

Uniting Church in Australia. The relevant extract of this report is available from:

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The Uniting Church is not alone in renewing the diaconate. There is a growing worldwide recognition of the importance of diaconal ministry. Several overseas churches, notably in Europe and North America, have acted similarly to renew the diaconate in recent years. In Australia, movements are underway for the appointment of permanent deacons in at least two other denominations.

### How are Deacons related to the Uniting Church?

As ministers of the Church, Deacons are placed and stipended in the same manner as Ministers of the Word. In common with Ministers of the Word they are accountable to the church for their ministry, through the presbytery. They may be in part-time or full-time placements. Deacons are closely related to a church congregation even when their ministry is based in a community organisation. The congregation to which a Deacon relates is called to be a caring and supportive Christian community for the Deacon.

While the primary responsibility for worship in congregations lies with the Minister of the Word and the Elders, Deacons have a liturgical role appropriate to their distinctive ministry. Deacons will frequently share in the leadership of worship, including preaching from time to time (more often in some placements). In their preaching, Deacons have a particular opportunity to reflect from a theologically disciplined perspective on the challenges of Christian witness in the world.

Deacons have authority to preside at the sacraments, and will do so usually (but not exclusively) in the context of their ministry placements. Guidelines are available from the Assembly on the celebration of the sacraments where a Deacon and a Minister of the Word are placed in the same parish.

### What about me?

*If you . . .*

- ☐ feel God may be calling you to the ministry of Deacon
- ☐ are a confirmed member of the Uniting Church
- ☐ qualify for entry to a tertiary institution
- ☐ would welcome the years of theological and practical formation necessary
- ☐ believe your personality, spiritual maturity and prior experience are suited to the responsibilities of this ministry

*. . . then enquire now!*

### How do I enquire?

- ☐ talk to your minister who will advise you of procedures for the Period of Discernment
- ☐ contact the Uniting Church Theological College in your synod and speak with the Dean of Candidates
- ☐ through the synod, make contact with Deacons serving in your Synod



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THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

# *the ministry OF deacon*





**D**iaconal ministry takes Christ as the model: the humble servant who washes feet (John 13: 1-17); the one who preaches good news to the poor, proclaims freedom to the prisoners, sight for the blind, releases the oppressed and proclaims the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4: 18-19).

All Christians are called to this ministry of service. Those who are Deacons of the Uniting Church are to embody this ministry in their life and work and are to equip and enable the diaconal ministry of all church members.

### What is a Deacon?

The Uniting Church in Australia recognises two expressions of ordained ministry: the ministry of the Minister of the Word and the ministry of Deacon. Together with the whole people of God they share in the ministry which Christ committed to those who follow him as disciples (Acts 1: 8). These are mutually complementary ministries given by the Holy Spirit to lead and build up the whole body of Christ for its life of worship, witness and service.

Deacons are called to offer leadership among the people of the Uniting Church 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.

A Deacon is a person who is called to this ministry of loving service, who is recognised by the church as having the gifts and graces essential for this ministry, who has undertaken the necessary theological education for the ministry, and who has been set apart by ordination for ministry as a Deacon.

### Why Deacons?

The Uniting Church has been led into many areas of ministry which focus on the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised people. The church also has been led to take, at times, risky and prophetic positions on issues of social justice at home and abroad.

Through the ministry of Deacon the Uniting Church 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.

#### Deacons:

- ❑ 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 recognise and use their gifts of service
- ❑ are called to be **prophets** prepared to challenge injustice and offer alternatives
- ❑ are **bridge-builders** between the church and the community

### What do Deacons do?

#### Deacons may serve in:

- ❑ ministry in a congregation or a group of congregations in city, suburban or rural areas, working with a focus on the needs of people in the community; or similar ministry based in a presbytery, a synod or the Assembly
- ❑ chaplaincy, for example in hospitals, schools, and prisons
- ❑ mission placements in Australia or overseas, pioneering serving ministries
- ❑ community or government organisations where their appointment has been recognised as a placement by the appropriate synod body

#### Some diaconal placements include:

In congregations, some specialising in family work, community development, or pastoral care; chaplaincies in prisons, universities, mental health services, aged care and church schools; in church community service agencies and parish missions; in ecumenical placements; with Frontier Services; with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress; and in placements outside the jurisdiction of the church.

### Renewal of the Diaconate

The first Deacons of the Uniting Church were recognised in 1992. In the Basis of Union, the foundational document of the Uniting Church, reference was made to the possible renewal of the diaconate. After several years of serious consideration and a number of reports, the national Assembly of the Uniting Church decided in 1991 to proceed to renew the diaconate.

The Uniting Church has always recognised the ministry of deaconess. But now that the ministry of Deacon has been defined and is in place, no new deaconesses will be recognised.

Details about the renewal of the diaconate are found in the 1991 Report on Ministry in the