

17/98 Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

Introduction

1. Resolution 17/98 reads as follows -

"Synod requests that the Standing Committee prepare a report for the first session of the next Synod concerning ways in which the recommendations of the report, 'Concerning the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate' 1987, have been and could be further implemented."

Background

2. By resolution 8/83 the Synod requested that the Standing Committee consider, among other things, the nature of a distinctive and permanent diaconate and report its findings to the first session of the 40th Synod in October 1984.

3. The Standing Committee appointed a committee comprising Mr G R Christmas, the Rev D E Eastway, Mrs M Gabbott, the Rev R E Heslehurst, Deaconess (now the Rev) N Jarrett, the Rev J G Mason, Deaconess (now the Rev) E Matheson, Deaconess E Standfield and the Rev (now Bishop) P R Watson to report on the nature of the distinctive and permanent diaconate, as well as the diaconate as defined in the Ordinal. Mr Eastway and Deaconess Jarrett resigned before the committee completed its report.

4. The committee reported to the Standing Committee in June 1987 and the Standing Committee agreed to print the committee's report for the Synod, without recommendation. The report is printed on pages 337 to 346 inclusive of the 1988 Year Book and a copy is available from the Diocesan Secretary upon request. This report is the report referred to in Resolution 17/98.

5. In its report, the committee considered the categories of the diaconate ("transitory" and "permanent"), why a distinctive and permanent diaconate was desirable and the role and function of the diaconate as described in the Ordinal. It concluded its report with 2 substantive recommendations -

"That Standing Committee consider the promotion to General Synod of a canon whereby the Australian Prayer Book service for the making of deacons be prescribed and whereby the collect the rubric at the conclusion of the Book of Common Prayer service be deleted for the reason that it suggests to some persons that the present order of deacons is transitory and not permanent.

The Standing Committee consider the promotion of a further General Synod canon whereby a deacon may be permitted to administer the service of holy communion."

6. In response to the committee's report, the Synod resolved as follows (Resolution 5/87) -

"Although Synod does not necessarily accept some of the comments (and) recommendations contained in the Report concerning the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate, nevertheless it recognises that the Report attempts in a practical manner to deal with significant aspects of ministry, and accordingly requests that -

- (a) the Report be made available to parishes at minimum cost for discussion purposes supplemented by any additional material as Standing Committee may consider appropriate;
- (b) Area Deanery Conferences be convened for the purpose responding to the Report and such material during the period from January to June 1988; and
- (c) the Standing Committee take steps to give effect to the above as soon as practicable and to report to the next session of Synod as to action taken and responses received."

7. In early 1988 the area deanery conferences contemplated by Resolution 5/87 were held and, later that year, the Standing Committee advised the Synod that the summary of responses from those conferences ran to 13 foolscap pages. In the Standing Committee's view, it was only possible to draw the most basic of conclusions from those responses. The conclusions indicated that some supported the idea of a distinctive and permanent diaconate as a separate order, others preferred to see the present diaconate developed and others rejected the concept of a distinctive and permanent diaconate altogether!

8. The Standing Committee also advised the Synod that it considered the questions of whether to have a distinctive and permanent diaconate and, if so, how to introduce it, were for the Synod to decide. The Standing Committee suggested 3 options, should the Synod want a permanent diaconate -

- (a) implement the concept within the context of the present Ordinal;

- (b) amend the Ordinal, which would require the promotion to the General Synod of a bill for a canon whereby the Australian Prayer Book service for the making of deacons be prescribed whereby the collect and rubric at the conclusion of the Book of Common Prayer order of service be deleted for the reason that it suggests to some persons that the present order of deacons is transitory and not permanent; or
- (c) promote to the General Synod a bill for a canon to establish a distinctive and permanent diaconate as a separate order.

9. The Synod did not debate the principle of a distinctive and permanent diaconate or how it could be implemented and has not subsequently done so.

Comments

10. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the Standing Committee considered in 1988 that the question of principle of a distinctive and permanent diaconate was for the Synod to decide. The Synod has not pursued the matter. Accordingly, the recommendation of the committee that a canon be promoted to the General Synod to provide for an amendment to the Ordinal has not been pursued.

11. The Standing Committee sought the advice of the Archbishop who indicated that he believes that all that is required to establish a permanent diaconate is an understanding, at the time of ordination, that ordination would be for the diaconate on a permanent basis. Accordingly, the Archbishop endorses the suggestion of the Standing Committee in 8(a) above, namely, that the concept, if it is to be implemented, be implemented within the context of the present Ordinal. This being the case, the Standing Committee does not intend pursuing the matter unless the Synod determines, as a matter of policy, that it wants a distinct and permanent diaconate to be created by legislation.

12. The recommendation of the committee that a canon be promoted to the General Synod to permit a deacon to administer holy communion has not been pursued. As members will be aware, the Synod has adopted another course of action in relation to this matter.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE
Diocesan Secretary

12 August 1999