

**SO TELL ME AGAIN,
WHAT IS A DIACONAL MINISTER?**

A Major Project for
St. Stephen's D. Min. Program

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INTRODUCTION

What is a diaconal minister? The question comes in a variety of forms and it comes all too often. Diaconal ministers find themselves explaining who they are again and again. It becomes part of the job; however, something happens, in the constant need to interpret diaconal ministry. Diaconal ministry has the opportunity to evolve. Since the question is recurrent, diaconal ministers are forced to reflect continuously on their ministry. They update their view of ministry introspectively, but they also talk about it together in diaconal gatherings. The meaning of diaconal ministry is refined with each discussion. Then, when the question arises, "What is a diaconal minister?", interpretation can be given that includes an historical perspective, and shows how diaconal ministry fits with the present church and times.

Something else happens, however, to diaconal ministers in the constant request to explain themselves. They become disheartened and deeply frustrated, particularly with people who have been involved in decision-making at various church levels. Why are these people who "should know" still asking? How long does it take for a church system to recognize this particular ministry? It becomes evident that diaconal ministry is indeed on the margins of the United Church. The question, "what is it?", contains not only a request for an explanation, but an underlying request for a justification of this ministry. Some are more blunt. Out of ignorance or bureaucratic frustration, they propose that diaconal ministry ought to become part of ordained ministry in order to simplify the whole matter of having variations within ministry.

Perhaps it is helpful to note that the confusion about diaconal ministry exists in other denominations as well. In the book Called to Serve, a publication of the United Methodist Church, the authors state that diaconal ministry has always been a source of controversy in the church historically, and perhaps inevitably. They go on to say that this controversial movement gives hope "because the diaconate embodies what the whole church is called to be" (Keller, Moede and Moore, p. 3). The community of faith has the unsettling task of working towards justice in the world, and diaconal ministers have the role of encouraging the community in this task.

In this project, both the meaning of diaconal ministry and its relationship to the church provide the focus for study. The first objective, then, is to discover how diaconal ministry is currently interpreted by diaconal ministers and to articulate a diaconal identity. A second objective is to formulate an analysis of the difficulties the church has in understanding and appreciating diaconal identity, from the experience and reflection of diaconal ministers. This study is clearly limited to data provided by diaconal ministers. A complete analysis of the difficulties in misunderstanding would need to include a variety of other members of the church--another study in itself!

This part of the project, the research and writing, represents Phase One. Phase Two was an implementation phase, using these findings about diaconal ministry in an educational program. How should people entering diaconal ministry be prepared to take on this identity? How should they be prepared to handle the difficulties the church has with diaconal ministry?

METHODOLOGY

For this study, I have made use of a small population who have shared their thoughts in depth. To arrive at the questions which would be most fruitful in getting at the meaning of diaconal ministry, I worked with two other diaconal ministers, Betty Marlin and Teresa Jones. To use research lingo, I would call these two women "exemplars" of diaconal ministry, who could not only interpret diaconal ministry for themselves, but who could enable others to express diaconal ministry both in words and in action. In separate conversations, we took on the task of devising questions which would bring out a discussion of the essence of diaconal ministry and what made it distinctive. I came away with two fascinating lists of potential questions which I consolidated in consultation with a third diaconal minister, Ann Naylor, staff person for the National Committee on Diaconal Ministry.

As well, I arranged to receive supervision from Merlin Wahlstrom, Ontario Studies in Education, to assist me in setting up research procedures and in the interpretation of the data. Rather than interviewing individuals, or sending out questionnaires, I chose to gather data through a focus group. A focus group provides for interaction of several participants around a specific topic. The moderator presents open-ended questions and encourages honest discussion.

While the focus group does not allow for drawing conclusions from a large random sample, it does offer other advantages. It promotes an in-depth discussion of the research topic. Participants are able to consider and re-consider their responses to the topic as they interact and hear different viewpoints and experiences. For the purposes of this research, the focus group approach seemed ideal. Diaconal ministers could work together to

develop a common articulation of diaconal ministry and the current obstacles they encounter. As well, the use of focus groups ensured a method of research that was congruent with the way diaconal ministers operate in educational settings--valuing experience, encouraging dialogue, seeking communal wisdom.

Because not everyone could attend the first focus group, I held a second group, with two more diaconal ministers. The participants for the focus groups were chosen to represent different experiences of diaconal ministry--community and social ministry as well as educational settings and congregational ministry. There was an age span, from the 30's to the 60's, and a span in the number of years of experience as well. I tried to ensure that all persons had some commitment to diaconal ministry and had given that identity some thought and struggle. Focus group participants and other consultants are listed in Appendix 1. The moderator's questions appear in Appendix 2.

After the focus groups met, I transcribed their comments, which had been tape-recorded. Most of the quotes you read in this paper are taken directly the transcription. An initial draft of the project was then sent to the participants to check for accuracy. Several participants wrote about thoughts which occurred to them later or were sparked by the written draft itself, and many of these thoughts have been included here. The process could go on endlessly, just as diaconal ministry identity goes on evolving, but here I must freeze the picture in order to share it on a wider basis.

Another aspect of this study has been my own field placement as a diaconal minister. As part of my sabbatical year (1990-91), I worked in a rural pastoral charge to become re-acquainted with diaconal ministry in a congregation and to experience again what it is to be a student in a field placement. I kept a journal to assist in reflecting on my learning goals. One learning goal was especially pertinent: to become aware of how diaconal ministers relate to the ordained, in the context of sharing ministry. As this study on diaconal ministry developed, I was able to be conscious of the focus group questions (see Appendix 2) and put the same questions to myself each week as I wrote in my journal. In this way, I included myself as a active participant in the discussion, using my own experience of serving as a diaconal minister.

Because the statements which came from my journal of the field experience were not discussed during the focus groups where I was acting as moderator, I felt it was crucial to get reaction from diaconal ministers to what I was writing. Of course the participants in the focus groups were able to respond to the draft, but at this stage I was able to go further and include some additional diaconal ministers as readers of the project. Their comments on diaconal identity and its place in the church have been influential in re-drafting this project.

THE FINDINGS

What We Say About Who We Are

Diaconal ministers are commissioned to the ministry of education, service, and pastoral care. These are the words of the Service of Commissioning and they make a natural place to begin the explanation of what diaconal ministry is within the United Church of Canada. Church structures understand ministry functionally, by what ministers are assigned to do. On the other hand, diaconal ministers tend to talk about an *emphasis* in what they do. Their concentration is on education and community ministry primarily. But diaconal people expand on those terms. They see one of their tasks as broadening the understanding of Christian Education far beyond the traditional notion of Sunday School to encompass life-long learning, including adults at all stages of life as well as children. Moreover, this broadened understanding widens the scope of Christian education so that it may deal with any aspect of life that faith can address.

The way education is done also needs explanation. The approach is to start with people, assisting them to make discoveries about themselves and their world. It affirms people's experience in life, and builds their self-esteem, creativity, and critical thinking. Education is a process of raising up questions, of seeking meaning, of pushing for change. The focus groups noted that questions and changes are not always welcome; people like the comfort of hanging on to what they have and what they know. Yet, diaconal people believe that learning implies a willingness to change, to make changes in oneself and changes for the society to try to bring fullness of life for everyone. Education, then, naturally leads into the ministry of advocacy. Children, for instance, need advocates within the church as well as in the world to speak on behalf of their needs. One participant spoke about church resistance to children's art: "This beautiful building might be destroyed by children's work on the wall!" Her diaconal role in that context was to challenge adults to accept children as valuable members of the community.

In diaconal ministry, education and service are bound together. Diaconal ministers try to increase people's social awareness as preparation for involving everyone in the ministry of outreach and action. Social ministry and social analysis constitute a second emphasis of diaconal ministry. While the root word "diakonia" is translated "service", initially in early times, it meant service to the poor and marginalized. In the gospel record, Jesus identified himself with this kind of service (diakonia), for instance in his healing of lowly women who could not afford medical treatment (Luke 8:43) and in his concern for imprisoned and hungry people (Matt. 25). It is not the commonly held understanding of service as charity. Rather it is the kind of service that attempts to alleviate suffering by societal change.

Present United Church diaconal ministers have continued this same understanding of "service". They are focused on seeking justice for the poor and marginalized of our times in Canada and globally. Some diaconal ministers are directly engaged in working with the poor and marginalized; in the first focus group one was a chaplain in a low income housing project and another did community development work with youth. One participant spoke about her excitement in promoting justice for women around the world. She realized that women in Asia and Africa are also working for justice, and that there is potential for networking among women globally.

Pastoral care is an assignment shared with ordained ministers. Diaconal people approach pastoral care as a ministry that is shared with lay people as well. They are aware of the need for group support in pastoral care, even where congregations may not yet expect it. Almost as soon as pastoral care was mentioned in the focus group, the need for pastoral care teams became an item in the conversation. The diaconal role was seen as initiating and educating others for ministering with one another. At times, diaconal ministers report that people they visit viewed them more as a friend than a minister! Their commitment is to work towards mutuality in relationships, including the pastoral relationship. People discover that diaconal ministers know some of the issues that underlie the pain and that they have some analysis of these situations. Because of the diaconal commitment to social justice, pastoral care is more than giving comfort where it is needed; it is about gaining strength for resisting injustice where that has occurred and redirecting energy towards fullness of life for all.

Challenges We Encounter in the Church

Because diaconal ministers are engaged in a ministry that is seen as less needed, or valuable, than the ministry of word and sacrament, they find themselves marginalized within the church. Often, when a congregation employs a diaconal minister, it is as a "second minister", although about one-third of diaconal people are

serving as the only paid minister. The "second" minister is then given a lesser status and authority in the minds of many church people, particularly when the second one is diaconal and female. One focus group member spoke about her experience of church people wanting to check out all committee decisions with the ordained male minister, even when she had been part of the decision-making.

Diaconal ministry brings the heritage of women to ministry and as such, it suffers the same sexism where men's work is given much higher value than women's work. The forerunner of diaconal ministry was the deaconess movement, begun in protestant churches in the mid 19th century. As a women's movement, it was accepted in the church because it offered single women an opportunity to offer their nurturing gifts. Mary Anne MacFarlane has called this, being the "wife of the church" (Educated Ministry: Diaconal Ministry, p. 82). While many deaconesses used their position innovatively and courageously, they were seen as "helpmates". Historically, the roles assigned to deaconesses and women workers in the United Church were "...serving, helping, educating, nurturing--time-honoured activities of Christian women. In addition, the role of the diaconal worker was an appropriately behind-the-scenes role....which did not involve direct leadership and public presentations (particularly preaching), that would have been considered unseemly behaviour for a woman." (Glenys Huws, "Diaconal Ministry Training", p.4)

In a church with centuries of male domination, the comment is still heard that diaconal ministers ought to learn "their place". This would be the place subordinate to the ordained, operating in the sphere of education with restricted powers. But this is deeply unacceptable to diaconal people. As one participant stated, "I don't want to be seen as second class because I am a woman. It is a hard place to be." In recent decades the United Church has acted officially to make diaconal ministry equal to ordained ministry. But what is stated officially is not yet what diaconal people are experiencing.

Whether they are the sole ministry personnel or work in a multiple staff, diaconal people face a dilemma which centres around power issues. To be recognized as equals, diaconal ministers find that it is important for them to participate in the activities the church values, for instance in the leading of worship, including the sacraments. Diaconal ministers are regularly granted the right by Conferences, upon request of the congregation and presbytery, to administer sacraments as an essential part of their ministry. Worship is a frequent place where the congregation gathers as a whole. To be visible in that setting as a capable leader is one way diaconal ministers attempt to address the power imbalance.

In worship, diaconal ministers have the opportunity to integrate educational ministry with liturgical ministry. As well, Sunday worship provides a place for diaconal people to become known

by the whole congregation. In what they say, or in how they lead, they may gain the trust of lay members; however, if they are seen to be doing what lay people do not do, they may be further "set apart" from lay people, the very people they seek to work with. Confusion sets in at another level as well. To be functioning in the same areas as the ordained person blurs the distinctions between diaconal and ordained ministry. They do the same things! And the question is asked, why do we have two forms of ordered ministry?

Diaconal people in the focus group responded to the question by pointing to the approach they take in ministry and the special training they have for it. In the focus group they spoke of diaconal ministry as enabling, non-hierarchical, affirming of lay ministry, being with people where they are and empowering them, raising questions and holding out an alternative vision, being prophetic, being "an evolving transforming presence". Certainly it is not possible to claim this style as *particular* to diaconal ministry because others may use it as well. Diaconal people would be the first to encourage that.

While this style is not *particular* to diaconal ministry, diaconal ministers have a *particular commitment* to the non-hierarchical style of ministry, and it is part of the educational preparation for diaconal ministry. The current theological centres for diaconal preparation insist upon a mutual style of ministry. Mutuality in ministry is a key concept in the educational philosophy of these programs and it is emphasized directly in the process of diaconal formation. Beyond the educational preparation, a diaconal network helps to reinforce one's commitment to this mutual style of ministry. With ordained ministry, the non-hierarchical style remains an option for those who choose it; the educational preparation for ordination does not necessarily guarantee a mutual style, nor is there a network in place to intentionally encourage such a style.

The conclusion is that the least problematic way to describe diaconal ministry is to name its functions (education, service and pastoral care) because that is how the church structure defines diaconal ministry. An explanation often starts there with an interpretation of the diaconal functions and their place in the whole of ministry. The functions legitimize diaconal ministry within the church, but the character and essence of diaconal ministry *cannot be described as merely the functions* of ministry it assumes. Rather, the essence of diaconal ministry is its commitment to a *vision* and a *style* of ministry (the way ministry is done). While the functions are the only way the church has to recognize diaconal ministry formally, diaconal ministers find their identity informally through their style and vision of ministry.

How We Relate to the Church

A Note of Explanation: The participants in this project are all diaconal ministers and they speak of their relationship to ordained ministry out of their own experience. Ordained ministers may not recognize themselves. Some readers (ordained ministers) definitely did not see themselves in this way. To them, it seemed like the representation of the ordained was out of date. However, the words here emerge from real encounters in recent experience, and they are often painful encounters. My conclusion is that some of ordained ministers act in the ways described here at least some of the time.

One participant found herself explaining diaconal ministers by what they are not: not ordained, and not lay. An understanding of diaconal ministry must include how it relates to the general ministry of the church.

The trend now is for diaconal ministers to become commissioned as a second career, later in life. Most have spent a considerable number of years as active lay people in the church. They come already having a strong identity with lay ministry and the socialization during preparation for becoming diaconal does not destroy that bond with the laity. If anything, the bond is reinforced. Diaconal ministers talk about their primary task as enabling the ministry of the whole people of God.

At the same time, there is a recognition that getting a formal theological education and receiving pay for ministry does set diaconal people apart from lay people. Knowledge and money (salary) are indicators of having power. But diaconal people make an effort to use their power to empower others. The focus group participants clearly state that they do not wish to be seen as "the experts", in a hierarchical sense, and they say this to others with whom they work. They are convinced that the experience of the lay people is the valid place to start, whether preaching or leading an educational event or responding to a social crisis. Because of their belief in life-long learning, diaconal ministers continue to be learners, ready to learn and receive ministry from others.

In the first focus group, the participants noticed that there was a difference between how they approached ministry and how ordained ministers approached ministry. (Inevitably, with no ordained members present, there was a tendency to characterize the ordained in general and more traditional terms, in order to delineate the contrast between "them" and "us".) The role diaconal people see for themselves in relation to the church is a bridging role between the church and the world. In fact from early church times, the diaconate has represented the intersection between the church and the world. Whether it is "bridge" or "intersection", the

traditional image for diaconal ministry is a "bringing together" or a "joining" of church and world. By comparison, ordained people are traditionally seen as operating inside the church at its centre in an intermediary role between people and God, the role of the priest. The purpose of the bridge is to allow people to cross over and enter closer relationship. The purpose of the intermediary is to be a representative or a substitute, where it may not be possible to have immediate relationship. An intermediary may "go between" or "speak for" and may even become a substitute for immediate relationship. The bridging function, however, requires being at the margins to work at closing the gap between people.

While the images described above are the traditional images, it is interesting that the diaconal folk were enthusiastic in continuing to see themselves as a bridge between church and world. One diaconal minister (a reader) pointed out that this is a key concept in describing diaconal ministry. In this case, the historical image still fits. Informal discussion with ordained folk within the United Church, however, would lead me to expect that most of them would take issue with the traditional image of priest, even though it is part of their history and it is reinforced by our present church policy on the sacraments.

Despite an evolving image for ordained ministers, diaconal people find that in working with ordained ministers, each of the two approaches may differ considerably in tone. The diaconal minister walks beside the people, working with them and learning from them. As one diaconal minister put it, "This makes my relationship with the ordained very difficult because we are on different planes." The different approaches to ministry frequently involve different leadership styles. While there are many styles of leadership to choose from, diaconal ministers lean towards using a shared leadership style wherever possible. Leadership style is all about how power is used. Traditional authoritarian leadership uses power over people or on behalf of people, and this has been the primary model historically in our church where the preacher, the priestly dispenser of sacraments, or the lecturer (in theological education) held sway.

On the other hand, shared leadership is a sharing of power. It means involving the people actively and meaningfully. As one diaconal minister noted "It means really honouring, although I find that difficult to do, really honouring where people are, and trying to start there." It is a ministry of enabling through helping people identify what their needs are, what their gifts are and then actively living out their ministries. Diaconal leadership tries to avoid concentrating power within the leader, and for this they may be misunderstood.

Because of different models used in theological education, diaconal ministers often find that they have adopted a different style of leadership from many ordained ministers. Tension results

in those situations where a diaconal minister operates from a stance of shared power and the ordained person is operating from a stance of power over, or on behalf of others. (A difficulty here is that I suspect ordained people no longer want to be seen in the traditional power position, but as yet many do not know how to use a mutual style.) Lay people are most familiar with the power-over model. Our whole culture has had a long experience of that traditional model, and only some lay people have had the opportunity to come to appreciate the value of a shared-power model of ministry. Diaconal people find that they are caught in the middle, with the task of convincing both lay people and ordained people that there is another way to operate in ministry that might be more fulfilling for everyone.

One diaconal minister reported that when she described what she did around the church the lay people said, "But we do that too, only we don't get paid for it!" Of course lay people are involved in exactly the same kinds of activities as diaconal ministers: they are educational church leaders, they are community workers, they offer support and care to one another, they participate in leading worship. When diaconal ministers are hired by a congregation, they expect lay people to continue to be involved in all these activities, sharing the ministry together. From the lay point of view, the question about salary may well be valid. Why should one get paid while all do the work? From a diaconal viewpoint, the salary is justified since they provide ongoing leadership within the congregation or agency (with specific time expectations set out), but it is a servant-leadership that may need interpretation. Diaconal people are not there to do ministry for the people, but with the people. All need to be seen as equal participants in the community.

The same idea carries over into the relationship between diaconal and ordained. From the diaconal perspective, there is an expectation of working with the ordained in a collegial fashion. It is a team approach to ministry. Consequently, a source of frustration and disappointment for diaconal people is the prevalent notion that there has to be a hierarchical model for leadership within the church. Often it is phrased, "The buck has to stop somewhere", or "Someone has to make the final decision when there is a disagreement". When a strictly functional approach to ministry is applied to teamwork, the ordained and diaconal each work in their own areas. Unfortunately, a separation of the functions strengthens the hierarchical model by placing more value on certain functions, such as preaching or sacraments.

Through their education, diaconal people have experience with the consensus model of decision-making and with mutual team approaches to ministry. One person stated, "I'm much more inclined to see them all [lay, diaconal, ordained] as complementary, at least in the best of all possible worlds. There is a hell of a lot of ministry out there to be done and it's not the purview of any

one person or order. Some of us do this and some of us do this and some of us do this, so let's just get on about it! In complementarity, you just sit down and figure out who is going to do what and get about doing it."

Complementarity presumes that there is a mutual recognition for what each brings to ministry. Diaconal ministers, however, find that they have to earn that recognition. Recognition goes with power. Since diaconal ministers are committed to a particular understanding of power (shared power), they find that the recognition they need for leadership is slow in coming. Their usual experience is to find themselves marginalized within the church. Ordained ministry has been the recognized model for many centuries. Frequently, diaconal ministry is seen as secondary, lower status, "women's work", and not quite "real ministry". Diaconal people, many of whom are women, experience a dilemma at this point. For those who are feminists, they renounce any categorization that places them in a second class position; yet by choosing diaconal ministry, they have made a deliberate choice to join a class of ministers which the church clearly sees as inferior. An all-too-familiar question is: "And do you intend to go on and become ordained?" By not choosing to become ordained, with the accompanying status which goes with it, diaconal people are opting for solidarity with all kinds of marginalized people, inside the church and globally. By choosing to be diaconal, marginalization becomes a "given" reality. As people prepare for diaconal ministry, they encounter questions and attitudes from church members and committees which alert them to this reality of marginalization. They may also hear stories from experienced diaconal ministers giving further verification of it. The experience of most focus group participants, especially the more recent graduates, was that by the time of commissioning they knew they were entering a form of ministry "on the edge" of the church.

One participant discussed how she was referred to at her church. "They call me Associate Minister, but I don't like that. My teammate [ordained] isn't called Associate Minister. So I'm trying to be called Diaconal Minister. Maybe it is the word, and the problem of trying to get around the word [diaconal]." Yet the problem is more complex than it first appears. While trying to achieve equality within the church, and do away with marginalization for all, diaconal ministers are fearful that they will be co-opted, or "bought off", in any attempt to make them equal to the ordained. Some wonder if this has already happened, when diaconal ministers were made part of the order of ministry. This kind of equality may do away with the obvious marginalization for diaconal folk, but it comes at the price of joining the privileged place in the hierarchy and losing the solidarity they have with other marginalized people. Diaconal ministers do not intend that marginalization be their fate, or anyone else's; the struggle is for larger transformation. No one is free until all are free. As one reader wrote, "Perhaps when the whole church

recognizes its marginalization and we stand in solidarity as a church with one another and with [marginalized] others, that will be the time when we will not lose the ability to be with others."

Because of their marginalization and the isolation, diaconal ministers find that they truly need to be with one another to gain support and direction. In fact, one introduced herself to the group as being too busy doing things and not having time to reflect on herself as a diaconal minister so that she was especially glad to come to the focus group and use it as a place to sort this through. Another spoke of a national gathering of diaconal ministers as a "coming home experience". She found there was common ground and no need to explain who she was or what she was about. A third diaconal minister stated that she could not imagine what her ministry would have been like without contact with other diaconal ministers. During the years where there was no meeting of the diaconal association, she really felt the gap.

When the diaconal community gathers there is opportunity to re-think who they are as diaconal ministers and to examine their roots within the deaconess movement. The history of being women in ministry is vital to diaconal identity. In the focus group conversations, however, some revealed an ambivalence towards the deaconess movement as a time of servitude, instead of servanthood. As feminists, some wanted to reject the image of the bowl and towel; others thought the image ought to be reclaimed. One reader suggested a way to re-image: instead of being the "friendly servant", diaconal ministers could think of themselves as the "serving friend." A small change of wording, but a large change in the image!

Our Vision for Ministry

Diaconal people in both focus groups started with their commitment to justice for the world as the beginning point for their vision of ministry. Prophetic ministry becomes central. They speak of a facing injustice both inside and outside of the church, of critiquing oppressive social systems and creating a world where fear and terror are supplanted by peace, justice and love. The task of ministry is to assist people in discovering their place in the world, particularly to come to know themselves as incarnational beings and then to discern what they will do with that. If ministry may be defined as doing God's work of love and justice in the world, then diaconal ministry is to be a catalyst for the involvement of the whole people of God in that work. A fundamental belief is that all people are called to ministry and this "ministry of all" is the most important ministry. Ordered ministry exists solely to enable this important ministry. The leadership and organization provided by those in ordered ministry enlivens lay ministry in the world by offering spiritual sustenance and the practical resources such as education, supportive structures, and skills training.

Inherent in this vision of ministry is a view of people as God-bearers. People are gifts of God to one another, and need to be honoured. One diaconal minister commented:

"I'm very keen on the theology of gifts of the people, enabling them to discover the gifts inside that they don't even know yet and how they can share those. We all work at this together. I believe very strongly that I see the image of God in every person that we meet. I mean precisely that. The whole people of God is the whole people of God."

A basic tenet of diaconal ministry is that people have a potential to grow, an ability to learn, and a willingness to struggle. As a bare assumption, it is not always true that people are willing to learn or to struggle for justice. Then it becomes the diaconal challenge to find ways to remove the blocks that keep such people in their complacency.

Another aspect of a diaconal vision for ministry is to consciously confront the dualisms that have been part of Christianity. For instance, the dualism of body/spirit or the dualism of mind/body tends to split the human personality in unhealthy ways. It sets up an inner hierarchy corresponding to a societal hierarchy where domination is experienced in all aspects of life. To work at dismantling dualisms is to work for the wholeness of all people.

Creation has a special place within this vision of ministry. God has given us what we need in creation, even though it is incomplete. With God imprinted in each one of us, we become co-creators. Each of us has growth potential and each is called to be part of the whole growth towards a just world. To work towards such a vision is certainly demanding; it is even risky and dangerous. But it is not all heaviness. There is excitement, uplifting energy, and fun -- all elements of the search for justice.

The phrase "evolving transforming presence" was one which caught on in the first focus group. For these diaconal ministers it became an apt description of their own place within the whole ministry. It involves working with the reality of "what is", but also looking beyond that reality to "what might become". There is a constant need to bring a critique to the present reality, especially the critique from the underside (the marginalized). And there is a constant need to bring change based on that critique.

There was a remarkable coherence to the vision and theology expressed in the two focus groups. Perhaps a wider conversation would have brought out greater diversity; yet, like diaconal identity itself, the vision they hold for ministry is a developing, ongoing discussion among diaconal people.

The Question Behind the Question

When diaconal ministers tell others what they do, it is not uncommon for them to get the response, "But I do that too...So?" Both lay people and ordained ministers have responded in this way. Lay people see that diaconal ministers do what is often done by volunteers. Ordained ministers are more apt to rejoin "But I do that too" when diaconal ministers talk about their role as enablers of the ministry of the whole people of God. While there is no intention to claim the enabling ministry solely for diaconal people, they do have particular education in how to enable individuals and communities of people. I believe that what lies behind the question is another question: What is the uniqueness of diaconal ministry?

With this assumption, I tested the question of uniqueness with both focus groups. Discussion centred around a quote from a diaconal minister (involved in preparing focus group questions): "The uniqueness of diaconal ministry is that we are not unique!" In other words, there is nothing that belongs to diaconal people alone. Their very style of ministry ensures that they share ministry in a collaborative way. There is no aspect of ministry that they possess. No licenses are handed out to permit persons to do educational ministry or service ministry in the way licenses are scrutinized for the ministry of the sacraments. In one focus group, they began to consider whether their job as diaconal ministers might be to try to do themselves out of a job.

As the groups discussed how diaconal ministry might be seen as unique, they talked about the different emphasis, different training, the different approach, the different style they bring to ministry, all of which focus on learning and doing ministry together. This word "different" becomes problematic. Does it reinforce the idea that the norm for ministry is the ordained ministry as it has been traditionally known? Certainly there are significant differences from traditional ordained ministry, but they are not necessarily particular to diaconal ministry (as seen earlier in this paper). The same approach and style may be found among lay people and among the ordained. Diaconal people would hope for this. As one stated, "I have no wish for diaconal ministry to try to have a "corner" on non-hierarchical ministry. Hopefully, it should be as widespread as possible." What is particular to diaconal ministry is a commitment to this non-hierarchical approach to ministry. As a group of ministers, the ordained have not been as ready to "carry the torch" for a mutual approach to ministry in an explicit way. For them, the adoption of this approach is optional; with diaconal people, it is part of how they identify themselves. For the ordained, the privilege remains the same whatever the style of ministry; with diaconal ministers there is a price to pay for operating in a mutual style of ministry.

Perhaps it is a unique mark of diaconal ministers that they have chosen to identify with the marginalized and consequently have become marginalized themselves within the church. Because their theology of ministry, they have made this as a conscious choice. And the choice is followed by a constant soul-searching about who they are in ministry. The question was asked: Do other ministry groups do this same soul-searching? There is something significant and positive in the soul-searching that is called for--a recognition that the answers to ministry are never easy, nor should they be!

It became evident in the exchange of dialogue that the very question, "What makes you unique?", puts diaconal people in an adversarial relationship. They are being asked to stake a claim on some aspect of ministry, and that polarizes the different approaches to ministry. Diaconal people find such a polarization distinctly unhelpful. Instead of seeking uniqueness, diaconal ministers seek greater identification with lay folk, encouraging and affirming the ministry of the people in the world.

The effect of the question about uniqueness is to put diaconal people into a trap. Underneath the question is a challenge to prove their right to exist. Of course diaconal people want to impress upon the church that there is a need for diaconal ministry. On the other hand, the question about uniqueness suggests that once the uniqueness is named, it can be categorized into a hierarchical order. Diaconal people want to avoid being placed in a second class, or having any ministry seen as second class. One diaconal minister spoke passionately:

"I just am so tired of the adversarial stuff and I get so ticked off. I finally figured out that the reason I came out of those conversations feeling like my back was pushed against the wall was because the questions were in fact pushing me against the wall. It took a long time for me to be able to turn it around and answer the question differently. I'm just not in it to be competitive, thank you very much!"

How often are ordained people asked the question, "What makes your ministry unique?" This very question puts diaconal people into a defensive posture, having to justify their ministry to the church. It is most certainly a place where diaconal people experience marginalization. They are defined as different from the norm, ordained ministry, and then are seen as being in opposition to the status quo and regarded as a threat. There is a clear parallel here to the way women are defined as different from the norm, the male experience, and then seen as threatening if they claim equality.

Diaconal ministers in the focus groups stated their wish to be seen as a valid ministry, *not* in opposition to ordained ministry. A more helpful way of expressing the difference between the various

forms of ministry (lay, diaconal, ordained) is to see each of them as having a distinctive contribution, rather than a unique status. In the first section of this paper, some attention has already been given to the way diaconal ministers see their distinctive contribution. Diaconal ministers speak of a particular understanding of power and use of power. Their chosen mandate is to enable the powerless to become powerful, not as dominators, but rather as partners.

Why Do We Have to Explain Ourselves All the Time?

Even when diaconal ministers have searched out their own identity and found words to describe that identity, they feel misunderstood by others. The two focus groups tried to analyse this phenomenon, from the perspective of their own experience. Of course, a full analysis of the difficulties in the communication of diaconal identity would have to include conversations with other groups to discover why diaconal ministry seems to be "a mystery" to lay people, ordained people or non-church people. One might ask: what is so difficult to understand? And, don't they want to understand?

Despite the fact that this research study encompasses only diaconal people, the issue of being misunderstood is certainly worth exploring. In fact, it has become part of the identity of diaconal ministers to acknowledge that they are misunderstood and marginalized within the church. The formation of diaconal ministers includes a coming to terms with a choice that means marginalization, and with the expectation that wherever they go, they will need to explain themselves.

In the discussion, the focus groups were able to pinpoint several obstacles which prevent others from understanding them:

1) The sheer fact of numbers. Across Canada currently there are only 120 active diaconal ministers serving pastoral charges and specialized ministries, with another 135 either retired or in positions outside church institutions. This makes for a total of 255 compared with a total of 3,733 ordained ministers. Not many church members have encountered a diaconal minister. Fewer still have had opportunities to work with a diaconal minister. They all know what an ordained minister is, and this is their only reference point. The lack of models for diaconal ministry is a severe obstacle in communicating its essence.

2) Those who have come to know diaconal ministers may not realize how much of their style is simply personality and how much of it is their commitment to a diaconal approach. One diaconal minister questioned this for herself, "How do I know how much of my style is just me, and how much is being diaconal?" This led to an interesting discussion about whether diaconal ministry attracts a certain personality type, more oriented towards a shared approach

to ministry. Personality does help to determine the ministry choice.

3) The ignorance about diaconal ministry among United Church members may be part of a larger issue--lack of information about many aspects of the structural church (presbyteries, conferences, national committees). One person stated, "We really haven't been good communicators". Representatives to the church courts, for example, have not educated the membership. The membership, for their part, seldom have interest beyond their own congregational borders.

4) The institution of the United Church has a problem recognizing and incorporating diaconal ministry, especially those places of ministry outside the congregation. Social ministries, for instance, report having a more difficult time securing presbytery approval. Yet even within congregational ministries, diaconal candidates continue to report acute dissatisfaction with settlement procedures especially when this process has difficulty finding diaconal positions or team positions.

5) For those outside the United Church or for ecumenical settings, there is a special difficulty. The United Church has its own history and development of diaconal ministry which has led to certain specialities and a philosophy that baffles other denominations. Diaconal ministers working in ecumenical ministries or community agencies find that they have a larger educational task to explain themselves.

6) People do not understand a ministry to be real ministry unless it includes what ordained people do, such as performing the sacraments. For some, sacramental ministry is the only model they know and the sacraments appear to validate the ministry. This seems to be a test question, and diaconal ministers hear it often: "Can you give the sacraments?" As the only well-known form of ministry, the ordained ministry is the norm for what constitutes "real" ministry. Not only does this deny that diaconal ministry is real ministry, it denies the validity of lay ministry as well.

7) Visibility is an issue for diaconal ministers. Much of the ministry diaconal people do is to provide a supportive role to others in their ministry--a "behind the scenes" approach. To compensate for the lack in visibility in congregations, diaconal ministers have to ensure that they participate in leadership roles where others will see them as ministers. In community ministries, it is even more of an issue, since there may be no natural platform for visible leadership.

8) Because diaconal ministers often work in multiple staff positions, the congregation must learn to make sense of having two ministers, but with different emphases. The two emphases might be delineated in terms of the differences of specialty in ministry

(namely, word and sacrament, or education and service), but as noted earlier, diaconal people would express their emphasis more in terms of approach to ministry (style and vision). In congregational life, more weight and value is assigned to the ordained specialties of word and sacrament and more authority accompanies that form of ministry. The diaconal minister tends to be regarded as the assistant minister, with the false impression of being assistant to "the minister". The issue is exacerbated if the diaconal minister is part-time. Congregational members do not accord the diaconal minister the same authority when s/he is not there every day. Without such authority, diaconal ministry is not seen or accepted as an equal and complementary ministry.

9) Because diaconal ministry is not as highly valued as other forms of ministry, there is less attempt to understand it and promote it. There is complication with male/female heritage. Often diaconal ministry is seen as women's work (eg. educational ministry with children), and consequently devalued. Despite the strides taken by the United Church, the model of male authority is still deeply entrenched and sexism remains a strong obstacle to the appreciation of diaconal ministry.

"We live in a society where public authority is granted much less readily and less cheerfully to women than to men, and in the church this phenomenon is reflected in the way relationships have been structured between diaconal and ordained ministers." (Glenys Huws, Voice, Vision, and Space: Women and Transformative Education, p. 246)

10) The style of diaconal ministry is basically a feminist approach, drawing on the feminist principles of mutuality, as opposed to hierarchy. Because there is an association of diaconal ministry with feminism and because the overwhelming number of diaconal ministers are women, some people react to diaconal ministry as a group of feminists. The Centre for Christian Studies, which has educated most of the diaconal ministers in the past, has a reputation for being an institution with a feminist perspective and everyone who has studied at the Centre is regarded with raised eyebrows by those who are suspicious of feminism. This, too, makes for an obstacle in communication. Feminists, on the other hand, would likely have a basis for an understanding diaconal ministry.

11) Any understanding of a non-hierarchical approach is difficult for many people to appreciate. Society at large operates in a hierarchical manner and this approach is all that many people have known. Shared leadership and shared power is not only unfamiliar within the church, it is unwelcome because it does not seem like leadership; it "unseats the mighty from their thrones". From a broader perspective, it can be maintained that the whole history of patriarchy (ie. widely accepted power of men as a group to name and control social relations) mitigates against the

acceptance of diaconal ministry. Where it is not accepted, it tends to be misunderstood or even maligned. The obstacle here is that diaconal ministry has a different approach in the use of power.

12) Diaconal ministry may not be able to be understood without some first-hand experience of it. Even then, there has to be a willingness to unlearn past conceptions while learning new conceptions of ministry. This is not simply an intellectual understanding. People have to be open to involvement in a deeper way with diaconal ministry, to come to understand it at a "gut level". It seems to require a "conversion" from the traditional understandings of ministry as one person's sacramental calling, to the view of ministry as a mutual calling of all God's people.

As one diaconal minister put it, the main reason for all the obstacles to understanding and appreciating diaconal ministry is that "They don't really want to know!" Both personally and institutionally, they don't really want to know. Personally, people have a way of warding off what they do not want to know by masking their resistance as "confusion". They may have understood diaconal ministry all too well! The emerging insight is that others have to want to understand diaconal ministry and to be willing to unlearn past conceptions of ministry. Institutionally, to truly accept diaconal ministry means that the church will have to be prepared for a revolution in ministry. The sharing of power through a mutuality in ministry marks a radically different approach from the current church where "the minister" has not yet been removed from the pedestal. The task for diaconal people is to cultivate that willingness for a mutual and collegial approach to ministry both in themselves and in others.

A corollary to the statement, "They don't really want to know" is the possibility that in some circumstances, diaconal ministers "don't want them to know". One diaconal minister wrote back in her comments: "To survive out there, we do what we can, but we don't broadcast who we are or what we are about because, in fact, we are subversive." If diaconal ministers sense resistance to the changes they represent, they move about more quietly to work for change from within.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

Diaconal ministers have constantly been at work defining their identity. They have been forced to work at this by the need to explain themselves to the church. Yet the soul-searching has its benefits. The gain has been an evolving dynamic sense of identity and an accompanying theology of egalitarian ministry.

Even though diaconal ministers may have found words and concepts to describe the essence of diaconal ministry (for the present time!), the result is something like jargon where only

people on the inside track seem to know the meanings. Formation in diaconal ministry needs to include formation in communicating the essence of diaconal ministry along with an invitation to join in this ministry whether lay, ordained, or diaconal. It is extremely important that diaconal ministers avoid alienating those people among the lay and ordained who could be their friends and supporters within the church.

The church structures, by their very nature, can only understand diaconal ministry functionally, in terms of the specific assignments of education, service, and pastoral care. These tasks in themselves do not provide diaconal identity, however. Diaconal ministers find their identity much more in the style and the vision of ministry they have adopted, which affects how they do all the tasks of ministry. They know that they are not unique in the approach they take, and it is not their wish to be unique! Because diaconal people see themselves as an evolving transforming presence, this has to be an shared ministry, not an exclusive ministry. In fact their role is to be a reminder to the whole church of its shared diaconal ministry.

Marginalization is certainly the experience of diaconal ministers in relation to the church. The insight which arises is that marginalization is the visible result of other forces at work within the church, namely, sexism and clericalism. When diaconal ministry is not seen to be the norm (i.e. male ordained) or not seen to be functioning in accordance with the norm (i.e. subordinate to the male ordained), then diaconal ministry has the potential to become subversive. It is a challenge to the patriarchal arrangement of clergy/lay. The parts of the church that wish to preserve the old order attempt to either keep diaconal ministry in its (subordinate) place, or to disregard it (giving it no place within the church). Diaconal people experience both the second-class role and the invisibility of their ministry as marginalization. An image may help to express this analysis: clericalism and sexism intertwine as two roots of a weed, with the marginalization of diaconal ministry spreading out as the visible branches and leaves. The soil in which this weed grows is patriarchy.

A final insight is that there is a reason for the church's difficulty in finding a place for diaconal ministry within its structures. Diaconal ministry does not readily "fit" because it poses a challenge to the past practice of ministry in the United Church, and calls for new ways of being the church. It is the challenge that comes from the margins and from the commitment to people on the margins. It is the challenge to dismantle privileged status and hierarchy inside and outside of the church. It is the challenge to pull the church from the centre of the status quo onto the margins of society. It is the prophetic challenge to practice justice and to create justice throughout the church and world.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

In the formation of diaconal ministry, there needs to be clarity about identity, and a way to begin practising it. Some students decide on diaconal ministry based on their abilities and interest in the functions of diaconal ministry; other students are attracted to diaconal ministry based on what it stands for within ministry, its style and vision. Clarity needs to be given to both aspects. With the functions, it is essential that a broad understanding be taught, just as the participants in the focus groups spoke about their role in broadening the understanding of the functions within the congregations and agencies they served. The educational program and specific courses need to address an expanded concept of Christian Education, pastoral care, and social ministry. The style and vision of diaconal ministry needs special emphasis during the education of diaconal ministers since that is where diaconal ministers find their identity. This is not simply a matter of explaining what the style or vision is (collegial, non-hierarchical) but it will entail initiating people into that style and vision so that they can operate in those ways and adopt them for their own.

During their education to become diaconal ministers, people need to be assisted to find words to describe their chosen ministry in ways that others can comprehend and relate to. Courses and papers often assist students in finding the theological concepts for ministry. That task must still go on, but in addition, there needs to be attention given in speaking to lay people many of whom have never met diaconal ministers.

Diaconal ministers must become advocates for diaconal ministry, and their educational program needs to deliberately offer support for this role. During their candidacy process, in field placements, and in home settings, students encounter people who have not grasped the essence of diaconal ministry or who may be out of date. Students, then, will need not only the communication skills to explain diaconal ministry, but they will need the self-assertion to affirm its validity in the face of potential hostility. In situations of advocacy it will be vitally important for diaconal students to have gained an approach which does not alienate others, but also does not compromise the vision of ministry that diaconal people embrace.

Networking is central to diaconal ministry for its very survival. This is a skill and an attitude which can be taught within the educational program through working consultatively in groups and teams. It entails learning to operate interdependently with others and to find support when needed. Specific preparation needs to be given for students to make the transition, upon graduation, from the school's support network to the diaconal network.

A crucial element of the education for diaconal ministry needs to be the preparation for living within the church or society in a marginalized position. Certainly education will need to include a thorough social analysis of the roots of this marginalization. People will need to be informed that their choice to become a diaconal minister involves taking on a prophetic stance, calling the church and society into just relationships. Such a stance is not popular where significant change must be made. Along with skills in analysis, the program will need to provide students with workable strategies, and opportunities to develop astuteness.

This paper has documented the ways in which diaconal ministry does not "fit" the church. Students entering diaconal ministry find that they do not "fit" either. For some, this is a transition from the centre to the margins; for others, it is discovering more connections out on the margins. The educational implication here is that students need assistance in learning how to live on the margins. An educational program can assist them through providing information, options, and skill-training. For those who are opting not to "fit", there needs to be a survival kit made up of the skills listed above: finding support, developing clarity, assertion without alienation, learning analysis, strategies and astuteness.

A survival kit made up of these skills will help diaconal ministers to maintain vision in all kinds of situations. A further educational implication, then, is to lift up the vision. Diaconal ministry does have a place in the church, after all. It is a place of nurture and challenge. While diaconal ministry nurtures the gifts of all the members in ministry, it also calls the church to truly be the church, a community practising love and justice in the world.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Introduction

To complete this project there was an implementation phase with students in my work setting at the Centre for Christian Studies. During the academic year following the writing of the paper, I continued the project in the form of testing it out with students. I wanted to discover whether the way in which the project articulated diaconal ministry was able to be communicated to students and whether they would find it to be of benefit in their vocational exploration. In addition, I wanted to find out whether the analysis of marginalization within the church contributed to their own understanding of how they are perceived by the church and whether they might generate further insights for this analysis.

With these objectives in mind, I set myself some educational tasks. As well, I contracted with Ann Naylor to have at least seven supervision sessions over the course of the year to assist me in applying the concepts of this project.

Educational Tasks

1. To communicate an articulate concept of diaconal ministry a) for ourselves as diaconal ministers and b) for others.

It is obvious that diaconal ministers need to be clear about who we are. In setting this task I wanted to discuss identity, not only as we see ourselves as diaconal ministers, but also as we would present ourselves to others within or outside the United Church.

2. To share insights of the research leading up to this paper.

Three specific insights were important to share with students in the process of developing their own diaconal identity. a) that diaconal identity lies in style and vision, more than in function b) that trying to see diaconal identity as unique within the church is indeed a trap c) that there is an analysis of the experience of marginalization which diaconal ministers have in the United Church.

3. To assist students in becoming advocates for diaconal ministry

In the process of candidacy students often must advocate for the validity of diaconal ministry with the committee members who are unsure, and perhaps even hostile to diaconal ministry. To equip students to deal with a church system which has not been affirming of diaconal ministry requires a) that they know the church system, and b) that they have an analysis of power and how power functions c) that they develop skills in self-assertion.

4. To begin to develop skills for networking.

Support systems prove to be invaluable for people on the margins. Skills for networking become skills for survival in

diaconal ministry. My hope in this educational task of learning networking skills was to emphasize and extend the learning which is already part of the CCS curriculum. Specifically, I hoped to extend the learning about interdependence and consultation from a relational basis to a systemic basis within the church.

5. To offer a survival kit for "living on the edge".

"Living on the Edge" was the title of a biennial gathering of Diakonia of the United Church, held at the Centre for Christian Studies in 1990. It was an apt image for diaconal ministry. A survival kit for living on the edge would contain skills and abilities for the following: maintaining vision, finding support, networking, becoming advocates, assertion without alienation, analysis, strategies.

All of these skills and abilities are part of the program at CCS. By placing them together with an image of the survival kit, I hoped to raise awareness of how such skills and abilities are indeed life issues for diaconal ministers. I did not necessarily plan to use the image of survival with students but it was helpful in my own imagination and in planning.

Places for Implementation

The diaconal cluster at CCS offered a place for direct implementation of my educational tasks. As the staff person for this cluster I could plan to make opportunities for my own agenda around this diaconal project. At the same time, I was convinced that my agenda was a central agenda for the diaconal cluster quite apart from any research benefits. These question of identity and analysis of marginalization and power operating within the United Church were key issues to be addressing in any year with students intending to become diaconal ministers.

The courses I facilitated also offered potential for implementation of my educational tasks. I hoped to relate discussions and analyses specifically to diaconal ministry identity. As well, in the journals, reflections, and integrative papers, I wanted to note the extent to which students identified clearly with a diaconal expression of ministry.

Informally I expected that I might be consulted by students as they prepared to interpret diaconal ministry in various church or committee settings. As well, I expected that students considering diaconal ministry might have conversations with me in a counselling mode concerning their vocational decisions.

Observations and Learnings from the Implementation Phase

The diaconal cluster includes all students in the candidacy process for commissioning in the United Church. It meets once every three weeks. At the beginning of each year, the cluster determines questions and issues to explore. As part of the cluster, I included my own agenda of the educational tasks listed above. Students readily agreed to include it along with other concerns, such as settlement issues, presbytery and conference interviews, team ministry and the history of the diaconal movement.

There were two specific occasions for the sharing of this diaconal project. The first was a session dealing with diaconal ministry identity and how we communicate that. I found that many of the words used by students to describe diaconal ministry were the same or similar to the words used by members of the two focus groups. During the last part of the session we focused on communicating our identity with others. We divided into sub-groups to have each group prepare suggestions for communicating what it is to be a diaconal minister to 1) children of the church 2) relatives outside the United Church 3) United Church Women 4) ordained ministers. The most difficult groups were (4) the ordained ministers and (2) the relatives from a different church or religion. While explanation was painstaking for the relatives, the matter of communicating with ordained raised issues of whether the claims of diaconal ministry are in fact a direct challenge to ordained ministry. We discussed the question, often raised by ordained people, as to whether diaconal ministry ought to exist if ordained ministers also see themselves as enablers of the whole faith community. The group that became the most creative were the ones communicating to children. They made use of a story, "The Stone Soup", to make the statement that diaconal ministers try to support and enhance lay ministry, the flavouring in the soup which increases the taste of each ingredient. At the conclusion of this session I was clearly satisfied that the cluster students had words and concepts for diaconal ministry, along with an acute sense of the need to adapt these words and concepts for specific situations.

The second specific occasion came when the cluster considered the research findings. These were referred to more than once, but for this session we chose to work at analysing the marginalization of diaconal ministry in the United Church. This session became a discussion of the items listed in the analysis section of this research paper. Clearly, the cluster was aware of marginalization and many told of instances they had already encountered through reactions of others when they announced their choice for diaconal ministry. They agreed with the analysis of the focus groups generally and were particularly interested in analysing the power issues which led to diaconal ministry being seen as a "lesser" ministry. As well, they discussed the "catch 22" of seeking status for the sake of equality but not wanting hierarchical power.

The third educational task of becoming advocates did not have a specific session, yet the cluster worked at advocacy for diaconal ministry in several ways. Becoming familiar with the church system was an important concern of the cluster members. Invited guests came to discuss the candidacy processes, preparation for interviews, and settle procedures. The students learned how the church system functions formally, and to some degree how it functions informally. As well, they developed ideas through discussion and questions as to what their rights were and how they might appropriately act in their own best interests. A major issue was how to handle the question: "Are you in essential agreement with the Basis of Union?" For most students the Basis of Union is an archaic formulation of faith which does not express their current faith. Ideas for self-assertion certainly emerged in all of these interchanges.

While students in Core-Field II were definitely learning networking skills these skills did not receive a special time on the agenda for the diaconal cluster. (Educational task: networking).

With regard to the image of the survival kit, I did not expect the cluster to deal directly with survival skills. It became part of the agenda, however, when we used the idea of a presenting survival kits as a "send off" to the students graduating this year. The exercise of putting together a survival kit became a test of how the cluster would name diaconal ministry as a marginalized ministry. On the page following, the list of words and symbols offered by the cluster affirmed their consciousness around the importance of networking, of maintaining vision, and of finding ways to support oneself.

SURVIVAL KIT

THICK SKIN MEDITATION TAPE COURAGE
NETWORK COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT
PEOPLE ~~INFINITE SELF-AFFIRMATION~~
LEARNING PARTNER KLEENEX
HALLELUJAH FLOWER (growth) FLEXIBILITY
DATE BOOK FOR MEETINGS
SPARKING IDEAS SLEEP
SENSE OF HUMOUR CONTINUED LEARNING
GOD BOX (to put concerns in)
CONNECTION TO THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE
PERSONAL SUPPORT AND NURTURE
CORE SKILLS: PLANNING AND TRAINING
SENSE OF VISION
SENSE OF "BEAUTY"
WOMEN'S WISDOM (ways of knowing and being)

In other places beyond the diaconal cluster the implementation of my research was much less direct, and I myself was much less deliberate. I am aware now of an ecumenical difference between cluster sessions and class/seminar sessions where I mention diaconal ministry less frequently. My approach in class/seminar becomes more general since it includes Anglicans and other denominations, along with students who are choosing to be lay professional ministers. Because of the composition of the class/seminar, I view my staff mandate as encouraging ministry identity, including diaconal identity, but not as the only focus.

Through this implementation phase, I have become acutely aware of my own need to find ways to speak affirmatively of diaconal ministry while also supporting others in their choices for ministry.

In the curriculum of the course "Education and Pastoral Care" and the subject areas for Field there certainly were opportunities for power analysis on many occasions. One session of EPC dealt with "Power Elements in Educational Ministry" and a Field reflection of "Power" included assigned readings on the analysis of power in ministry settings. I feel confident these program areas did provide for the kind of learning I was seeking as part of the educational tasks I set myself for the implementation phase.

Student assignments were another place where I hoped to find an articulation of diaconal ministry. I confess that I have some frustration that there was no way to "measure" the ability of students to articulate diaconal ministry. Several people in their final assignments referred to diaconal ministry, or specifically identified with diaconal ministry. Some mentioned ways in which they educated others about diaconal ministry. One student included diaconal ministry as part of her analysis of gender in ministry. For many, the emphasis was to empower or encourage laity and this was seen as the heart of diaconal ministry.

Diaconal ministry appeared in many assignments, but in fact, I was somewhat surprised that it was not named more often. Perhaps this is simply a function of my own subjectivity as I tried to be alert to diaconal ministry identity in students. Perhaps students did not see the need to write about diaconal ministry specifically; it might seem like stating the obvious.

Summary of the Implementation Phase

The value of the implementation phase was that the research project became a resource for a whole group of people. I became more deliberate and more watchful about clarifying, supporting, and advocating for diaconal ministry. Students gained insight and became more articulate about a diaconal perspective on ministry. While they did not add new material to the research, I feel confident that they found it beneficial in their development as diaconal ministers.

Through this year I sensed that a commitment and excitement about diaconal ministry was fostered. From the diaconal cluster I discovered that the students valued the increased attention to diaconal ministry. In their evaluation of the diaconal cluster gatherings, students affirmed that it was essential to have a place to talk about diaconal ministry--about what is good and what is tough in diaconal ministry. To graduate and become a minority in the church means that they needed the networking and support they began in this setting.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES EMERGING FROM THIS PROJECT

As this project developed over time, certain questions and issues began to cry out to be addressed. In conversation and correspondence with readers, in interaction with students, and particularly in supervision with Ann Naylor, the discussion led to deeper unresolved issues surrounding diaconal ministry in the United Church.

In my own mind, these questions and issues are large. I began to realize that to deal seriously with them was beyond the limited scope of this project. They require considerable research and investigation as well as more reading. To try to include a discussion of these issues would entail beginning all over again. Instead, to stay true to my initial research design and to honour the responses of the participants in the focus groups, I have chosen to offer the project in its present form and to set out the emerging questions and issues for a future consideration.

Questions/Issues

1. *Is it possible to be diaconal and be happy in ministry? What would fulfilment for a diaconal minister look like?*

At first glance, this may seem like a frivolous question. Yet the wide-spread pain of diaconal ministers serving the church makes the question very real and pertinent. One diaconal minister said that she cries every time someone is commissioned during the annual conference service of ordination and commissioning. Her tears are in anticipation of the pain the woman or man will experience because of this choice of ministry. Diaconal commitment is to a ministry which is largely unrecognized, misunderstood, and devalued. To maintain such a commitment may mean an acceptance of ongoing pain within the life of the church, in order to lift up an approach to ministry which one deeply believes the church needs.

Another way to phrase the question is to ask: how would one describe a situation where diaconal ministry was being fulfilled? This project points to the ideals and hopes carried by diaconal ministers. For these to be realized would mean an enormous change in way people in the church relate with each other and with others in the world. It would mean living out the gospel more faithfully.

Some further questions occur: to what extent is it possible to live diaconally, or to live in the style of Jesus' ministry? How might the church move more in this direction? How might diaconal ministers assist in this movement? How might the diaconal vision be maintained during the long haul?

2. Do we experience "difference" as "threat"? Is it possible to have a distinction in ministry existing side-by-side without placing ministry roles in an up-down schema?

A lawyer stated the following premise to me during a presbytery meeting--that wherever there are two designations or two categories, one is always seen to be superior. He claimed there is a tendency in human nature to discover the "best one" or the "right way". At first I put this down to his adversarial training, but no doubt it is larger than that. It is part of the patriarchal thinking which is pervasive in our culture. In relation to the two genders, this principle has been operative for centuries, with men receiving the privilege of superiority over women. Within the church's expressions of ministry diaconal ministry has been evaluated against the norm of ordained ministry which is usually seen to be superior.

In this project participants referred to diaconal ministry and educational preparation as "different". Is this an indication of an acknowledgement that ordained ministry is the norm for ministry? How can such a norm be erased? Is it not possible for diaconal ministers to claim our own ministry as valid without reference to ordained?

In the later seventies and early eighties, diaconal ministers were seen as "complementary" to ordained ministers. "Complementarity" was adopted as a helpful word in establishing equality and mutuality. Instead, that word has undone equality, at least for diaconal ministers. The ordained were never seen as "complementary" to diaconal. The message conveyed was that diaconal ministers were incomplete, yet ordained ministers were complete in themselves to function in ministry.

The relationship between diaconal and ordained ministries points to a larger question: How do we deal with difference? Does encountering difference necessarily mean there is threat? An ordained man asked some diaconal ministers whether they existed mainly to critique ordained ministry. This is an astute question,

and one that needs to be addressed in diaconal circles. Both diaconal and ordained personnel need to examine how to relate to the "other".

3. How can diaconal ministers claim distinctiveness when there is an increasing blurring between ministries?

The issue here is how to claim identity for diaconal ministers when the distinction between diaconal and other ministries is becoming blurred. As this project has discovered, the identity for diaconal ministers is found in the style and vision of diaconal ministry, rather than in the functions of that ministry. Yet diaconal ministry is legitimated in church structures by its functions. The problem is exacerbated by the needs of the church placing a number of diaconal ministers in settings where there is only one paid staff, usually a "word and sacrament" staff. It has also been the choice of some diaconal ministers to serve in settings as the only paid staff. Both in cases of settlement and of choice to work as the sole paid minister, most conferences are now granting licenses to diaconal ministers for the sacraments. Generally diaconal ministers support this extension of diaconal ministry into the wider functions of paid ministry. In diaconal gatherings discussions include how to work at doing general ministry from a diaconal perspective. For instance, the leadership of worship can be seen as diaconal ministry--educational, pastoral, community-building, promoting of transformation.

The question becomes: is it possible to argue the case for diaconal ministry, not from the standpoint of specialized functions, but from the standpoint of diaconal perspective? Such an argument is problematic, since the church structures can validate functions needed in ministry, but have not designated the styles or perspectives of ministry. To this point, church structure has only understood and used "functions" as the distinguishing marks of ministry. It is much harder, perhaps impossible, for an organization to distinguish ministries by the concept of "style".

Another issue arises from the increasing blurring of ministries. Ordained ministers may choose to operate in a style similar to diaconal ministry perspective, with collaboration, mutuality and empowerment of the ministry of all people. In welcoming the increased attention to this style of ministry from ordained personnel, do diaconal ministers lose the identity they gain from this perspective? Is the very thing they seek (wider acceptance of diaconal style) a threat to their own existence?

4. *Diaconal ministers have been placed on the margins of the church, but do they want to stay there? How does marginalization connect to transformation?*

A book From Margin to Centre by bell hooks, a feminist writer, has been suggested as further background for this question. In this book she argues that feminist theory must encompass the experience of women on the margins, such as black women. This "parallel experience" might assist with the dilemma diaconal ministers experience in responding to their own marginalization.

As this project portrays, diaconal ministers experience themselves to be on the margins of the United Church, both structurally and ideologically. In one sense, there is a choice to be marginalized, when one enters into diaconal ministry or remains in diaconal ministry knowing that this is a "less acceptable" ministry within the church. In this case, it is the church, through ignorance and neglect, which has created the marginalization. Diaconal people may recognize that this is where the church puts them, but may also resist this marginalization.

The dilemma becomes whether to try to move to the centre of power, or whether to try to help the whole church operate from the margins. A move to the centre might be to become ordained or to find ways to enhance the status of diaconal ministers. However, this may simply be the temptation of hierarchical thinking. Another option is to insist on the margins, to try to assist the church to be in solidarity with marginalized people everywhere.

From its beginning diaconal ministry has been focused on the poor and marginalized. Yet the vision of justice is for marginalization to be removed, for all to be included in the circle. Perhaps the identification of diaconal ministers with the marginalized is a temporary identification in a long term vision of transformation.

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MODERATOR'S GUIDE

WHAT ARE THE KEY ASPECTS OF YOUR JOB (JOB DESCRIPTION) WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO? (Beginning sharing, vision of ministry)

What do you see yourself needing to be about as a diaconal minister in the church/world?

WHAT DOES "DIACONAL" MEAN TO YOU? WHAT PART OF WHAT YOU DO AFFIRMS WHO YOU ARE AS A DIACONAL MINISTER? (ENABLES YOU TO EMBODY DIACONAL MINISTRY) (Identify diaconal)

What aspects of education, service and pastoral care do you like? What ways in which you go about doing those aspects of your job are diaconal?

WHAT ASPECTS OF DIACONAL MINISTRY DO YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT? WHAT PART OF DIACONAL MINISTRY ARE YOU NOT ABLE TO DO? (complete identification of diaconal) What part of what you do raises questions about who you are as a diaconal minister? What do you dislike about diaconal ministry? What is the significance of that for diaconal ministry?

APART FROM THE TASKS YOU DO AND THE WAY YOU DO THEM, IS THERE A BELIEF SYSTEM YOU HOLD THAT SPEAKS OF DIACONAL MINISTRY? (assumptions of diaconal ministry, theological underpinnings) How is the call of God present in diaconal ministry?

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES PREVENTING OTHERS FROM UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING DIACONAL MINISTRY? (group analysis of misunderstanding) If the church were yours to change, what would you do?

HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A DIACONAL MINISTER IN RELATIONS TO OTHER MINISTRIES--ORDAINED MINISTRY AND MINISTRY OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE? (Identity through relationship; understandings and misunderstandings) What is the significance of "order of ministry" for you? What are your feelings around having or not having sacramental privilege?

WHAT IS YOUR FORM OF CONTACT WITH THE DIACONAL MOVEMENT (LOCAL, NATIONAL, GLOBAL, HISTORICAL) OR WITH OTHER DIACONAL MINISTERS? WHAT EFFECT DOES THIS HAVE IN YOUR MINISTRY OF YOUR DIACONAL STYLE? (commitment to the movement; degree of communal approach) What from the historical tradition informs you? What, if anything, is important to carry forward? What are the benefits/drawbacks of diaconal ministry roots being a woman's movement? What meaning do you find in having a global diakonia?

IN WHAT WAYS IS IT HELPFUL/NECESSARY FOR DIACONAL MINISTRY TO BE UNIQUE? OR DO YOU AGREE THAT "THE UNIQUENESS OF DIACONAL MINISTRY IS THAT WE ARE NOT UNIQUE?" (struggle with power and visibility; vision of diaconal ministry in context) What does diaconal ministry have to offer in relation to the ministry of the church? How do you envision the future of diaconal ministry? If you had to do it over again would you choose to be diaconal?