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Dear John,

First, thank you muchly for the hospitality, and for the time we were able to spend with you. We arrived back on Saturday, with a huge pile of things to do, not least the diaconate thing.

I'm enclosing a copy of the draft summary, which I'm sending to Louis Bank for his comments etc. I'd also like to have any comments you might want to make.

There's another thing, which is not elaborated in the summary, but which I've mentioned to Louis Bank as a possibility for working into a resolution, and which I'll elaborate here : again, I need your comments, quickly

This is the matter of training for deacons, and initial recruitment.

Geoff Davies of the Department of Mission has said that vast sums of money are available for any church willing to start a realistic ministry in resettlement areas. That will immediately gladden the heart of PSC, at not having to find anything immediately from the Common Provincial Fund.

I have an idea, that our old vision of a community teaching politics, theology and agriculture could become a reality.

Among the resolutions Louis drafts for Provincial Synod would be one relating to the training of deacons. At present I don't think any of the theological colleges are suitable. Diocesan In-Service Training programmes are a possible long-term answer, but are too local and difficult to get going from scratch if we want to get the deacons going soon.

One possible answer is a Province-wide training programme perhaps for an initial three year period. I would envisage a modified version of the Nomads idea - three months together, the rest of the year on the job - so it would be a Provincial In-Service training programme.

But unlike the Nomads and other youth things, it would not be concentrated into one month.

The three months would be spread out over the year - say January, June, October, using one of the conference centres, at least initially. Then the rest of the time would be spent in resettlement areas, or in similar situations, engaged in practical ministry. The time together would be used for spiritual development, teaching theory (politics, theology and agriculture, etc) learning skills, and in the later sessions, reflecting on experience.

The scattered times would be spent as licenced lay ministers in a parish, working mainly in a resettlement area, preferably in co-operation with other ministries (evangelists, catechists) Also visiting other projects to see what is being done elsewhere.

At the end of the year, those with a clear vocation could be ordained as deacons, and then for the next couple of years return for one of the one month sessions each year. At least one of the one month sessions would need to include the rectors of the parishes for part of the time (non-attendance by the rector means he doesn't get a deacon) to train them in how to relate to/work with deacons.

This would be very expensive - gathering up to 20 people three times a year at one place is bound to cost a lot of money. But after a three year pilot project, if things were working well, dioceses could then be encouraged to set up their own training, using those trained on the Provincial pilot project to teach the others.

Also, three years after ordination, some of those deacons should be sent abroad for further experience or training, for up to 6 months (of which not more than 1 month is to be spent in Europe or North America)

All this would only train one kind of deacon. Candidates would need to be unmarried, and they would obviously be stipendiary deacons. But I believe this would be a good way of getting a diaconal ministry going in resettlement areas etc., and getting it going quickly. A further thing is, as is stressed in the report, the need to teach people about what deacons are, in order to encourage vocations to the diaconate.

I think we would have plenty of resources for training. I would plan it to begin with a retreat lasting some days (a good old-fashioned silent retreat) preferably led by a bishop (several of whom are quite good at that kind of thing). This would be followed by some time spent on the candidates looking at their own spiritual life, and where they are in relation to God's call (AE people are quite good at this) then a look at different ministries in the church, add the place of the diaconate in the total ministry (Hayes & Aitchison would be quite good at this) Then theology of church and world, salvation and redemption, liberation, leading on to a look at politics and economics, oppression and repression, what the world is like, leading on to some elementary practical skills along the lines of Liberal Party rural organizers courses - how to run a meeting, how to get a community to discuss its problems, choose its leaders, and begin to look for solutions without having solutions imposed on it, and some elementary liturgical skills to - leading Morning and Evening Prayer, administering the chalice, etc.

Such would be the first month. Then out into the field, doing some study with TEE College, Unisa or something. Spending time observing, meeting people, getting to know the situation, doing surveys in preparation for evangelism and other such ministries (perhaps getting evangelists from outside to do this) and then trying to build up a core of leaders, and identify their ministries.

Next month together would begin with evaluation and interpretation - what they observed, did, heard. What the response of the people was, what the problems were. Then interpretation of the problems - theologically, politically, economically. Help here from resources such as PACSA, AFRA, etc.

More theology, and time spent in acquiring particular knowledge/skills relevant in the place where they are working. Finally a tour of resources, depending on where they are working and the needs of that community - for rural communities, AFRA, ACAT, etc. For urban communities, different kinds of development programmes, trade unions, etc. For all communities, evangelistic and relief resources provided by para-church organizations (AE, World Vision, etc)

Back into the field for three months, this time to try to get community organization started, and helping local community leaders with knowledge of resources, legal aid, emergency feeding, health education etc.

Final month together - similar to second month to begin with, then with rectors for a week if possible. How does ministry of deacon fit in to total ministry of the parish, how will the parish as a whole support and encourage this ministry, teaching on the nature of the diaconate, for the benefit of the rector, explanation of the social ministry of deacons, and practice in the liturgical ministry. Then more theology, and another retreat, with the last few days spend considering vocation - whether to be ordained deacon, or be involved in diaconal ministry as a layman, or go off into something else.

This is just a sketch outline of some of the ideas I've had. Let me know what you think . . . soon.

love to all,

