



ANGLICAN DEACONESS INSTITUTION ANNUAL MEETING

The New Testament presents us with an array of women who played significant roles both in the ministry of our Lord and in the subsequent history recorded in the Acts and the Epistles.

The experience of faith in Christ and Spirit inspired love for him knew no gender bounds then nor in subsequent Christian history.

The history of the Anglican Deaconess Institution tells the same story. From the initial impetus of the 1885 Sydney Synod resolution favouring the work of Deaconesses and the ordination of Miss Mary Schleicher in July 1886 as the first Deaconess up until the present moment, and in its present form, the Deaconess Institution displays a record of the desire of women who love Christ to serve him faithfully in the fellowship of this Diocese.

The work undertaken by those who have served as deaconesses, and the institutions created and reshaped over the years in pursuit of the goal of serving others in Christ's name, are a testimony to the flexibility and responsiveness to need that has been a hallmark of women's ministry in the Diocese and beyond.

As I draw near to the conclusion of my term as Archbishop I wish to express deep appreciation for the work of the Deaconess Institution in its many forms including the ministry of Hope Health Care.

I have particular reason to be grateful for the ministry of deaconesses. As a parish clergyman I valued the work of those who served with me as colleagues.

In that same role I came to appreciate the facilities provided for people in need.

As the Bishop of Wollongong I was familiar with Hilsyde, its purposes and its staff.

In more recent years I have had cause to admire the work of Mary Andrews College, its Principal and its staff. In its provision of teaching programs for women throughout the diocese it makes an immensely valuable contribution to the life of the Diocese. I want to commend Rev. Narelle Jarrett for her leadership patience and perseverance.

Hope Health Care has demonstrated a capacity to respond to new and changing circumstances and I express my congratulations to those responsible.

I have special cause to thank those who sustain the Diaconal Fellowship as a vital unit for support and encouragement for those who serve in the diaconal ministry.

I also wish to take this opportunity to say how much I have valued the work of Archdeacon Nicolios. She has sought to advance the ministry of women in the Diocese and to provide as many opportunities for employment as possible. She has been a great colleague.

Service to others is a rich and rewarding activity. When done as service to Christ it is an outward expression of love for him and for others because of him. In that spirit, whatever difficulties may be encountered, it carries with it its own in-built satisfaction and reward.

Christian service is rarely without difficulties and ministry by women, especially as it relates to the ministry of God's word, has its own special tensions. I applaud the gracious spirit that gets on with the task of making Christ known and serving his people in whatever opportunities are provided.

In my judgement the 'diaconal spirit' is appropriately displayed in at least three areas

The first is in the warmth and maturity of our relationship with God through Christ. The spiritual fruits of faith in God, of love for him and for others, of humility, perseverance, mercy, generosity, and submission to God's will, are all to be constantly renewed. For this God has given His Spirit, his Word, the Sacraments, the fellowship of his people and the trial of life. Whatever our service, preaching, teaching, caring, administering, or governing, the spirit in which they are undertaken is paramount.

The diaconal spirit is a surrendered spirit. It is both Mary and Martha, it is Timothy and Paul, it is Peter and John. It is serving unnoticed with devotion to Christ. It is accepting responsibility and an enhanced public profile with a proper sense of being Jesus' servant who must one day give an account of a stewardship.

The diaconal spirit is a praying spirit that looks to God in all circumstances and aspects of service for his enabling.

The diaconal spirit is a dependent spirit that looks to the Holy Spirit of God for strength and wisdom.

The diaconal spirit by its will to serve speaks a language of its own. Out of the horrors of a concentration camp Viktor Frankel wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*. He wrote:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude to any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way.

While visiting Sydney recently the Very Reverend Johan Candelin, Director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship told of a pastor who had previously been a policeman in the Soviet Union. With some others he had badly damaged the home of a Christian woman. Before they left she insisted that they remain so she could serve them something to eat and drink. The man was so touched by this action that he returned the next day in tears to ask what had prompted her gracious action in the face of their destructive behaviour. This encounter was the point

that turned him to Christ and a life of Christian ministry. The diaconal spirit speaks its own powerful language.

Secondly, the diaconal spirit is displayed in a powerful desire to declare the goodness of God to others. Stephen, one of the Acts 6 deacons, was a powerful witness to the acts of God in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord.

Philip approached the Ethiopian eunuch with the spirit of a servant offering to assist Candace's treasurer in his understanding of Isaiah 53.

Timothy served with Paul as a son with a father in the cause of the Gospel giving evidence of his desire not to seek his own interests but that of others.

The making known of the rule of God that has broken into our world, and the call to come under his gracious authority, is the great service which we have to offer to men and women everywhere.

The declaration of God's love and forgiveness in Jesus is that which alone can heal the alienation and distress which is so much a mark of human existence.

The ministry exercised by women in our Diocese at the present time is of great significance. The ministry in our parishes is enriched and advanced by trained women ordained and non-ordained, and by a variety of ministries exercised by those who serve as part of their own local church and parish. While the preaching role of women in our churches is a matter that troubles some people, it has been my policy, in succession to those who have preceded me, to authorise suitably qualified women to preach where that has the support of the Rector of the Parish. Our women deacons are well trained and have been used by God to bless the lives of both men and women.

To proclaim in word and deed the saving act of God in Jesus is the service that we offer to the world in his name. To assist those who believe to live faithfully with that which God has revealed as his will and purpose is a service of 'love of the brethren' in which we seek to bear one another's burden and thus fulfil the law of Christ. The diaconal ministry of God's word is fundamental to this calling. The preparation of those who will do this work is a vital component of seeking to honour God in making him known.

Thirdly, the diaconal spirit is displayed in the effort to do good to all and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

"Doing good" is a Christian calling. Doing good to all is an exhibition of the character and concern of God. We, his children, are called to a life of 'good works'.

The ministry of the Deaconess Institution in its works of mercy is an important expression of God's mercy and compassion. It stands as a testimony to his concern for all people. Those who administer this work as well as those who deal face-to-face with the public are part of a ministry of care and concern in his name.

As my service as Archbishop draws to an end permit me once more to offer my personal thanks to the Deaconess Institution and Hope Health Care and to all who serve through these institutions. I wish you all the blessing of God for the future.

Let me to conclude now with the words of the Apostle Paul to Titus.

Titus 3:1-8

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared,5 he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.6 This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.8 The saying is sure.

I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

May the Lord enable you to be faithful until he comes.

RH Goodhew
Archbishop of Sydney
23 November 2000