

Report of the Theological Task Force on Holy Orders
The Anglican Church in North America Provincial Council
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Task Force Members

The Rt. Rev. Kevin Allen
Mrs. Katherine Atwood

The Rev. Dr. Leslie Fairfield
The Rev. Canon Mary Hays
The Rt. Rev. David Hicks

The Rev. Tobias Karłowicz
The Rt. Rev. Eric Menees

The Theological Task Force on Holy Orders continues work on Phase Three of its agenda, by examining ecclesiological issues which are related to the church's understanding of holy orders. Since the last meeting of the Provincial Council, the Task Force has met four times: September 25-26, 2014 (Pittsburgh, PA); November 20-21, 2014 (Bedford, TX); February 26-27, 2015 (Bedford, TX) and May 29, 2015 (telephone conference call).

The Task Force notes that the Anglican tradition has been strengthened by the existence of “three strands” of theological perspective over time – Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical/Reformed, and Charismatic.¹ The existence of these three strands has provided a level of flexibility and breadth in Anglicanism, which has been the hallmark of our tradition. Although strength is derived from the combination of the three strands, we recognize that often there is tension between them, and at certain points in history there has been a high level of tension between them. The current issue of men and women in holy orders presents a point of high tension between the strands. While we anticipate that our study will provide resources for the church to arrive at further definition and clarification of our understanding of holy orders, we urge the church not to marginalize one of the strands in an attempt to resolve one point of tension.

The Task Force reported to the College of Bishops, during its January 2015 meeting. We informed the Bishops that the Task Force had identified and examined those areas of “common ground” shared by the three strands.

- From the foundational documents we understand that holy orders in the Anglican Church are based on the historic pattern of the three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons.
- Each ordained office has duties peculiar to it, and there is a hierarchical relationship between the three. The details of the qualifications for each ordained office are outlined in Holy Scripture, the Ordinal, and the Constitution and Canons.
- The act of ordination requires conformity to these requirements and the laying on of hands by a bishop with authority in that jurisdiction.

¹ Many will be familiar with the phrase, “three streams,” as a metaphorical description of the three great perspectives within the Anglican tradition. One of the Task Force members, Dr. Leslie Fairfield, is credited with coining that phrase, and it is with his permission and blessing that the Task Force urges our church to adopt the “three strands” metaphor. The metaphor of strands has the benefit of illustrating that each of the perspectives has a level of consistency and coherence which remains, despite its interaction with the other two; also, the image of the intertwining of three strands, such as with a rope, communicates the reality that the church is strengthened by the combination of the three perspectives.

- Those called to holy orders traditionally have two key functions. The first is the transmission of the Gospel and right doctrine. The second is the administration of the Sacraments. Bishops, priests and deacons are set apart and given the responsibility to transmit, administer and defend the doctrine and liturgy of the Church and care for the spiritual health of the laity.

We also noted that there are matters in the life of the Church, for which the Church is free to make changes or eliminate; however, there are other matters for which the Church is not free to modify or abolish (Article XX). The Church has the authority to provide form and order for the corporate religious worship of the church, which is the liturgy, but the Church may only change or eliminate those traditions and ceremonies which are not based on the instructions of Scripture. The Church may do nothing that circumvents or supersedes the Word of God. When changes are made, they are done in a conciliar manner. In the Anglican Church, there are two traditions and ceremonies that are accepted as clearly and directly being ordained by Christ and therefore are not able to be changed substantially or abolished: these are Baptism and Holy Communion. The Church may not change or replace the elements chosen by Christ, or the words and actions that accompany them, as witnessed to by Scripture. The ultimate question before the Task Force, the Bishops and the Church is the extent to which the Church is free to alter matters pertaining to ordination rites, regulations and qualifications.

We outlined the description of the three-fold office, in terms of what our church, as a whole, understands each office and how they are to function in our church.

Deacons:

- ▶ The office of deacon is concerned with actively ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of the community and assisting the priest in the liturgy.
- ▶ Deacons are the liaison between the needs of the people and the parish leadership.
- ▶ Deacons owe obedience to the bishop and represent him to the community at large.
- ▶ Deacons must be publically recognized for their virtue, dependability, honesty and dedication. They must prove themselves able to be leaders within their own households and willing to minister among the people to meet their daily needs, freeing other ministers to concentrate on the spiritual business of the church.
- ▶ They baptize only if it is not possible for the priest to be present.
- ▶ They preach only with authorization by the bishop.
- ▶ They do not pronounce blessings or absolution, nor do they consecrate at the Eucharist

Priests

- ▶ A candidate for ordination to the priesthood is a deacon, who has sufficient experience and understanding of the faith and lives a morally upright life. The priesthood is not a position of privilege, but a post of serious responsibility.
- ▶ Priests receive authority from the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands at ordination to pronounce blessing, forgiveness or the need for further repentance, and to consecrate and administer the holy sacraments. Priests also receive full authority to preach and teach the Word of God to the congregation. They speak to God on behalf of the congregation and speak to the congregation on behalf of God.
- ▶ A priest's duty is to study the Scriptures continually, to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to act as a leader and defender of the flock, bringing them safely through the

door of Christ. Following the pattern of the Apostles, priests are sent out into the world to represent the gospel message and to grow the flocks committed to their charge.

- ▶ Priests owe obedience to their bishop and may be given full ecclesiastical authority in a parish. Priests exercise the ministry of their order within a diocese and only with the written permission of their bishop. They represent the bishop and the authority of the Apostles in the congregation where they exercise their ministry.

Bishops

- ▶ By the tradition of Christ's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, bishops are consecrated by at least three other bishops in apostolic succession, signifying that their duty is not only to their own dioceses but also to the Church as a whole. Bishops attend to the whole Church by participating in the Church's councils and defending the faith in the public arena. They are successors of the Apostles in their oversight of the Church, through the grace of the Holy Spirit given to them. They are chief missionaries and chief pastors, guardians and teachers of right doctrine and administrators of godly discipline and governance. They maintain sound teaching and right worship in the Church.
- ▶ Bishops are called to exercise their ministry as priests, to be pastors to the priests in their dioceses, to supervise and to direct the deacons, and to work publicly and privately for the preservation of the faith and teaching of right doctrine for the people. Like a shepherd, bishops provide direction and discipline for the flock and are responsible for the growth of the Church, by providing for the establishment of new congregations and ordaining clergy to serve them.
- ▶ Although there may be titled offices higher than bishop, such as Archbishop, these do not have the Church's authority to declare doctrine unilaterally or to challenge the authority of a bishop in his own diocese, except if that bishop is in violation of the Constitution and Canons of the Province of the Church.
- ▶ Bishops attend to the whole Church by participating in the Church's councils and defending the faith in the public arena.
- ▶ They are successors of the Apostles in their oversight of the Church, through the grace of the Holy Spirit given to them.
- ▶ They are chief missionaries and chief pastors, guardians and teachers of right doctrine and administrators of godly discipline and governance.
- ▶ They maintain sound teaching and right worship in the Church.

We also note that there are divergent views among the three strands. The Task Force has been working to identify those perspectives on ordination which lead to divergent understandings of the nature of ordination and holy orders. In some instances, the divergence stems from a difference of emphasis, rather than contradictory perspectives. Other points of divergence occur with certain perspectives that are not accepted by the whole church, but nevertheless, they remain acceptable positions within the history of the Anglican tradition.

Bishops

- ▶ Teacher/scholar
- ▶ Pastors' Pastor
- ▶ Prophet (to the world)
- ▶ Social activist (Liberation theology)

- ▶ Leads in speaking the accountable word to the world (eg. Manhattan Declaration)
- ▶ *Esse* of Christ's Church (No bishop, no legitimate Church)
- ▶ *Bene Esse* (A good form of polity that contributes to the well-being of the Church)
- ▶ Successor to the Apostles
- ▶ Channel of Apostolic authority (Anglo-catholic)
- ▶ Passing teacher's mantle (Evangelical/Reformed)
- ▶ Spiritual gifting (Evangelical/Charismatic)
- ▶ Father of the family
- ▶ First among Presbyters (essentially a priest, who has been set apart for a separate function)
- ▶ Chief Mission Mobilizer
- ▶ Symbol of Unity in Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church
- ▶ High Priest

Priests

- ▶ Minister of Word & Sacrament
- ▶ Channel of sacramental grace
- ▶ Eucharistic role – *in persona Christi*
- ▶ Pastor/Teacher
- ▶ Coach/Comforter
- ▶ Local mission mobilizer/encourager of gifts
- ▶ Ruling Father
- ▶ Extension of the bishop's own ministry
- ▶ Scholar in residence/expert on religion
- ▶ Social worker
- ▶ Sacrificing Priest

Deacons

- ▶ Priest-in-waiting
- ▶ *Junior Priest*
- ▶ Assistant at the altar
- ▶ Extension of the bishop's ministry
- ▶ Aide to the bishop
- ▶ Intermediary between the church & the needs of the world
- ▶ Catechists
- ▶ Organizer of new ministries
- ▶ Analogous to the OT Levite
- ▶ There is an essential difference between the transitional and vocational diaconate

The Task Force carefully notes that the Anglican way has been concerned to grant as much liberty of conscience as possible, so that beyond the definitions found in the Ordinal various interpretations of what it means to be a bishop, priest or deacon (even contradictory ones) have been tolerated in the interest of that liberty. It remains to be seen whether or not the issue of women's ordination can be resolved in any direction beyond the status quo, apart from making judgments about these divergent views, thereby further defining holy orders for the

whole church. The bishops and church will need to consider the tension between the values of liberty and unity in this regard.

With the help of selected scholars, representative of the three strands, we are posing a series of questions to each of the three strands. The questions, listed below, are the first draft and are subject to modification, based upon input from the College of Bishops.

1. What is the nature, historicity, function and importance of apostolic succession?
2. What happens at the Eucharist?
3. What is the significance of the celebrant at Holy Communion?
4. What happens at ordination?
5. What is the significance of the incarnation for the priesthood? Ordained ministry?
6. How the differences between male and female affect leadership ability?
7. Is leadership more office or charisma?
8. Does order pertain to the gospel?
9. In what way is order/authority received from Christ? Is there a role for the church?
10. Can orthodoxy be preserved without order/structure?
11. How important is historic continuity?
12. What is our accountability to catholicity, and where is catholicity located?

We anticipate that the answers to these questions will provide further clarification for the church, in terms of the specific issues that need to be addressed when considering the manner in which candidates for holy orders will be accepted in the church. It is our hope that the completed report for Phase Three will be complete by the time of meeting of the College of Bishops in January 2016.

Sincerely in Christ,
The Rt. Rev. David L. Hicks