

16/93 Lay and Diaconal *Presidency*

(Under resolution 16/93, the Archbishop conferred with the Standing Committee on 3 occasions about the impact of lay and diaconal *presidency*. This report is an edited version of papers presented to the Standing Committee by the Archbishop on 26 April and 25 July 1994.)

Introduction

1. Synod resolution 16/93 asked me -

"to confer with the Standing Committee to investigate the impact of lay and diaconal *presidency* on church order and other matters relating thereto."

2. I refer members to the comments on lay presidency in my Presidential Address delivered to the Synod in October 1993 (*pages 310 and 311 of the 1994 Year Book*). At that time I raised a number of issues which I would need to consider before I could consider giving assent to any Ordinance that the Synod might pass authorising Lay or Diaconal *Presidency*. I said -

"Both diaconal and lay *presidency* will raise genuine concerns for many despite the opinions of the Legal Committee and the Doctrine Commission. Not all those who would be against such moves could be classified as unreformed or sacerdotalists. My esteemed predecessor was not prepared to assent to legislation enacting any such provisions.

My own position is not quite so unequivocal. I can see the merits of licensing permanent deacons to conduct the Lord's Supper in certain situations. I can agree that there are no theological reasons why lay people cannot be licensed to do the same. My uncertainties lie in the area of order, of what the long term consequences may be for ordained ministry, as well as the obligations which might rest upon me as a diocesan bishop in this Church and as the Metropolitan of New South Wales. These will require more reflection on my part before I can indicate my response to legislation that might be presented to me in 1994."

Will it be seen as Contrary to Our Constitution?

3. Clearly I have an obligation to seek to lead this Diocese in the light of God's Word. As a priest I promised "to minister the doctrine and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord has commanded, and as this Church has received them ...". Our reports have indicated majority opinions to the effect that there is no legal impediment to lay *presidency* in the circumstances contemplated in those reports. The question may need to be asked whether or not an ordinance that gave greater opportunities for lay *presidency* than envisaged in the earlier reports would still have the same approval. The opinions advanced in our reports have not yet been subjected to the scrutiny of a circle wider than our own Diocese. The Appellate Tribunal may or may not concur.

How will it Affect this Diocese?

4. There are indications that this is a contentious issue both inside and outside the Diocese. Correspondence and conversations have confirmed for me the opinion expressed in my Synod Charge and quoted earlier in this paper. Not everyone is convinced of the cogency of all the arguments in the reports. This issue could bring a further cause for division within the life of the Diocese. Is there a theological concern at stake for which any measure of division is a small price to pay? Are there practical demands that make this an imperative?

What will it do to Ordained Ministry?

5. I can envisage as time goes by 2 classes of people leading the worship and life of churches in the Diocese: 1 which has gone the traditional route of selection, training examination and public ordination with prayer and the laying on of hands; the other by licensing on minimal requirements. The services of the latter would be very tempting in multi-church parishes that are short on funds. Might we restrict employment opportunities for those whom we ordain to full time ministry?

What will be Distinctive about Ordination?

6. The original intention of our Ordinal seems clear. Priests were to be publicly set aside after due examination by prayer and the laying on of hands for the task of spiritual oversight and care for the flock of Christ in the parish to which they were licensed. Their work was to be accomplished by prayer and the ministry of the Word and Sacraments both in public and in private. They were to be assisted in that task by a deacon. If non-ordained people can be authorised to preach and administer the Sacraments what call is there for Ordination? If I should answer that ordination gives the responsibility of oversight could I not with some reasonableness reply that a person thought worthy of being licensed to preach and administer the sacraments would not lack the qualities that might on occasions suggest that he or she should be given oversight? Has the time come to consider why we ordain and just exactly what we consider it to mean in this church now and in the future?

What Obligations do I have in this Matter?

7. The will of my own Synod expressed in its resolution concerning diaconal and lay *presidency* cannot be treated lightly but I do have additional obligations in other directions as well. As a bishop in this Church and as the Metropolitan for New South Wales I am bound to weigh up how the actions of this Diocese impinge on the rest of the denomination and on the wider Church.

Lay *Presidency* and the General Synod

8. I am aware that the General Synod Commission on Doctrine issued a Report in 1981 which said -
"The Commission cannot recommend that laymen be licensed to preside at the eucharist, because a layman thought fit by the bishop and congregation and willing to lead that congregation in this way ought to be ordained."

9. In 1987 the Provincial Synod gave consideration to the issue but its Standing Committee declined to refer it to the General Synod.

10. In spite of this I think it correct to say that the General Synod itself has not seriously debated the question. I believe that we have a responsibility to pursue a course through the General Synod before action is taken by us in isolation. If we are not to bear the same criticism which we directed towards others when they appeared to us to be taking precipitate action on other matters we need to allow time and opportunity for this issue to be thoroughly ventilated in that forum.

11. The Australian Bishops' Conference was held recently at Gilbulla. This provided me with an opportunity to address the Bishops on the question of diaconal and lay *presidency*. I attach a statement entitled "Ministry in Tomorrow's Church" which was adopted unanimously by resolution at that conference after our discussions.

12. You will see that the Bishops of New South Wales have been asked to bring a report to the Bishops' Conference in April next year. The Bishops of this Province will meet in Sydney in June to commence work on the project. I have appointed Canon Dr Peter Jensen, Principal of Moore College and the Rev Dr Ivan Head, Master-Elect of St Paul's College in the University of Sydney, to be the "specialist theologians" to advise the Bishops as requested in the statement. Those consultants are currently preparing background material to allow the Bishops to read themselves into the subject.

13. The statement envisages that a report with recommendations will be brought by the Australian Bishops to the General Synod in 1995.

Where do I Stand?

14. In the worst of all places: endeavouring to straddle 2 apparently diverging horses. I think the opinions of our Doctrine Commission and the Legal Committee of our Standing Committee must yet undergo further scrutiny before they can be accepted as secure. They need exposure for the evaluation of the wider Church. "Friends" and "foes" need the chance to give us their reactions. I am therefore indicating that at this stage I am inclined to the view that diaconal and lay *presidency* should be debated at General Synod in some appropriate fashion before it becomes a practice in this or any other diocese.

Administration of Holy Communion Bill 1994

15. Though I will of course listen to all contributions to the debate on this bill in the Synod, and further, without prejudice to any decision that I may make about assenting to an ordinance of this nature, I wish to indicate that I would request an amendment to clause 5 that would limit authorisation to the Archbishop, or to an Assistant Bishop on his behalf if authorised by the Archbishop.

16. I would seek the same provision in clause 11(a) which seeks to amend clause 5 of the Deaconesses, Readers and Other Lay Persons Ordinance so that the new clause 5(1) included words similar to those that would appear in clause 5 of the Bill.

17. By way of further consideration I ask the question: "Might it be wise to consider also including the administration of Holy Baptism, since there is, in the minds of some, doubt about the appropriateness of people other than Priests regularly baptising?" This would require a renaming of the proposed Bill.

Ministry Bill 1994

18. This Bill is before the Synod at the second reading stage. However I wish to indicate that I would be eager to have an amendment to the words that permit an Assistant Bishop to give approval, along the lines indicated in my comments in items 15 and 16 of this paper. I presume also that this approach would modify or remove clause 7(2)(e) to which I do not feel I could accede. I would also like it to be made clear in the new clause 7(4) that the approval of both Churchwardens and Parish Council is required in all cases.

19. If I have not properly understood the effects of the Bill and proposed amendments I wish to make clear that I would want the exercise of the ministries that are the subject of this material specifically authorised by the Archbishop or by an Assistant Bishop if so authorised by the Archbishop.

Lay Assistants at Holy Communion Canon 1973

20. I wish to indicate that I would not be prepared to act in the way suggested in Option 3 of item 6.3 of the report on resolution 16/94. As the report on resolution 16/94 observes in item 4.8 -

"... it seems clear that neither the General Synod nor the Sydney Synod *intended* to allow for lay people to be authorised to offer unlimited assistance to the priest in the administration of the Lord's Supper."

Conclusion

21. I believe the Diocese of the Southern Cone acted appropriately when it resolved not to act on lay administration of the Holy Communion before it was thoroughly considered by the Communion as a whole. Whatever our convictions I believe we have a responsibility to debate this issue in the General Synod in some fashion before we take any action. I am persuaded that as a Bishop in this Church and as Metropolitan I have an obligation to see that this is done before this Diocese moves unilaterally on this issue. This is a significant issue for many within this Diocese and throughout the Communion. I consider I am obligated to act in a way that would be deemed to be responsible by all who have an interest in the matter.

22. The authors of the report on resolution 16/94 have made a case that must be considered by the Australian Church and the wider Communion. I think they have raised in a pointed way the need for a clearer understanding of what ordination means and implies, and what, if any, are the distinctions to be observed in ministry between those whom we ordain for oversight by means of Word and Sacraments, and those who do not receive that public examination and setting apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. They have asked us to consider that in our contemporary practices we have moved a considerable distance from the pattern of ministry that formed the outlook of The Book of Common Prayer with its Articles and Ordinal. Whether or not one thinks that lay administration of the Holy Communion is the best point for the question of the nature of ordained ministry to be raised, the fact is, that for many, that is exactly what it does raise.

23. I would like the Standing Committee and Synod to be aware of my hesitations so that if I am ever placed in the situation of needing to deliberate on whether or not I can sign into effect an ordinance permitting lay administration they will not be able to say that I had not informed them of my concerns. While I will certainly listen to the debate and decisions of the Synod and be open to be influenced by it, I want to indicate that I would be unlikely to consent unless I am persuaded that there is reasonable support for this provision amongst the church people of the Diocese and substantial support from evangelicals in other parts of the Communion. I am not eager to put the Diocese out on a limb on an issue like this.

ARCHBISHOP R.H. GOODHEW

12 August 1994

Statement Adopted by the Australian Bishops' Conference

Ministry in Tomorrow's Church

1. This National Conference of Anglican Bishops is aware that the past 30 years have witnessed rapid change, not only in society as a whole but rapid change also in the life of the Church. This is a time when we Australians are taking stock of all the change that has occurred both in society and in the Church.

2. Very significant among the changes in church life is the growth of the ministry of the laity. In recent years this has expanded into areas which many once saw as the ministry of the clergy. By the mid-1990s increasing numbers of laity teach, preach, conduct worship services, counsel, visit homes, hospitals and jails, and in some cases, conduct funerals and care for the grieving.

3. However the greater involvement of lay people with such ministries in the life of the Church raises issues not only in Australia and among Anglicans, but overseas and among other churches too, that require deep reflection as to their consequences for the 21st century Church. Some such key issues are-

- (a) What is the nature and role of the ordained ministry of Bishop, Priest/Presbyter and Deacon?
- (b) Are there any limits to the ministry of the laity as compared with the ministry of the clergy, in particular can the laity preside at the Holy Communion just as they preach sermons and lead other forms of worship?
- (c) Is the primary focus of lay ministry the Church or the wider world?

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4. Such questions as these take us into even deeper issues, that need constant re-thinking in the light of experience, issues such as -
- (a) What under God is the nature and role of the Church?
 - (b) How do individual congregations, individual dioceses and national churches ensure that what they believe and do is in accord with Divine truth?
5. These fundamental questions affect every part of the Anglican Church of Australia and we, the Bishops, are committed to address them afresh. We recognise that there will be differences of opinion but these differences offer the possibility of a creative renewal of all parts of our Church, as we consider together what it will mean to be the Church of tomorrow.
6. We have agreed unanimously to appoint the NSW Bishops, together with a small team of specialist theologians, to begin work with the following brief -
- "To explore the biblical and historical foundations of Christian Ministry, with a view to clarifying the proper nature and roles of lay and ordained ministry in the Church, with special attention to the matters specifically raised in this statement."
7. It is the expectation of this Bishops' Conference that a report with recommendations will be brought to the July 1995 meeting of General Synod.

18 April 1994