Abstract

Drawing upon reflections and study on the role of deaconess by John Wesley and Lucy Rider Meyer, this paper explores the historic roots and influences upon the role, particularly its initiation rituals. The paper traces the use of an ancient prayer in rituals for initiation to demonstrate the nuances of this lay role’s responsibilities and authority. Set apart through services of consecration, the deaconess provides a formal lay role inclusive of women, later broadened to include laity generally in United Methodism through the lay missioner.

[The Candidates rise, and the Minister, taking the right hand of each Candidate, shall say:]

“I admit thee to the office of Deaconess in the Church of God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Introduction

This paper explores select history of and influences upon deaconesses and their initiation rituals including roots in Scripture and Christian antiquity to John Wesley in the eighteenth and Lucy Rider Meyer in the nineteenth centuries. This paper offers a frame within which to understand use and implications of initiation rites to the roles of deaconess and lay missioner in United Methodism. The role of deaconess was first formally recognized among Methodists by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1888. While a small number of similar Protestant groups preceded this modern recognition of deaconesses, this was the first recognition of a lay ministerial office inclusive of women in Methodism. It was soon followed by other significant Methodist deaconess organizations in the United States—for example the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, German Methodists and African Methodist Episcopal Church. Lucy Rider Meyer, founder of the Chicago Training School and fervent advocate for the office of deaconess within the Methodist Episcopal Church, provides a thoughtful historical study entitled Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American (1889), in which a consecration rite for deaconesses appears. A number of documents from Meyer’s era, as well as earlier, use the language of ‘ordination’ for the initiation of those into the role of deaconess. However, most often such services are considered ‘consecration’ rituals, including the service


2 Among those earlier deaconesses are the deaconesses established by Pastor Theodore Fliedner at Kaiserswerth, Germany in 1833. Fliedner’s establishment of the role of deaconess modeled after English efforts in prisons and work-houses led by Elizabeth Fry and Thomas Chalmers, grew widely to include schools, hospitals, orphanages in the decades to follow. Most would insist the Kaiserswerth deaconesses were not ordained, the initiation rite to the role is described by Lucy Rider Meyer as “consecrated to the work, and in connection with this there is an imposition of hands.” Lucy Rider Meyer, Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American (Chicago, IL: The Message Publishing Company, 1889), 37.
appearing in Meyer’s text as well as the service included in the “Deaconess Manual of the African Methodist Episcopal Church,” (1902).³

Interestingly, the prayer for consecration in the service included in Meyer’s text, as well as in a similar service later included in the appendix of the MEC Discipline beginning in 1896, and in the main body of the MEC Discipline in 1908, share links with a document from early Christianity with which John Wesley was familiar. The following is a translation of the prayer:

Eternal God, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of both man and woman, you who filled Miriam, Deborah, Anna and Huldah with the Spirit, you who did not judge it unworthy for your Son to be born of a woman, you who in the Tent of the Testimony and in the Temple designated women to guard your holy doors; let your gaze now fall upon your [female] servant here present, who has been designated for the diaconate, and give her a holy spirit, cleanse her “from every defilement of body and spirit” [2 Corinthians 7:1], that she may carry out in a worthy fashion the task confided to her, for your glory and for the praise of your Christ, with whom…⁴

This prayer most likely first appears in the Apostolic Constitutions, a document of the early church composed around 380. In subsequent pages we will follow the appearance and use of this prayer to explore the role and initiation rituals of the deaconess (and eventually the lay missioner in Methodism in the United States).

John Wesley and the Role of Deaconess

The office of deaconess within Methodist traditions enjoys a rich history drawing on John Wesley’s innovative re-appropriation of practices from Christian antiquity. John Wesley’s interest in practices of the early Church, such as sick visitors and his introduction to this prayer from the Apostolic Constitutions, received inspiration from Thomas Deacon, a leading Non-Juror, as well as the Moravians Wesley encountered on his voyage to Georgia. John Wesley’s affirmation of the role of deaconess grew from his interest in and reverence for the early church. During the initial years of his ministry, Wesley intended to implement the role of deaconess along with additional early church practices, such as the use of hymns, lay leaders, and extemporaneous prayer and preaching, to recapture the spirit of the early church.⁵ Wesley’s readings, writings, and practices surrounding the time of his journey to Georgia as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel demonstrate his view of the Georgia mission as an opportunity to restore ancient Christian practices and liturgies, particularly among Native Americans in a context with similarities to that of the early church.⁶ The implementation of the role of deaconess while in Georgia was one of Wesley’s initial experiments.

³ These two consecration rituals appear as appendices to this paper.
⁶ Ted Campbell, John Wesley and Christian Antiquity (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 34. Similar to the context of the early church, particularly Native Americans in Georgia had not encountered the gospel in substantial ways beyond earlier Spanish traders.
Throughout his ministry in Georgia, Wesley referred to Thomas Deacon’s work, particularly Deacon’s treatment of the *Apostolic Constitutions* in his *Compleat Collection of Devotions*. Wesley first met Deacon in June 1733 while traveling to Manchester with John Clayton, a tutor from Brasenose College, Oxford. Clayton had convinced Wesley and the Holy Club of the importance of following the practices of the apostles in the earliest days of the church. Correspondence shared between Deacon and Wesley demonstrates Clayton’s success and a persistent interest on the part of Wesley in early church practices. Deacon eventually enlisted Wesley to assist with the compilation of the *Compleat Collection of Devotions*, with Wesley contributing “An Essay upon the Stationary Fasts” from which Deacon included several excerpts. Deacon’s compiled work included a service for the ordination of deaconesses from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, including the prayer quoted earlier. Deacon included the provision for ordaining deaconesses to assist with the administration of baptism by immersion and ministry to women. Deacon based his allegiance to the early church on two principles stated in the preface to his *Compleat Collection of Devotions*:

First. That the best method for all churches and Christians to follow, is to lay aside all modern hypotheses, customs, and private opinions, and submit to all the doctrines, practices, worship, and discipline, not of any Particular, but of the Ancient and Universal Church of Christ, from the beginning to the end of the Fourth century…

Second. That the Liturgy in the Apostolical Constitutions is the most Ancient Christian Liturgy extant; that it is perfectly pure and free from interpolation; and that the book itself, called the Apostolical Constitutions, contains at large the doctrines, laws, and settlements, which the three first and purest ages of the gospel did with one consent believe, obey, and submit…

Wesley shared Deacon’s inclinations and likewise emphasized the lay role of deaconess as an aspect of his evangelistic ministry in the Georgia colony.

The Moravians, a group of Lutheran pietists Wesley encountered on the journey to Georgia, also informed Wesley’s ideas regarding the participation of laity and women in Christian ministry. While sailing to Georgia, Wesley acted as chaplain for the ship, The Simmonds. These Moravians introduced Wesley to their deep spiritual resources of a simple piety, joyful hymns, as well as their communal life—all reminiscent to Wesley of early church practices. In their communal life, the Moravians separated men and women, also similar to the early church, prompting a need for ministry roles by and for women—such as the role of deaconess.

Wesley implemented the role of deaconess in his evangelistic plan for the Georgia colony, both for the purpose of baptism by immersion of newly converted (often Native American) women as

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7 Ibid, 22-23.
12 It is notable that Wesley’s support for the ministry of women endured after his fervor for the *Apostolic Constitutions* faded. Wesley would eventually adopt the position of his father, Samuel Wesley, on the *Apostolic Constitutions*, namely they are too Arian in nature. Phillip Henry, “A Letter to a Curate,” in The Life of Reverend Charles Wesley, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: John Mason, 1841), 2: 514.
13 Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 39. In order to better serve the large group of Moravian immigrants aboard the ship, Wesley learned German.
14 Ibid.
well as for other ministry needs. According to Frank Baker, “At least three women carried similar responsibilities [teaching, and offering pastoral care to the parish], and Wesley seems to have called them ‘deaconsesses.’” Wesley compared the deaconess role in Georgia to his description in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, “It was their office, not to teach publicly, but to visit the sick, women in particular, and to minister to them in both their temporal and spiritual necessities.”

In his sermon “On Visiting the Sick,” Wesley acknowledged a place for women in recognized lay ministries by the church. Wesley argued that women as well as men are made in the image of God, women are equal candidates for immortality with men, and women are also called by God into ministries of the church. Wesley named the deaconess as a precedent for women’s ministries of pastoral care in a letter to Vincent Perronet in 1748, “Upon reflection, I saw how exactly, in this also, we had copied after the Primitive Church. What were the ancient Deacons? What was Phoebe the Deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?” While in Georgia, Wesley produced a manuscript abridgement of Claude Fleury’s *Moeurs des Chretiens*, revealing Wesley’s conceptions held at the time. Among Wesley’s editorial work on the manuscript was the replacement of Fleury’s chapter on the clergy with a distinctly shorter chapter, probably of Wesley’s own hand, explaining the orders of bishop, priest, deacon, and deaconess in the early church. Wesley’s choice to categorize the office of deaconess with the higher clerical orders alludes to the significance he attributed to the pastoral duties of the deaconess. Differences in the jurisdiction and authority assigned to such offices, particularly deacon and deaconess have existed throughout church history. Wesley chose to recognize the similarities of pastoral duties.

**Deaconesses in the Early Church**

The prayer previously quoted in the introduction of this paper found in the *Apostolic Constitutions* appears among the ordination prayers of other clerical offices, after the ordination prayer of the deacon and prior to the ordination prayer of the sub-deacon. Some scholars argue deaconesses received ordination, similar to other offices held by men, based on the following: (1) the service took place during the Eucharist and followed the epiclesis characteristic of the ordination of higher clergy, (2) the service took place in the sanctuary before the altar, (3) the service began at immersion required nudity. The need for a female order, and Wesley’s support for ‘ordained deaconesses,’ is inextricably linked to the practice of baptism by immersion. This reference to ‘ordained deaconesses’ is from a conversation between Wesley and Moravian leader August Gottlieb Spangenberg, recorded in Spangenberg’s diary during their journey to North America. Wesley, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 51.

Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 22


Ibid, 8: 263.


Ibid, 36.

the same time and in the same way as that of the deacon, and (4) the deaconess also received the orarion\textsuperscript{24} after her setting apart and took holy communion at the altar.\textsuperscript{25}

However, differences between the liturgies also exist. For example, the deaconess stood during her service, while the deacon knelt on one knee, and the presbyter knelt on two knees.\textsuperscript{26} During the service the deaconess also did not lean her head against the table. These postures indicated the authority imparted to the individual for the ministries of the altar table. The deaconess wore the orarion differently than the deacon, tucked inside her robe rather than hanging loose outside her robe, since she was not invited to proclaim during the liturgy similar to the deacon who held the orarion in his hand when participating in proclamation.\textsuperscript{27} Another difference involves the laying on of hands. According to Hippolytus, only the bishops, priests, and deacons received the imposition of hands, although in the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions} the deaconess, subdeacon, and reader also received the laying of hands.\textsuperscript{28} Notably, the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions} are considered an aspirational document, rather than historically accurate. In the Nestorian rite, the bishop placed his hand on the deaconesses’ head, not in the manner of ordination, but in order to bless her, perhaps similar to a benediction.\textsuperscript{29} In summary, sources from the early church seem to support setting apart, or the consecration of, deaconesses initiating her into a formal lay role, rather than recognizing the deaconess as another clerical order.

The function of the deaconess in the early church consisted predominantly of charitable and catechetical functions. Liturgical functions assigned to the deaconess were to be administered among women only. On rare occasions the deaconess might participate in a minor liturgical function, such as removing the Eucharistic elements from their storage, if a deacon or presbyter was not available. The primary function of the deaconess, described in the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions} and agreed upon in other ancient documents, was her assistance to the bishop in baptizing female candidates.\textsuperscript{30} The deaconess was responsible for teaching the newly baptized women how to live the holy life, and to be their spiritual mother, as well as distributing charitable contributions to the poor and ministering to the sick in the community.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Apostolic Constitutions} also outline several liturgical functions regarding the deaconess’s responsibility for women congregants: (1) exchanging the kiss of peace with women in the assembly during the Eucharist, (2) keeping the doors for the female side, (3) maintaining order among the women, and (4) receiving female visitors to the worshipping community.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{24} The orarion is a liturgical vestment, a narrow stole, usually four to five inches wide and about ten feet long. The orarion is worn over the left and in the Greek tradition wrapped once diagonally under the right arm. The deacon often takes a section of the orarion in his right hand when leading \textit{Litani\textae} or drawing attention to a particular liturgical action.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 86-87. Among those scholars is well known Orthodox scholar, Evangelos Theodorou.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{27} Martimort, \textit{Deaconesses: An Historical Study}, 245.
\textsuperscript{28} P.R. Smythe, \textit{The Ordination of Women} (London: Skeffington and Son, LTD., 1939), 70.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{30} Fitzgerald, in \textit{Women and the Priesthood}, ed. Hopko, 81.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 81.
These functions were constrained by specific limitations placed upon the deaconess. The deaconess was not allowed to participate in the sacramental anointing of the sick. Despite her role in baptism related to women converts, she was not allowed to participate in the imposition of hands, anointing, or pronouncement of the baptismal formula, each of which required the participation of a priest. The deaconess was not allowed to teach or preach in public. Additionally, admission to the diaconate included more strict qualifications related to age and condition than male roles. While some interpret the deaconess’s authority as similar to the deacon’s based on similarities in the initiation rites attributed to early church practices, this does not necessarily translate into similarities in responsibilities and authority. However, early church sources seem to support a formal lay role for deaconesses.

Lucy Rider Meyer and the Deaconess Movement

The modern revival of the deaconess movement in Methodism in the United States is often attributed to the strategic leadership of Lucy Rider Meyer. With her husband, Josiah Shelly Meyer, the Meyers established the Chicago Training School for deaconesses in 1885. From this organization alongside numerous Deaconess Homes and eventually other training schools founded by other leaders such as Jane Bancroft Robinson and Iva Durham Vennard, scores of women were prepared and sent into the world to minister to those in need. Frances Willard commented on the nature of the deaconess’s contribution, “What a practical element these Deaconesses would introduce into religion.” In her preface to Meyer’s text, Willard describes the deaconess movement as one of “the lost arts” of the religious world, “That the Church could ever have fallen away from an application of Christianity so helpful, comforting, and blessed, having enjoyed it once, furnishes proof sadly significant of the human alloy that so grievously distempers its gold.” Willard held the deaconess movement in high esteem as a valuable resource for the church in her era providing practical service for those in need. The deaconess movement also provided women, and laity generally in the contemporary context, with an opportunity for recognized service in the church as well as training for their role.

Meyer’s book opens with a historical study of deaconesses in biblical as well as early church texts in which she highlights the common thread of the ‘ordination’ prayer from the Apostolic Constitutions later included in the Methodist Episcopal Church’s consecration rite for deaconesses. In addition to acknowledging the significant number of women mentioned in Scripture, particularly by and with Jesus and Paul, Meyer builds her case for a renewed diaconate on exegesis focusing on Romans 16.1-2 and I Timothy 3.11.

In Romans, Phoebe the first deaconess (diakonos) appears in Scripture. According to Meyer, “Nearly all the authorities agree that the proper translation of the celebrated passage, Romans 16.1, should be ‘Phoebe…a Deaconess,’ instead of ‘Phoebe…a servant.’” She continues her reflection

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33 Martimort, Deaconesses: An Historical Study, 176, 247.
34 Ibid., 174-75, 247.
35 Ibid., 247.
36 Smythe, The Ordination of Women, 76.
38 Ibid.
into the second verse, from her translation, “that ye receive her in the Lord, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you, for she hath been a succorer of many and of myself also.” Meyer translates the term *succorer* from the term, *prostatis*, corresponding the latter with the term *president*, or “one who sits or stands in the front of things to direct and control.” According to Meyer, Phoebe was like a president in the church of her time, most likely among other deaconesses.

Meyer’s observations related to I Timothy’s third chapter focus upon the wives of the bishops and deacons in the church. I Timothy 3.11 reads “Even so must their wives [Deacons’ wives presumably] be grave.” According to Meyer, “any careful student will be struck with the fact that *their* is in italics. It was supplied by the translators.” Meyer argues the Greek word used in this verse is *gune*, which may mean wife, but not necessarily as it could also refer to woman. According to Meyer, “There is no intimation that the women spoken of are the feminine complements of the Deacons, their wives; on the contrary, there is strong reason to believe that they are the feminine counterparts of Deacons, Deaconesses.” Meyer continues her argument stating the same adverb precedes the descriptions of both the deacons in verse eight and the women in verse eleven, implying similarities in their roles. According to Meyer, “Moreover, if they were only women in private life, why are they mentioned at all, and why is their character pictured here with that of the Bishops and Deacons? For that matter why are not the wives of the Bishops exhorted as well as the wives of the Deacons?” Meyer concludes her argument with references to respected biblical commentators from Christian tradition:

Chrysostom says of this passage, it means not women in general, but Deaconesses. Jerome translates it ‘mulieres similiter’—similar women, and Wycliffe, a thousand years later, translated it quaintly: ‘Also it bihoveth wymmen to be chaste,’ etc. The more we study this passage, the more sure we may be they were not ordinary private women, but the women of the church, in which case all is plain. Paul, in giving the character of the Deacons, would next most naturally speak of the Deaconesses.

Meyer laments these frequent mistranslations, i.e. Phoebe called a “servant” in Romans 16.1-2 and women referred to as “wives” in I Timothy 3.11 rather than as deaconess(es), as undermining the role and impact of the deaconess in the church.

Interestingly, many such as Thomas Deacon, John Wesley, and Lucy Rider Meyer, as well as the Methodist Episcopal Church’s *1892 Journal of the General Conference Missions’ Committee Report*, refer to the deaconess as ordained and her ritual of initiation to the role as ordination. However, this language is not adequately substantiated either by early church materials or the legislation of Methodist denominations. The initiation rituals of the deaconess, though similar to those of the ordination of deacon, are most often referred to as consecration services. The women consecrated to the office of deaconess are both “set apart” by the Church and given the Spirit’s “holy anointing” to imitate Jesus Christ “ministering as he did to the wants of a suffering, sorrowing, and sin-laden world.”

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40 Ibid., 14.
41 Ibid., 15.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 16.
44 Ibid.
46 *1896 Methodist Episcopal Doctrines and Discipline*, Appendix ¶ 55, p. 365.
In her study of deaconesses in the early church, Meyer acknowledges the *Apostolic Constitutions* as the source for a “prayer to be used at the ordination of Deaconesses.” Meyer includes an introduction to the prayer, and the prayer, the same prayer included earlier in this paper, in her text highlighting the liturgical practice of episcopal imposition of hands: “Touching the Deaconess, I Bartholomew, do thus ordain. O Bishop, thou shalt lay on her thy hands in the presence of the Deacons and Deaconesses, and thou shalt say…” Following the mention of the prayer and its introduction, Meyer explains that this prayer was also used in the ritual of consecration for setting apart deaconesses in the Methodist Episcopal Church at the suggestion of Professor Charles F. Bradley, faculty member in New Testament at Garrett Biblical Institute. According to Meyer, “Nothing could be more appropriate, with perhaps the omission of a single sentence, and nothing, certainly, can be of greater historical interest.”

The sentence referred to is most likely, “Cleanse her from all impurity of the flesh and of the spirit.” This line appeared in the ritual text included in Meyer’s historical account of deaconesses. However, it was later omitted in the ritual texts included in the Methodist Episcopal *Discipline* from 1896 to 1908 and following. The latter omitted statement offered support for the assertion of the impurity of women and allusion to women’s participation in the fall of humankind (Genesis 3). In addition to the understanding among late nineteenth century clergy that women possessed innate gifts that fitted them for domestic work as well as visitation, nursing and care of children, allusions to women’s weakness of flesh also appear throughout primary sources describing Methodist deaconess work.

The contrasting themes of denominational sanction and qualified relegation to traditional gender constructs of the era throughout the deaconess consecration rituals is paradoxical. The long heritage of the prayer originating with the *Apostolic Constitutions* with its scriptural allusions witnesses to the importance of the work of women in compassionate ministries, and the role of compassionate ministries in the church’s witness throughout church history. Yet, Christian tradition has insisted upon the qualification of women’s ecclesiastical authority and often the degradation of compassionate ministries to and prescribed limited spheres of authority in specific roles.

The earliest consecration rite for deaconesses in the Methodist Episcopal Church appeared in the appendices to Lucy Rider Meyer’s text published in 1889. This rite, prepared by the Rock River Annual Conference’s Board of Deaconesses, was composed for the purpose of consecrating licensed deaconesses in that annual conference following the approval of the office of deaconess at the 1888 General Conference. The first use of the consecration rite occurred in June 1889, when three women were set apart as the first deaconesses in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Minor alterations were made to this original text before the ritual was included in the 1896 Methodist Episcopal *Discipline*. The alterations consisted of the omission of a responsive reading from Matthew 25. 31-46 and an opening statement made by the president. Additions included a hymn,

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 25
50 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 204-205. The names of the three deaconess candidates were Isabella A Reeves, Evelyn Keeler, and Fannie E Canfield.
promises in the candidates’ examination regarding scripture, ministry and obedience, as well as an invocation of the Holy Spirit. This revised consecration ritual was included in the appendix to the Methodist Episcopal Discipline beginning in 1896. The consecration rite eventually found its place within the main text of the 1908 Methodist Episcopal Discipline following the rituals for the ordination of elders and deacons. This period of twenty years between the official recognition of the deaconess as an order of ministry in the MEC and the inclusion of its consecration rite in the Discipline alongside the ordination rituals for deacons and elders may demonstrate hesitancy toward the female lay order among the denomination.

Conclusion

Meyer consistently advocated for women’s in ministry alongside men, particularly in roles of service to those in need. According to Meyer, “We are always amazed at the rapid growth of the early church. Beginning with a handful of unlearned and persecuted men, in three centuries it spread through the civilized world…” Meyer then claims, “May not the explanation of this astonishingly rapid growth be found, partly, at least in this multitude of devoted Christian women, who as ministrae worked side by side with the ministers of the gospel…?” She then boldly continues, “How much of that darkness [Dark Ages] was caused by the lack of woman’s God-given work [and the suppression of the role of deaconess], we may only conjecture. It cannot have been little.”

Deaconess Manual of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
By Abraham Grant (1902)
“Ceremony of Consecration” (pages 23-25)

23

HOW CONSTITUTED.

A woman feeling herself called to the office of Deaconess may state the same to her pastor. If the pastor regards her as a suitable person for Deaconess, he shall present her name to the Official Board. If the Official Board regard her as worthy it shall elect her Deaconess and select a committee of three Stewardesses to arrange for her consecration. On a day appointed by the Bishop, for consecration of Deaconesses, all persons to be consecrated shall appear in full Deaconess garb. The Bishop, some person appointed by him, shall deliver address or sermon, setting forth the importance, responsibilities and duties of the Deaconess,

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The committee of Stewardesses shall conduct the candidates to the pastor, who shall present them to the Bishop.

54 1896 Doctrines and Discipline, Methodist Episcopal Church, Appendix ¶ 55, 363-67.
55 1908 Discipline MEC, 400, para 508.
56 Meyer, Deaconesses, 26.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 27.
CEREMONY.

Pastor: "Reverend Father in God, I present these holy women to be consecrated Deaconesses."

The Bishop: "Take heed that these women whom you present be proper persons to perform the work of a Deaconess, and that they be of sober mind, modest in all their ways and possessed of large charity."

_Pastor:_ "They have been examined and are believed to be well qualified to enter upon the sacred duties of Deaconess."

_The Bishop:_ "It becometh the Deaconess that she shall be pious, chaste, temperate in all things, modest, humble, industrious and devout, as she is to serve the Church of God to His praise and glory. Throughout the history of the Church God has been pleased to call and qualify certain women for the gentler and holy service of ministering to the Church and the ministry. Such women were Deborah, Mary the holy mother, Eunice, Lois, Priscilla, Lyddia and Phoebe. And in the latter days He has been pleased to own and bless the labors of Sister Sarah Gorham and many others. May the Lord bless and acknowledge these persons according as he has blessed the ministrations of all holy women. May they withdraw themselves from all worldly cares and vocations and give themselves up entirely to ministrations to the Church and to suffering humanity."

Then shall the Bishop inquire of the candidates as follows:

"Have you duly considered the sacredness, the ex-

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actions and responsibilities of this office which you have come to enter?"

_Answer:_ "I have considered them all."

_Bishop:_ "Are you determined to observe all the rules for a Deaconess, give yourself up to such li and duties as these rules require, and keep yourse unspotted from the world, all its vanities and frivolities?"

_Answer:_ "I am so determined."

_Bishop:_ "Will you be governed by the discipline of the A.M.E. Church and subject to the direct ion given in the discharge of the duties of your office?"

_Answer:_ "I will be so governed."

Then shall the persons to be consecrated kneel.

_The Bishop_, taking each candidate by the hand, shall say to her:

_Bishop:_ "Be thou consecrated to the office and work of a Deaconess in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."
“Order of Service for the Consecration of Deaconesses”
from Lucy Rider Meyer, *Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American* Methodist Episcopal Church
1889
APPENDIX B.

ORDER OF SERVICE FOR CONSECRATION OF DEACONESSES.*

LEADER.—The duties of this hour call us to assemble in the presence of Almighty God to celebrate and confirm a sacred office through a solemn covenant. That we may understand more fully the meaning of this covenant, let us recall certain circumstances connected with the organization of the Christian Church. In the Early Church there were widows and orphans, and sick and poor who daily required assistance, but who were overlooked for want of persons duly appointed to minister unto them. Because of this the Apostles called together the church and commanded that men should be chosen, of good report and full of the Spirit of God, to take care of those afflicted and destitute ones. Shortly afterwards women were appointed as assistants in this work, among whom was probably Phebe, the honored woman of whom Paul speaks in highest praise. Thus originated the office of Deaconesses in the Church of God. For many centuries Deaconesses were found acceptable and profitable helpers in the Church. Their labors were among the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and the children. At this hour these women before us desire to be appointed to a like work of love in the Church of God. They are of good report; they have obtained the evidence of their sins forgiven and the witness of the Holy Spirit; they hold the faith of the Gospel in a pure conscience; they were tried long as probationers, and have proved themselves blameless and skillful in the service of the sick and poor. Under the instructions of physicians and Biblical teachers, they have been prepared to meet the physical and spiritual needs of those to whom they will be called to minister; and having thus been qualified and found worthy, we are here to-day for the purpose of consecrating them Deaconesses in the Church of God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*Prepared by the "Board of Deaconesses" of the Rock River Conference; used first by Bishop Thomas Bowman, in Chicago.
RESPONSIVE READINGS.

LEADER.—The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

CONGREGATION.—For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich.

LEADER.—Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

CONG.—Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord when saw we Thee an hungered and fed Thee? Or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in? Or naked and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick or in prison and came unto Thee?

LEADER.—And the King shall answer and say unto them, verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

CONG.—The Lord doth build up Jerusalem; he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.

LEADER.—He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord and of Great power; his understanding is infinite.

CONG.—The Lord lifteth up the meek; he casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; Sing praise upon the harp unto our God: for he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.

LEADER.—Have respect unto the covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.

CONG.—O let not the oppressed return ashamed; let the poor and needy praise Thy name.

LEADER.—Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness. Therefore God thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

CONG.—All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made Thee glad.

LEADER.—Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women; upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.
CONG.—Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget all thine own people and thy father's house.
LEADER.—So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.
CONG.—The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold.
LEADER.—She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work; the virgins, her companions that follow her, shall be brought unto thee.
CONG.—With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace.
LEADER.—I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee forever and ever.
CONG.—Let thy work appear unto thy servants and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea the work of our hands establish thou it.

LEADER.—Dear Sisters: Forasmuch as you desire this office and work, it is but fitting that you should be here reminded of the duties that will devolve upon you, as set forth in the law of the Church of which you are a member. You are to minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray with the dying, care for the orphan, seek the wandering, comfort the sorrowing, save the sinning, and, relinquishing wholly all other pursuits, devote yourselves to such forms of Christian labor as may be suited to your abilities.

Are you convinced that God has called you to this ministration in the Church?
CANDIDATES.—I am.
LEADER.—Do you, in the presence of God and this congregation, determine faithfully to perform the duties pertaining to the office of Deaconess in the Church of God?
CANDIDATES.—I do.
LEADER.—Dear Sisters: The motto that you have chosen for your life-work is, "For Jesus' sake." You are doubtless associating self-denial and self-sacrifice with the blessed words, but they have other associations as well. Jesus says that he who renders the humblest service for His sake—gives even the cup of cold water in His name, shall in no wise lose his reward. You will walk among the sick and poor and friendless, but you will not walk alone. You will have the constant reward of your Lord's companionship. And since Jesus has also said, "Forasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these
my little ones ye have done it unto Me,” you will also have the joy of knowing that you are ministering to the suffering Lord Himself, in the person of His suffering members; a privilege that might well be coveted by the angels in heaven.

Let us pray:

*O, eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator both of man and woman, who didst anoint with Thy holy spirit Mary, Deborah, Anna, and Huldah, who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman, who also in the tabernacle, the testimony, and the temple, didst appoint woman as keepers of Thy holy gate, look now on these Thy handmaidens, here set apart for the office of a Deaconess. Give unto them Thy holy spirit. Cleanse them from all impurity of the flesh and of the spirit. Accomplish the task committed unto them to the glory and praise of thy Christ, with whom to Thee and the Holy Spirit, be glory and worship for ever and ever, amen.

*This form of prayer is recorded in the “Apostolic Constitutions,” and was doubtless used in the consecration of the Deaconesses of the Second and Third Centuries.

CONFERRING OF LICENSES. By the Chairman of the Board of Deaconesses.

PRAYER HYMN.

God of all blessing, lay Thy hand
Upon these bowed heads to-day.
They kneel to touch Thy garment’s hem;
They rise to follow in Thy way.

Take—O thou Father of the poor,
Thou Saviour of the sinner,—take
These feet that choose the rougher path,
Through sin and want, “for Jesus’ sake.”

Take Thou these hands, for love of Thee
So freely yielded to Thy poor;
So gladly to Thy guidance given;
So emptied of all earthly store.

God of all comfort, take these hearts
Loosed from the world, and won to Thee;
Seal them for service in Thy name:
Bind them to Thine eternally!