

DIACONAL MINISTRY IN NAMIBIA
CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA (ELCRN)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
DECLARATION	v
COPYRIGHT STATEMENT	v
DEDICATION	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
0.1 The focus of this study	1
0.2 The relevance of this study	3
0.3 The methodology of this study	4
CHAPTER ONE - THE ELCRN AND ITS DIACONAL STRUCTURE	5
1.1 Historical Background	5
1.2 Mission Work in SWA	6
1.3 Mission to Church	7
1.4 Diaconal ministry	9
1.4.1 Humble Beginning	9
1.4.2 Current Dispensation	10
1.4.3 Problems in the Ministry	11
1.5 Conclusion	12
CHAPTER TWO - THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DIACONAL MINISTRY	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 Point of departure - Luke. 10:25-37	14
2.2.1 Who is my neighbour?	15
2.2.2 Unfortunate casualty	15
2.2.3 The Priest and Levite	16
2.2.4 The Good Samaritan	17
2.3 The Great Commission - Mark. 16:15	18
2.4 The Great Commandment - John. 21:15-17	20
2.5 Conclusion	21
CHAPTER THREE - SOME CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF DIAKONIA	22
3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 Diakonia is essential	22
3.3 Diakonia is local	23
3.4 Diakonia is preventive	23
3.5 Diakonia is humanitarian	24
3.6 Diakonia is liberative	25
3.7 Conclusion	26

CHAPTER FOUR - CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF SOME WCC/ CICARWS RECOMMENDATIONS ON DIAKONIA (1990)	27
4.1 Introduction	27
4.2 The Church – Conscience of Society	28
4.3 The Church – Agent of Change	28
4.4 The Church – Relief Provider?	29
4.5 The Church – One United Voice	31
4.6 The Church – Honesty and Integrity	32
4.7 The Church – Theology of Diakonia	33
4.8 Conclusion	34
CHAPTER FIVE - HOLY SPIRIT VIRTUES OF DIAKONIA (GAL. 5:22-23)	35
5.1 Introduction	35
5.2 Virtue of Love	35
5.3 Virtue of Peace	36
5.4 Virtue of Patience	37
5.5 Virtue of Kindness	39
5.6 Holy Spirit in Diakonia	40
5.7 Conclusion	42
CHAPTER SIX - CRAFFORD’S IMAGES OF MISSIONARY DIAKONATE REVISITED	43
6.1 Introduction	43
6.2 Exemplary diaconate	44
6.3 Caritative diaconate	45
6.4 Koinonial diaconate	47
6.5 Social diaconate	48
6.6 Industrial diaconate	49
6.7 Political diaconate	50
6.8 Conclusion	52
CHAPTER SEVEN - A NEW VISION FOR THE DIACONAL MINISTRY	54
7.1 Introduction	54
7.2 Weakness and Strengths	54
7.3 From Centralization to Decentralization	56
7.4 Continued Diaconal Education	58
7.5 Promoting Volunteer Service	59
7.6 Conclusion	61

CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSIONS AND THE ROAD AHEAD	62
8.1 Introduction	62
8.2 The Macedonia call	63
8.3 ELCRN and the Road Ahead	64
8.4 A practical example: the Church and HIV/Aids	65
8.5 Conclusion	70
ABBREVIATIONS	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72

ABSTRACT: “DIACONAL MINISTRY IN NAMIBIA-CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA (ELCRN)”

This investigative and evaluative study aims at contributing to the ongoing dialogue on the necessity to have a diaconal ministry within the framework of the overall mission of the church under discussion (the ELCRN). A further aim is to present some workable proposals and recommendations for the revitalization of this much-needed ministry under the umbrella of the said Church in particular, but also to have a message to the Church of the Lord in Namibia.

The assumption is made and the hypothesis developed that a diaconal ministry is without doubt part and parcel of the mission of the Church. This necessitates rethinking on the current problems encountered and a new look at the Church's structures, plan of action and future vision - in view of the establishment of an effective diaconal ministry. The operating of an effective diaconal action is in line with the cross-bearing responsibility of the Church. Any ideas to the effect that the State ought to take over all responsibilities for the social needs of people after independence, is to belittle such a costly obligation and mission of the Church. The thesis thus argues that there is a great need and urgency to have an effective diaconal ministry, particularly in the ELCRN.

This argument is firstly developed by giving a historical background of the Church under review, particularly its humble beginnings of which the missionaries laid the foundations - including the current dispensation and problems within the said ministry. The purpose is to show that evangelization in Namibia was started not only to 'convert the heathen' but to provide also in the bodily needs of the African people, and that this legitimate diaconal function of the Church should still be taken very seriously

The biblical and theological basis of this ministry will be reviewed in Chapter 2, having Luke 10:25-37 as point of departure, backed by Mk. 16:15 and John 21:15-17, which is the Great Commission and Commandment respectively.

Chapters 3 and 4 will cover a critical discussion of various insights gained from the extensive research done by the World Council of Churches on this subject. Arguments in these studies have again been based on the findings of workshops held in Africa, thus representing the African understanding of diakonia and the way of doing it. The impact of the Holy Spirit, an essential element in the mission and ministry of the Church, will be dealt with in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6, is based on Crafford's theological and professional analysis of a responsible church diakonate (a far cry from the soup-kitchen mentality within traditional approaches), and forms a prelude for Chapter 7, which will argue the case for a new vision within the diaconal ministry.

In conclusion it is argued that the diaconal ministry is not really the business of only a few staff members at a central institution, but is in fact the total obligation and responsibility of all Christians nation-wide and for the purpose of this study, specifically for the overall Church membership of the ELCRN. Now is the time, the “kairos” for the clergy and laity of the church to join hands for this most important ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Macedonia call from God's children in need of the assistance and services rendered by the diaconal ministries of the churches of Christ in Namibia is becoming by the day more urgent and desperate. Such destitution, one could expect, ought to touch and stir the conscience of the church in Namibia. This costly responsibility can not be relegated to the Government, NGOs and other charity organisations with good sounding excuses (such as lack of funds, etc.) after independence. The decision to embark on this study stemmed from the pastoral conviction that much more can be done from the side of the church to reactivate and revitalise the diaconal spirit of yesteryear.

Many thanks are due to professors Christo Lombard and Paul Isaak for their steadfast assistance and encouragement during the theological and practical journey of this study. Much gratitude and appreciation goes to René du Toit for the unselfish typing of this material, in her spare time, without asking compensation. My wife Paulina Hereros, attached to the diaconal ministry herself, deserves to be mentioned, specially for her experienced advice and support during the long and mentally exhaustive hours of reading and research.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Diaconal Ministry in Namibia-Challenges from the perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN)”, is a true reflection of my own research, and has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

The views and opinions expressed in this thesis are not necessarily those of the ELCRN, unless expressed otherwise.

Cornelius Frendeb Isaak

Windhoek, Namibia

8 February 2002

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DEDICATION

With inexpressible gratitude to those believing in me to finish this assignment, I dedicate this study to the memory of the late Pastor Hendrik Samuel Isaak, the first indigenous pastor of the ELCRN, ordained by the German missionaries in 1949. This study, in many ways, have just been a follow-up on what he and his contemporaries advocated, advanced and stood for.

May their memories and examples guide us in the diaconal ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Having been a long-time serving, ordained pastor of the ELCRN; having also been involved in this ministry for the past 25 years because of my marriage to one of the church diaconists, I found it pastorally hard to live with and witness the retrogression of this much-needed ministry without doing something about it myself.

As pastor, being well-placed in terms of the leadership cadre of the church, this dilemma developed in me an academic interest and curiosity in the ministry. I then decided to make a positive contribution by lodging a study (this mini thesis), in focussing on the reasons for the decay and subsequently to propose some rescuing recommendations for the upgrading and restructuring of this ministry.

This introduction will deal with the focus and relevance of this study, and the methodology followed.

0.1 THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia has been running, for many years, a diaconal ministry under the auspices of its Social Diaconal Services, operating from Khomasdal, Windhoek. Pastors and diaconists and lay-people are involved in the operative machinery of the diaconal services, both in Windhoek and some parishes. From a very good and flourishing start, this ministry can today be regarded as ailing, almost on the brink of being closed down, hence there is a need to look into the factors causing its

ailment and to present practical and executable proposals that can be applied to rescue this division.

It looks as though the diaconal ministry is alive, yet it is dying (Rev. 3:1c). We are living in changing times and so is it with the church members who lost their first love for the church (Rev. 2:4). The place and importance, which the church occupied in the hearts and minds of the people, is no more, even though this may sound disturbing in Christian Namibia.

The scenario that we have in the church under discussion is that the ministry of diakonia is assigned to a central institution. Such approach is only good enough for administrative purposes because the staff attached to such an institution, will never be able to be there for the people who is supposed to be served by the diaconal ministry.

The responsibility of the local church concerning its diaconal ministry is almost at zero level. The handful diaconists are just not enough for such a wide-ranging task. The interest in the diaconal ministry from other local groups is dying, and painful as it may sound, the fact that diakonia does not feature on the programs of the local churches must be acknowledged.

Diaconally speaking, we need to listen to admonitions like “the witness of the church is its activity of practising what it preaches” (Nolan 1984:209). Now is the time for the church to add deeds to its words and to give a new sort of love to God’s people, because “the Christian, the church, must bring to man another kind of love, another quality of

love. It is human love, yes, but we must love not only with our own weak human hearts, but with the heart of Christ within us” (Suenens 1970:75).

0.2 THE RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

The diaconal ministry is inseparable from the office of preaching the gospel. The mission of the church is to empower its congregations and to help them making the good news of Jesus Christ a reality in the lives of the people around them; and to empower communities, especially society’s marginalized, poor and unemployed, enabling them to create for themselves a dignified life of peace and justice.

The relevance of this study is to look at the reasons why issues surrounding the diaconal ministry are coming to a standstill in the church, why those starting with vigour and excitement are burning out and to explore what can be done to revive a diaconal spirit in the whole church. The intention of this study is to come up with proposals that will introduce a shift from an institution-based to a local church-driven spirit of diakonia in the whole church.

Hopefully an effort of this nature will necessitate the discussion of this ministry on the Synod, Church Board, Circuit and parish levels so that some sense of seriousness and commitment can be awakened in the ELCRN. The purpose is to open a new dialogue, which can lead to the re-thinking of this dying responsibility of the church.

0.3 THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

The thesis will examine the diaconal ministry within the ECLRN and identify challenges and shortcomings with the aim to make recommendations for the improvement of such diaconal ministry and services. To enable implementation of this method, the study will analyse and consult various sources on this topic. Wide-ranging reports to the Synod, archive material as well as information from the director of the diaconal ministry, serving diaconists, clergy and laity will be analysed and incorporated into this research. Church magazines and journals, especially from Africa, will also be consulted.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ELCRN AND ITS DIACONAL STRUCTURE

1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, which is today the second largest denomination in Namibia, can recall with Christian pride and honour, its humble beginnings. Although long before the arrival of the missionaries the people prayed to a higher Being whom they believed was in command of their lives and ultimate destiny, the church in the true sense got off the ground with the arrival of the missionaries from Germany.

The starting of mission work and evangelisation in the then South West Africa was very tiresome, challenging and demanding, but against all odds and difficulties, the church stood the test of the times and triumphed over the almost impossible, alone by the grace and guidance of the Lord. During the years of formation and establishment, many Christian friends left the church for other greener pastures but it is with pride that it can be recorded that in its 159 years of existence, there only occurred three great schisms within the church, the one leading to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the other of the Baster church in Rehoboth and the third schism resulting in the formation of the Oruano church among Otjihereros (Sending tot Kerk 1967).

Throughout its existence, the church greatly contributed to the upliftment of the Namibian people, especially in the areas of education, health, development, arts, agriculture and farming. The church was also a very reliable partner during the liberation struggle and today plays a constructive critical role vis-à-vis the politics of the government of the day. The church is also very prominent in the ecumenical movement under the umbrella of the Council of Churches in Namibia, holding the presidency at times, and it is against this background that we would like to see and learn how the diakonia ministry is executed within the ELCRN.

1.2 MISSION WORK IN SWA

The ELCRN is the product of the mission work initiated from Germany. History learns that the German missionary Schmelen was busy with mission work together with the London Missionary Society (LMS) as early as 1814, but in the true sense, mission work in the ELCRN started with the arrival of Christian Knudson to Bethanië in 1842, the year which is widely regarded as the year of the establishment of the church under discussion (for background history, cf Nambala 1994). Nambala (1994:71) is observing: “When Knudson arrived, these people rejoiced at having their own missionary again, since Schmelen had left eighteen years earlier. Severe droughts soon struck the area, making preaching and catechising difficult. People were scattered in the search for resources of survival. Another painful event, which occurred at that time, was the arrival of a trader who brought along brandy and firearms to Bethanië.”

Despite these problems and difficulties the mission work expanded rapidly. More missionaries arrived and more mission and preaching stations were soon established.

Everything however was not rosy and easy-going during the stay of the missionaries in Namibia, as Katjavivi (1989:4) remarked: “Under German colonial rule church-state collaboration became more manifest. While the Germans conducted their war of extermination (1904-7) against the Namibian people, the German Lutheran church hierarchies did very little to stop them.”

There is no room for any bitterness or hatred against the German people in the hearts and minds of our church members today. The past counts no more and is forgiven; as equal partners we now look forward to the conquering of new challenges in our bid to keep on preaching the gospel and to contribute to the social upliftment of the people which is closely linked with the diaconal ministry, and have basically been started by the missionaries. The relationship with the German Mission Society in Germany today is on a healthy and sound basis. More partnerships have been established in the meantime and fruitful cooperation is experienced throughout the relationship with the former mission agencies.

1.3 MISSION TO CHURCH

After 115 years of missionary leadership (1842-1957) the happy day at last dawn when it was the appropriate time to hand over the leadership of this indigenous church to the African leaders of Namibia. The church received its current name in the Stefanus Kirche, Okahandja, on October 4, 1957 during a solemn occasion, but for some strange reasons, only partly at that time because all decisions to that effect have been taken by the missionaries themselves in Germany . The indigenous pastors were however still not in

control of the entire leadership as both the president and the secretary of the church remained German, being Präses H.K. Diehl and Pastor Gunther Reeh.

Even the composition of the new Church Board left much to be desired due to its racial structure, but that was the time of apartheid; divide and rule. The Hereros, Coloureds, Bastards, Namas, Damaras and Ovambos each had a pastor, all male, to represent them in the Church Board. Developments however were destined to change and prior to the change of leadership, the first indigenous pastors were ordained in 1949. (Sending tot Kerk 1967)

Präses Diehl held office for 15 years (1957-72), followed by Präses Dr. J.L. de Vries for another 6 years (1973-78), followed by Präses Hendrik Frederik for another 6 years before he was also elected to become the first Bishop of the church on May 18, 1986, a position he held until 1993.

Today the church is led by Bishop Dr. Zephania Kameeta assisted by Dean Jakobus Ngapurue (deputy bishop) and Deans Walter Bobby Namaseb and Stefanus Tiboth.

Only one lady serves in the Church Board. The church has a congregation in all the major towns of Namibia except Ovamboland where our sister church ELCIN is ministering with hundreds of preaching stations, a high school and theological seminary to administer, and many other institutions to care for. From a very humble beginning the church can today be counted among the established churches of Namibia.

1.4 DIACONAL MINISTRY

1.4.1 HUMBLE BEGINNING

Mission work in Namibia started in ca. 1814 with the Londen Missionaries followed by Knudson and others from 1842. The main ingredients of their missionary activities were based on the diaconal ministry. They were not only concerned with the ministry of the soul but to a large extent also with the care of the body.

The luggage of the missionaries consists not only of Bibles; on the contrary, ships taking months before arriving in the country were also loaded with blankets, clothes, food, medicine, almost all that was needed for life sustenance. Under very difficult circumstances, these stocks were carted away with ox-wagons over mountainous, dangerous routes to their destinations.

It was in this fashion that the mission stations were established which helped lay the foundations of trade schools, schools, clinics, farming and agriculture, and which we today, recognize in the education, social and medical services and the economy of Namibia.

It is therefore very sad that the Bible School of Otjimbingwe, which started as a mission station, was closed down due to financial considerations in 1979. The decline of the diaconal ministry somehow started with the closure of this institution where the diaconists of the church received training.

The challenges of the new millennium tell the story that the church need to train church members anew so that the gaps in the diaconal ministry can be filled because the Macedonia call is resounding everywhere - the call to the church to come and HELP! The spotlight is falling very intensively on the Social Diaconal Services of the church and together with many others, one is wondering whether the time is not now to release the diaconal ministry from its institution-centeredness so that the church can reach out to the desperate, marginalized, needy and poor of Namibia. To achieve this noble goal, the whole church membership needs to put the hands to the plough in a concerted effort to revive the diaconal ministry.

1.4.2 CURRENT DISPENSATION

The ELCRN is running a diaconal ministry embodied in the Tabitha Diaconal Centre, Khomasdal. Under more positive circumstances, the centre should have been the pulsation or the nerve centre of the diaconal ministry – setting the pace, indicating the direction, and identifying the areas of concern and to timeously submitting proposals to the parishes and the church authorities so that the vast slumbering division of the entire church could be given new life. The director of the Tabitha Centre is for sure overloaded and the handful of our trained diaconists are just not enough to answer to the great demand of service to the neighbour.

What is more deplorable is the fact that it seems that they are left alone to fend for themselves while the parish leadership and the church members remain inactive, silent onlookers, a situation that a church taking its mission seriously, can ill-afford. There is a need to pool all the available resources if this ministry is to be rescued and regenerated.

1.4.3 PROBLEMS IN THE MINISTRY

When the programs and activities of the church show signs of stagnation, leading to the downscaling or even the closing of institutions and the termination of activities, it has become time for serious stocktaking in the church. Such an exercise of stocktaking is not necessarily meant to belittle the continuous efforts made to keep God's business running, at most it should be seen as an all-inclusive effort by His people to prioritise the items on the agenda of the church's mission to the world.

Apart from the centralisation of the diaconal ministry, there is another aspect of the diaconal ministry of the church, which needs to be addressed. The starting point in the diaconal ministry is currently, strictly spoken, aimed at aged people only. This could have just been for the initial beginning, but the need is now to broaden the scope of this ministry since the social responsibility of the church ought to reach and serve a variety of the different segments of the societies the church are called to be stewards of.

The church is leaning very heavily on the pastors and church members for the effective running of the diaconal ministry within each and every parish. The approach of the church to lean on these stakeholders are quite correct, but the education and training to equip and sensitise God's people for a Christ-centred service to the neighbour, unfortunately lacks.

That is the current scenario surrounding the issue whilst it is the intention of the church, through its diaconal ministry, to execute its social responsibility towards the whole person. It is however very unfortunate that seriousness, determination and commitment

lacks in the diaconal ministry. It is true that the lack of funds contribute to the deplorable situation in the church, however the issue concerns itself not only with money, but to a large extent with how the available resources are utilised and how the equipment of God's people can lead to an effective diaconal ministry.

I am of the opinion that the lack of interest and the apparent lukewarm attitude to the diaconal ministry of the church can be attributed to some dysfunctions within the parish management and Christian education programs. Such attributing factors have been identified as the absence of diakonia as subject during the pastor's training, the lack of training of lay-people to manage the diaconal ministry locally and deficient promotion of diakonia-related stewardship.

The solution to the problem is not the closing down of the diaconal institution in Khomasdal or retrenchment of the handful diaconists of the church; the challenge is to face the problem and to come up with proposals that will lead to the revival of a church-wide diaconal spirit. The church under observation needs to rethink its obligation towards diakonia, which is supposed to reflect the value which the church attaches to its social responsibility.

1.5 CONCLUSION

It is as though church programs, specifically the diaconal ministry, flourished when the fabric of life itself was grassrooted and very simple at the beginning of church-building in Namibia. The quality of today's Christianity seems more doubtful and inconsistent compared to that of yesteryear. Lifestyles have become more privatised and the African

culture of sharing and carrying one another's burdens seems to pine away by the day. The following chapter intends to bring the Christianity of Namibia back to the drawing board and to the basics of a Scripture-instructed ministry of the church.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DIACONAL MINISTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The diaconal ministry is Scripture-instructed and Scripture-based. The mission of the church to the world of God's people is inseparable from the office of preaching, evangelisation and diaconal ministry. The important location of this ministry within the mission agenda of the church is clearly prescribed by the words of Jesus, "For God so loved the world (and) serve the Lord" (John. 3:16, Rom. 12:11c). The strong links between evangelism and the diaconal ministry, or the social responsibility of the church, is echoed by Stott (1977:26): "His words and deeds belonged to each other, the words interpreting the deeds and the deeds embodying the words." In this chapter the diaconal ministry of the church is approached by studying and listening to some theological considerations.

2.2 POINT OF DEPARTURE (LUKE 10:25-37)

The parable of the Good Samaritan does have elements that speak to the scenario that unfolds itself within the diaconal ministry. For the church to understand what it takes to be involved in this ministry, an exegesis of this text is needed, divided into the following aspects: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR, LIFE'S UNFORTUNATE CASUALTY, THE PRIEST AND LEVITE, AND THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

2.2.1 WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR? (vv.25-29)

The question that prompted the telling of this parable is very interesting. The lawyer, we assume, should have been concerned about inheritance, testaments, social security, human rights and finances etc.

But no, he is concerned about the everlasting life! Not in the collective sense of ‘we’ but individually as ‘I’. The answer of Jesus to this Jewish-theologically formulated question, turn the spotlight on the neighbour, coinciding with the traditional questions linked to it, like the “boundary of neighbourliness, applicable conditions, who is the closest, who is the furthest?” (Golwitzer 1970:117)

The lawyer poses the question to Jesus in an effort of self-justification, as if he was ignorant about whom his neighbour was. To this hypocritical showpiece Kretzman (1924:325) responds: “There is no need of spending much time in looking for neighbours. Every one whom the Lord places near us, brings us into contact with, and who is in actual need is one toward whom we can and ought to show mercy.”

2.2.2 UNFORTUNATE CASUALTY (v. 30)

The unfortunate situation that we have in this text, is the one of an innocent traveller; overshadowed, assaulted, robbed and left to die.

The neighbours that we see and meet on the many Jericho roads of our country are victims of crime and violence, social injustice, alcohol and drug abuse, rich-poor inequalities, developmental disparities, tribalism and nepotism in society and church.

Moltmann (1980:61) mentions for serious consideration aspects that are normally overlooked in our diaconal ventures, like “estrangement, loneliness, silence, solitude, inner emptiness, deprivation, poverty, not-knowing and so forth”. For this reason the diaconal ministry of the church cannot only be a business of soup kitchens for the old people or the distribution of second-hand clothing to the grandmothers’ children of our congregations; this is just not enough.

The influence and authority of the church is at stake, because people are not influenced and interested in our words only. The expectation and demand today from the church, is to practice what it preaches, to add meaning to her faith, by “wresting a positive meaning out of the loneliness, the silence, the inner emptiness, the suffering, the poverty, the spiritual dryness.” (Moltmann 1980:61)

2.2.3 THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE (vv. 31-32)

The status of the first two persons on the scene calls for a closer look, being the priest and the Levite. Kretzman (1924:325) reports on them: “Both of these men belonged to the leaders among the people to such as were supposed to be teaching and practising the arts of mercy and kindness toward all men”. These two leaders were supposed to stop and help, yet their own safety counts more at that crucial moment.

The blend of our leadership styles, approaches and behaviours is at stake and at times in direct contrast with our preaching, teaching and admonitions to the people. A North American survey among Lutherans in 1979 presents however something positive: “There is a new awareness, especially among clergy, that the teachings of Jesus can and should be applied to society – to its economic structures and social structures and social institutions, to serve the needs of all men” (Brekke 1979-51).

Action speaks louder than words, the saying goes, therefore the priest /Levite unchristian behaviour should serve as a good reminder to all of us in leadership positions to have a check-up on our roles in church and society. These two leaders lack compassion without which the diaconal ministry can hardly survive, as Fox (1979:7) asserted: “Compassion is about doing and relieving the pain of others, not merely emoting about it.” By walking away, the two leaders render a disservice to their call and vocation.

2.2.4 THE GOOD SAMARITAN (vv. 33-35)

What immediately strikes the reader of this parable when the Good Samaritan appears on the scene is the immediate change his very presence brought. It is from his Christian example that we learn that the diaconal ministry of the church ought to have the capacity to change the circumstances of the victims of today’s misfortunes.

The church as the mission agency of God to the world, through its offices of preaching, healing, evangelisation and empowerment by education, should have the potential to transform, renew and change the damaged image of God in people, demonstrating the

Samaritan approach: “But he wasted no time, neither in anxious solicitude for his own welfare nor in idle lamenting over the man’s misfortune. He acted.” (Kretzman 1924:325)

What Morissy (1997:1) is revealing calls for serious diaconal rethinking: “The hard fact which Christians are reluctant to face is that so far we have never made appreciable inroads into our secular society on behalf of the gospel. Once a culture achieves a degree of affluence and security, aspects of life lose their religious significance, church involvement plummets and religious literacy of the populace deteriorate rapidly”.

The sad observation today is that Christians are mere onlookers, inactive witnesses; untouched, unmoved by the fate of the neighbour, always blaming others for society’s emergencies, always hand-folded!

The signals of come over and help us is visible and audible, the time is now to get involved because the demand for activity applies to all members on all levels. The inmost character of the activity of the church is revealed in Luther’s statement that the Christian is to be ‘a Christ to his neighbour’ (Aulén 1960:372).

2.3 THE GREAT COMMISSION (Mk. 16:15)

The great commission places the emphasis on evangelism, but to evangelise is not only a preaching, converting and a teaching mission, it includes “social as well as evangelistic only responsibility.” (Stott 1975:23)

Preachers at occasions are more concerned with the future, the hereafter, and less with issues related to social injustice, which directly affect the lives of those on the receiving end of injustice. This amounts to a global mission failure, rather: “to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think ourselves into their culture and their problems, and to feel with them in their pains.” (Stott 1975:25)

Jesus sent the church into the world, just as the Father sent him. Whatever is happening in this world ought to be on the agenda of the church. The diaconal ministry should be on the agenda of the church on a permanent basis, this is both a biblical and political prescription. There was no needy person, we are informed in Acts. 4:34-35, yet the story is different in Matt. 25:35-36, especially the reminder that we as Christians will be judged for what we have left undone to the least of this world; the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned. The scope of the diaconal ministry seems to be endless, a viewpoint shared by Macias-Alatorre (1995:121): “An analysis of the mechanism of society today leads us to the discovery of the truth that the conditions of misery that prevail today are the results of unjust social structures. They are not entirely accidental but the product of human malice: colonialism, neo-colonialism...imperialism, the state of artificial dependence, armament economies etc.”

The norms of preaching should be changed so that not only the conversion of the souls is stressed, but continuously the unjust social structures, which causes the miseries of this world. To avoid the distortion of Jesus' words, the relation between the commission and the commandment should be given proper attention in the diaconal ministry.

2.4 THE GREAT COMMANDMENT (John. 21:15-17)

In his book “*Christian Mission*”, J.W.R Stott is dealing quite concisely with this aspect of the diaconal ministry: Love your neighbour. The highest consideration in this ministry is love, the driving force and power behind all actions and programs. This great commandment is at some moments embarrassing in the diaconal ministry, which ought to be a demonstration of love bestowed, as Miller (1961:146) reports: “It may be added however, that while neither the church nor social workers are likely to be inclined to quibble with such a statement, both are embarrassed by the fact that much of the good being done in our society seems to be getting done without much love”.

Drawing the lines between the great commission and the great commandment, Stott (1975:29) had this to say: “The great commission neither explains nor exhausts, nor supersedes the great commandment. What it does is to add to the requirement of neighbour-love and neighbour-service a new and urgent Christian dimension”, complementing each other in the pursuance of this dualistic ministry, because “our neighbour is neither a body less that we should love only his soul, nor a soulless body that we should care for its welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from society.”

Just as the mother body (the church as a site of struggle), its baby, the diaconal ministry, is also engaged in an uphill struggle to bring about security, housing, peace, healing, dignity, renewal and justice for all people, by making **to love**, **to go** and **to serve** the motto of this ministry.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Lack of funds comes first to the mind when the decay in some of the church's programs became evident. The linkage of money to the progress and well-being of the various church programs without looking at the human element of failures, shortcomings and negligence, is clearly a deviation as shown by the examples we have from the Scriptures. Not only money, but especially kind, caring and loving hearts are needed in this ministry.

CHAPTER THREE

SOME CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF DIAKONIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An inside look at the diaconal ministry gives the impression that we really do not understand properly what it takes to run such a ministry on a theological and biblical basis. In the process of the rethinking and restructuring of this ministry, the mood in which the problem ought to be approached is one of self-evaluation, acknowledgement of failures and a willingness to listen and learn anew for a fresh start.

The Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS) of the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) held a consultation in Geneva, Switzerland from 22-26 November 1982 on Diakonia and produced a report titled: *CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF DIAKONIA*. Eight such “understandings” have been presented but only five will be considered here as they relate more appropriately and contextually to the ELCRN. Each of the five selected understandings will be viewed from a biblical-theological perspective. (All references to this publication will be indicated by the relevant page numbers in brackets).

3.2 DIAKONIA IS ESSENTIAL

To be serious with the task of the church is to be serious with the diaconal ministry. A church without such a ministry is deviating from the biblical instruction, ‘love your

neighbour' (Matt. 22:39). The essentiality of diakonia is further stressed by Stott (1975:25): "It is in our servant role that we can find the right synthesis of evangelism and social action. For both should be for us, as they undoubtedly were for Christ, authentic expressions of love that serves."

3.3 DIAKONIA IS LOCAL

Whatever good reasons there may be for an institutional form of this ministry, it cannot take over the responsibility of the local Christian communities (p.2). The diaconal ministry belongs on the agenda of the local church and should be spearheaded by the pastors and other church workers who, in the first instance, should set the example of Christian love to the neighbour by serving the Lord with gladness (Ps. 100:2).

3.4 DIAKONIA IS PREVENTIVE

Diakonia need not always be understood as a helping tool of the church nor only as a self-bemoaning agency struggling with the necessary means to meet the needs of the people. Too often the church is fighting with its limited resources only the symptoms of injustice without asking about the root causes of the people's needs.

By so doing, the church provides an ideal platform for the haves and powerful who will misuse diakonia to sooth their conscience, so that the effects of injustice may look less disastrous (p. 2). The prophecy of Amos 5:21-24 is a hard-hitting message to the church when the pronouncement is such that the Lord hates and despises that which is traditionally dear to the church: feasts, solemn assemblies, offerings, singing and music. However, what is required is stated in verse 24: "let justice roll down like waters and

righteousness like an overflowing stream.” Preventive diakonia “sensitises, educates and mobilizes people in order to become aware of these symptoms and powers which deprive human beings of their dignity” (p. 2). Moltman (1984:20) adds his voice to these arguments: “The church, Christian congregations, and ecumenical organizations have the clear task and duty of identifying, promoting and realizing human rights.”

3.5 DIAKONIA IS HUMANITARIAN

Diakonia is not “limited to churches and Christians” (p. 3), we read from the report. The sad observation in Namibia however is that diakonia is institutionally structured, bearing the names of churches and giving preference to own church members. At least the majority of the CCN member churches does have their own divisions of diakonia and the same pattern is developing in the AIDS campaigns – Catholic Aids Action, Lutheran Aids Program etc. Over against these unnecessary church developments, stands the warning of Philippians 2:4: “Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others.” God is working not only through the churches, we learn from the report, but also through dedicated individuals and groups who struggle outside the churches for a more just and human society. There are instances where self-giving service is more apparent among others than among Christians” (p. 3). For Schillebeeckx (1975:96) the crux of the church’s problem is not the “conciliar decisions about the structures and functions of the church...it is living human beings, confronted everyday with secular problems which may be of enormous significance for the future of mankind, who ultimately matter.” The diaconal ministry must never lose sight of its humanitarian nature.

3.6 DIAKONIA IS LIBERATIVE

The approach of the diaconal ministry of the church at present is not liberative or empowering; it rather makes the needy and suffering people habitual receivers and beggars. Instead of making the people masters of their own destiny, the current approach we have enslave the people and make them dependent on goodwill leftovers from the rich and powerful. The WCC report warns against this: “the prior concern needs to be the empowerment of the people...such liberating empowerment call for new learning mechanism that the oppressed may make their own assessment of their situation and determine the diakonia that can remedy it” (p. 4).

Since the time of the missionaries, the diaconal ministry have been known as operating in some congregations through soup kitchens and distributing second hand clothing as a windfall after a long time of anxious waiting. The help from the church in this regard is only temporary and to continue in that fashion is to make the diaconal ministry the breeding ground of more beggars and receivers than good examples of people that have risen beyond the abyss of misery, standing tall in the society after regaining true human dignity.

After dealing with the story of the Good Samaritan extensively, Borsch (1983:39) poses the question to his readers: “Might we discover a new capacity to empathize with and have compassion upon those whose lives are quite unlike ours?”

The answer should be yes, because in bringing people to their full potential and restoring their human dignity the recipe for an effective diaconal ministry can be found.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter underlines the necessity to broaden the scope of the diaconal ministry by moving away from the well-intended but unfortunate soup-kitchens and the distribution of second-hand clothing to the elderly and their grandchildren. The ever-changing cycle of life produces enough realities to continuously rethink, evaluate and adjust the diaconal ministry to provide an answer to the social, political, religious and industrial realities of present-day Namibia. To be in a position to provide such answers to the realities of every day life, the church's diakonia needs to be local, preventive and liberative.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF SOME WCC/CICARWS

RECOMMENDATIONS ON DIAKONIA (1990)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Lalashawi Swai and Richard Murigande wrote the following in their introductory remarks of a 1990 CICARWS information booklet on Diakonia: “This book is also a challenge to the Church in Africa to do better than its previous best, in terms of rendering more appropriate and credible Diakonia, a kind of Christian Service/Diakonia which, while attending to the wounded victims of the crisis-prone continent, will also be flexible enough to research, with conviction and persuasion, for a solution aimed at making the road to Jericho safe and robber-free”.

From the initiative that started in Swanick (1966), WCC/CICARWS has had a proven track record in the study and research of Diakonia, which globally benefit the member churches. After this consultation, which was in fact the founding one, the following assemblies backed up their credibility on this ministry – Nairobi, 1975; Geneva, 1982; Vancouver, 1982; Larnaca, 1986; El Escorial, 1987 and Nairobi, 1989 again. After 35 years of involvement in this discipline, their word on this ministry, should be taken very seriously by all churches, church organisations and individuals who understand that diakonia is a very serious business which is engaged in and busy with the precious lives of God’s people. Theological comments and biblical references will supplement this discussion.

4.2 THE CHURCH - CONSCIENCE OF SOCIETY

The recommendation in this regard is for the church to remain the conscience of the society regardless of political changes and government policies. To execute this obligation and responsibility of being the conscience of society, the church must not just be outspoken against social injustice for the sake of outspokenness only; there must be truth and integrity in her assessment of the social analysis lest her utterances backfire (Matt. 7:8). Being the conscience of society is a wide-ranging responsibility: “Conscience covers the whole of life, not merely the specifically ‘religious’ duties, but civil obligations (Rom. 13:5), and matters of purely ‘private’ choice (1Cor. 10:25-29).” (Thornton-Duesbay in: Richardson 1962:52)

The Church as a conscientious objector should not be silenced, as is the situation now, by political change or majority rule. Because of sin, we will always have injustice in this world. The Church needs to keep her own house in order at all times.

4.3 THE CHURCH - AGENT OF CHANGE

The overall mission of the church can be summarised in terms of changing the situations and unjust structures that affect the living conditions of God’s people everywhere where they might find themselves. As an agent of change the church must be bold enough to speak out on behalf of the people the Lord entrusted to her. It is inherent to the Church’s diaconal ministry that it should have the capacity to change the lives and situations of the people. The world and mankind are yearning for change that will bring about justice, fair distribution of material resources, solutions to the extreme rich/poor imbalance etc. Evangelisation, spiritualization, healing, Christian education and other disciplines should

be designed and implemented in such a way as to bring about change in the *status quo*'s of this world.

First-aid treatment of today's misfortunes are just not enough, the church should get down to the heart of the problems without fear of the powers that be. Thomas Jefferson once said: "Nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man." Quoting from a publication of the United Methodist Church in the USA on human rights, Villa-Vicencio (1992:151) reports: "As people 'committed to Christ' and 'called to change' we are responsible for securing the integrity of our covenant in the midst of new imposing human rights developments; these include the impact of capital intensive technology, the use of data banks to provide pervasive information, the growing phenomenon of an underclass of persons domestically and internationally excluded from full participation in society..."

Such statements underline the heavy task the church has in the service to mankind as expressed in the diaconal ministry. By keeping her conscience clean, the church will have power to appeal to the conscience of those inflicting injustice to society.

4.4 THE CHURCH - RELIEF PROVIDER?

The diaconal ministry of the church is regarded by some as only providing temporary relief of the multiple social evils and needs within a given society. Such an assessment could be correct under certain crisis dispensation. It is however not adequate as a general statement because the scope of the diaconal ministry is as wide as the human need.

Let me start with some questions in this regard. How effective is a soup kitchen once a week for old people being hungry everyday? How long can old clothing hold for active, playing children? Old sunglasses, are they doing good to the weak eyesight of our old people? Old shoes and underwear with foreign smells, are they not dehumanising? The flow of begging letters to overseas friends, are they not damaging the image of Church and State? The list of questions can be endless, but, simultaneously, all these imperfect efforts do represent the dire need of the people. What the church and other social groups provide is just temporary relief because the needs of the people will be the same again tomorrow. While the church is involved in providing relief, there is great concern for the image, nature, character and identity of the church. She guards jealously over her doctrines, ethics, rules and orders; in a way the church thinks too much of her own welfare; she is too self-directed.

We are very proud about being Lutheran, Methodist, and Catholic etc. but shameful about some ministries of our churches, like in diakonia. Rahner (1972:63) poses the following valid question: “Is enough love applied in the church, is there enough courage for stubborn confrontations, and are enough power, time and money given to unselfish service to others, without calculating the advantages to the church herself?”

The negative answer to this question rings a bell for the church. Let the churches start to work on the root causes and think less of their own welfare because the future of the church of Christ is accomplished (John. 19:30).

4.5 THE CHURCH - ONE UNITED VOICE

Before independence it was most encouraging to observe that the church of Christ in Namibia acted and spoke out from a one-united voice. Serving God's people in Namibia, today there is a greater need and urgency for the church to restore and maintain the same principle of one united voice. The wording of this recommendation appeals to the conscience of the member churches of CCN when it states: "The church must speak with one united voice, and know what to speak, when, how and to whom – under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit" (p. 61).

It is most disturbing to observe that the once united voice of the church in Namibia is disappearing into obscurity. It looks as though the current church leadership in Namibia is involved in an inner-struggle not to fall out of favour with the ruling party of the day whereby dangerous compromises are in the making at the expense of the gospel-authority of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (c.f. Lombard 1999:61-62)

The church speaking with one united voice belongs to the era of the liberation struggle in which she participated as a powerful, respected partner for freedom and independence. Too many concessions have been made to the ruling party in the past and today it is difficult for the church to openly criticise her former ally. The comfortable place that the church enjoys next to the ruling party, is no more comfortable and one wonders what the consequences would be if unavoidable differences will occur in the future.

The one united voice of the church in Namibia is silent. It is disturbingly silent on issues like old age pensions, high housing and medical fees, inadequate care for alcohol and

drug addicts, the fate of the street children, luxury life-styles of the powerful, underpayment and its bearing on family life, underdevelopment in certain regions etc. The statement of Santmire (1987:88) is very encouraging in this regard: “Christians say, in effect: You must love your enemy – without qualification. The gospel calls you to reach out to your oppressor, as a person, no less than to your friends in the oppressed community. The gospel calls you to take a visible, public stand for peace and justice...and Christians must be prepared to die for this faith, as Jesus Christ was prepared to die when he went the extra mile on behalf of his enemies, and as Martin Luther King was prepared to die when he led marchers into some of the racist white neighbourhoods of Chicago.”

The perpetrators of injustice are always the enemy of the church, but she needs to talk to and approach this Pharaohs in Jesus’ name; this is the directive from Gal. 1:10. The church is in the need of the Romeros, Bonhoeffers, Kings and Tutus of yesteryear so that some authority can be attached to the statements and actions of the church.

4.6 THE CHURCH - ITS HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

What we have from the wording of the recommendations is the following: “To play the prophetic and advocacy role effectively, the church must strive for honesty and integrity, and be just in its own practices and lifestyle.” (p. 10)

It is as though those attending that particular consultation in Nairobi (1987) came with doubts over their own churches’ honesty and integrity. As far as it concerns practices and lifestyles, the picture can be true of Namibia as well.

The statements and actions of the church in Namibia is today judged against the unfolding scenario within the churches like comfortable lifestyles, expensive cars, above-average incomes and schooling, good medical treatment; it is simply a fact that in most needy areas and locations or parishes, those in better positions are generally government and church workers.

The word for 'honest', which appears in the New Testament, is the Greek word 'kalos', which stands for GOOD. The characteristics of this word comes out very clearly in Phil. 4:8 and especially its linkage with the peace of God, going along with honesty, makes the duty to be honest, essential in the dealings with the diaconal ministry which also involves a lot of money and material. No diaconal agency, the church included, can afford to be dishonest in this regard because such behaviour is, for all practical reasons, hurtful and most disappointing. No integrity can afterwards be maintained since mistrust and suspicions follow.

4.7 THE CHURCH-THEOLOGY OF DIAKONIA

This very progressive recommendation: "The church must define and articulate clear theological stands, firmly rooted in the Bible to guide its members in their diaconal activities" (p.51), poses a challenge to Namibian theologians, pastors and sociologists to produce literature on diakonia by engaging themselves in the study of this discipline at university, seminary and college levels.

Such an academic effort, contextual as it ought to be, can cover topics like welfare funding, welfare facilities, culture, politics, employer-employee relations, family life,

training in diaconal management and so forth. Though we need a good and sound theological perspective on diakonia in Namibia, we moreover need dedicated and committed Christians who will give their hearts for this blessed ministry.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The rediscovery of the true meaning of diakonia is an academic journey in itself. Research on recommendations of this sort can really help the church to develop a better understanding of this ministry and to streamline the operations of this ailing ministry, e.g. through working out the consequences of a sound theology of diakonia, including the views of the church as the conscience of society, as an agent of change, as more than a temporary relief provider, and as operating with one united voice of honesty and integrity.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOLY SPIRIT VIRTUES OF DIAKONIA (GAL. 5:22-23)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As much as I am concerned about the running of the diaconal ministry, am I worried about the impersonal, nonchalant and incompassionate way in which the few to whom this ministry is entrusted, are at times handling this blessed service. A service of love towards the downtrodden ought to resemble the humble dignity and compassion of people like the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It should be a service of smiling, committed and determined Christian church workers, extending a helping hand to the less fortunate of our societies, transferring and resembling Christ-like love to what I would call the 'Jericho road victims' of Namibia. Love prescribes that this ministry should be carried by loving, dedicated and self-giving Christian men and women from both the clergy and the laity. The power of the Holy Spirit in diakonia will be discussed here in an investigative, frank and honest way as a revitalising contribution to the dying diaconal ministry of the ELCRN.

5.2 VIRTUE OF LOVE

The cornerstone of diakonia rests upon the principles of love. Diakonia with other motives than love is like food without taste-giving salt. It is true that the fabric of our societies have changed with the dawn of independence and freedom. The sense of belonging to one another and goodwill among all people is no more because we lost our

first love (Rev. 2:4). The call and appeal today is to bring love back into the diaconal ministry so that we can get rid of the prevailing half-heartedness in the affairs of church and society. In this regard, Torrance (in Anderson 1979:715-6) correctly links the element of Christian love to the element of Christian service: “Christian service is not the service of love for love’s sake, but, service of love though it is, the duty rendered by servants to their Lord in obedience to His commandment.”

By her involvement in the diaconal ministry, the church is not necessarily following a popular trend or imitating other sister-churches, she is duty-bound to render this service of agape, which means “unconquerable benevolence. It means that no matter what a man may do to us by way of insult or injury or humiliation we will never seek anything else but his highest good.” (Barclay 1976:50)

5.3 VIRTUE OF PEACE

The lovely thing about the diaconal ministry is its capacity to bring peace to the hearts, minds and consciences of the Christian brothers and sisters engaged in this Christian service. Martin Luther provides good guidelines in this regard: “That Christians may be peaceable and quiet both towards God and towards men; not being contentious, nor hating one another, but bearing one another’s burden, through long-suffering and patience, without which peace cannot continue.” (Followes 1979:351)

Christian service or diakonia to the world can not function without peace, as we have it from Bonhoeffer (1959:102). “The followers of Jesus have been called to peace; when he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told they must

not only have peace, but make it.” Christians can only become peacemakers by engaging themselves in the struggle against the enemies of the diaconal ministry, like poverty, hunger, alcohol and drug addictions, injustice, unemployment and so forth by following the example of Jesus, as we learn again from Torrance (in Anderson (1979:717): “Diakonia describes not only the relationship of service which the whole membership of the church and specific individuals within it bear to Jesus Christ, but the form which that relationship takes in the mutual service of members to one another and in their service to their fellow men in the world.”

What needs to concern us in diakonia is the form of the relationship and service, which we as Christians render to the needy, downtrodden and marginalized of this world. The church is duty-bound to keep the diaconal ministry alive because of her relation to Christ and we, as Christians ought to be sensitive about the forms in which we render this Christian service of love to the neighbour. The human factor is always with us, creating forms of anger, frustration, intolerance etc. We have to be watchful of this and pray often-times like Corrie ten Boom: “Lord Jesus, I offer myself for your people. In any way. Any place. Any time.” (Hanks 1992:339)

5.4 VIRTUE OF PATIENCE

The situation into which the diaconal ministry leads us in and confront us altogether, also calls for great capacity of patience. Christian believers are encouraged in James 5:7 ff to be patient just like the agrarian.

We are not supposed to get impatient or to look at instant solutions to the difficult and problematic situations within this ministry because the urge is to have patience until the parousia of the Lord.

The cause of diaconal ministry is the suffering of God's people in various forms. The believers and the church are very much tempted to do something to alleviate this human phenomenon. Peterson (1975:113) provides good advice on patience: "In counteracting the trend, Lamentations provides demonstrations for the ennoblement of suffering. It faces suffering, encounters suffering. It doesn't do anything about it. It doesn't give an answer. It doesn't provide a remedy."

It is perhaps appropriate to understand that we will always have the suffering in our midst and that all those dealing with suffering, "pastors prominent among them, are by training and temperament doers and fixers" (Peterson 1975:113). At least one should be a doer and fixer rather than a passer-by or an idle onlooker when the world need people whose hearts are burning for the needy and suffering among us.

There is a dire need of patience within this ministry and statements like the following just prove how much rethinking still needs to be done on this matter: "Until the Christian church heals within itself the division between the service of Christ clothed with His gospel and the service of Christ clothed with the need and affliction of men, and until it translates its communion in the body and blood of Christ into the unity of its own historical existence in the flesh, it can hardly expect the world to believe, for its diakonia would lack elemental integrity." (Torrance in Anderson 1979: 733)

As much as the diaconal ministry will not be in a position to cover all the needs of all the people, the exercise of patience is highly recommended.

5.5 VIRTUE OF KINDNESS

The condition and state of the Jericho road victims of Namibia, is painful, touching and deplorable. Because of sin and injustice, the church will always be confronted by the situations and faces of these victims, who constantly knock on the heart and conscience of it. The holistic approach that the church should have in her ministry and mission to God's people, is seriously under question as far as it concerns the diaconal ministry. The biblical, theological and socio-ethical foundations of the church are shaken and the integrity of her healing, preaching, restoration, renewal and reconstructing role in the existential reality of humankind is constantly under review. It is as though the people are expecting more from the church, much more than the routine of sermons, prayers and singing. Kindness as a virtue is needed in this complex, difficult and challenging Christian service.

Kindness presupposes goodness and pleasantness (Smith in Richardson 1956:119) coming from the helper to the victim, just as the behaviour of the Good Samaritan can be described. Diakonia as a Christian service ought to have elements of this virtue because of its nature of sympathy, solidarity and compassion which only is possible through the Holy Spirit, the active power in the mission of the church, because: "God is the Father in administration; God is the Son in revelation; but God is the Spirit in operation, so that wherever the power of God is manifest, you see the work of the Holy Spirit." (Coleman 1956:10)

In a PACLA (Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly) publication of 1976, we read the following: “He touched untouchable lepers, and allowed prostitutes to touch Him. He shrank from nobody, He offered friendship, understanding, acceptance, love.” (p. 202).

This is what it takes to be kind to your neighbour, to practice Christian diakonia.

5.6 HOLY SPIRIT IN DIAKONIA

The diaconal ministry of the church is still breathing and kicking, albeit desperately. The chapter on this essential ministry within the kingdom work of the church, has not been closed as yet, ought not to be closed in any case; yet the hour of a new spirit and awakening has dawned in this ministry and the need is now to allow the Holy Spirit to infiltrate all the levels of the church’s diaconal ministry.

Commenting on the text at hand, MacArthur (1975:107) had this to say: “Behind the ‘action-fruit’ stands attitude-fruit. Before we ever see the product of action-fruit, there must be attitude-fruit. Whatever is going on inside will produce on the outside. We cannot love alone; there has to be an object to show that love to. We cannot have joy alone; it must be shared. Not even goodness is self-centred. All of it is attitude-fruit that produces action.”

The diaconal business of the church is all about our attitudes toward this ministry, which is in most cases dealing with struggling and suffering children of God. Pain, furthermore, is the main ingredient in this ministry without which no church of Christ can do; the

mental, spiritual, physical and emotional pain of poverty, loneliness and addiction, to name but a few of the multiple casualties of the diaconal ministry.

We need to change our attitudes in the church toward the marginalized and the downtrodden; otherwise the church will become an elite club of the rich and powerful. What we ought not to lose sight of is the fact that globally the church was started with the poor and the illiterate. Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda presents us with a good example of a Holy-Spirit-filled church leader, a fearless human rights activist, a true diaconal pastor and the voice of the voiceless in the then terror-stricken Uganda under Idi Amin. A statement by the Kenyan church after his brutal death, can today be regarded as a fitting tribute to this great son of Africa: “We confess that we have too often kept quiet when we should have identified ourselves with the suffering and persecuted peoples of the continent of Africa and Uganda in particular. It only remains for good men to do nothing for evil to flourish.” (Hanks 1992:370)

To see a change of attitude towards the diaconal ministry, the indwelling Spirit of the Lord is needed in the hearts of the post-independence Christians of Namibia since the fabric of the people’s lives changed dramatically after that period in our history. The “survival of the fittest” system is in place, people are living on self-created private islands with no time and space for the Jericho road victims of our country. Bringing his comments on this text to conclusion, Barclay’s (1976:52) words are worth mentioning: “It was Paul’s belief and experience that the Christian died with Christ and rose again to a life new and clean, in which the evil things of the old self were gone and the lovely things of the Spirit had come to fruition.”

5.7 CONCLUSION

It is not only the diaconal ministry that seems to be dying, the people and the co-workers of the church involved in that assignment looks also as if they have lost interest in the whole ministry. Just as the ministry ought to be revitalised, those dealing with this difficult but blessed ministry should also be empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is possible through counselling and encouragement at appropriate times. Without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit the fruits and witness of the Spirit will not be an integrated part of Christian diakonia: love, peace, patience, kindness.

CHAPTER 6

CRAFFORD'S IMAGES OF MISSIONARY DIACONATE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The academic year at the Theological Faculty of the University of Pretoria starts annually with a refresher course for ministers of religion. During one such theological exercise in 1982, Prof. D. Crafford presented a paper on the theme: “*IMAGES OF MISSIONARY DIACONATE*”. For the purposes of this research, his lecture on the images of diakonia, was found very helpful in the contextual consideration, approach and restructuring of the ELCRN diaconal ministry.

To be able to help the church get rid of the soup-kitchen mentality, lessons of this nature should be taken seriously because the church is then better positioned to understand diakonia not only in spiritual terms, but also as having social, political, cultural and ecumenical implications.

Crafford, who presented his paper in Afrikaans, is starting with a striking statement: “Where the diaconate is functioning weakly in the church, which is the body of Christ, God is robbed of the essential characteristic which should have been made visible in the world and deprive the world of the hope which the Christian message carries for those in need and suffering.” (Crafford in Barnard 1982:37 - further quoted, in my own translation, in this chapter only with the relevant page numbers in brackets)

Dwelling further on the responsibility of the believer to make this happen, Crafford provides the advice that the close link between mission and diaconate should be lived out by the believer in “word and deed, proclamation and service, salvation and liberation, conversation and healing, saving of souls and changing of sinful structures.” (p. 38)

It is the conclusion of Crafford that “witness and service, mission and diaconate, do have their common basis in the all-inclusive mission of God to a lost and suffering world” (p. 39). Reading through his presentation, one discovery deserves to be mentioned, i.e. the understanding that diakonia is a church, parish, believers and all Christians’ concern and business if ever any credibility can be attributed to our confessed faith and the quality of our Christian lifestyles. This chapter will be devoted to Crafford’s contributions to the diakonia dialogue, with the aim to provide further credible insights to the ongoing debate on the diaconal ministry and its proper place in the overall mission of the church.

6.2 EXEMPLARY DIACONATE

Our attention is called for four realities: diaconate as an example of God’s merciful interference in suffering and emergencies of this world; the exemplary lifestyles of all believers; diaconal attitudes leading to serving parishes, and the need to consciously upgrade the parishioners on diaconal matters.

On setting examples, Luther had this to say to the princes during the rebellion of 1523: “The common man is learning to think, and the scourge of princes is gathering force among the mob and with the common man. I fear that there will be no way to avert it,

unless the princes conduct themselves in a princely manner and begin again to rule decently and reasonably.” (Althaus 1972:144)

Just as that rebellion was spearheaded by the oppressed, those struggling to survive the hardships and miseries of this life, are on the brink to renounce all church responsibilities and duties due to the fact that they feel being left out of the caring zone of the church. This in itself is a very dangerous development for the authority and integrity of the church. Therefore it may be worthwhile for the church and all Christians to listen to Titus 2:7: “Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.”

6.2 CARITATIVE DIACONATE

Crafford is of the opinion that due to the broad scope of human need the diaconate also ought to develop in such a way to at least be an answer to the variety of human needs. The proposal here for the church is to engage herself in various merciful actions on a variety of needs. Citing longstanding donor agencies such as CICARWS, Kindernothilfe and Brot für die Welt, we ought to take notice of this good advice: “Everywhere where there is poverty, suffering and sickness do the church have ample opportunities to deliver services of mercy also beyond parish level. This ought to be promoted by the diaconate in a spontaneous and organised manner.” (p. 45)

The traditional caring culture of the African people is sadly dying a slow death due to the money-orientated, modern lifestyles occurring nationwide after independence. There is

sadly no space anymore for the struggling, suffering masses in money-mad Namibia - the people who should benefit from the church's diaconal outreach.

Care for the neighbour is out, it is today intended and directed only at the inner family cycle, relatives and friends, since the adoption of private lifestyles to the extent that Christian worshippers are on strangers' terms with one another. People meet at the church service and pray together, share fellowship for an hour but everything is over after the service and for the rest of the week they remain total strangers.

Feeling the threat of an assassination very near, Bishop Romero who gave his all – love, care, solidarity- to the Salvadoran people of God, was quoted in a newspaper after a retreat as follows: “My death will be for the liberation of my people and a testimony of hope for the future. A bishop will die, but the church of God, which is the people, will never perish.” (Erdozain 1981:765)

The caring pastorate of the late Romero should serve as a worthy line to be followed by all Christian believers as we ponder and meditate over the ‘take care of My sheep’ (John. 21:16) instruction to the church under all circumstances. To care is to be prepared to carry the burdens of the downtrodden (Gal. 6:2) and to fulfil the law of Christ, which is love. Before the diaconate can be revived in the church, love for the neighbour should be promoted and advocated in all spheres of society and church, as we learn from McKay (1961:66): “Christ taught men to care. That was his supreme contribution to human culture. He taught men to love, to be concerned about people who were not naturally lovely or lovable, people who had special claim upon their interest and were not in a position to recompense their benefactors for kindness bestowed.”

6.3 KOINONIAL DIACONATE

Koinonia is the Greek word for fellowship. The diaconate of the church ought to promote this fellowship in the pursuit of unity, nation building, reconciliation and reconstruction, the post-independence period in the history of Namibia, which is almost as important and difficult as the pre-liberation period. According to Crafford's view, (p. 45) "diakonia is the visible expression of koinonia. In Acts 6 it is clear that the seven also have the task to normalise fellowship among the quarrelling factions within the congregation."

Fellowship promotion is not only for stressful times; it should moreover be encouraged during times of peace and calm, for harmony and neighbourly coexistence. The formation of charity organizations, at times backed by the local churches, is at some level detrimental to the spirit of diakonia and koinonia because they still separate the people and even in common realities like the emergencies with which diakonia is dealing, continue to serve God's people on different and separating terms. There is a futility in the mushrooming of these agencies, now even with the HIV/AIDS pandemic since funds and human resources that otherwise could have been pooled together, is being utilised separately to the harm of such important and necessary diaconal ministry, a situation defiant of the 1963 papal encyclical – *Pacem in Teres* – which "instructed Catholics to work with people of other faiths for the common good." (Walker 1970:548)

This church organisational failure is a sad development, yet all is not lost as yet, because, as Walker (1970:557) states: "The long history of the Christian Church is a panorama of lights and shadows, of achievement and failure, of conquests and divisions...yet no Christian can survey what the church has done without confidence in its future. Its

changes may be many, its struggles great. But the great hand of God which has led it hitherto will guide it to larger usefulness in the advancement of the kingdom of its Lord, and toward the fulfilment of His prediction that if He be lifted up, He would draw all men unto Him.”

6.5 SOCIAL DIACONATE

We learn the following from the lecturer of Crafford: “The diaconate is not only concerned with merciful deeds and love, but also with justice, not only with the poor and suffering, but also with the oppressed and the injustice.” (p. 46)

The understanding and the lesson here is that the diaconate is not only dealing with people, but importantly also with the societal structure causing the diaconal ailments, which is just mounting by the day. The diaconate in this sense is the spokes organ, the voice and the activist for social justice and peace. Under this obligation, the diaconate will be in constant dialogue with the government, local authorities, NGO’s and even the church herself to which she belongs as it appeals to the conscience of these bodies and institutions.

Crafford aims the spotlight very clearly and directly at the church, God’s kingdom agency here on earth, to fulfil its social diakonate mission (p.46)” “The church must often through her witness (to the social issues) call the government to task while establishing signs of social diaconate to bring the plight of the needy under the attention of the state.” (p. 46)

The signs can be the distribution of old clothes (to show poverty) or soup-kitchens (to show hunger), but the diaconate in our modern times are seriously and urgently called upon to make an impact on social needs such as job creation, housing, social services, rehabilitation of prison inmates to name but a few. This is the social diaconate of the church of the God of the oppressed (Ps. 72, 1 Sam. 2:4,8), as described by Boesak (1984:73): “The church can do nothing other than be on the side of the poor and the dispossessed. It cannot but proclaim a message of liberation from misery, oppression, poverty, domination, exploitation, and fear. That means it cannot but search and fight with all its might for justice, peace, reconciliation, human fulfilment. It has no choice but to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.”

6.6 INDUSTRIAL DIACONATE

Ever since independence, a new platform and challenge has been created for the church and her diaconate on the labour front. New labour laws have been passed and a directorate of the Labour Commissioner established. This ‘terrain of the industry with its manifold labour and relationship issues, requires specialised attention’ writes Crafford (p. 46).

The diaconate needs to play watchdog over the application of the current labour laws lest injustice prevails in other forms. An academic study of the migrant labour systems in South Africa (1972) comes, for example, up with 31 arguments against the system lamented by the researcher: “I cannot convey adequately the sense of hurt rage of black South Africans at what is being done to them. Anybody who believes that blacks are

contented with the migrant labour system in S.A. is living in a fool's paradise, as those who have seen the remarkable play Sizwe Banzi is Dead will know." (Wilson 1972:2)

There are definitely certain concerns in the labour industry of Namibia, which calls for diaconal intervention e.g. selling of sex at the ports and on the highways, despite HIV/AIDS and uncontrolled availability of liquor and drugs, contributing to addiction. The call of outrage by the late Bishop Auala in 1971 is still valid in the labour industry: "The contract system is today already a great evil which shatters many families and brings great misery to families...It is not the will of the Lord that husband and wife and families be this torn-apart, frequently to live in sin and adultery. This way of life breaks up many marriages and will eventually have a disruptive effect upon the whole of society." (Wilson 1972:265)

Although most of the labour disputes belong to the Labour Commissioner, assistance of the diaconate will be needed in areas of housing, unfair dismissals, transfers, suspensions and retrenchments. People at times need other people to speak for them; this is where the industrial diaconate is very useful and necessary.

6.7 POLITICAL DIACONATE

In the traditional sense, to speak of a political diaconate sounds a bit strange because there always is a drawing line between government policies and church programs, the one taken as worldly and the other as heavenly. There is however a close correlation between the two entities in so far as both are dealing with people, created to the likeness of God and accountable to Him at the judgement day. We have to agree that there should

however always be a line of distinction between their roles of authority in church and society. The diaconate in political dialogue on social issues must however bear this in mind: “It is the mission of the church to transform the world, not to become conformed to its norms.” (De Gruchy 1995:254)

Too often the two entities engage themselves in unnecessary accusations - the church through sermons and statements and resolutions and the state through the electronic media and political speeches; the state accusing the church of interference in politics and the church blaming the state for not meeting its obligations towards the civil society.

Accusations is not the solution, the issue is the promotion of peaceful coexistence in a world of democracy and political plurality. De Gruchy’s statement brings both the church and state back to the drawing board (1955:255): “If democracy is about political participation in which difference is respected and which contributes to the well-being of the whole, how much more should the church as the koinonia of the ‘people of God’ embody and express true human sociality, reflecting the restored image of the triune God?”

The necessity of a political diaconate is based on Ex. 3:7-8 where the prophet speak out very clearly against the injustices of that time. For Crafford “political structures and political decisions determine exclusively people’s life-styles and opportunities.” (p. 47)

Silence on unjust laws and legislation means damage to the witness ministry of the church. The church on the other hand should not only be a vocal exponent of social injustice, she should test herself against the same norms of justice, democracy and

fairness which she applied to the state, or as De Gruchy (1995:255) says: “The prophetic witness of the church to the reign of God against injustice and discrimination of all kinds has to be addressed first of all to its own life and structures.”

The summary remarks of Crafford cannot be sidestepped and ignored in any debate, dialogue or discussion on the need to always have a diaconate, structured to the images discussed above, within the church’s structures: “An underdeveloped diaconate create vacuums in which ideologies such as Marxism can flourish. When there is a lack of the signs of the diaconate, the proclaimed message becomes incredible and the reality of the kingdom of God being obscured. Therefore we must not neglect or slack in our efforts to build the missionary diaconate with all the might in the context of South Africa.” (p. 48)

This statement can be directed at the context of the church in Namibia as well. The vanishing of the diaconate from the church’s structures can bring in our context nepotism, favouritism, discrimination, tribal tensions and ultimately, disunity. The consequences are too hard to contemplate. The church cannot afford to close shop on the diaconal ministry, because it would be a very costly exercise.

6.8 CONCLUSION

By simply studying the lecture of Crafford, it becomes very clear that the church still has a long way to go in the redefinition and understanding of her diaconal ministry. This lecture quite obviously showed clearly the different characteristics of a sound and effective diaconal program. Such insights on a caritative, exemplary, koinonial, social,

political and industrial diaconate, can fruitfully be applied in the reconstruction and regeneration of the diaconal ministry.

CHAPTER 7

A NEW VISION FOR THE DIACONAL MINISTRY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

There is need for new vision, strategy, planning, management and plans of action within the dying diaconal ministry of the church under review and perhaps also for the larger church of Christ in Namibia. In the foregoing chapters of this research, the biblical, theological and social-ethical dimensions of this much needed ministry have been explored and studied. This chapter will attempt to come up with practical hints and proposals that hopefully will enhance a new and fresh look to this ministry in a bid to abandon outdated practices and to bring the diaconate in line with the ever-changing present-day needs and challenges affecting the lives of God's people which this diaconate is supposed to serve. The point of departure will be practical and biblical rather than theological.

7.2 WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS

Even though the management of the diaconal ministry for the church is quite problematic, as argued above, there is no question about the need for such a ministry within the church, since it is linked to the mission of the church in this world to preach, heal, serve, reconcile, reconstruct and repair the broken image of God. Growth and progress within the church can also be measured against the level of growth within the diaconate, as stated by Isaak (2001:1): "For the body of Christ to grow, structure and services are

equally important. Without an adequate and expansible framework, the church will be in danger to neglect some of the valuable ministries. Put differently, one may emphasize this point by saying that the churches need structures of high motivation, maturation, education, training and pastoral care, together with programs that promote togetherness, sense of community, extension of helping hand, namely diaconal ministry.”

Before looking at the weaknesses and strengths, it is advisable to have a firm understanding of diakonia or the social ministry of the church in the modern context, as explicated by Watkins (1994:x): “Social ministry emphasizes the demonstration of Christ-like concern because Jesus is our model for helping persons in need. He not only taught us that we should be concerned. He demonstrated the type of concern we are to have. He did more than inspire this type of concern; He commanded it. This concern always expresses itself in concrete action. The goal of social ministry has to do with helping persons in the Spirit of Christ.”

It is in its mission to the world, that the church needs to return to its nature of servanthood and become more than ever a serving church with serving and humble bishops, deans, pastors and the serving community of believers at large. Sad as it may sound, it is very unfortunate that the go-and-serve principle of the church’s mission, which ought to be the first priority, seems to come last in our context.

This negative tendency can among many other factors be attributed to the quality of pastoral training, the traditional and not professional formation of our presbyters and the lack of up-to-date and contextual parish Christian education.

In the process of the revitalisation and reconstruction of the diaconal ministry, the membership of the church, which is the community of believers, remains the strong target group. It is the potential, capacity and ability of this group that lies hidden in our parishes, just waiting to be developed through training and education. The weakness in our diaconal ministry is the quality fruit we bear as Christians. The fact that church programs and activities are dying while we believe in and confess faith in the Jesus of love and compassion for the neglected and marginalized, is surely an indication of the low level of the quality of our faith. Add to that pastors and presbyters who are not doing more than what is expected, you understand why the decline in the diaconal ministry is alarming. The stagnation is also linked to the lack of compassion within the church and the warning of Fox (1979:1-2) should be taken heed of: “This exile of compassion leads to the poison and pain that becomes incarnate wherever people are treated unjustly. Who can number the victims, living and dead, of the exile of compassion, sacrifices of human flesh to all the gods that humanity worships ahead of compassion.”

7.3 FROM CENTRALIZATION TO DECENTRALIZATION

The urgency and the need of the diaconal ministry within the church of Christ, has been kept for too long in the obscurity of our minutes and resolutions. Diakonia is not only a point on the agenda of our synods destined to end up in documents. Diakonia is not only about talking; it is more about doing and showing. Diakonia should be brought back where it belongs, the local scene in the local church, because as Tournier states (1965:145-6): “The church’s hour has come. The church instituted by God, the servant of God, must again become his instrument to affect the synthesis for which all men of our time are consciously or unconsciously yearning. And here I mean the church in the

broadest sense, not only the clergy, not only the established churches, but all those who have been gripped by Jesus Christ.”

The diaconal ministry belongs to the local church. Deviation from this constitutional principle comes in when institutions linked with diakonia come into being causing a detrimental understanding. An almost impossible situation has been created which produce the understanding that all should be done from somewhere else, e.g. from Khomasdal’s Tabitha Centre, on behalf of the ELCRN.

Against such a wrong approach and negative understanding, we learn from Kysar (1991:146): “Unless the whole mission of the church, including social ministry, is articulated and presupposed in the total congregational life, the church can never be faithful to its calling.”

Arguments for the diaconal ministry to belong to the local church are manifold and justifiable because the perspectives from institutions differ from the grassroots experience. The diaconal mission of the church is best dealt with in the local church and should not be left in the hands of pastors and presbyters, but should be seen as both the individual and collective responsibility of all God’s people, having: “That sense of having been sent, of being commissioned, and of being designated envoys of God’s care and compassion that makes social ministry even conceivable (because) we are called to care, even as we have been the objects of God’s care for us.” (Kysar 1991:147)

Diakonia is about the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 6:22, with compassion added. Those to whom Jesus had compassion are “referred to as the poor, the blind, the cripple, the

leprous, the hungry, those who weep, the sick, the little ones, the widows, the captives, those who are weary and heavily burdened with religious legalism, the lost sheep.” (Bosch 1980:54)

In most or all cases, they are the parishioners themselves; therefore the argument for local diakonia remains very strong and applicable.

7.4 CONTINUED DIACONAL EDUCATION

Bringing back the diaconal ministry to the local church will put the focus on contextual parish education on a regular basis so that the general parish membership can come to grips with their diaconal responsibility, as Wessler (1969:91) argues: “Not only the word of proclamation, but also the deed of love is a witness for Christ. Forms and tasks of diakonia cannot permanently be established because they change according to the social, economic and political situation of the church and the environment. A good diaconal ministry is always changing and movable.”

The diaconal ministry and its management will have to move with the times and adjust its strategies from time to time to answer to the human need as can be identified in a certain location. Diakonia cannot remain institutional for time unknown, for it is the product and fruit of the Christian heart, expressed and lived out in love, care and compassion to the neighbour. Such education is needed to enlighten, equip, mobilise and reactivate the church membership for involvement in a fruitful and effective local diaconal campaign, to the stage of what Kraabel (1941:103) calls “radiant, more effective, more deeply-soul-satisfying, when in faith and assurance, he give himself in every way, and at every opportunity, to this glorious labour of love.”

The mammoth task of parish education with emphasis on the diaconal ministry cannot be left alone with the local pastor only who is already overloaded. Watkins (1994-145:158) gave the local pastor who is also part of a social ministry, for example 11 ministry role models but, concludes: “They must be competent administrators. They must know and understand public policy issues and the functioning of political systems. In addition, they must have a basic understanding of the physical needs of persons.”

Understanding the difficult task of the pastors and their assistants, Wessler (1969:93) writes: “Those already involved in this ministry, need peculiar counselling because of the problems and difficulties they encounter while enduring hostilities and critic. Encouragement and intercession is needed if they are not to be crippled not to lose courage in this sacrificing service.” (own translation)

7.5 PROMOTING VOLUNTEER SERVICE

The success of the effective management and running of the diaconal ministry in the local church depends very much on volunteer service which ought to be offered by the parishioners themselves. Speaking at an International Year of Volunteers fundraising dinner, President Nujoma remarked: “Now is the time to turn volunteerism into the fight against poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, natural disasters, environment degradation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to take care of our children, orphans and child headed families” (The Namibian, 08/11/2000, p. 5).

Such influential voices are very much needed in Church and Society, both of which are battling with numerous social evils and dysfunctions. The President’s call for the pooling

of resources came at a time when both churches and social agencies have it tough with the availability of manpower and funds. In this regard, he said in the same address: “Resources should be mobilised for these activities as volunteering was not cost-free, even though it might be cost-effective.” (The Namibian, 08/11/2001, p.5)

Single-handedly the local church will have it very difficult to provide service and solutions to the multitude of needs and those in need of care and assistance in a given location. The situation, in which the Namibian churches engage themselves in diaconal ministries and social programs on an independent basis, is most disturbing and discouraging. We confess our unity in Jesus Christ, which ought to knit us together more closely in our activities, yet there seems to be no unity in purpose and actions, which should be attributed to a lack of communication between the churches. The same is true within the set-up of the social agencies. We have one community with many agencies, each asking for or donor funding, sometimes at the same donor-agencies, this is most unfortunate. Volunteerism should rather be encouraged through regular motivational talks and continued parish education. Watkins (1994:136) provides good advice in this regard: “The church is full of loving and gifted people with many skills and talents. These people are often not used in the Lord’s service because they are not teachers or singers. So many more persons could be involved in the church’s ministry if church staff would make an effort to find out what each member can do. The staff could then match persons up with a ministry program that would enable them to experience the blessings that come with service.”

The Human Resources Development program of the church can come to good use in this regard.

7.6 CONCLUSION

To overhaul the machinery of diaconal ministry to such an extent that it becomes an effective service-rendering ministry of the church, some fundamental changes need to be introduced and implemented. The advice here is to approach such changes step by step and implement them as the need arises and becomes clear. The diaconal ministry of the ELCRN ought to be taken to where the needs of the people are at the highest level and not be confined to a single institution in Windhoek. The membership of the church should be involved in this whole exercise by continued grassroots parish education and by stimulating volunteer service.

CHAPTER 8

THE ROAD AHEAD: PRACTICAL DIAKONIA

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Research on this important ministry within the context of the Church of Jesus Christ in Namibia with reference to the ELCRN, proved in so many ways the long road to the realization of an upgraded and effective diaconal ministry. To make this happen, it is now the time for the Church leadership, who in the first instance ought to lead the campaign to overhaul the total machinery needed to keep this Church business alive, vibrant and effectively running, both on parish, district and church wide levels, to return to the drawing board.

The ordained clergy's involvement is very much needed in this whole exercise. The inclusion of this discipline in the curriculum of the theological seminary is highly recommendable. During internship and later in the vocation itself, the clergy ought to be involved in continuous in-service training because they are the ones to lead the flock in the direction of a new interest in this ministry which really should be parish-initiated and society-oriented.

The involvement of the broader Church membership is a crucial consideration. Through programs and activities on parish level, those showing interest can be identified and through education and training brought to the level of local administrators of the local diaconal ministry. All we need in this regard is hard work, commitment and

determination. Welfare grants from the State, once-a-week soup kitchens, old clothing from abroad is just not the appropriate answer to the ever-increasing human need which forms the backbone of the total diaconal enterprise. Deep, serious rethinking will be an urgent call to the entire Church leadership so that this vital ministry will not only be viewed and approached as a budgetary item but as a ministry belonging to the whole Church to which we would like to refer as ‘mine’ and ‘ours’.

8.2 THE MACEDONIAN CALL

We are now at the end of this study on the Diaconal Ministry in Namibia as a challenge from the perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN). While coming to this conclusion I am reminded of the Macedonia call in Acts 16: 9-10 to Paul, who is a theologian, and Luke, who is a medical doctor. One night “a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

This particular chapter deals with the theme of diakonia when missionaries entered Europe for the first time. It is important to note that such missionaries were people such as Paul, a theologian, and Luke, a medical doctor. To put it differently, the vision of Paul to preach the message of God was based on the spiritual *and* diaconal ministries. When the Macedonia call came to them, they knew what kind of help to offer. Such help could only be offered in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to serve the soul and body, and for this ministry of Christ, Küng (1972:39) says, “No other word could be used than that

completely ordinary, nonreligious and somewhat, humble flavours that suggest no connotation of officialdom, authority, dominion, position of dignity - the word *diakonia*, (more exactly service at the table). It was Jesus who ‘gave gifts to humankind.’ He appointed some to be apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers. He did this, to prepare all God’s people for the work of his service, in order to build up his body (Ephesians 4:11-12).”

At the conclusion of this study we should say that for the body of Christ to grow, structure and services are equally important. Without an adequate and expansible framework, the Church will be in danger to neglect some of the valuable ministries. Put differently, one may emphasis this point by saying that the churches need structures of high motivation, maturation, education, training and pastoral care, together with programmes that promote togetherness, sense of community, extension of helping hand, namely diaconal ministry. When properly understood, these ministries are contributing to the word *diakonia*, to be at the table and being served by Jesus Christ while serving each other.

8.3 ELCRN AND THE ROAD AHEAD

When the Macedonia call is issued and being implemented it should have both spiritual and the diaconal components. For example, the ELCRN Constitution stipulates in paragraph 2 (b) the task of the Church as follows: “The Church is called to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all and everyone (Matthew 28:18). She fulfils this task when every congregation member and especially the ordained ministers witness this message to the upliftment of the congregation through preaching, administering the sacraments,

diaconal services, confirmation, evangelisation and mission work.” Furthermore such diaconal services “should be done on all levels, especially to the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and other physically impaired.”

From above perspective the Church regards diaconal ministry in serious light. The provisions of the Constitution according to Diergaardt and Boois (2000:50) “clearly indicate that the ELCRN should include diaconal ministries in its sphere of influence, as part and parcel of the Church structure.” In other words, both aspects of the Macedonia call should be included.

From a historical perspective the ELCRN has always promoted the diaconal ministries. Since 1925 the ELCRN promoted such services in the areas of caring for the elderly, providing medical services to the sick, and education especially to the formerly disadvantaged part of Namibian society. Establishment of schools such as Paulinum Theological Seminary and Martin Luther High School, medical centres at places such as at Otjimbingue, Okakarara and Okombahe testify to the Church’s involvement in diaconal ministries. However, today the issue is what is the vision of the Church and in what ways should the Macedonia call be implemented? The Church is faced, as never before, as far as its spirituality and structures are concerned, with daunting challenges. Let us consider one very practical, but also very urgent, example.

8.4 A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: THE CHURCH AND HIV/AIDS

Since the 1990’s the churches are challenged with the issue of HIV/AIDS. This challenge for help from Macedonia is a challenge to be accepted by the Church. In the case of the

ELCRN such a challenge has been accepted. According to Isaak (2000: 114-115) the Church diaconal ministry includes caring for those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. Isaak states as follows: The Churches have long played an important role in providing Christian counselling, preaching, health, education and diaconical or development services and in meeting social crises in communities. Today, AIDS demands of us that we in the churches acknowledge the unprecedented AIDS pandemic. AIDS is a family disease that is spread from men to women, women to men, men to men, women to women, and mothers to children. AIDS affects married people, their children, and young unmarried people. It is this dimension which makes AIDS the most deadly disease. At the same time, unfounded fear should be removed by education and information so that understanding and compassion can grow. It is ignorance, silence, deception, blame, and denial – especially on the subject of sex – which are extremely dangerous.

One great challenge to the church is to stimulate discussion of sexual relationships, especially among the youth, in ways which not only engage the values of the church but also realistically protect against AIDS. The church's commitment to sex education, discussion, and counselling must reflect these realities if it is to make a fully responsible contribution to stopping AIDS. In addition, the church with its members is called to the ministry of caring. This means promoting the acceptance of people with HIV/AIDS, fighting against discrimination and developing programmes, which address the needs of the people. Each community will develop its own approach, one which fits its own circumstances.

For the churches it is difficult to find common ground on the issue of prevention. The churches want to distinguish themselves from the heavy promotion of condoms that the

government and most NGOs focus on. At the same time the churches know that, to have their message heard, they have to address issues of sexuality and sexual expression openly and honestly, and the churches must begin “where their clients are.” To simply ignore or condemn condoms would be a complete turn-off. Similarly, the churches know that the Ten Commandments instructed people that, “Thou shalt not kill,” and that this most certainly applies to situations where one partner is infected with HIV and the other, not-yet-infected, wants to protect her or himself. Even for most spiritual and royal Christians, many serious moral dilemmas emerge. But at the end the theological decision should be made and recommended. We have to apply the principle of ABCD, namely “A” is for *abstinence* before marriage, we say, and “B” stands for *be faithful* in marriage. This is the Christian way, and it guarantees LIFE. But if you find that you cannot follow this teaching, we go on, then choose “C” for a *condom*, because the alternative is “D” for *death* (Isaak 2000: 114-115).

Today, our biblical, theological, and pastoral perspectives may include the message of encouraging the application of the “ABCD” principle. As a rule let us not lose sight of the fact that the “A” (for Abstinence) and the “B” (for Be faithful in marriage) comes first. All Christians are required to follow this ethics of rule. Be faithful in marriage and no sex before marriage as a rule based on the Holy Scriptures. The Church should devote itself to the much difficult principle of promoting sexual discipline among the unmarried. The Church should say in no uncertain terms that it would not tolerate promiscuity and a kind of behaviour, which endangers human well being.

But so far we have no cure for AIDS. At such moments what should we do? Perhaps one way is to revisit the guideline for “rule” that includes “exception”, namely, if you cannot

follow the rule, then choose the guideline of exception, namely the option of “C” (condom). While saying this we also know that a loving God is in control of the situation and is the source of hope in the midst of hopelessness and desperation. If God is God, death and destruction cannot have the last word. That is where Christian hope comes to the picture. We all have to become involved in this struggle for our heritage and our futures.

The new emphasis on the dimension of diaconal ministry that includes HIV/AIDS has been recently endorsed by the ELCRN. In a press statement, dated June 29, 2001 in *The Namibian*, the Church said the following: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia with an estimate membership of 300 000, along with other Churches and Church bodies, the Namibian Government and other social and cultural organisations face the challenge of offering spiritual and moral motivation for building a new, HIV/AIDS-free society. By accepting such a challenge, the ELCRN will launch on SUNDAY, 8 JULY 2001, at Rehoboth, in the local Paulus congregation HIV/AIDS programme that will be known as Evangelical Lutheran Church AIDS Programme (ELCAP). The objectives of ELCAP are:

1. Recognising that Churches have long played an important role in providing Christian counselling, preaching, education and health services, and in meeting social crises in communities. Today, HIV/AIDS demands that we, as Churches, acknowledge this unprecedented pandemic. It is a family disease that is spread from fathers to mothers and from mothers to children. It does not only affect the physical body but also the entire structures of the extended family and thereby threaten the survival of the human race.

2. Affirming that HIV/AIDS is no longer a problem out there, which the ELCRN and Christian communities in Namibia can ignore. HIV/AIDS caused destruction in terms of human lives; it is, psychologically, physically, socially, economically, and spiritually. It is a deep spiritual and social concern for all Churches and the churches cannot remain quiet and inactive.

3. Confessing that ELCRN cannot forsake our God-given responsibility to care for our sisters and brothers and children who are infected and affected. The Church is called upon to provide a healing ministry to its members and the whole society; praying and providing healing services so that God will take away from the face of Africa and the entire world the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the Holy Scriptures, God diverted many dangers that threatened the survival of our world and God's people. The saving arm of God has not been shortened over time. Therefore, the Church is a source where the infected and affected will come and receive love, hope, understanding, acceptance, compassion, and spiritual upliftment to their complex questions that includes "why my God?" The Church will advocate a holistic approach to address various psycho-social and health needs of the people with HIV/AIDS and their loved ones, their families, friends, and neighbours and most of all their children left behind.

4. Implementing in practical terms and in accordance with the biblical mandate a Centre that will provide, assist, and guide and support home-base family care. Such initiative will assure that those who suffer from AIDS will not die in loneliness.

Against this background, the ELCRN will establish a Centre in Rehoboth to cater for those suffering and living with HIV/AIDS as well as providing out-reach programmes across the country. Such ministry of caring will be done in the spirit that those who suffer will not feel rejected, abandoned, discriminated against and ostracised. Instead, those who suffer will come to know that they are not forgotten, since God cares. Just like Jesus we demonstrate that we also care by providing and sharing our food, medicine and fellowship with all, especially those who are isolated due to sickness from the good life. In short, the ELCRN AIDS programme, known as ELCAP, is an initiative that wants to network and contribute together with all other AIDS programmes, socially and culturally, whether they are from the other Churches, the Governments or NGO's or overseas partners.

8.5 CONCLUSION

For the greater part of my pastoral ministry, I have always been disturbed and wondering about the developments in and approaches to the diaconal ministry on the verandah of my own church. I keep on reminding myself not to make easy conclusions regarding this ministry on the ecumenical front but to limit myself to the familiar and experienced situation of the church I serve. Having been caught up in the dilemma of judging the situation only from the perspective of eyesight observation, I was challenged and in fact compelled to read more about the ministry of Diakonia. The contents of this study and the subsequent recommendations can therefore be regarded as the fruit and logic of the search and discovery of the lost connection in this holistic ministry dealing with and addressing human need and suffering in all its dimensions. The discussion is open-ended, but this honestly are simple insights which have been greatly influenced by the wisdom,

experience, knowledge and the compassion of those already busy to research and write on the mission of the church in Namibia.

God challenges the Church in every new situation and context. While entering the 21st century we are dealing with a new Macedonian call. The Church leaders and people of other professions are challenged to focus anew on the spiritual and diaconal ministries. Today, the Namibian churches and religious communities accept that providing diaconal ministry (including a ministry for HIV/AIDS) is part and parcel of their task. At the same time, as argued in this thesis, such diakonia should always include other services around the round table, namely training and pastoral counselling, preaching, sacraments, caring for the elderly and providing health care for all.

What is needed is an all-embracing (social, political, industrial, koinonial) diaconate, that is rooted in the local congregation (based on volunteer service and continuing education) and that is empowered by the Holy Spirit (showing the spiritual values of love, peace, patience and kindness), and gives profile to the unified voice of the church as an agent of change and human liberation. The Macedonian call of God's people in Namibia knocks very urgently at the conscience of the churches of the Risen Lord in our country.

ABBREVIATIONS

ELCRN	-	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
SWA	-	South West Africa
LMS	-	London Mission Society
WCC	-	World Council of Churches
CICARWS	-	Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service
NGO's	-	Non-governmental organisations
PACLA	-	Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly

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