

**Formation for Ministry:  
Ministry of Deacon in the Uniting Church in Australia**



**(DRAFT by Sandy Boyce, August 2020)**

## **A quick snapshot of historical precedents**

The churches that came into union to form the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977 had training specifically for Deaconesses, in their own training institutes.

### Presbyterian Deaconesses

In Victoria in 1898, six women were 'set apart' by the Commission of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 'in a special way for Christian service as the chief object of their life'.

From the beginning, two important principles were clearly stated:

1. that the ministry of the deaconess was to be seen as a ministry to the less privileged and persons in need;
2. that adequate training for such ministry was necessary.

The special ministry of deaconesses included:

- \* 'ministry to the body as well as the soul'. Some of the first nurses in the Australian outback were deaconesses. Trained as they were, they could conduct services where there was no minister. As nurses, they were important leaders in the establishment of Dr John Flynn's Australian Inland Mission.
- \* ministry to the material, moral, social and spiritual needs to people in the inner suburbs;
- \* Assistants to ministers in large parishes, youth work, including camps, Sunday schools, Bible classes etc;
- \* teaching scripture in government schools, thereby getting the word across to children in homes where religion was unknown - 'the greatest open door in front of the church today, and the main hope of preserving Christian ideals in this land';
- \* running hostels for country girls, visiting gaols, attending children's courts and 'as probation officers were able to keep girls from entering a life of crime;
- \* missionary trainees to Korea, China, and the Pacific Islands.

(<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4275b.htm>)

The Presbyterian Deaconess Training Institute was opened in Powlett Street, East Melbourne 1898, in large measure because of the committed work of The Rev William Rolland. Of the five initial students in residence, three went on to complete the two year course of training. By the end of the first year, the institute moved to a larger house in George Street, Fitzroy to accommodate the growing number of enrolments. Although the location, in the centre of the city mission district and close to the medical mission, was perfect for training purposes, its location here was not permanent. Two more moves to South Melbourne and Albert Park took place before the institute found permanent residence in Rathdowne Street, Carlton, in 1915 where it continued for almost 60 years. In 1936 the institute was officially renamed 'Rolland House, Deaconess and Missionary Training College', in honour of the founder.

(See the publication *Rolland House : a college for the training of women for the service of the church at home and abroad*).

Rolland House formed both a residential college for Deaconess candidates and missionary workers and was also a home for the Deaconess Association of the Presbyterian Church. Following a re-organisation of studies in 1947 the training of Deaconess students became more and more closely integrated with that of other Presbyterian theological students and at the time of Church Union (into the Uniting Church) virtually all such training took place at Ormond College. When the responsibility for training deaconesses was transferred to the Board of Theological Education, the role of Rolland House changed to a hostel for women tertiary students. After Church Union in 1977, the house remained with the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. A few years later it was sold into private hands.

*(Source: Deaconess Training Institute. (2011). In Trove. Retrieved August 25, 2020, from <https://nla.gov.au/nla.party-1477361>)*

### Presbyterian Deaconesses

There are many inspiring examples of Presbyterian Deaconesses.

**Hope Goldie** (1896-1964) was a missionary with the Australian Presbyterian Mission in Sholinghur, South India for thirty years from 1927 to 1957. She had a short-lived career in teaching before completing a course as a deaconess at the Deaconess and Missionary Training Institute in Carlton. Late in 1927 she went to India as part of the Australian Presbyterian Mission in Sholinghur South India.

Hope learned to speak and write the Tamil language, overcame and adapted to the climate and the poor living conditions and devoted the next thirty years to living the message of the Christian gospels. After being involved in a great variety of mission work - health, education, evangelism and work with women - she moved from the mission compound to her own bungalow in a weaver's village called Ramakrishnarajupet.

There she opened her Santhi Nilayam (Abode of Peace), a refuge for people in need and a centre of expansion work into the villages where welfare and handcraft centres were established. Her (secret) gift of £1000 was used to purchase a Fordson van to use as an ambulance and a roadside clinic. Hope's Indian co-workers included a doctor, nurses and evangelists.

The building of a village church was a significant achievement for Hope. With money given by an Australian congregation she was able to purchase land and oversee the building of a church in an Indian architectural style. On completion the Poddaturpeta church was absorbed into the Church of South India and dedicated by the Bishop of Madras on 29 June 1952. In 1957, after thirty years in India, Hope Goldie retired and returned to live in Melbourne. She continued to promote the work in India at every opportunity and contributed most of what small savings she had to projects such as village wells.

*(Source: <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE5375b.htm>)*

**Catherine Ritchie's** legacy has been significant. The clear priority that shaped her diaconal ministry was to identify ways to resource women in different cultural contexts. In 1937 she was posted to Masan in Korea. In 1944, in the midst of a war zone, she travelled to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), exploring opportunities for ministry with women in the Pacific. She showed a particular kind of courage, conviction and determination. Her pioneering leadership role developed further when she was Principal at Rolland House, the deaconess training centre in Carlton (1945 to 1968). She was a bold leader long before workplace equality for women, and she rose to the challenge of being a lone female voice amidst the predominantly male leadership of the Presbyterian church at that time. Catherine Ritchie was committed to training that developed both mind and character, and theological education that formed belief and spirituality. The deaconess students were asked to reflect on what it meant to respond to the 'insistent challenge' - a question that demands a response from us today.

*(Her book, *Not to be ministered unto: the story of Presbyterian deaconesses trained in Melbourne* (1998), recounts this rich history)*

### **Methodist Deaconess Order in South Australia**

The Methodist Order of Deaconesses was established in 1942 as a result of the inability of the Methodist Church in Australia to implement the principle affirmed at the General Conference in 1929 - that women who believed that they were called by God to a wider (professional) ministry in the Church than was available to them at that time, could offer as candidates for the ministry under the same regulations as men.

Its establishment led to marked changes in the opportunities available to women in the life of the church. Significantly, it offered structure, support and status for women's ministry by providing a professional pathway. It created opportunities for women's ministry at home, not just in international mission fields. By helping to create a context whereby men and women worked together, it enabled the Methodist Church to come to the view that women had a place in the ordained ministry.

The idea of establishing a Deaconess Order in South Australia was mooted as early as 1922 by the Rev John Pearce, superintendent of the Home Mission Department. The 1935 General Conference decision to establish such an order found a most enthusiastic supporter in Kate Cocks, who was well known in South Australia as an advocate on behalf of women and children's rights and welfare. A study trip to New Zealand to investigate the work of Deaconesses in that country convinced her of the need for a similar organisation in South Australia. Her recommendations were endorsed at the Annual Conference in 1937. Although the outbreak of war delayed further decisions, it also highlighted the need for women's ministry and a training institute to support it, as women rushed to fill the gaps left by men who went off to fight.

*(Hancock, Bethany, *A History of the Methodist Deaconess Order in South Australia*, Uniting Church Historical Society (S.A.), Malvern, SA, 1995).*

## **Diaconal Ministry and the reshaping of the mission of the church: 20 years of the Renewed Diaconate in the UCA.**

A paper by Rev Dr Alison McRae (Deacon) 2012

([http://diakonia.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/Renewal-of-the-diaconate.20th-celebration\\_Alison-McRae.pdf](http://diakonia.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/Renewal-of-the-diaconate.20th-celebration_Alison-McRae.pdf))

*The following is a shortened version of Alison's excellent paper. It highlights the distinctive nature of diaconal ministry. Davis McCaughey, in his commentary on the Basis of Union, and speaking of the possibility of a renewed diaconate, stated that those people whom the church recognises as being endowed with the special gifts and graces for 'service for the needy world' (p77) will be trained appropriately. If, as McCaughey suggests, that if there is a 'theological principle underlying our understanding of the church that (these gifts) should be different, distinctly characterising particular people (p 77,78) then **we need to ensure that deacons are formed in the best possible manner for their calling to this distinctive ministry.***

The renewal of the diaconate grew out of a conscious effort on the part of the church to highlight that an appropriate engagement with God's mission is at the heart of how we are to understand the church and its mission. Mission must be at the heart of the life of the church. The mandate for the ministry of the Ministry of Deacon was to both embody and lead the church in God's mission in the world. Diakonia, upon which the ministry of Deacon is modelled, is central to how we are to understand both the church and its mission. Of course, Deacons are not the only ones within the life of the church who engage in mission or who model diakonia, but their special calling means that they have a mandate to ensure that it happens.

A little known 19th Century Dutch Theologian suggested in 1890 that 'The church can live without buildings. Without diakonia the church dies' (Rev J.C. Sikkel, 1890). Some years later, in response to the unjust social conditions of his day he pleaded with those in the church 'to stop locking up the Gospel in your church' and called for a public display of Christian social justice. By the standards of his day such comments would have been considered quite radical; sadly, I suspect, the same might be a reflection of the church today, more than 100 years later.

Whilst I was a student at the Theological College in Melbourne during the latter half of the 1980's many of the debates about the renewal of the diaconate were taking place. I was able to contribute in part to some of these discussions. I was a member of what became known as the 'Lavender Committee' (named after the chair of that committee, Charles Lavender) which reported to the 1988 Assembly (held in Melbourne) and a consultant to the Task Group which presented the Report on Ministry to the 1991 Assembly (in Brisbane). I also had the opportunity to see first

hand some examples of diaconal ministry in other countries, such as England, Scotland, Canada, America, and the Philippines.

It was through this experience with our own discussions and similar discussions happening in some overseas churches that I realised greater attention needed to be paid to the ecclesial nature of this ministry we had spent so many years debating. The Uniting Church already had a very strong foundation for an understanding of a renewed diaconate in the previous ministry of Deaconess, but we needed to move beyond some of the constraints that were placed on the understanding and practice of that ministry.

It is important to realise that whilst we were discussing the possibility of a renewed diaconate similar discussions were taking place in various churches overseas. The movement into a renewed diaconate within the Uniting Church was not something that was occurring in isolation, nor was it unique to our country or situation. This is important to remember lest there be a tendency by some to think that the Uniting Church was departing from ecclesial understanding and practice within worldwide ecumenical discussion.

Most scholars acknowledged the part that the World Council of Churches discussions had on the ecumenical and international movement towards a renewal of the diaconate in its various forms. The 1982 publication of the World Council of Churches' Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document states that 'today there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own integrity and meant to be exercised for life'. (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, #3, 22-33. Geneva: WCC, 1982, 27.*)

This document goes on to affirm 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.

Here is an attempt to express a renewal of the diaconate in terms of re-orienting diaconal ministry away from understandings of individual charity responses towards seeing the diaconate as an essential expression of the life of the whole church. The BEM document encouraged a theological and ecclesiological shift in thinking and approach in relation to how the ministry of Deacon should be understood. Deacons were not to be seen as the ones to 'do' the charitable work of the church, rather [they were] to act as a focus for the [ministry] of the whole people of God. Along with worship and witness, diakonia is to be seen as being central to any understanding of the church.

Each of our Union churches had a more or less well-established form of diaconal ministry - the Presbyterians from 1898, the Methodists from around the 1930's (although a group of young women known as Sisters of the People, were established by the Wesleyan Central Mission in Sydney in 1890 was a forerunner for the Methodists) and the Congregationalists (although very small in number) from a similar time. From about the 1920's and 1930's the Congregational Church began ordaining women.

The writers of the Basis of Union recognised the need to reconsider traditional forms of ministry, including a more contextual understanding of the existing ministry of Deaconess. They foreshadowed the possibility of a renewed form of this diaconal ministry in the Basis of Union. Paragraph 14c states that: 'The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which men and women offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of [humankind] in the face of changing need. She will so order her life that she remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate: in these circumstances she may decide to call them Deacons and Deaconesses, whether the service is within or beyond the life of the congregation'.

In his commentary on the Basis of Union published in 1980, Davis McCaughey points to the significance that this part of the Basis of Union may have on our understanding of the diaconate and of our understanding of mission and church. Seeing diaconal ministry as being one amongst a number of expressions of ministry, McCaughey affirms that the church is to see to it that those people with the charismata, or gifts of grace, for diaconal service are trained in and for the sake of the mission of the church. He states that 'The gifts are not identical with those of other ministries: indeed it is part of the theological principle underlying our understanding of the church that they should be different, distinctly characterising particular people'.

*(J. Davis McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union (Melbourne: Uniting Church, 1980), 77,78).*

These gifts, bestowed through the work of the Holy Spirit, and recognised as such by the church, underline that ministry in its various forms is to be constitutive of and not merely derivative from the church's being and identity. The church orders its life so that some of its members take on representative functions for the sake of the whole. In the case of Deacons this representative function is in order to help identify the nature of the church's own mission and thereby enable the mission response of the whole. Thus, for the church to be church it must be focussed on mission, responding to God's calling-out of its people to life and witness within and for the sake of the world. Moreover, the Basis of Union affirms that this witnessing church will need to find a true rhythm of Christian involvement in the world both as a community of faith which is gathered for worship, and as the people of God scattered for everyday life in the world. Its service is rooted in

worship and as the Body of Christ it is to be a sign and instrument of God's grace available for the whole of humanity. It reminds the church that its ability to be a living community determines the manner in which it is possible to be Christ's diakonia in and for the world.

The basis for a renewed understanding of diaconal ministry was therefore the church's own commitment to mission. Moreover, it meant an approach to mission that had at its heart an appreciation of the new context of the church, recognising that in order to faithfully respond some revised approaches and structures were called for. Much of this background was outlined in the Report on Ministry presented to the 1991 Assembly

*(Report on Ministry in the UCA: Report of the Task Group on Ministry of the Church to the Sixth Assembly (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, 1991).*

This Report made recommendations about all ministries within the church, but particularly about both ministry of Word and ministry of Deacon. The 1991 Report envisaged a renewed diaconate whose members, to be known as Deacons, would be a sign for the congregation...of the presence of God in the world, holding before the church the model of Christ's service as being central to all Christian ministry.

Amongst other things, it affirmed that deacons in the Uniting Church are called to:

- \* Be, along with the scattered members of the congregation, a sign of the presence of God and God's kingdom in the everyday world;
- \* Be especially aware of the places in the community where people are hurt, disadvantaged, oppressed, or marginalised and to be in ministry with them. (eg. see Matt 25:31-46);
- \* Recognise, encourage, develop and release these gifts in God's people which will enable them to share in this ministry of caring, serving and justice in their everyday lives;
- \* Serve in the manner of Christ alongside marginalised people in solidarity with them as they struggle for human dignity and justice (Isaiah 58:1-12; Isaiah 61:1-3; John 8:2-11; Hebrews 13:1-3)

Of course, this does not mean that Deacons are the only ones in the church who do this. We know that there is much more ministry and mission contained within the life of the congregation and community than Deacons can possibly respond to. However, what the church is saying is that this is a particular responsibility of those who are called to be Deacons. Without their representative focus on these missional ideals a large component of the church's life and identity becomes compromised.

My thesis title was *De-Centred ministry: A Diaconal View of Mission and Church*. Drawing on the ministry experiences of deacons since the renewal of the Diaconate in 1992, the thesis affirms that the church's diaconal ministry is essentially an ecclesial concept, representing to the church that diakonia is at the heart of its identity. Using key Assembly reports which remind us that



deacon ministry is essentially a ministry on the margins, the conclusion was drawn that diaconal ministry can be seen to be a de-centred ministry. Using this concept of 'de-centredness' it highlights how the ministry of Deacon is best understood as being directed towards the needs of the wider community, finding its true home by operating on the margins of both church and community. It challenges us to move away from any temptation to see diaconal ministry as being merely a ministry of charity or of humble servanthood, and rather, to see it as an essential ecclesial concept that helps us understand more about the nature of the church, what is at the heart of the church's own diaconal mission, and how and where the church is to be found. It invites the church to embrace the contributions that deacons make to the mission life of the church and to discover how, in their representative capacity, they can embody the diakonia of the whole church.

Swedish theologian Sven-Erik Brodd maintains that the diaconate is a representative ministry. Being one of the ordained ministries of the church, it is not the same as the general ministry to which all Christians are called through baptism, even if some of its tasks may appear to be similar. Rather, Brodd maintains, its shape and expression is to be determined by the nature of the church itself; it has no existence apart from the church because diakonia is at the heart of the very nature of the church. He maintains it is an 'indispensable element in ecclesiology and a necessary function of the Church of Christ, simply because the church [itself] is diakonia'. (Sven Erik Brodd, *Diakonaten: Från Svenska Kyrkans Teologi Till Pastoral Praxis (the Diaconate: From Ecclesiology to Pastoral Praxis: English Summary)*, Tro & Tanke 1992:10.

Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkans Forskningsråd, 1992. 240)

Not long after the renewal of the diaconate, Dorothy McRae-McMahon challenged deacons that 'unless the diaconate enters into mission and ministry with the church rather than for it, ... it will fall far short of its calling'.

(Dorothy McRae McMahon, *Deacons and the Mission of the Church*, presented at the Ministerial Education Commission National Consultation on Deacon Education, Mt. Martha, Victoria, April 1994).

My research indicated that Uniting Church Deacons understand the church as being clearly missional, called to share God's work in the world. They affirmed that God was at work transforming the world into a community of love, justice and peace and that we are all invited to participate in God's mission (*missio Dei*). There was an awareness that this is an ongoing process and that we are continually being drawn into new encounters and understanding of a future defined by a resurrected Christ.

Those who are on the margins (however that is defined) were seen as being of particular concern for Deacons as they seek to give expression to the invitation of Christ to go into all the world. One deacon spoke of 'working the jagged edges', another of being prepared to see the face of God in

the people he encounters even if such encounters throw up disturbing challenges. Most understand the mission of the church to be broader than what is contained within the four walls of a building, or even in a particular denominational expression of church. They seek to respond to the call of the God who has already gone before them into places, for example, such as remote and isolated communities served by agencies such as Frontier Services, or within a community of people living with mental illness, or on the kerbside of a busy city street, and amongst many other places where people are vulnerable and God is to be found.

My research explored some of the different ways in which we experience church, and how the church, as an incarnated community, is a sign of the kingdom of God and a work of the Spirit. It suggested that because the church has a commitment to 'outsiders' it must always allow itself to be challenged by the boundaries and to recognise that, in what might sometimes be disturbing encounters thrown up by an engagement with the boundaries, it will discover something more of what it is called by God to be.

The ability to listen to the voices and concerns of those who are 'outside' the life of the church is critical because it is often through such encounters that we learn something new about ourselves, our mission and the nature of church. The story of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-37 (see also Matthew 15:21-26) offers an example of how this encounter with outsiders might teach us something new about ourselves and our mission. On the surface, this is a disturbing passage for the church. In it the familiar image of a compassionate teaching Jesus is turned upside down and we have instead a portrayal of a learning Jesus.

My research used insights from selected liberation theologians to highlight the implications of margins and the particularity of social location for mission. It affirmed the necessity of taking context and culture seriously as we explore the manner in which the church is called to be involved in God's *Missio Dei*. It maintains that the centre and edge must live in creative dialogue if we are to be a truly missional church and invites us to be open to the possibility that engagement with the margins may lead to a transformation at the centre of the church's life. It affirms that the 'de-centred' nature of diaconal ministry has an essential role in offering an alternative view on where the church might find itself and of how it might continue to define, and redefine its life.

The research suggested that the commitment of the Uniting Church to renew its expression of diaconal ministry has enabled it to be clearer in its understanding of the representative function of an ordained diaconate. On the strength of this some conclusions were drawn about how we are to understand mission and church and the place of the ministry of Deacon as being one which will help lead the church to be more intentionally aware of the variety of contexts in which God's

church is found. It challenges the church to free its representative expression of diakonia to help lead it into renewed expressions of faithfulness, for the sake of the gospel. The thesis concluded by offering some challenges to the church and to deacons about how this might happen.

There are some theological and practical issues which will remain as challenges for the church and for Deacons. In no particular order, these are:

First, Deacons must form an identity based on ecclesial understanding. Any discussion about the diaconate and Deacons must be based on a clear understanding that diakonia is at the heart of how we understand the church. Deacons are called to live out the diakonia of the whole church and to lead the church into its own diakonia. The ministry must have a clear ecclesial basis otherwise we are in danger of confusing what deacons are and do with any number of Social Work and community services activities, important as they may be.

Second, we need to take account of the influence of history and pay attention to the international scene as far as the diaconate is concerned. We need to know what has gone on in the past in order to understand some of the challenges and opportunities of the present.

Third, Deacons need to find an intentional location for ministry and develop a strong identity for ministry. Being in areas where people are vulnerable, on the margins, outside of community, as the victims of injustice, in community development are all places where Deacons can be found. We take account of those on the underside of the community and society. Our ministry does not need to be spectacular, but it does need to be faithful to the Gospel and our calling as particular ministers of that Gospel. It may require us to be in places that the church would rather not go, and for us to call the church itself into such places if it isn't already there.

Fourth, Deacons should have a strong connection with a worshipping community. It is difficult to see how Deacons can do justice to their call to represent the diakonia of the whole church without having a strong connection to a local worshipping community. If diakonia is central to the church's identity, as it is, Deacons must also be in the midst of the church's liturgical life in order to raise the diaconal consciousness of the worshipping community and represent what is often referred to as a 'double diakonia' - from the church to the world, from the world to the church. In this way the Deacon is a constant reminder of the church's own identity.

There is a leadership role in worship for Deacons as they also need to be good preachers and explore new ways of worshipping. We know that not all worship happens on a Sunday morning, or in a building called the church - it is more than that, and worship much broader than that. Nor should we assume that the people with whom a Deacon is in ministry with will necessarily find their way into a local church congregation. They may, but probably not, as our symbols and imagery can be very foreign to those outside the church.

Fifth, Deacons are engaged in a ministry that takes time. Ministry takes time; relationships take time to develop and trust to grow. This is probably not so much a challenge for individual deacons as I suspect most are prepared to be patient and take what time is needed. The challenge here is for the institution to be patient and allow deacon ministry to take the time that is needed. A Deacon is a companion, and a 'loiterer with intent'. Being a companion and a loiterer takes time.

Sixth, Deacons need to be formed appropriately for their ministry. Davis McCaughey, in his commentary on the Basis of Union, and speaking of the possibility of a renewed diaconate, states that those people whom the church recognises as being endowed with the special gifts and graces for 'service for the needy world' (p77) will be trained appropriately. If, as McCaughey suggests, there is a theological principle underlying our understanding of the church that [these gifts] should be different, distinctly characterising particular people (p 77,78) then we need to ensure that Deacons are formed in the best possible manner for their calling to this distinctive ministry.

Seventh, Deacons need to have the freedom to be engaged in ministry on the 'margins' for the sake of the church. Rosalind Brown reminds us that the natural place for a Deacon to be is on the margins, able to occupy space on the boundaries, to be ... at ease alongside people who are at the edges of church and society ... simply because God is there. (*Being a Deacon*, p31,33).

Finally, Deacons stand under the authority and accountability of the church. Because they take particular vows at their ordination they are therefore under the authority and accountability of the church. Sometimes there is an uneasy relationship between Deacons and the church. I don't necessarily see this as a bad thing, so long as there is a willingness to respect differing positions. It is within both the character and mandate of a Deacon's ordination to call the church beyond itself. The challenge comes in discerning those times when this is the case, and maybe even living through the consequences of that calling and action.

Alison McRae 2012

## **Formation for Ministry**

This paper seeks to provide some background and resources to help the Deacon candidates navigate their way through the formation process to adequately prepare them for ordained ministry as a Deacon.

Davis McCaughey's affirmation that ***Deacons are formed in the best possible manner for their calling to this distinctive ministry*** has not always been the case for candidates. An ongoing conversation with current Deacon candidates reveals their frustration at the lack of distinctive formation opportunities for diaconal ministry. To which the pioneering Deacons in the early 90's simply repond, 'nothing has changed!' and recall their own frustrations at the formation process for Deacons at the time of the renewal of the diaconate. In 2021, it will be 30 years since the UCA Assembly agreed to the renewal of the diaconate in the UCA and yet some of the same frustrations about formation for Ministry of Deacon candidates remain.

Individual Deacon candidates have reported that they have been told that there is no distinctive diaconal training for them, nor need of it. Some have reported opposition to the Ministry of Deacon, with individuals on faculty saying that they don't believe it should even be a ministry in the UCA. Other Deacon candidates have reported that they are delayed in their formation studies, being asked to do further studies when Minister of the Word candidates are not asked to do so.

Rev Dr Michelle Cook (Deacon) is on faculty of Nungalinya College in Darwin. There are no other Deacons who are members of faculty in other UCA theological colleges.

## **Assembly Deacon Working Group ... to Standards for Ministry**

The Assembly Deacon Working Group had oversight for the formation of Deacons. Rev Dr Alison McRae was Chair. In more recent years, the Education for Ministry Working Group has been the Advisory Group to the Assembly on the standards of formation, education and training for the ministry of the Word, ministry of Deacon, ministry of Pastor and ministry of Lay Preacher. Both Rev Bev Fabb (Deacon) and Rev Denise Savage (Deacon) have served on this Committee.

## **Formation program**

The Formation Program for candidates for ministry in the UCA is to be not less than two years, and is meant to develop the strengths of individual candidates and to develop skills for ministry, particularly developing the strengths of individual candidates and to develop skills for ministry, including engaging in fresh expressions of ministry for the 21st century.

During the formation process, there are usually 2-3 interviews each year with Formation Panels, which monitor progress, suggest options for study, and decide when a candidate is ready for ordination. The Formation Panels may take on the responsibility that once may have been the role of an Academic Dean.

It is interesting to note that many Formation Panels with Deacon candidates do not have a Deacon on the Panel (nor co-opt one when they are meeting with a Deacon candidate), which may present a problem when advising candidates on specific opportunities to broaden and deepen their formation for diaconal ministry.

It is imperative that **candidates** themselves become familiar with the Assembly document, '*Standards for Theological Education and Formation: Phase 2 for Ordained Ministries*', and to regularly discuss it with their supervisor. Candidates need to be intentional in considering ways to focus their energies for formation for ministry. Candidates need to be prepared to discuss their insights and ideas with their Formation Panel rather than being a passive recipient in the process.

The document provides an integrated approach to understanding standards for formation, but the following key points highlight some important components:

The Church's basic approach to theological education is one in which the context and experience of Ministry is taken seriously and allowed to interact with the theological disciplines. The emphasis is not to be only on a mastery of academic knowledge, supplemented by field education. Rather, it is essential that there is an active interaction between culturally shaped insights, experiences of Ministry, and the academic disciplines. Candidates will study in an open learning environment where they are encouraged to question, to think creatively, to try new forms of Ministry and then to evaluate and reflect upon them theologically. Given the nature of contemporary Australian society, a significant portion of this study will take place in a multicultural and ecumenical context, where life in a multifaith society is in view.

Established degrees or diplomas in theology may not meet these Standards in the case of every candidate. For the information of those responsible for developing courses for particular candidates, the Church regards it as more important to see that candidates are prepared for Ministry than that they obtain a formal qualification.

The Church anticipates diversity, collaboration and coordination between Synods in the development of the ordinand syllabus. The Church also anticipates the importance of flexibility within the program for individual candidates, recognising their prior learning and experience and

their particular gifts and calling. Therefore, these Standards do not prescribe a detailed syllabus but the general parameters within which particular ordinand courses shall be developed. Each Synod and the UAICC, through its MEB, is responsible for the way it fills out the intention of the Standards in its particular missional context. *(See, One Body Many Members: Living Faith and Life Cross Culturally, and the accompanying Call to the Church, 13th Assembly, 2012)*

It is desirable that the pathway towards achieving the desired outcomes include either practical experience gained by working in an area of Diaconal Ministry or the Ministry of the Word; or studies in a non-church tertiary institution in areas related to Diaconal Ministry or the Ministry of the Word. Such studies may include, for example, community languages of First or Second Peoples, intercultural studies, community services, youth work, social work, business administration, community development, narrative therapy, organisational psychology, leadership, education, or communication. These studies may be undertaken before, during or after theological studies.

*=> what related topics might complement study options offered to Deacon candidates (and possibly to gain cross-accreditation into the candidates primary degree)?*

Flexibility in devising the pathways which enable candidates to achieve the desired outcomes will mean that candidates may proceed on a part-time basis; that academic studies may be undertaken by distance education; that some components may be completed in Phase 3; that mentoring of candidates and supervision of their formation may take place in diverse contexts; that due account will be given to the different perspectives of Diaconal Ministry and the Ministry of the Word; and that opportunity is provided to engage in exploration and study of areas which are more closely related to the particular field of Diaconal Ministry or Ministry of the Word for which they are preparing.

The Assembly determines the following Standards to guide Uniting Church theological colleges and Ministerial Education Boards in each Synod, with regard to the formation and education of candidates for ordination as Ministers of the Word and Deacons:

## **FAITH, LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE**

4. All aspects and elements of the education and formation of candidates for ordination as Ministers of the Word or Deacons shall be oriented towards the provision of Ministers who have made appropriate progress “as part of a life-long journey” in exhibiting the following attributes:

1. an understanding of God, a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and the capacity to articulate this contextually;
2. the practice of Christian spiritual disciplines and embodying faith in Jesus Christ in their own lives;
3. acknowledging a call by God through the Church to give themselves to the Ministry for which they are ordained, following Jesus' pattern of love and service;
4. a mature knowledge of Christian tradition and the Biblical witness, and the ability to help the Church shape its future in the light of that tradition;
5. a capacity to articulate Christian faith in contextually appropriate ways;
6. adherence to the *Basis of Union*;
7. being equipped to help the Church be faithful to its identity and lead the Church in mission in a rapidly changing and diverse cultural and social context;
8. commitment to the Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (1994) and working within the understandings expressed in the *Preamble to the Constitution* (2009);
9. embodying the Church's declarations that *We Are A Multicultural Church* (1985), *Living with the Neighbour Who is Different* (2000), and *One Body Many Members, Living faith and life cross culturally* (2012)
10. a well-developed and reflective understanding of their identity as an ordained Minister within the Uniting Church;
11. ability to engage the tasks of Ministry with critical imagination, courage, emotional maturity, theological judgment and self-reflection; and to exercise this Ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God;
12. readiness for the practice of day-to-day Ministry, and the quality of being and awareness which gives integrity to the exercise of this practice;
13. the capacity for and commitment to intentional life-long learning;
14. the commitment to comply with the *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice*.

=> how might this list help identify strengths for individual candidates, and their vocational experiences prior to candidating, and in what ways can the growing edges be strengthened?



**Deacon Intensive** (formerly Diaconal Ministry Preessional)

*A summary from the 2002 document prepared for the MEC, UCA Assembly*

The National Deacon Intensive is offered every two years, coordinated by the national body of the Deacons in the Uniting Church (DUCA) in collaboration with a theological college. It has been operating since 1991, when it was accepted by the MEC as a required part of the formation program for all Deacon candidates (phase 2). Participants should have completed at least one year of theological study at Bachelor of Theology level. It is a requirement prior to ordination.

The Deacon Intensive is seen as an essential component in developing community and a sense of collegiality and support amongst Uniting Church deacons. In some instances, candidates for the permanent diaconate within the Anglican Church have also been involved. This adds an important ecumenical dimension to the program.

From 2002 the Deacon Intensive has been held in conjunction with the National Deacon Conference and a National Continuing Education event for Deacons. It is anticipated that whilst these three programs are an entity in themselves, there will be some joint activities and joint planning, in order to allow students to be part of the wider deacon community and to share leadership resources across these events. It should be made clear to the candidates that the National Deacon Conference is an important component of the overall Deacon Intensive experience. The program of the Deacon Intensive should take this into account. It is important, however, that the Deacon Intensive maintain its own entity and distinct character and that the ability to make it available so that students can claim degree credit for it is not compromised.

Participation in and completion of the Intensive may be cross-credited towards a Bachelor of Theology/Bachelor of Ministry in the sending college of each of the candidates.

The broad aims of the Deacon Intensive are:

- To contribute to the formation of candidates for the ministry of deacon;
- To enable deacon candidates to further integrate their studies from various theological disciplines with their developing theology and practice of diaconal ministry.

This will enable students to continue to develop:

- an understanding and ability to articulate a theological basis for the practice of diaconal ministry;
- an ability to reflect theologically on ministry and life experiences;
- an understanding of the place of the deacon within the overall mission and ministry of the Uniting Church;

- an understanding of the history of diaconal ministry within the Uniting Church and how that relates to diaconal expression within the ecumenical and international church community;
- a sense of ministerial identity as a deacon;
- an appropriate spirituality to sustain them in ministry;
- a sense of belonging within a diaconal community which provides mutual support and challenge;
- an understanding of the importance of theological and sociological analysis as integral to the task of diaconal ministry;
- appropriate leadership styles for ministry.

In order to achieve these aims it is understood that the *process* of learning is as important as the *content* of the course. The process should enable the development of a sense of community and be as non-hierarchical and fully participative as possible. All students should be encouraged to provide some leadership within the course at some stage during the two weeks. This could come about through various directed group work processes or leadership of worship etc. It is expected that students will participate fully in the program for the entirety of the Deacon Intensive.

#### Suggested topics

Whilst this list is not exhaustive, areas that have been covered previously include:

- History of the diaconate in each of the union churches and history of the development of the renewed diaconate in the Uniting Church.
- A history of the diaconate through the ages
- Theology of the diaconate
- Ecumenical dimensions of the diaconate nationally and internationally.
- The deacon in mission
- The deacon as evangelist
- The deacon as theologian
- The deacon as prophet and enabler of the diakonia of the whole church
- The deacon as educator
- The deacon and worship, within the gathered congregation and beyond.
- The deacon and social analysis, particularly in relation to theological reflection.
- The deacon and community development, and as worker in the community
- The deacon and spirituality.

There should be an attempt to address all of these areas in some form during the Deacon Intensive.

The naming of these topics can be adjusted in order to take on a particular emphasis. They can also be dealt with in a variety of ways, taking into account the direction the leadership team may wish to take. The above are offered as a guide as to what could reasonably be expected to be touched on. Some topics may take a greater amount of time than others, and some may be dealt with experientially through an action reflection process. They attempt to take into account what has been suggested as requirements for deacon formation within the Core Phase 2 document presented to the 2002 MEC meeting by the MEC Deacon Working Group.

As part of the process for planning the content of the Deacon Intensive it would be worth checking with each of the colleges to see what Deacon specific work they already do with each of their candidates . It is inevitable that some students may feel that they are 'repeating' work. This should not be seen as a major problem as those students who believe they are in that category could be asked to help with the facilitation and learning for their colleagues. In this case the Deacon Intensive process becomes a reinforcing of learning and hopefully allows the students to be open to a different perspective on the same or similar material. However, care should be taken that not too much 'repeat' material is offered.

The Deacon Intensive assumes that the *process* of learning is as important as the *content* of the course. Care is taken to provide a balance between a high expectation of intellectual engagement along with attention to issues of personal and ministerial formation.

The following could serve as a guide to a Course description:

This unit is designed to contribute to the formation of participants for the diaconal ministry of the church. The unit will enable participants to further develop their understanding of the principles and practices of diaconal ministry, particularly the ministry of deacon within the Uniting Church. It will help students integrate studies from various theological disciplines around an understanding of diaconal ministry. Participants will be provided with information and resources on different dimensions of diaconal ministry; be encouraged to develop relevant skills and an appropriate spirituality; provided with further opportunities for personal growth and reflection, and encouraged to develop their own theoretical and practical framework for diaconal ministry.

**Assessment of the course** could be based on the following:

\* ***Participation in the class process.*** This to include an obvious attention to any of the pre-reading set for the course, a willingness to undertake planning for and leadership of group processes or presentations, and participation in group discussions

\****Critical reflection on the course in a daily journal.*** This not to be so personal that it cannot be read by another person. It should be handed in at the end of the course and returned to

student within a week so that it can be used as part of their resource for the writing of the integrative essay.

\***A book review, or a critical reflection on a Field Visit** (approx 1000-1500 words?). This is to show an ability to reflect on the reading or visit in the light of the content and processes of the presessional. This work to be due 2-3 weeks after the conclusion of the course.

\* **An Integrative essay** (approx 2500 or 3000 words?) There may be set questions offered designed to focus attention on an aspect of diaconal ministry, or it could be left open for the student to determine their own area of exploration. This task is designed to demonstrate the integration of existing knowledge about different theological disciplines and diaconal ministry in particular, insights gained from participation in the course and attention to their own critical reflection and understanding about diaconal ministry. It should help lead the student into some of their original thinking about the theology and practice of diaconal ministry and open up for them areas for further exploration.

If there are students who do not need to claim degree credit for this course they should still engage in most of the written work. This is based on the belief that since this program is a key part of the formation requirement for all deacon candidates the discipline of critical reflective writing will contribute to the intentional focussing of their involvement in the program.

The course prescription should include a short bibliography which picks up some of the key resources around the history and theology of diaconal ministry, and other aspects of theology and mission. A more extensive bibliography of diaconal resources should be made available for all students.

## The changing shape of diaconal ministry

[\(https://crosslight.org.au/2015/04/05/changing-face-diaconal-ministry/\)](https://crosslight.org.au/2015/04/05/changing-face-diaconal-ministry/)



While kangaroo tails are cooked and smoke billows above an inner city church courtyard on a balmy summer's evening, stories are told by Indigenous people. During morning worship, chairs are stacked in a haphazard pile to express sorrow over injustices experienced by the marginalised. Encouragement is given through Biblical stories of women and men who show their faith in Christ by listening, serving and forming new worshipping communities. These are a few examples of the diverse and enriching experiences of the Deacon Intensive (for candidates) and the national DUCA (Diakonia in the Uniting Church in Australia) Conference held in Adelaide, based at Pilgrim Uniting Church over two weeks.

Two indigenous leaders, an Irish pastor, two Australian aged care chaplains, a Filipino journalist and social activist, two Australian congregational leaders and an Afro-American woman comprised the group of UCA Deacon candidates who met in the first week to learn more about diaconal ministry and the Ministry of Deacon. They participated in worship, Bible studies, discussions, and immersion visits. Evening sessions further extended their engagement with mission and community service.

During the second week, 40 Deacons and Deacon candidates from diverse settings around Australia participated in the National DUCA conference. After a traditional Welcome to Country by Dr. Alitja Rigney, Rev. Prof Andrew Dutney's opening address was a catalyst for conversation about the current reality and future possibilities in the Uniting Church. During the week, panels of speakers presented on relevant issues, electives were offered, and visits were made to sites to hear and see inspiring community engagement.

The most valuable part of the week for many was the encouragement and learning received from conversations with each other, as they heard how God is working in their lives and the lives of those with whom they journey.

## Essential reading

Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia

Especially 3.6.2 The Ministry of Deacon (pp.38-45)

Source:[https://ctm.uca.edu.au/lay-ministries/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/02/UCA-1991-](https://ctm.uca.edu.au/lay-ministries/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/02/UCA-1991-Ministry-in-the-Uniting-Church-in-Australia.pdf)

[Ministry-in-the-Uniting-Church-in-Australia.pdf](https://ctm.uca.edu.au/lay-ministries/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/02/UCA-1991-Ministry-in-the-Uniting-Church-in-Australia.pdf)

Acknowledging the 20th Anniversary of the Renewed Diaconate in the Uniting Church in Australia: Diaconal Ministry and the reshaping of the mission of the church: 20 years of the Renewed Diaconate in the UCA.

Rev Dr Alison McRae (Deacon), 2012

([http://diakonia.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/Renewal-of-the-diaconate.20th-celebration\\_Alison-McRae.pdf](http://diakonia.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/Renewal-of-the-diaconate.20th-celebration_Alison-McRae.pdf))

Deacons as sole agents in a congregation (Queensland Synod)

[https://ucaqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PC\\_PRO\\_015-Deacons-as-sole-agents-in-a-congregation.pdf](https://ucaqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PC_PRO_015-Deacons-as-sole-agents-in-a-congregation.pdf)

Guidelines for Deacon Intensives, <https://assembly.uca.org.au/education-for-ministry/resources/ordained-ministries> (scroll to bottom of screen and click on the link)

Standards for theological education and formation: Phase 2 for ordained ministries

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/education-for-ministry/resources/ordained-ministries> (scroll to bottom of screen and click on the link)

De-centred ministry: A diaconal view of mission and church

A doctoral thesis by Rev Dr Alison McRae

[https://repository.divinity.edu.au/4/1/Alison\\_McRae\\_Thesis\\_copy\\_1\\_pdf.pdf](https://repository.divinity.edu.au/4/1/Alison_McRae_Thesis_copy_1_pdf.pdf)