.

It is a movement, first and foremost, about radical transformation - of that which inhibits life, liberation, love and learning into that which facilitates their flowering and bearing fruit. (David Clark)

Originally, it was envisaged that UCA Deacons for the most part would be working outside of the institutions of the church (ie not in congregations). But taking in the wisdom offered by David Clark, the Deacon's role in the gathered congregation is central to the work of the *new form of institution called the diaconal church*.

'The primary resource of the diaconal church as new movement is the people of God in the world. Their calling to be the church in the world also entails their working alongside 'friends of the kingdom', fellow travellers of other faiths and convictions'.

'The type of leadership needed to give impetus and shape to this new form of movement is a renewed diaconate. It is a divine gift to enable the people of God, and all fellow travellers, to respond to the quest for community, local, national and global, on which the future of humankind depends'.

'Every denomination within a fragmented Christendom faces its own particular challenges in seeking to bring the servant church, the diaconal church into being. It is a daunting but exhilarating task which will take many generations to accomplish. However, we have to begin where we are. This means welcoming those still faint signs foreshadowing the coming into being of the diaconal church and a renewed diaconate'.

'We have to hammer out, own and communicate a new narrative in the form of a theology (of the kingdom) and ecclesiology (of the diaconal church) which is paramount for the communal salvation of a world on life-support.

We need to grasp that diaconal ministry is very different from 'witness through service' (which is the calling of all God's people).

It means us becoming passionate about the creation of a new form of Christian leadership as enablers and change-agents.

The vocation of a renewed diaconate is to inspire, energize and equip the whole church, in partnership with fellow travellers wherever they exist, to become a movement for the communal transformation of society and world. I am convinced such a movement is a divine calling and imperative for our day and age. (David Clarke)

In what ways can the leadership of Deacons working in and through congregations enable the flourishing of the *diaconal* church as articulated by David Clark?

So, what do UCA Deacons 'do'? Deacons are men and women who:

- hold up **service** as an inescapable response to the Gospel
- **encourage** all God's people in their service of God inside and outside the church
- are **advocates** for justice, sharing in the church's justice ministries, standing beside people who are disadvantaged or oppressed, encouraging others to work for justice and calling the church to costly action
- are **carers** who offer support and encouragement, standing beside those who suffer, and encouraging others to use their caring gifts
- are **pioneers** serving on the fringes in areas of life where social, economic and political changes are exposing new needs which are frequently remote from the experience of church-goers
- are **educators** whose special task is to educate the church on justice issues and community needs
- are **enablers** who encourage other people to recognize and use their gifts for service
- are called to be **prophets** prepared to challenge injustice and offer other alternatives
- are **bridge builders** between the church and the community.

A very broad set of skills for ministry and mission!

The ministry of Deacon in the UCA is understood primarily as:

- a **link** between congregations with issues and communities of needs beyond the congregation
- a **transforming influence** on church and community
- a **catalyst** for renewing the diakonia of the whole church – raising awareness in congregations and the wider church about issues of justice or people in need, and in many places leading other people to become involved in advocacy and service for the disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people.

The Report to the 6th UCA Assembly said:

Deacons are closely related to a church congregation even when their ministry is based in a community organization. Deacons will frequently share in the leadership of worship. 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 (*Report to the 6th UCA Assembly, p.42*).

In their preaching, Deacons have a particular opportunity to reflect from a theological and socio-cultural perspective on the challenges of Christian witness in the world. Of course, Ministers of the Word and others who preach also have the opportunity to do so, but it is a characteristic of Deacons because of their diaconal ministry focus. They will seek to bring to the congregation's attention that worship and service are interwoven. Deacons are also attentive to the work of providing a solid and robust biblical and theological foundation for a diaconal church, and will use that lens when reflecting on the Biblical narrative.

Deacons are called to offer leadership among the people of the UCA in a ministry of service to the world. The primary focus of the ministry of Deacon is on care and compassion for the poor and oppressed and in seeking social justice for all people. Through the ministry of Deacon, the UCA is responding creatively to God's call to ministry in our time, by providing a body of men and women who will exercise leadership in service and justice ministries.

In structuring its ministry to include a renewed diaconate, the UCA recognizes 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. The gathered congregation, grounded in worship, is called to be a sign and instrument of grace available for the world.

When the UCA talks about 'diakonia' it means more than individual acts of charitable service. It responds to the model of Christ's ministry (Luke 4:16-21), recognizing that service in solidarity with the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized people is integral to its life and mission. '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 UCA, 1994, para 104*).

Through its diakonia, the church becomes a community encompassing within its life something of what it means for the whole creation to live under the coming reign of God, and takes account of the creative Spirit of God at work in transforming activities in the wider community and within the church building up the faith community.
(1991 & 1994 report)

Whatever the UCA says about the diakonia expressed in the ministry of Deacon it also says about the ministry of the whole people of God, for all are called to priestly and serving ministries by virtue of their membership in Christ.
(*Ministry in the UCA, 1991, p.12*)

Reflections on the UCA 'Statements to the Nation' (1977 and 1988) and the World Council of Churches statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*

The UCA has been led into many areas of ministry which focus on the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people. The UCA Statement to the Nation (1977) affirmed 'our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race'. It went on to 'pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur; to work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond; to affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available; and to oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms'. It committed the church to 'challenge values which emphasise acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others and which encourage a higher standard of living for the privileged in the face of the daily widening gap between the rich and poor'. And in a prophetic statement, the church expressed concern for 'the basic human rights of future generations, and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment'.

Similarly, the 1988 Statement to the Nation, prepared by the then President, Sir Ronald Wilson, for the Bicentennial Year, rejoiced 'in the vision of a multicultural society where these peoples may live together in unity and diversity, maintaining different cultural traditions, yet forging a common destiny based on commitment to the ideals of equality of opportunity, tolerance, justice and compassion'. It also expressed the commitment of the Uniting Church in Australia, that 'in obedience to God, in concern for the integrity of our nation, and in co-operation with all citizens of goodwill, we Aboriginal and newer Australians have determined to stand together'. In so doing, 'we are committed to work for justice and peace, calling for honesty and integrity, encouraging tolerance and compassion, challenging acquisitiveness and greed, opposing discrimination and prejudice, condemning violence and oppression and creating a loving and caring community. We deplore the divisions of humanity along racial, cultural, political, economic, sexual and religious lines. In obedience to God, we struggle against all systems and attitudes which set person against person, group against group, or nation against nation. We recognise a widening gap between the rich and the poor, not only within Australia, but within the whole human community. We will strive to uphold the rightful claims of the poor on the resources of this nation and the world. We will seek to identify and challenge all social and political structures and all human attitudes which perpetuate and compound poverty. Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation'.

Policies, public statements and resources over the 43+ years of the Uniting Church in Australia has led the church to take, at times, risky and prophetic positions on issues of social justice at home and abroad, arising from and informed by a confident faith in God, the example of Jesus Christ, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledging they were written in a particular time and place, nevertheless the essence of the priorities and concern continue in our time and place. While the church once held a more 'privileged' position in society, it is now definitely on the margins with less influence and power.

Perhaps it's not such a bad thing. The World Council of Churches document, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, located mission **from the margins**, not to the margins. An important distinction.

It states:

(37) Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in

order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination, and dehumanization, and which exploit or destroy people and the earth. **Mission from the margins** calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian mission has at times been understood and practiced in ways which failed to recognize God's alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God's Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.

(38) **Mission from the margins** seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. **Mission from the margins** recognizes that being in the centre means having access to systems that lead to one's rights, freedom, and individuality being affirmed and respected; living in the margins means exclusion from justice and dignity. Living on the margins, however, can provide its own lessons. People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins, living in vulnerable positions, often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles; people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions".

(40) Because the context of missional activity influences its scope and character, the social location of all engaged in mission work must be taken into account. Missiological reflections need to recognize the different value orientations that shape missional perspectives. The aim of mission is not simply to move people from the margins to centres of power but to confront those who remain the centre by keeping people on the margins. Instead, churches are called to transform power structures.

(41) The dominant expressions of mission, in the past and today, have often been directed at people on the margins of societies. These have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not as active agents of missionary activity. Mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural, and political systems which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex. Historically, this stance has equated Christianity with Western culture and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood of the victims of such marginalization'.

These profound insights offer challenges to the institutional church and where it places itself. It also affirms the work of a diaconal church prepared to address, challenge and transform marginalizing structures, systems, values and practices. It will shape worship, preaching and missional priorities.

How might a Deacon offer leadership in and through a congregation to this transforming mission?

Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes

https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/TogethertowardsLife_MissionandEvangelism.pdf

A credal statement

The 2001 DIAKONIA World Assembly in Brisbane, 'Hearts on fire in a new time', developed a credal statement which picked up the themes explored during the Assembly. The creed is a way of expressing diaconal ministry where standing diakonia is "Christian service to which all the baptized are called and which is part of the mission of Christ's church in the world".

We believe in God, creator and re-creator
Awesome mystery and ever present,
Rock and ground of our life.
We believe in God,
Wide of heart and full of compassion,
Gathering us and embracing us in all our diversity,
Faithful, with us, loving parent of the world.
We believe in Jesus Christ,
Friend and forgiver, companion and redeemer,
One with us in vulnerability,
Full of grace and kneeling at our feet.
We believe in the Holy Spirit
Comforter and disturber, sustaining guide and liberator,
exciting, leaping flame of life
And sacred space for our dancing.

We affirm our diaconal ministry.
With thankful hearts,
We celebrate in wonder and joy the safe place of our meeting
and the renewal of our passion for service.
In unity and diversity and in humble faith,
We commit ourselves again to justice and caring,
To seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus
and to moving towards the truly inclusive community
of a God who makes the impossible possible.

In faith, we will face the truth of our times,
with its powerful global forces and sweeping new technologies.
In Jesus Christ, we will discern the good and the evil,
we will seek the struggling and the lost in all
and we will lift up in hope the dignity in the chaos.
We will be the splash which creates the ripples of transformation
and which point to the miracles of God.

We believe that Pentecost is renewed every day.
The fire of the Holy Spirit will burn within us
as the grand passion in the belly of our life,
sometimes gently flaming from the patient rubbing of the fire sticks,
sometimes sparking painfully as we dare to risk the costly friction
of coming very near to each other in our diversity,
Sometimes given as a gift as we sit warming ourselves
and resting by the fire of God.

We believe in the fire of life which always leaps free of us.
Surprising and refining
Cleansing and consuming
Costly burning from the very heart of God
The fire which burns forever.

'You're a Deacon? What are you doing in a congregation?' **by Rev John Brentnall (Deacon)**

Can the role of the Deacon be one whereby the congregation itself is equipped, encouraged and 'sent out' for diaconal ministry in the community - the diaconal ministry of the whole people of God.

My experience of paid ministry is unique and I consider that it was “deacon-like” long before I was ordained. I had completed my Bachelor of Theology as a private student and I was about to begin a Basic Clinical Pastoral Education course so that I would be allowed to visit a hospital as a volunteer pastoral care worker. I had loved the missiology part of my BTh. and had attended a number of mission focussed seminars during the previous decade, including a number by Kennan Callaghan. So, I had a heart for pastoral care and a passion for mission.

I began in 2004, employed half time by a congregation to replace a Minister of the Word. I was a lay person, who the congregation called a “Lay Minister,” and paid the same as an ordained ministry agent. It was a fairly large congregation, a merger of two former congregations, and had a Minister of the Word and a part time youth worker as well as me. There were three Sunday services, which were a morning traditional, mid-morning “alternative” worship and an evening youth service. My role was principally to provide pastoral care to the “more mature” members of the congregation, who mainly attended the morning worship and provide chaplaincy services to a residential aged care facility and an independent living village. I was also on the preaching roster, mostly for the morning service.

After 12 months in this placement, I was called to a small, semi-rural congregation as the half time Minister. This congregation was in a recovery phase, having been assailed by two dramatic events. First, it had been rent asunder by the Resolution 84 decision of the 2003 Assembly, which saw 60% of the congregation leave, (including the Minister) being the younger and middle-aged cohorts of the congregation. Families were divided by this event and lifelong friendships ended. The second drama was the retirement on medical grounds of the Minister who had been called after the split. Although he had only been there a short time, this minister had been working hard to care for the congregation and help them to re-structure so that they could carry on into the future. He had quickly become loved and many were deeply saddened when he became ill and had to retire.

One real positive when I arrived was that 6 months before, a couple of men from the congregation had set up one of the first Men's Sheds in Australia, auspiced by the Church Council and given some seed funding. I started to visit the Shed on a regular basis at morning tea time and began to build relationships there. I realised however, that this kind of involvement was too limited and that I needed to become an active member. So, I paid up and began attending one morning a week and getting my hands dirty. By doing this I was sometimes in the position of working on a job alongside another member and having some deep conversations. I was also in the position of being able to see the immense benefits that Shed membership gave to the members. The social interactions, the camaraderie, the friendships formed, especially at morning and afternoon tea and at lunchtimes, were life giving to many and for some, life reawakening. I became a staunch supporter of the Shed and defended it whenever it was attacked by those who questioned why the church supported it when it never led to more “bums on seats” on Sunday mornings.

In our Mission planning, I encouraged our people to include a goal to “provide generous, intentional hospitality, and welcoming inclusion to members of our programs and activities and others in the community.” I have modelled this in various ways such as arguing for the purchase of decent coffee rather than the cheapest brand!

Partly from self interest, and also to add to my modelling of community involvement, I joined the local Rural Fire Service, Palliative Care Volunteers and lawn bowls club.

During my 6 1/2 years with this congregation I became a Lay Pastor and then “transitioned” to ordination as a Deacon in 2010. The Presbytery Chairperson said that I held the record for commissioning as I had been commissioned in various ways four times before my ordination!

In my conversations and my preaching, I encouraged the congregation to mentally “sit on the veranda” of the church and become aware of what was happening around us in the community. I often prayed that we would discern what the Spirit was doing in the community and that we would find ways to join with the Spirit in that work. I like to think that I helped to create an atmosphere in which the people were encouraged to think creatively and come up with ideas for ways to create connections with the community and opportunities to start and build relationships. As I look back, I am gratified that two people came to me, and then the Church Council, with a proposal to start a “Computers for Seniors” group. Some women had an idea to start a “Social Craft” group. Some others wanted to start a community garden and this was able to happen when a couple in the church offered some land on their farm, a short drive out of town. The Men’s Shed put in a lot of time and effort helping the garden get established, constructing the raised garden beds, fencing and a shed.

In 2010 the congregation subdivided its two acre block of land and sold half. The proceeds were used to build a purpose designed Men’s Shed and kitchen and a meeting room, office and storeroom for the church.

Some of us were inspired by a video interview that Craig Mitchell did with Charles Gallacher and Kerrie Lingham of the Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale Uniting Church. They had a church in Queenscliff that was open seven days a week with all sorts of activities that connected with different parts of the community. One of our members had a vision of our suite of buildings becoming something similar - a wellness centre for our community, open seven days a week.

I left in 2012 to serve for three years as a Resource Ministry agent and came back to town when I retired in 2015. Since I came back, three of the women had an idea which they called a “Pop Up Community group.” As there is no council library in our town and the bookmobile is not accessible for some elderly people, one element of this is a Community Library. The meeting room was stripped of its furniture and book shelves placed around the walls. An appeal was made to the community for book donations and this was responded to generously by the community. At any one time there are about three thousand books on the shelves, at least that many in a reserve area and thousands have been passed on to St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, aged care homes or sold in an annual Men’s Shed sale. The Library has become a hub and meeting place in the community, helping to break down social isolation, and helping newcomers to town to meet people. The library coordinator vibrantly personifies “radical hospitality,” supported by a great group of volunteers, many of whom are not members of the congregation. A book group adds value to the library each month.

Another element of the Pop Up Community Group is a monthly gathering called “Coffee and Friends.” Before COVID-19 we met once a month to enjoy a good speaker, good coffee and good conversation. We had received a grant from Uniting to set up the Pop Up group and used part of it to buy a coffee machine. In the early days we had about twenty people coming but it grew to about 50 each month and many people not connected to the church looked forward to it each month.

With another part of the grant we purchased a laptop computer. We advertised to the community who didn’t have computers or the internet that they could come and use our internet to do on-line applications, download and print forms and so on.

In a way, we have at least partially realised our dream of a seven day a week community centre. Before the virus lock down, we had the library open five half days a week, the Men’s Shed is open two days a week, and apart from the church groups meeting weekly fortnightly or monthly, we had a range of community groups such as AA, Al-Anon, Red Cross, Rotary

committees and U3A using our facilities. We also have a yoga group, meditation group, "calm birth" group, karate club and dancing classes hiring our halls. We have a wonderful booking person who personifies "generous, intentional hospitality" and goes out of her way to assist our hirers in every way possible.

Granted, we are only a small faith community in a small town and we have had unique circumstances. However, to answer the question, yes, I do believe the role of the Deacon can be one whereby the congregation itself is equipped, encouraged and 'sent out' for diaconal ministry in the community.

Rev John Brentnall (Deacon)
27th September 2020



The experience of Deacons and Congregations by Rev Juleen Willis (Deacon)

I served as a Deacon for 10 years in a congregation in a regional town in the Adelaide Hills. Prior to ordination I was ministering in a diaconal role in the same church for nearly 10 years before that.

Deacons have a great part to play in ministry in the 21st century within local congregations. The local church is often the most visible face of the church, so it makes sense for the congregation to be a sign of God's presence in the community. This is especially the case when the church is in the town centre, as this church is.

In our situation that firstly meant working out a way to support a man recently out of prison (which is located not far from the church) as well as local families of prisoners. As a result of these relationships a vision developed of the work God was calling us to – 'To be the Heart of God Open to the Community'.

Slowly a new diaconal mindset developed and over the years a number of values and decisions shaped the culture of our church.

1. The congregation started to look outward to our local community and made plans to include the 'outsiders'. Mission work undertaken by other organisations was supported generously by this congregation, but not everyone embraced face to face relationships with people who were different, especially those likely to disrupt our plans and property.
2. Giving 'outsiders' priority in our mission planning at times seemed to be at the expense of benefits to the established congregation, but this actually brought benefits to our whole church and community in the long run.
3. Ensuring those regularly involved in the programmes were given input to the places in our church where key decisions were made. This is an opportunity for those with the power in our church, to share that power with those who do not usually have it.
4. Attitudes are often the most difficult to change. When broken or troubled people come into the church, it seems most people are looking for, and expecting change as a result of the ministry 'given' to them. As followers of Jesus that mindset should be reversed; it is the strong who should take the burden and difficulty of change – learning to be more humble, more patient, to acknowledge prejudices and to understand the other, to see injustices for what they are, and try to address them.
5. Seeing each person as an individual as we do any other church member: Their name and gifts first, not 'the drug addict', or the 'homeless bloke'. Then more authentic relationships where both acknowledge strengths and weaknesses become possible.
6. Ensuring our responses to problems were addressed in light of who Jesus is. When a few homeless people started using parts of our property to sleep it was suggested we should call the police. Instead we looked at what we could do to serve those God was bringing to our area.

Starting from the first coffee morning and at the suggestion of those present we started a free community meal in Feb 2001 - as though we were inviting people into our dining room. Dignity for each person and our shared humanity was the focus. Subsequently, starting an informal church service in 2008; developing a room on our property as an emergency accommodation in 2015; and a Community Kitchen Café for career training and community building in 2017.

This diaconal work has also meant increased opportunities for the local churches to work together. A number of small churches in the region have given wonderful support to the programmes mentioned above, along with people from other denominations.

Hungry No More (HNM); the umbrella name for all these programmes, has become well known and valued in the district. Diaconal ministry is the key here especially at this time in our history when the approval rating of Christianity and the Church is at a low point.

With this profile, HNM has been invited to a number of forums with the local regional council looking to address homelessness in the area and been referred to a number of people looking for services in the area.

I finished my placement 12 months ago. The new minister is not a Deacon (although the church was open to calling a Deacon). The church, through the profile, gave high priority to ensuring the work that had been developed over 20 years would continue and be developed further.

The work of the diaconate is essential to the work of the local congregation and Deacons should seriously consider this possibility.

The words of a simple song I found recently epitomise what I feel my work as a Deacon is about.

Draw the Circle Wide (The Nature of the Church)

Draw the circle, draw the circle wide. Draw the circle, draw the wide.
No one stands alone, we stand side by side.
Draw the circle, draw the circle wide.

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still; let this be our song:
no one stands alone. Standing side by side, draw the circle, draw the circle wide.

Rev Juleen Villis (Deacon)

September 2020



'You're a Deacon? What are you doing in a congregation?' **by Rev Christa Megaw (Deacon)**

I was ordained as a Deacon while I was working as International Mission Officer in the SA Synod with Rev Adam Tretheway (Deacon). I left that role due to budget cuts and was called to a placement in a congregation in the Adelaide Hills.

On my first visit to the church, I noticed a poster promoting Uniting World's 'Lent Event' on the front wall, which confirmed to me that this congregation would be open to hearing about and supporting those in need - including those in our partner churches.

This was a congregation that included a number of people who were involved in supporting the Kairos prison ministry. A small Mission and Outreach team was formed and encouraged the playgroup, organised Pancake Day to support Uniting Care, World Vision 40 hour famine, Days for Girls, the community garden. We supported the local Christmas pageant and the Christmas Bowl Appeal. We also supported the 'Hungry No More' ministry in another congregation in the Adelaide Hills.

Through the year, various issues were highlighted in our worship services, including asylum seekers, indigenous people and the environment. Being an intergenerational congregation, I also encouraged children and young people to be involved in worship leading, and local and wider mission activities. Lifelong learning is important for us all, and this includes helping to educate the congregation about ways of caring for our neighbours. I also invited a range of speakers to preach on relevant issues on Sunday mornings. This was partly because my placement was part time and partly because I think it's important for a congregation to hear a range of voices, particularly those from the margins.

While I believe most people in the congregation appreciated the focus being on connecting the church with the community, when it came time for me to leave and I asked for feedback on my ministry, I did hear a couple of people say that they wished I had given more time to them.

This year I have accepted a call to Henley Fulham UC - 1 congregation, 2 sites. The demographic of this congregation is older. Numbers have declined over the years, and some older members can no longer attend in person. I have found more of my time has been spent in pastoral care. Fortunately there is an active pastoral care group as well.

The congregation is also committed to local and wider mission initiatives and I was delighted to see how much non perishable food was brought to a recent Harvest Thanksgiving service. The food was donated to Uniting Care. Members of the congregation have also had significant involvement in the Red Dove Café in the Royal Adelaide Show, with profits given to a number of different projects.

The congregation has a link with the Oodnadatta faith community, and have provided transport for young people attending a Christian youth gathering back to Oodnadatta. A few of us recently met with Pastor Mark Kickett, Interim chairperson of the National UAICC and Ian Dempster (Resource Officer UAICC SA) to talk about how we might continue to strengthen our relationship with Congress, and Oodnadatta faith community.

This September in our worship we have been focusing on the Environment through using the Season of Creation themes. This is the first time this congregation has considered these issues and they have appreciated the opportunity. I will encourage them to take action on being more environmentally conscious.

Recently, we received a Uniting Foundation grant from the SA Synod to employ a part-time Community Support Worker. We aim to make more connections between the community and the church and to explore having a virtual mid week community. The most important thing for

the person taking up this new appointment will be to listen to members of the community to find out what the needs are and then to work together to address these needs.

In recent years as numbers in churches have declined, there has been a focus on pioneering ministries, such as fresh expressions and church planting. Deacons in congregational placements are in a prime position to play a key role in experimenting with new ways of being church.

An important question is: 'What is God up to - and where are the opportunities for partnering with the Spirit?' Rather than thinking about how people can join us in our church buildings, we are being called to join God in our neighbourhoods.

This will take different forms in different places, but the challenge is certainly there for us to explore.

Rev Christa Megaw (Deacon)

September 29th, 2020.



Deacons in a congregation by Rev Andy Broadbent (Deacon)

Prior to my first and current placement at Busselton Uniting Church I spent ten years working as the WA Coordinator for TEAR Australia, having been a high school teacher and school chaplain before that. I have always had a heart for people on the margins so it seemed natural to be ordained as a Deacon.

When I arrived in 2015, Busselton was a reasonably sized, elderly congregation (70-80 on a Sunday morning, with an average age of 76). I was initially working four days per week alongside a Minister of the Word who was also working for the Presbytery in a Family & Children's role. The church had an op-shop, low cost food shop and community café (2 mornings per week) and a large part of my role was to help rebuild the relationship between the church and the outreach programmes (for a variety of reasons there was angst and a disconnect).

To my mind, too many of our missional activities (as Uniting Churches) are disconnected or at best only have a loose affiliation with our worshipping communities (to the detriment of both!). I see my role as a Deacon to make sure the two are intimately connected.

In my experience, the key to this is staffing (be it paid or voluntary) and to this end we have worked hard to ensure our key people actively share our faith and understanding of mission. This is true of our paid coordinators (in the op-shop, community café and soon to be opened debt relief centre) and of our volunteers, although many of our volunteers are not part of our worshipping community and do not share our same faith convictions. There are currently between 60-70 volunteers involved in our missional programs (approximately 20 of those are a part of our worshipping community.)

For the past three years I have been the sole minister in placement and so I preach and lead worship most weeks which means I am constantly referring to our missional programs (and the theological imperative for them) in my sermons and through the prayers etc. As such our missional activities have become a key part of our identity as a congregation and there is a strong sense of ownership of them. For example, when our op-shop burned down 12 months ago we were left with a \$15,000 hole in our budget to keep our community café open - we put a call out to the congregation and in a sign of how highly it is valued, they very happily and readily stepped up to fund the short fall.

Part of my role as a Deacon is to encourage the leaders of our missional programs. We have a basic question when it comes to structuring our programs; "How holistic are they?" We want our programs to help people experience the life to the full Jesus spoke about in John 10:10, we want people to be healthy emotionally, physically and spiritually and so we look at how our programs are facilitating that. For example, in our café there is a well-used prayer box where people can place prayer requests, we have run Alpha for people wanting to explore the Christian faith and volunteers often invite people to church on a Sunday.

These are our programs:

Followers' Inn Community Café

Open Tues & Thursday 8.30am-12.30pm provides food and community to people who need it (serves between 50-60 meals per day). We pay a coordinator 12 hours per week and have about 20 volunteers. The majority of the people who access this service are very much on the margins (sleeping rough, financially struggling etc.)

Op-shop

Due to re-open in December following a fire, open 5 days per week. We have a paid coordinator (15 hours p/week) and there will be approximately 40 volunteers. This is the financial driver for our missional activities.

CAP Debt Centre

Christian Against Poverty Debt Centres help people who find themselves in major debt by providing a free service that provides financial counselling as well as a budget that will help them achieve financial freedom. This is due to open in early 2021 and we will be paying a coordinator 2 days p/week. Trained volunteers from the church will be providing pastoral support to those accessing the program as they journey out of debt. We accessed a seeding grant from the WA Synod to get this started but longer term it will be funded by our op-shop.

Reconciliation Choir (Wadan Warangkinny)

Consisting of indigenous and non-indigenous members, started and coordinated by two people from our church. There 6-10 people involved in this.

Challenges as a Deacon in a Congregational Placement

As our worshipping community and programs have grown (we have between 100-120 on a Sunday morning), I have found myself being more of a facilitator than an active participant in our missional programs. More of my time is spent on the practicalities of running a church and organising worship then it is at the coal-face (so to speak) of our missional programs and there is a sadness and sense of loss there for me. I am energised by involvement with these programs and I have less and less time for them.

Balancing the needs of the “old and new” is hard! We have younger people in our congregation now), plus people joining us from our programs with no church background so a traditional worship service, geared for 80 year-olds is not appropriate.

The final thing to say is I am very aware that in writing these reports things (and the role of the minister) can seem better than they are! I was very blessed to arrive at Busselton, a place with some incredibly high-capacity people. I think as a Deacon what I was able to do is join the dots and create a greater synergy between what was happening in the community and what happens on a Sunday between 10-11am.

Personally, I would prefer to work alongside a Minister of the Word (to allow me to focus more on my areas of passion) but currently that is not possible.

Rev Andy Broadbent (Deacon)

Busselton Uniting Church
www.busseltonuniting.org



The role of a Deacon in a CBD congregation

by Rev Sandy Boyce (Deacon)

The role of Deacon at Pilgrim, a city church in Adelaide, sits within Pilgrim's own vision:

We are called by God to be a prophetic witness in the city of Adelaide, so that new life and vitality will be generated in our city and in its people. We celebrate in our unity and diversity, our shared beliefs and past experiences, and value worship, teaching, creativity and justice. (*Pilgrim Vision Statement*)

The following aims to give a 'big picture' snapshot of the focus of Ministry of Deacon at Pilgrim. The examples are indicative rather than comprehensive.

Ministry of the whole people of God

Supporting, encouraging and equipping others to use their gifts of caring and service. Deacons have a representative function which includes encouragement of the gifts of diakonia of all the members. Whatever the UCA says about the diakonia expressed in the Ministry of Deacon, it also says about the ministry of the whole people of God, for all are called to priestly and serving ministries by virtue of their membership in Christ (Ministry in the UCA, 1991).

At Pilgrim this will include:

- Through the Lounge Ministry for visitors during the week, Sunday Night Teas, and other related programs for disadvantaged and homeless people
- Through practical assistance to those in need, including connecting with other agencies
- Building relationships of trust and support with people who are vulnerable or marginalized
- Developing and documenting frameworks and approaches to working with others in need
- To offer practical and pastoral support to Pilgrim people working in areas of justice beyond the life of the congregation including working with refugees, and disadvantaged people.

Prophetic ministry and public theology

'The diaconate will 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 UCA, 1994, para 104).

The diaconate will contribute to public conversation on these issues, and in contributing to the social capital and 'common wealth' of the community.

At Pilgrim, this will include:

- Supporting and working with others in developing the shape of prophetic ministry and public theology as foundational and integral to the life and witness of Pilgrim Church
- Developing events with partners for public symposiums on important public issues
- Building links with agencies and networks involved in supporting people in need (eg Shelter SA, Homelessness SA, SACOSS, welfare agencies including Uniting Communities)
- Providing leadership for the Public Theology and Mission sub-committee (which relates to Mission Leadership Development Board, SA Synod), which includes Covenanting, In-

ternational Mission, Cross-cultural and inter-cultural ministries, CALD, Second Gen, and Justice.

- Working with other community groups and agencies in connection with public issues of concern and the 'common good'

Beyond the church building

'The deacon is present in the places where people of all sorts live their everyday lives, as a sign of the presence of God there. Moreover, because the deacon for the most part works outside of the institutions of the church, the deacon is a sign for the congregation, scattered as they go about their daily work and ordinary lives, of the presence of God in the world'. (Report to the 6th UCA Assembly, 1991)

At Pilgrim this will include:

- Connecting with Mental Health Services; Street to Home; Hutt St Centre, Westcare, etc
- Hosting events for community based NGOs and agencies
- Shaping liturgy and ritual, and leadership in public events eg WorkSafe SA memorial service for those who have died while at work (International Workers Memorial Day); Homelessness service for people who have died while homeless; Heart Week service for people who have lost loved ones
- Connections with Adelaide City Council, including seeking partnerships in community initiatives
- Collaborating with Flinders University - Social Work faculty, for Masters of Social Work student placements

Supporting justice

The distinctive function of the deacon is to hold up service, and justice, as central to Christian ministry (Report of Task Group on Ministry to the 6th UCA Assembly, 1991)

At Pilgrim this will include:

- Building relationships and/or offering practical support and involvement with the Transforming Justice officer and Covenanting Officer in the SA Synod, and Assembly Resourcing Unit Circles of Interest
- Promotion of opportunities to be involved in supporting justice in the broadest sense, including advocacy, and connecting with community groups around particular issues (eg Amnesty)
- Installations in and around Pilgrim Church to invite people to focus on issues of justice (eg Anti-poverty Week, Mental Health Week, response to disasters etc)

Worship

'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 to secular social work. Thus Deacons have a liturgical role appropriate to their calling and ministry. In their preaching, Deacons have a particular opportunity to reflect from a theologically disciplined perspective on the challenges of Christian witness and service to the world'. (Report to the 6th UCA Assembly).

- Leadership in worship and preaching, and especially reading the biblical narrative 'from the underside' and through the lens of justice, compassion etc. This has also included preparing and leading Bible Studies and Lenten series (eg The Gospel of Luke from the underside Bible Study)

- Inviting guest speakers/preachers who bring stories and experiences from the wider community and wider world in areas of justice, compassionate ministries, cross-cultural ministry etc
- Special events such as 9-11 (service of lament), service of lament for refugees who have died in detention centres (with community groups)
- Continuing to affirm the call for compassionate service, hospitality etc embedded in the Hebrew and Christian narratives, and for the vocation of Christian discipleship expressed in service to others.
- Building connections with the city community - residents, workers, visitors, and especially those isolated (including international students)
- Art exhibitions and other activities eg photo exhibition by homeless people displayed in homelessness week, a photo project that equipped women who have experienced domestic violence with skills to take landscape photos for display, photos from a trip to the partner church in the Philippines etc
- To develop resources for contemplation and reflection for people in the community who visit Pilgrim during Open Church on weekdays, and brochures on things like bereavement, depression, and loneliness.

Building cross-cultural ministry

The movements of history have brought together here, in one nation, people of diverse cultures. As a church which is itself composed of people of many cultures and races, both Aboriginal and migrant, we rejoice in the vision of a multicultural society where these peoples may live together in unity and diversity, maintaining different cultural traditions, yet forging a common destiny based on commitment to the ideals of equality of opportunity, tolerance, justice and compassion. (1988 Statement to the Nation)

- International students, especially those living in the city or attending university in the city; liaison with city campuses;
- part of the Adelaide City Council WAY project (Well-being and young people) with a focus on international students
- Encouraging participation in the life of Pilgrim Church by people from other cultures
- connections with the Chinese Congregation C(SA)CC at Pilgrim Church
- To foster intentional relationships with partner churches and other related organizations.
- to liaise with the Transforming Mission Officer in the SA Synod, the Covenanting Coordinator/Covenanting Committee, Multi-cultural and Cross-cultural ministries and CALD, in the SA Synod and Assembly

Promotion/PR

to seek avenues for a 'high profile' for Pilgrim through media, signage and other promotion, in a way that intentionally raises the profile of Pilgrim Church in the community so that it is recognised 'as a church in the heart of the city' and with a commitment to the common good for all.

- Building ministry of hospitality and welcome (with Ministry Development Committee)
- Pathways for newcomers – clarifying processes and promoting key aspects eg hospitality, inclusion etc
- Newcomers lunches

- To work closely with Mission Development Committee in identifying pathways and directions for mission and ministry, and new initiatives in and through Pilgrim Church, and supporting those with key responsibility for areas identified by the Mission Development Committee

Pioneering ministry

'pioneering new expressions of the gospel and encouraging effective ways of fulfilling the mission of the Church' (*The duties of a Minister (UCA Regulations 2.2.1 xii) pp. 74,75*).

- To identify new initiatives and areas in collaboration with relevant groups and committees
- To identify areas that may be developed with people who do not usually connect with the church.
- To work with those involved in children's ministry to explore ways to connect with children and family in the community. This also extends to young people and young adults in exploring new ways of engaging people not connected with the church at this time.
- To be open to fresh ways God may be leading us as a church in the city

And finally, some quotes that shape my understanding

...It is not the church which undertakes mission but the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church - and purifies it

...mission involves "the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world." There is no area of life that escapes the gospel.

...mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.

(*David Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.519*)

Through its diakonia, the church becomes a community encompassing within its life something of what it means for the whole creation to live under the coming reign of God, and takes account of the creative Spirit of God at work in transforming activities in the wider community and within the church building up the faith community.

(*1991 & 1994 reports to the Assembly*)

Rev Sandy Boyce (Deacon)

30th September 2020

(*Adapted from a document prepared for 2017 congregation profile*)

Pilgrim Uniting Church

www.pilgrim.org.au

