A Worked Example[1]

This worked example describes a consultancy project about individual and collective vocations in the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO). (See pp 257-260 and 325-326 for discussions on vocation.) It spanned three years, 1992-1995. Extensive records were kept. A comprehensive evaluation was made by the participants. A detailed account of the consultancy processes was published in 1996. This means that a reliable case history can be produced which illustrates aspects of the consultancy processes and procedures described in this book. In this case the consultant acted as a consultant, co-consultant and facilitator to an organization through working with small and large groups. Members of the Order acquired facilitative and co-consultancy skills in order to get people thinking as widely and deeply as possible—including those whose beliefs and ideas differed significantly from their own. Substantial private preparation was necessary for the public events. The design and structuring of the project evolved through tailoring the initial plan to cope with contingencies.

Consultations were held in several settings. Facilitating team meetings were held in the lounge of the Order's House in Birmingham. The seven members sat in a circle in comfortable seats around lounge coffee tables covered by large sheets of paper on which diagrams and charts were drawn and then pinned on the walls. The meetings started around 11.00 am and concluded about 4.00 pm, the team having lunched together. The "service team", the consultant, Jane Middleton and Hilary Smith, met for the same length of time either in an office in London or the consultant's study. These arrangements facilitated the work and bonded the members of the team as an effective working unit. Convocation (the annual meeting of all the members of the Order including those in training and those retired) took place in the Swanwick Conference Centre, Derbyshire.

I   Background: The Emergence of the Methodist Diaconal Order

For over one hundred years within the life of the Methodist Church there have been those who have been called to and exercised full-time diaconal ministry. For most of this period women exercised their ministry through the Wesley Deaconess Order (WDO). In 1978 it was decided to cease recruiting. This was a difficult decision because the WDO had an important place within the life of the Church. Members found this very painful: they could only look forward to the slow and inevitable death of the Order. Amongst the complex reasons for this decision were: the changing role of women in society; the acceptance of women within the presbyteral ministry; the decline in the number of candidates. Eight years later the Methodist Conference, the legislating body of the Methodist Church, decided that the Order

should reopen and took the radical step of suggesting that men as well as women could offer as candidates.[2] It became known as the Methodist Diaconal Order.

The events which followed proved this to have been a good decision. During the first five years there was such an influx that the number of students, probationers and those newly ordained equalled those members of the WDO in appointments. Some of the new people were men, many were older candidates who brought with them a breadth of experience.

In 1990 a new and renewed order celebrated its centenary and in doing so there was recognition that the MDO had emerged from the WDO; its history, its tradition and its commitment to servant ministry were gladly owned. But questions were being asked, particularly by new people, about who they were as members of the Order and where they were going. They were questioning their training and their status in the church. They were struggling with basic questions related to diaconal ministry and the Order as a religious order. For some there was a sense of frustration at the lack of answers.

Quite independently, the Methodist Conference (the supreme governing body of the Church) decided that further work needed to be done on the theological basis and the place of diaconal ministry within the whole church. Critical attention was focussed on two basic questions. What is the nature of diaconal ministry? Is the Methodist Diaconal Order an order of ministry and/or a religious order? Some quite radical ideas emerged and gained credence, not least among ecumenical partners. Chief amongst these was that the MDO is an order of ministry in its own right alongside that of presbyteral ministry.[3] Discussions about diaconal ministry were also occurring in local churches, circuits, among presbyteral ministers and within other denominations.

II   The Need for the Order to Think for Itself

While appreciating what was happening elsewhere the Warden of the Order, Deacon (The title now given to female and male members of the Order) Christine Walters, believed that the Order needed to do its own thinking and find answers for itself. Individuals need to be clear about their personal vocation in order to exercise, as they must, their ministry independently. But, if they are to represent the order of ministry to which they belong and to work interdependently and collaboratively within it, they need to understand and to embody its collective vocation and to be caught up in it. Consequently, creative interplay between individual and collective vocations is at the heart of building both effective vocational communities and workers.

Other members of the MDO Staff Team[4] agreed with the Warden. They too wanted to know what those called and committed to diaconal ministry really felt and thought about their vocation. Also, they wanted to know how they were responding to the ideas emerging from the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church appointed to report to the Conference about diaconal ministry. If the church is to think and act as one, official statements and the actualities of diaconal ministry in Christian and secular communities must inform and complement each other. Most people's understanding of diaconal ministry will come from their experience of deacons and deaconesses in the church and in the community not from official church reports. The Staff Team, along with other members of the Order, were convinced that individual members needed to think about their own ideas and feelings, to share them with others, to enter into each other's experience and to consider what was emerging in relation to the way in which, as we noted earlier, the Methodist Conference was radically reshaping the Church's understanding of diaconal ministry and its place in the Church.

III   Seeking Consultancy Help

Opening up the discussion in this way was adventurous. It was quite a different approach to the more normal one of seeking to persuade people to adopt a particular attitude. The Staff Meeting realised it was a risky business. It could be unitive, but all too easily it could lead to faction. Significant differences were known to exist between the members about key issues, and some anger, hurt and insecurities led to cries for certainties. The Staff Team felt that the risks had to be taken in a calculated way because it was their absolute conviction that the integrity of the Order, its well-being and effectiveness depended upon all the members thinking through all the issues openly, freely and rigorously in an atmosphere of loving care for each other and those to whom they minister in church and society. They were prepared to take the risks providing that they could get the consultancy help from outside the Order which they felt would help them to handle the potentially contentious issues and maximise the possibilities of them achieving their objectives for diaconal ministry.

Three of them had attended Avec work consultancy courses of the kind described in pp 357-360 and Appendix III. They had been helped to see ways and means of translating their commitment to participation into practice in the Order by working *with* as well as *for* people. They felt that someone committed to the *avec* approach could help them but the other members of the Staff Team had not the experience or the knowledge to make an informed judgement for themselves. Deciding who to invite was such a critical step that the Team rightly decided to approach it circumspectly. Deacon Hilary Smith was deputed to have an exploratory conversation with me about the possibility of my providing consultancy help. (To highlight the consultant's role I will refer to myself as "the consultant".)

She spent several hours with the consultant. They conceptualised the working situation, considered the Team's objectives, modelled alternative approaches to achieving them and discussed what would be involved in the consultant being employed by the Team, including the costs. The consultant suggested that if they wanted to explore the possibility further one way would be for a self-contained twenty-four hour consultative meeting to explore what was involved in promoting the kind of participation they had in mind, and then for the Staff Team and the consultant to decide whether they wished to proceed further with the consultancy. This would mean that, whatever the decision about a consultancy arrangement, the Staff Team would have a project design.

Hilary Smith reported back to the Staff Team. Members responded positively to the suggestions about possible ways of achieving their objectives, the consultancy help that could be proffered and the idea of a meeting to get the information required to decide for or against a consultancy contract.

IV Designing, Organising and Developing a Consultative Process and Exploring Possible Consultancy Arrangements

A twenty-four hour residential meeting was arranged for April 1993 to share ideas, design a consultative process and to provide the information to make informed decisions on both sides about a consultancy contract. By way of preparation for the meeting members wrote notes on their hopes and expectations and things they thought must be taken into account. The consultant prepared a briefing paper which included a synthesis of all the points made.

This formal summary somehow stifled free flowing discussion. So at the consultant's suggestion it was put on one side and the Staff Team members discussed what they wanted the Order to be and to do, to achieve and to avoid. The discussion flowed fast and furious. Members worked in pairs on one aspect or another and summarised their findings on pieces of paper. The consultant combined these to form the collage reproduced in Figure 3:1. This displays clearly the approach of the Staff Team to the work that lay before them. Achieving such a comprehensive and clear picture of complicated issues excited and energised the Team.

A possible consultancy process was sketched out and possible ways in which the consultant could be deployed were carefully considered. The Staff Team and the Consultant agreed to establish a consultancy relationship to work together up to the 1994 Convocation.

It was decided that the Staff Team plus the consultant should be the facilitating team to the Order for the project. This meant that, whilst the consultant was the facilitator to the facilitating team and through them to the Order, he was not the facilitator to the Order: some of *the* facilitating tasks were to be undertaken by members of the Order and others by the consultant. Gradually as the project
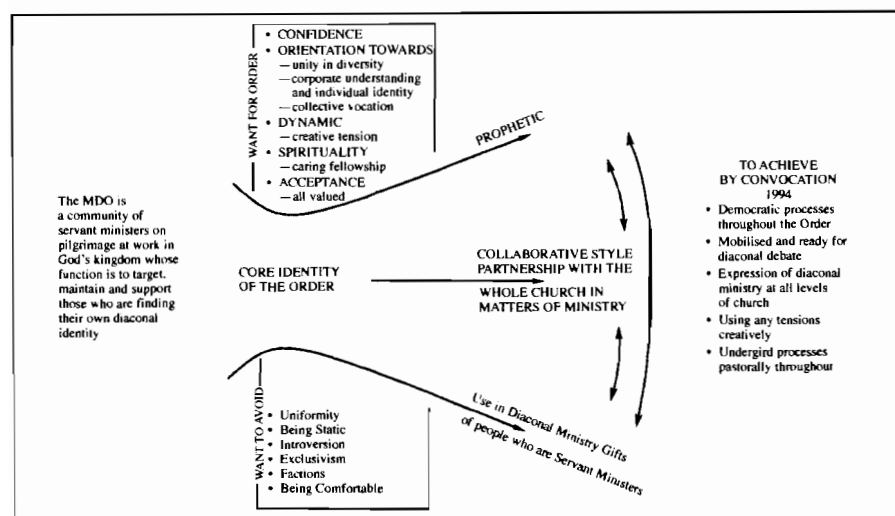

Figure 3:1 The Facilitating Team's Thinking at the Beginning of the Process in 1993

proceeded an arrangement evolved by which Jane Middleton, Hilary Smith and the consultant serviced the facilitating team by doing a lot of background and preparatory work. Clarifying these working relationships was important; staying in role was vital. By common consent the arrangement proved to be creative: it combined internal and external expertise; it developed the facilitating skills of the Staff Team and other members of the Order.

V Developing the Consultative Process

Even though it was agreed, and thoroughly tested by the consultant, that the project was about members thinking things out together, during the early stages, members of the Order in the facilitating team had lingering nagging feelings that *they ought to know the answers*. These feelings persisted even though they knew that the facilitating team's job was to help all the members to find answers together and that they had to find their own answers like everyone else. The consultant got them to examine their feelings. Gradually, as their feeling caught up with their reason, they became convinced that they did not need to know *their* answers to get others thinking for themselves. Once this was sorted out the facilitating team disciplined itself to exploring the issues during their meetings only in as much as it was necessary to carry out the facilitating task; this enabled them to conserve their energies for that task and avoid developing a party line.

The consultant gave a lead in constructing a flow chart similar to that in Figure 3:2 which helped the facilitating team to conceptualise, design and manage the twin central processes: that by which the facilitating team got the members of the MDO to work at diaconal ministry; that by which the members of the MDO worked at the
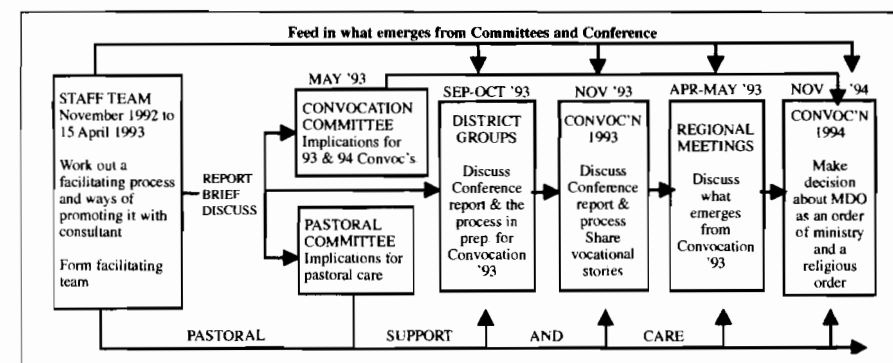

Figure 3:2 Internal Decision-making Flow Chart

subject matter and the outcome. Here we concentrate on the consultative process rather than the nature and praxis of diaconal ministry.

At one of the meetings of the facilitating team, the Warden said as an aside, that she was experiencing considerable difficulties in holding together the various things that were happening. Members expressed sympathy and the consultant encouraged her to expand on the difficulties she was experiencing. Cross referencing discussions about the Order in various courts of the Church with its everyday life,

she said, was complicated. All the discussions—those within the MDO and those in the Church at large had implications for the present as well as the future. In some instances these had to be anticipated without presuming what the Conference would eventually decide about the Order. At times this complicated decision making and planning. A simple diagram, Figure 3:3, helped the Warden and the facilitating team to consider the issues. It was realised that some of the difficulties resulted from a tendency to put, at the centre of this diagram, the particular stream of activity which was in focus rather than to hold to the centrality of the essential activity. Also, there was a tendency for the Warden to feel when engaged in one stream that working it out in another was "her responsibility". Whereas, what was involved in doing so needed to be part of any of the discussions because it was part of the reality. Keeping all three in mind helped the Warden and the team to set the consultancy process in context and to work at it holistically. It also helped the Warden to do the same when
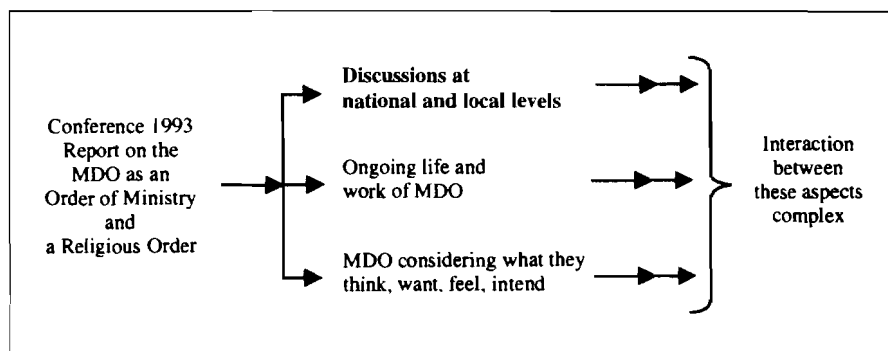

Figure 3:3 Process in Context

she was deeply embroiled in Connexional or domestic discussions. (Later the diagram helped Convocation 1994 to see things in perspective.)

VI Vocational Exploring and Sharing

The consultant and the facilitating team had to expedite three main phases of exchange between the members. The first involved telling and listening to personal stories. The second was considering in regional groups what was emerging from the collection of stories. The third was coming to a collective mind in the 1994 Convocation.

1. Sharing Personal Stories and Testimonies

Each member was encouraged to reflect personally about their own experience of diaconal ministry. Open questions were provided about: their personal calling; how they saw their own future development and that of the Order; what being a member of the Order meant to them and what it enabled them to do and be; their contribution to the Order and ways in which it sustained their ministry. Having done their own personal thinking, arrangements were made for members to share their stories in their District Groups. (These established groups enabled members living in the same area to meet three or four times a year.) In the briefing for this sharing they were encouraged to enter into each others' experience through listening

undividedly to each other in turn and discouraged from a general sharing of experience which is quite a different kind of activity. The sharing was presented as a wonderful opportunity to explore their own vocational identity and that of the Order and to dream about the future of the diaconal ministry and their part in it.

Members did reflect and share. There was a small but representative response to the request that notes of what emerged be sent by individuals and District Groups to the facilitating team. Notes were collated and used to prime the next round of exchanges which was at Convocation 1993. This took place in small "mixed" groups, made up of: retired and active members; probationers and students. Now they were asked to reflect on the stories in the light of what was happening in the church locally and nationally and in the world. A person from each group acted as a facilitator and another as a scribe. Reflections of each of the groups were recorded. A summary of the records was presented to Convocation so that every member had an overview of what was emerging from all the groups in order to check that all points had been noted. (The consultant helped to prepare for and service this aspect of Convocation but was not present.)

Two members of the facilitating team and the consultant collated and classified all the points made in the group reports. Care was taken to be comprehensive and faithful to what had been said—wherever possible the phraseology of the reports was used and ambiguities were included. A copy of the paper was sent to every member to give them a picture of the range of thought in the Order. To avoid any idea that it was being offered as the collective thought of the Order it was entitled, "A Collection of Thoughts About the Methodist Diaconal Order".

2. Reflecting in Regional Groups

The next stage was to get members discussing what they felt and thought about what all members were saying about diaconal ministry. Regional meetings were organised in Birmingham, Bristol, London, Manchester and York. Anyone unable to
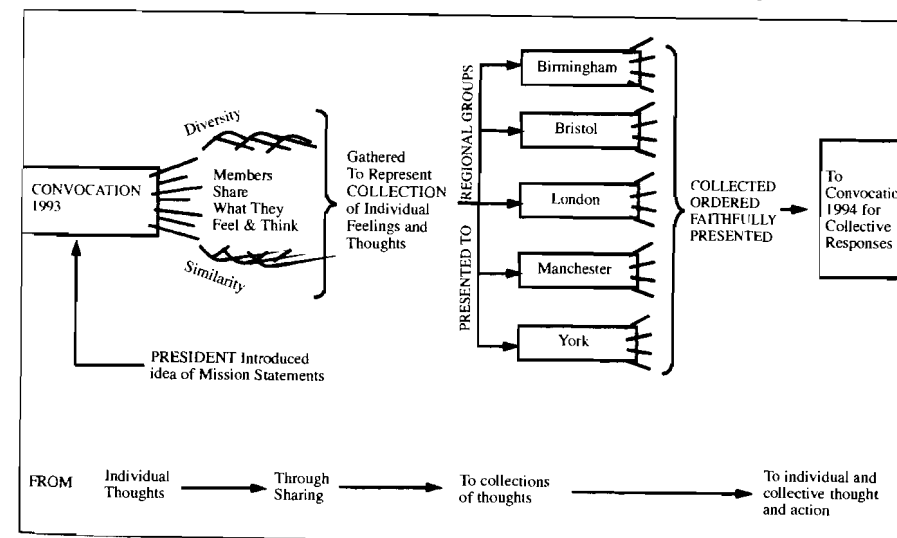

Figure 3:4 Critical Aspects of the Core Process

attend was asked to speak to someone who was, so that their voice could be heard by proxy. These groups considered the collection of thoughts about the Order.

A problem surfaced as the facilitating team prepared for the regional groups. Some facilitators felt that members of the Order could feel that they were being asked to go over the same ground *ad nauseam*. If that happened, it could spell the death of the process. The consultant encouraged the team to grapple with this possibility and the problem of maintaining the momentum of the process. The feeling was caused by revisiting the material several times in order to take manageable incremental steps from individual to collective thought. Nothing would be gained by accelerating this process to avoid the feeling of *déjà vu*. Two things emerged. The facilitating team came to a clearer understanding of the core process. Figure 3:4 shows how this was conceptualised by the consultant. Presenting such a picture of the process to the regional groups, the team realised, would not only stem any negative feelings about lack of progress but enable members to participate in more informed and active ways in the process.

The second thing that emerged was quite different. So far the discussion had been about the Order as an order of diaconal ministry in its own right alongside the presbyteral ministry. Much less attention had been given in the official papers and in the discussion, to the Diaconal Order as a religious order. The facilitating team felt it was important that both issues be considered. To stimulate further thought the consultant prepared a discussion paper, "The MDO as a Religious Order: Some Issues for Consideration".

This enabled the consultant and the facilitating team to plan the regional meetings with great care. A basic "facilitating structure" for the meetings was designed. Members of the team formed themselves into pairs of facilitators. Each pair undertook responsibility for one or two meetings. The consultant encouraged and helped each pair to make the structure their own and to prepare to act as non-directive facilitators. Problems they foresaw were discussed with the consultant and role-played in the facilitating team. Scribes were appointed. Briefing papers were sent out in advance.

By and large the meetings went well. Summaries were made by the facilitators before the meetings closed so that they could check them with the people concerned. Again they were at pains to use the language of the group. The scribes' notes made a mountain of material.

3. From a Collection of Vocations to Commitment to a Collective Vocation at Convocation 1994

Preparation for the next stage, the 1994 Convocation, meant yet another round of gathering together and making readily accessible to the members the vast amount of material that had emerged from the regional meetings. This gargantuan task was accomplished by identifying principal themes and then clustering together similar points and phrases to get an overall structure. Cutting and pasting copies of the records filled out the structure. Editing produced a briefing paper.

What emerged was a verbal picture of how members of the Methodist Diaconal Order saw, thought, and felt about their own diaconal ministry and about the MDO as an order of ministry and as a religious order. Obtaining a reliable synopsis of the

thinking of the Order was, of itself, a major achievement and development. Each member of Convocation could now engage with the thinking of all the members of the Order in ways simply not otherwise possible. And the thinking of the members of the Order could now be compared and contrasted more realistically with that of the Faith and Order Report which set out how the Church saw the ministry and organisation of the Order, the theology upon which it was based and its future. All round, better informed debate and dialogue was now possible.

Originally it had been envisaged that most of the three-day Convocation would be given up to the process of discernment. In the event there were five sessions of one and a quarter to one and a half hours' duration. The problem was how to get upwards of a hundred and fifty people to think through tricky highly charged issues with a realistic chance of them arriving at a consensus. There were several things the facilitating team felt it must do for Convocation which would help to create the optimum conditions for a good outcome.

The first of these was the preparation of objectives for the five sessions and a draft mission statement: it would be quite impossible in the time available for such a large group to produce these for themselves but it would be possible for them to adopt or adapt or reject them. The objectives related to the effective completion of a discernible stage of the process and to getting members to articulate, register and address concerns, issues and conflicts.

At an earlier stage, the idea of the Order producing a mission statement was introduced by the Revd Dr Brian Beck when he addressed Convocation during his year as President of the Methodist Conference, 1993-94. The facilitating team had not set out with the intention that the Order should formulate a mission statement. But, as the process unfolded it came to be seen as a consensus making tool: it gave the process a focus and a goal. Realistically speaking there was no way that the members of Convocation could produce for themselves in the time available the first draft of a mission statement. But, as with the objectives, they could work at a statement to make it their own. So, members of the facilitating team set out to produce a draft statement which best represented the thinking of the Order as revealed by the work done so far. From the words and phrases that had come from the regional meetings a draft mission statement was formulated by Jane Middleton and Hilary Smith with an ease that surprised them and checked out with the consultant against criteria for effective mission statements established beforehand.[5]

Then, the team, and the consultant had to prepare themselves to facilitate the five sessions of Convocation allocated to the process. First they established the overall facilitating structure and then that for each session. Facilitating the sessions was shared, two members taking primary responsibility for each session. But, to do the necessary thinking in depth small groups would be required and they too would need facilitators. These were called "base groups" and "base group facilitators" respectively. Twenty-two were recruited. They were briefed by the consultant before and during Convocation and offered ways of using and structuring the group meetings and dealing with problems they encountered. They, with the facilitating team, became an extended facilitating group. They made enormous contributions towards making the process work and as things went along they introduced important amendments to the procedures.

Considerable care was taken in introducing the proposed tasks to the members of Convocation and checking them for agreement. Using Figures 3: 3 and 4 they were introduced to the overall processes. Then using Figure 3:5 they were introduced to what was proposed for Convocation 1994; they already had copies of the draft objectives. Once these suggestions were presented and clarified members went into their base groups to discuss what they felt about the proposed procedures and
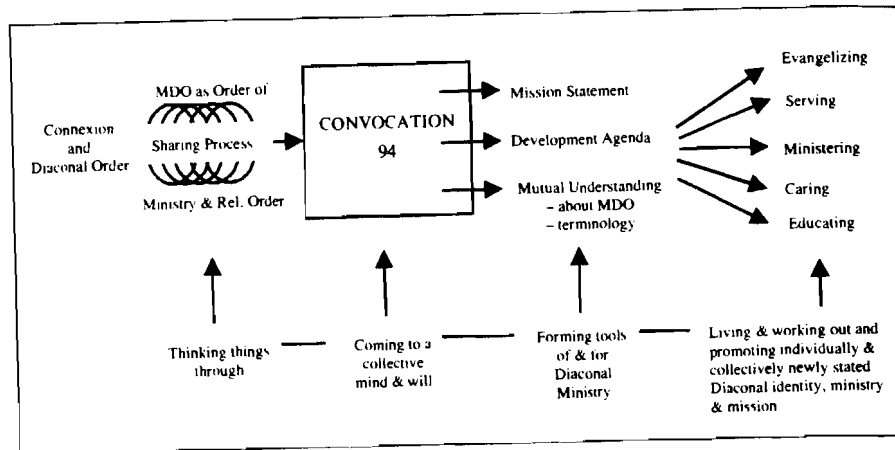

Figure 3:5 Overview, Convocation 1994

objectives and whether or not they would give themselves to the work involved. The proposals were adopted and a plethora of critical issues about the process and the outcome were tabled and dealt with to everyone's satisfaction. Convocation unanimously agreed to get on with the work with a will.

Base group facilitators worked with mixed representative groups of seven/eight people in relation to the objectives, the mission statement and all the other topics. Deciding how to feed back the thinking of the groups to all the members of Convocation was a problem. Verbal reports to plenary sessions by the base group leaders were impractical, there simply was not the time for twenty-two reports and even if there had been time they would have killed the Convocation stone dead! The way we got round this was that immediately after sessions and each evening the facilitators met the consultant. He debriefed them and summarised their reports verbally and in charts and diagrams. Then he made presentations to plenary sessions using an overhead projector and checked them out for acceptability. They did not normally take more than seven minutes. Also, groups displayed sheets summarising their discussions so that members could browse at leisure. The system worked well but it put a heavy strain upon the facilitators and the consultant, not least because the critical sessions were closely clustered.

At Convocation all the issues raised over the two years came into play as the one hundred and fifty members present discussed the mission statement. Thoughts, feelings and adrenaline flowed fast and at times furiously. This was the crucial debate. Much was at stake. A lot had been invested in the process. And members were mindful of a previous attempt to come to a common mind that had failed. They

were wary and worried by the possibility of another failure and of the danger of settling for a superficial statement to avoid the appearance of having failed.

The initial presentation to a plenary session of the draft mission statement by Jane Middleton was received with acclaim. (Had it been put to the vote at this point it would undoubtedly have been adopted with a resounding majority. Subsequent difficulties to reach an agreement led some to say that advantage should have been taken of that moment.) Members were asked to consider the statement privately and then in groups, first in relation to content and then against criteria for functional mission statements (see reference 5). This primed a plenary discussion that quickly got at fundamental issues upon which people differed. The discussion became difficult and fraught. Alternative ways of wording and structuring the statement were pressed by some and resisted by others. These exchanges were interspersed with demands for a vote to be taken. There was talk of the "vocal minority" trying to impose their views and will upon the "silent majority" and of the "silent majority" trying to silence the "vocal minority". At this point it seemed that agreement would never be reached. The consultant encouraged Convocation to stay with the process, although it seemed as though there was grid lock. There was a fear that all the work could run to waste. There was a sense of crisis as the confused impasse seemed impenetrable. Anxiety grew that this would be another failed attempt at consensus. Then, providentially, there was lunch! But not for some of the members of the facilitating team and the consultant! They worked frantically to help Convocation to get a better hold on the task.

Over the lunch break they redrafted the statement to include all the suggestions that had been made. Copies were prepared so that each member had a revised text. They decided that the best way they could reopen the discussion was by:

- **summarising what had happened;**

- **offering members of Convocation the revised statement to work on;**

- **reminding them of the nature of the task;**
  (It is not to get everything I think into the statement; it is to get a statement of essentials to which we are all committed and of any issues on which we are not in agreement or undecided about. The statement must be what we think, not simply what I or a majority think. It must be inclusive rather than exclusive. Consequently taking a vote will solve little.)

- **reminding them of the nature of the participation required.**
  (Members need to be engaged in two things: ensuring that the statement adequately represents them; helping to find ways in which the statement represents others, especially those from whom they differed. This is not the time to debate points of difference nor to attempt to convert people to another point of view. Such action is not likely to be successful. This is the time to accommodate not dominate, to gather not divide, to represent not distort.)

Convocation responded very positively to this introduction which was thoroughly tested for acceptability by the consultant. There was a real desire and will to find a way forward—but not at any cost. The consultant did not share the revised statement nor reopen the discussion on it until agreement had been reached about the task and the nature of participation as stated above. As with the first draft,

the revised statement was received with approbation. But, again the consultant and Jane Middleton, the co-facilitator for the session, resisted vote taking. Time was given to consider the statement in detail. New points were raised and worked through. The statement was amended until Convocation came to a common mind. Periodically it was necessary to remind people of the task and the approach to it to which they had committed themselves when exchanges deteriorated into a debate.

Quite suddenly it seemed, no more points were being made. The consultant checked out thoroughly whether there was agreement. The latest statement was read

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DIACONAL MINISTRY:

Diaconal ministry is a way of life which expresses the servant ministry of Christ by the whole people of God to the world.

DEACONS AND DEACONESSES:

- Are men and women called by God to serve in many different ways, offering lifetime commitment, and a willingness to serve where needed.
- Their call is tested by the Church which ordains them to the Office and work of a deacon/deaconess in the Church of God.
- They share with the church in its ministry.
- They work with people in church and community. They exercise caring, pastoral, evangelistic and outreach ministries. Some are Local Preachers; all are able to be involved in the leading of worship.
- They seek to hold in balance in their ministry: worship, prayer, service and personal relationships.
- They seek to develop a lifestyle and spirituality in keeping with the calling to a servant ministry.

METHODIST DIACONAL ORDER:

- Sees itself as an order of ministry and as a religious order.
- It is a dispersed community living by a rule of life.
- It provides fellowship and encouragement, pastoral care and mutual support, prayer and discipline and opportunities for sharing God's vision.
- It trains and appoints its members to exercise diaconal ministry in partnership with presbyters and laity.
- It is a sign and a means of diaconal ministry to the church and community.
- It is a practical, prophetic and educational expression of this form of ministry which encourages and enables others in their ministry.

**THROUGH GOD'S GRACE OUR OBJECTIVE IS
TO SHARE IN THE CHURCH'S TASK OF
WITNESS, MISSION AND SERVICE**

Display 3:1 Mission Statement of the Methodist Diaconal Order

out two or three times (cf. Display 3:1). There was a deep quietness when we realised we had a result! Consensus had been reached. No votes had been taken. Providentially, a two-year process of exchanges rewarded Convocation 1994 with what at various stages seemed well nigh impossible, an agreed collective statement of the mission of the Order sincerely owned and joyfully embraced by everyone. Truly a high moment of vocational consensus that will be long remembered. We sang the doxology. During the communion service with which the Convocation concluded, a copy of the statement was laid on the table as a sacramental sign of what had been achieved: the Methodist Diaconal Order had a statement to which all could subscribe without any pretence that it represented the totality of their thinking.

The activity which had taken so much effort gave new energy and induced a high sense of motivation. Convocation immediately and eagerly turned its attention to establishing a development agenda and working at various other things. Progress was made on those things which need not be reported here but members had spent themselves and were not able to work with the same intensity.

Looking at this mission statement again four years later, I found myself wondering why it seemed such a great achievement to the members of the Order and to me at the time and what got us so excited. In one sense it is a minimal statement, albeit a hard won one. From the words alone it could appear that the consensus was reached through reductionism. That possibility is ruled out by the passion and emotions associated with the drafting and the collective editing of the statement, the struggling for and the achieving of consensus through it and the way in which everyone took possession of it. The important thing that had happened was that all the members had together experienced a genuine consensus around core vocational beliefs and issues and openly accepted their differences. Their mission statement was highly valued by one and all, not because they thought it was comprehensive and complete, but because it was for them a tangible expression of vital and valued existential realities they encountered separately and together which drew them together and helped them to share their vocation with the church and the world. And that is their passion.

4. Evaluation of the Process by Members and Facilitators

Members were surveyed at the end of the 1994 Convocation through open questions about each stage of the process. There was almost 100% return. A considerable number were very carefully considered responses. The consultant made a summary of the points made and added his observations. Members of the Diaconate were deeply thankful and excited about the outcome. They placed enormous value upon the way in which, for example, the process had generated "a real feeling of wholeness in mission" and given a "greater sense of belonging together in diversity". They were greatly relieved that they had been able to reach a consensus about a mission statement and terminology to use to describe themselves (deacons and deaconesses but now they are all known as deacons) which was a contentious issue. Overwhelmingly they felt it was an inclusive collaborative consultative experience which was "as near to a consensus as we will ever get in an imperfect world". But there was far less unanimity in their responses about the processes that

had been used to gain these results and especially those used during the Convocation. Generally speaking their responses fell into four main groups.

(a)   Enthusiasm about the processes and their wider use. These people deeply desired to see the processes used more widely and consistently in the work of the MDO and for members to gain further experience of and training in the approaches and methods by which it is promoted. They were as excited about the process as the outcome.

(b)   Willing acceptance of the process and the work it involved as a means to an end and the use of it as required.

(c)   Reluctant/begrudging acceptance of the process and the work it involved. These people wish the approach to be used sparingly and then only when there is no other way.

(d)   Rejection of the process in favour of other more traditional methods.

A small but significant group made the (a) kind of responses; by far the largest group variously made (b) and (c) responses; more made (b) than (c) responses; a very small minority of two or three made the (d) responses. Some of those making responses (b) and (c) seemed to be trying to straighten out inconsistencies in their thought. Such people were genuinely pleased about the outcome; not enamoured of the processes which were new to them and the work involved; felt there must be some other way which would fit them better personally; realised all the ways they knew would not have achieved the same result; accepted the outcome wholeheartedly but not the process. They were in fact faced with the challenge of transformational change in their approach to working with people and the theory and theology on which it is based. There is an example of this in a reply to a question about the members' overall feeling about the process.

> It was very interesting to experience this way of working and it was a worthwhile effort — but a much smaller representative group could have produced exactly the same result and I'm not sure I would want to go through this procedure for everything, though it certainly makes me feel totally involved and that I can "own" the outcome in a way that would not have been possible otherwise.

What became very clear was that members of the Order differ significantly in their natural desire, aptitude and capacity to work at things in depth analytically and systematically. This threaded its way through the responses. Some found it very stimulating and rewarding, personally, mentally and spiritually. Others found it very hard work to be done only when absolutely necessary. They prefer to seek truth inspirationally, conversationally and devotionally. It is not difficult to see that these different approaches create tensions especially when one or other of them is dominant or in the ascendant. It follows that, whilst certain traditional and institutional functions and events associated with Convocation seem mutually acceptable to members, they differ considerably in the proportions of Convocation time they wish to see given to Bible study, prayer, meditation, worship, fellowship, business and work. The majority see the need for change, a minority are less flexible. Out of all these differences, however, a view was emerging, and gaining wide acceptance, that Convocation must be a place where fundamental issues are worked out collaboratively and openly. At the same time, there was agreement that

Convocation must not become a workshop. The discussion was about the combination of activities at Convocation which will best serve the Order and its members. Clearly the misuse of the working processes will cause all round dissatisfaction, over use will alienate one section and under use another.

All this reveals dimensions of the difficulties likely to be encountered in using this approach in an organization, the faction it can generate and the comparatively few people who are likely to become totally committed to it in contradistinction to those who will tolerate it.

Two months after Convocation the base group facilitators met for a day to evaluate their experience. Without exception they valued being facilitators even though it had been very demanding. They said it had been an "exciting adventure" and a "learning process for local needs". Major disenabling factors were the tightness of the timetable, the physical distance between meeting places and the small size and badly equipped facilitators' room. They appreciated the back-up help they had received from the team and the consultant in facilitating their groups and tackling problems they had encountered with them on the spot. In particular they found the introduction to non-directive group work skills and the questions, tasks and structures suggested for the base groups very helpful. They wanted to increase their facilitating skills and said they would be available for similar tasks in the future. A better grasp of the process, they said, would have helped them as would a preparation and training day for all the facilitators.

VII A Review of Developments and their Implications

After the Convocation the consultant presented his reflections to the Staff Team and reviewed with them the developments that had occurred and their implications. What follows is a summary of what emerged.

1.   Personal and Collective Changes

The Order now has its own mission statement. Members were amazed that they had achieved this and gained new confidence in their ability. Morale had increased. Members felt that their new understanding of the Order and of their own and each other's approach to diaconal ministry would help them to communicate what the diaconate is all about. Some time later someone who knows the Order well commented that the members were listening to each other more carefully and treating each other with more respect.

2.   Insights into the Changes in Convocation and the Order

The evaluation forms referred to earlier showed that members see Convocation variously acting as: a task group; a sentient group; a Bible study group; a spiritual retreat group; a business group; a legislating group; a bonding group; a religious order group; an association of those who belong; a group which reinforces identity through being a place of rituals; a safe place to be what they are. Members differed considerably in the importance they attached to these different facets and the ways in which they should be combined in an ideal Convocation.

Reflecting on these things led the consultant to glimmer that an inexorable transition was occurring through changes in the material upon which Convocation was being asked to work and the ways in which they were being asked to work at it. He presented what he had discerned in the diagrammatic form reproduced in Figure 3:6 (a). Discussing this led the group to clarify changes that were occurring: members were being asked to work at issues to do with the theology and praxis of diaconal ministry, for instance, which had previously been tackled by other courts of the Church; and they were being asked to decide upon them, not by democratic votes but by the much more demanding way of seeking a working consensus. Inevitably these changes led to subtle but deep secondary changes in the nature and character of Convocation. Originally it was seen as a retreat-cum-break whereas a feature of it could now be described as a hard working conference. The first formulation of this in diagrammatic form was a moment of disclosure (cf.Figure 3:6a). Identifying and conceptualising the inner nature of the transition helped to get to the source of members' feelings, to discuss the changes and to decide what response to make and action to take.

All this was symptomatic of the radical changes taking place in the way in which the Order was changing into an organisation which maximises the creative

Figures 3:6 (a) and (b) Critical Interrelated Transitions

participation of all its members and groups through the leadership working *with* as well as *for* the members. The changes are all of a part: it is not possible to become egalitarian without thinking and working things through with others. These considerations led the consultant to proffer a revised formulation of the transition which is reproduced in Figure 3:6 (b).

3. Extending the use of Internal Facilitating Resources

The consultant and the Staff Team considered the new facilitating resources resulting from the project. The Order had learnt and valued ways of using external consultancy help and of developing their own internal facilitating abilities and resources. Three ways of using and extending these resources were considered.

The first related to the facilitating team. The Staff Team felt that it had made important contributions. The consultant asked whether there was a need for such a team to be a continuing feature of the working life of the Order. It would take primary responsibility for promoting and facilitating discussions related to the overall development of the Order and its diaconal ministry. It would perform functions similar to those of a non-directive development worker. The Staff Team felt such an arrangement could be creative. They took some steps towards forming one and asked Jane Middleton, Hilary Smith and the consultant to work out the details of the proposals in a briefing paper. As they got into the task they became progressively more uneasy about what they were doing. Gradually they realised that, to be faithful to the ways of working which were fast becoming accepted practice in the Order, Convocation should have a definitive say in this innovation. So they prepared a report for the Staff Team setting out their concerns and suggestions. The Staff Team agreed. The facilitating team was disbanded and the consultancy contract concluded to eliminate the danger of the original team drifting on and in order that Convocation might have a free hand in considering this idea and any external consultancy help they might require. The idea was put on the Order's agenda.

The second resource results from the formation, preparation and training of a cadre of twenty-two group facilitators. An invaluable resource to any organisation. And these skills are those needed for some forms of diaconal ministry. This needed to be developed.

The third resource was in the evolution of a facilitating partnership, Jane Middleton and Hilary Smith. They went on to facilitate the discussions at Convocation 1995 about the implications of the decisions made at the previous Convocation.

VIII Consultancy Arrangement Concluded

Considerable progress had been made towards achieving the Staff Team's original objectives. This can be seen quite readily by reflecting on Figure 7:1 in relation to the outcome. What the facilitating team wanted to avoid was avoided: uniformity; being static; introversion; exclusivism; faction; being comfortable. Considerable progress was made towards achieving the things they wanted for the Order: confidence; unity in diversity; corporate understanding and individual identity; a
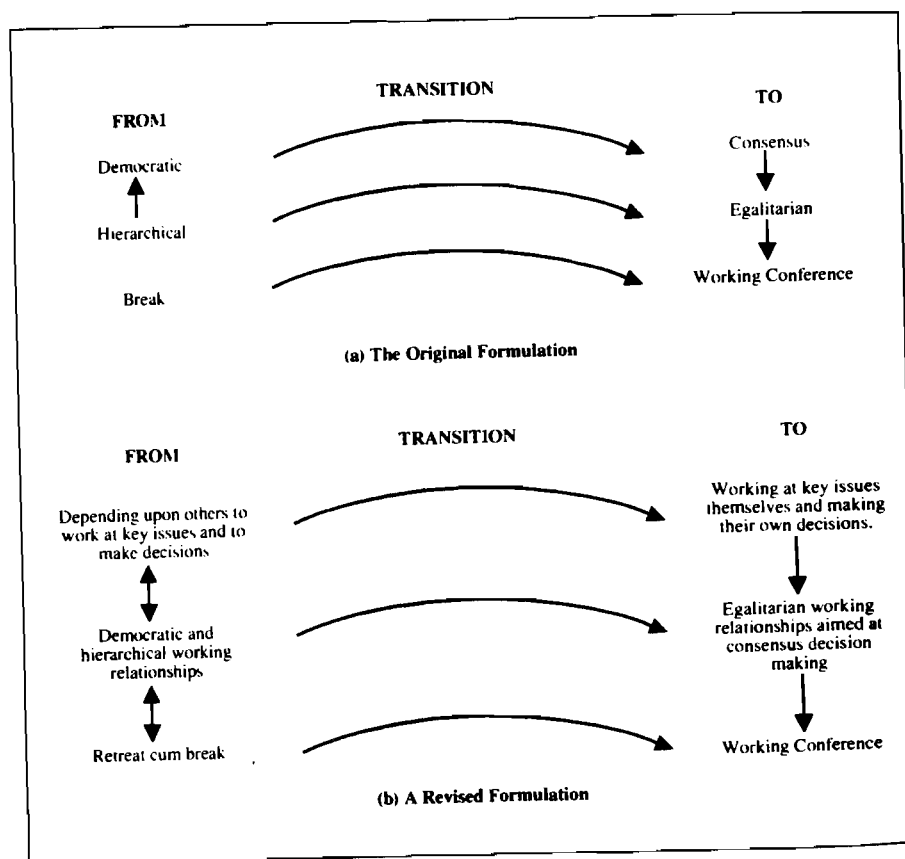
collective vocation; a dynamic creative tension; a caring fellowship; acceptance; all valued. Demonstrably one of their main objectives was realised: to be mobilised and ready for diaconal debate.

The amount of work in proceeding constructively from the articulation of individual vocations, through a shared collection to a collective consensus was enormous. Making a realistic assessment of the time taken would be difficult if not impossible. (Meetings of the Facilitating Team, for instance, took up five days. Making summaries of discussions took several people many days.Then there was the preparation.) It is of the nature of this approach that it is labour intensive. Nevertheless the consultant and facilitating team considered the time and energy was a good investment and they felt privileged to have had the experience.

Members of the Staff Meeting and the consultant felt that this was the point at which to conclude the consultancy arrangement. The Staff Team would be responsible for facilitating work on the implications of Convocation 1994 and for facilitating Convocation 1995.

IX Subsequent Developments

During the next phase the Warden and the Staff Team, in consultation with other constitutional groups took the initiative and responsibility for the facilitating process. They felt that there were several things they needed to do in order to take the facilitating process to the point where Convocation, not the Staff Team, took primary responsibility for its future. Amongst other things, they needed to get Convocation 1995 to determine the next steps to be taken in relation to: a continuing facilitating team; the nature of Convocation and the work it should do; the Methodist Diaconal Order as a religious order; the liturgical role of deacons and deaconesses.

The Team decided to use processes similar to those used for Convocation 1994. It appointed Jane Middleton and Hilary Smith to take overall responsibility for this phase of the work. They decided to draw and build upon the experience and suggestions emerging from Convocation 1994. A briefing and training day was arranged for base group facilitators, but this time they were called "task group facilitators". This proved to be a very helpful day. Facilitators were thoroughly briefed about the overall programme and provided with background information. They looked critically at proposed ways of working with Convocation on the various tasks and improved them greatly by raising issues overlooked by the team.

As in 1994, the task groups were mixed. Given the time constraints and what had been said in 1994 about the pressure of the work, it was decided that it simply was not possible for everyone to work on all the subjects. The work needed to be divided up, two group-work sessions being allocated to each task. Members were asked to indicate their first three task choices. Several groups were to work independently on the same task. Several facilitators undertook responsibility for a task and the groups so that they could work together on methods of working and the timing of sub-tasks and any problems they might encounter.

On the whole the task groups worked well. Some provided a working brief that the Warden could use and pass on to various committees. They did not need to report back to a plenary session. Some of the groups had to submit their work to the

Convocation so that it could make decisions. To use the time available to the best advantage, the facilitators of those groups working on the same task prepared a joint report which one of them presented to a plenary session inviting members to ask for clarification and to add points verbally or in writing to facilitators. Subsequently they presented amended reports for discussion and decision.

There was some dissent about Convocation nominating a new facilitating team. Somehow, members got into the "vocal minority" and "silent majority" syndrome again. After discussion, however, it was felt there should be a new team. With hindsight, the facilitators felt the time allowed and the timing was not ideal for this discussion. There were those who felt that they had been manipulated because the dissent was not handled adequately by the facilitators. The realisation deepened that to work in a collaborative way and to come to a consensus takes more time than had been allocated. Nor had the facilitating team worked out what to do if there was a negative response. Possibly they had fallen into this trap because, as the method had succeeded once, there were two unfounded assumptions: that it would work the next time; that sufficient members had grasped what it means to work towards consensus. Nevertheless, Convocation affirmed that it wished to continue to work in this new way and to develop its ability to do so even more effectively. In spite of the difficulties and partial success members had discerned the importance of the approach and methods and embraced them for themselves and the Order.

Writing in the Methodist Recorder about the 1995 Convocation a recently ordained deaconess, Judith Ashworth, said:

> There is a great sense of being on a pilgrimage as our warden, Deaconess Christine Walters, describes it.
>
> The impetus of the new life of the order is reflected in the new ways of working collaboratively to try and reach a consensus in everything we do. It's not a case of being pulled along or pushed from behind, but of moving together and feeling that we "own" what is happening.
>
> It was last year's convocation that most clearly set us on this course as we prepared a mission statement. This year, rather than focusing on one issue, we worked in small task groups on issues . . . and how we help each other to work collaboratively.
>
> But convocation was not all serious and self-analytical. Much laughter was heard . . . As always, the whole of convocation was wrapped around with worship. We were never allowed to forget who had called us to our vocation, who had called us to meet together and who calls us into the future on our pilgrim journey.[6]

X   Reflections in Relation to the Seven Elements of Chapter Two

To cross reference this worked example more directly with the consultancy praxis central to this book, these reflections are presented under the titles of the seven elements of practice theory described in Chapter Two. Considering each of the elements separately illustrates their significance and shows that they are interdependent parts of a consultative system, each necessary to the others. Effectiveness depends upon an integrated consultancy performance of the seven

elements: neglect of any element can flaw a consultancy even when there are outstanding performances of other elements.

Element One: Roles (cf pp 35-36).The role that the consultant had to perform was clearly enunciated at the outset. To stay in role he had not to become an advocate of a particular position nor a protagonist in the debate. This was not easy because through the papers and reports produced by members of the Faith and Order Committee and the Order, he had been convinced and excited by the biblical, theological and existential arguments in favour of the MDO being a religious order and becoming a diaconal order of ministry in its own right alongside the presbyteral ministry. Studying the concepts had been a disclosure experience: he saw that his ministry. Studying the concepts had been a form of diaconal ministry. And sharing in the non-directive consultancy work was a form of diaconal ministry. And sharing in the Convocation made him yearn to belong to a community of presbyters which constituted a religious order similar to that of the MDO. All this he had to contain so that his passion actually created the energy required to get members to do their own thinking. He had not to allow his own aspirations, thoughts and feelings about the nature and future of diaconal ministry to compromise in any way his ability to act as a non-directive consultant to the members of the Order: he had not to allow his own views to skew the discussion or to sway the members. Members had to come to their own conclusions independent of what the consultant thought. He had to be a facilitator and to help others to be the same.

Decision making was another tricky area. The consultant was involved with the facilitating team in making decisions about the consultative programme. Occasionally policy matters arose related to the Order in general. As the facilitating team was the Staff Team plus the consultant, it was natural for them to revert to their substantive role without acknowledging that they had done so. The consultant had to be alert to such changes, in some instances barely perceptible, because they signalled changes in his role and function. All too easily he could have acted as a member of the Staff meeting. On one or two occasions he was invited to do so. That would have confused and confounded his role. For instance, he could and did help them to make decisions but he could not and did not take decisions with them as he did in relation to the design of the consultative programme. Whenever the facilitating team reconvened itself as a Staff Meeting, the consultant drew attention to it and his change of role. This was appreciated. It avoided role drift and confusion and/or members wondering what his silence or change in behaviour meant. Vigilance was required. As working relationships became closer and the consultant was warmly accepted, it was tempting to become one of them!

Members of the Order involved in promoting facilitative processes had to resolve some role and function confusion and conflicts. Concurrently they had to come to their own conclusions about the issues and to share them *and* to get others to think for themselves and share their thoughts and feelings. So, for example, they had to share in ways which helped others to think, share and engage in creative dialogue; a very different approach from that which was normally expected of officers of the Order. Traditionally they would have been expected to reach a conclusion and, through strong, directive, charismatic and persuasive leadership, get the members to accept and adopt those conclusions. Some of the difficulties they experienced in being facilitative were noted in the account of the programme. It is highly

significant that the facilitators were able to fulfil this difficult composite role, some of them outstandingly, with the remarkable success documented above. Some of the things which helped them to do this are noted in Section IV. The evaluation by the base group facilitators throws light on the enabling and disenabling factors (cf section V:4). Then there was the consultant's role model. Much of this is about how they performed the facilitative role. Less is known about how they combined the dual activities of thinking for themselves and helping others to think for themselves. It could be profitable to research how they did this: what it involved within themselves and in their interaction with others. It would be interesting to know whether women do this more naturally than men and if so how and why. (Whilst the MDO has an increasing number of male members, the membership is predominantly female.)

Element Two: Interpersonal Behaviour (cf pp 36-46). Basic aspects of interpersonal behaviour were in play. Three attributes of this element combined to make the facilitating team meeting, the regional groups and Convocation safe places in which to explore thoughts and feelings frankly and in depth: the assurance of confidentiality; empathic relating; openness and privacy.

Other attributes—the deep desire to secure the freedom of members and consultant to be their own person in interdependent relationships *and* the need to be respectful and humble in critical creative engagement—were major factors in making the interactive process creative and in reaching a consensus. A telling example of this is in the reconsideration of the draft mission statement after the lunch break (Section V:3). Getting agreement on explicit aspects of the interpersonal behaviour prior to discussing the revised draft was key to getting consensus. Even then, as already noted, in the heat of passionate exchanges members had several times to be brought back to the agreed approach to the task.

Practising another attribute throughout—paying attention through genuine interest and single minded concentration and professional curiosity—was of critical importance to the outcome. One example occurred when the consultant realised that the briefing paper into which he had put so much effort (and of which he was proud !) was not galvanising people. There was a heavy atmosphere which he felt and responded to (see Section IV). Another example is recorded towards the end of the same section. Realising that the Warden's heartfelt sharing about holding things together was important, the consultant got her and the group to explore what was happening instead of passing on to the "real business" of the meeting which they were about to do. Much would have been lost had this been treated simply as a sympathetic sharing of stress. Yet another example occurred when all the points made about the first draft of the mission statement were included in the revised draft. This had a considerable impact; up to that point some of the contributors had felt they had not been heard (cf Section V:3).

All round "controlled emotional involvement", another attribute of this element, played a vital part in the whole process. This must have made very heavy demands upon everyone as they were involved in working at issues which had the potential to profoundly affect, positively or negatively, the vocational future, happiness and satisfaction of each member and condition the efficacy and destiny of the Order.

Element Three: Working Relationships (cf pp 46-51). To make the programme work significantly different, working relationships had to be established for the duration of the project. Some members of the Order acted as facilitators to other members in the district and regional groups and in Convocation. Facilitators had to adopt co-consultancy relationships with the consultant. Members and facilitators became consultors. There were several desirable consequences of this: the purposes of the project were achieved through the use and development of internal and external resources; members of the Order experienced, tested and came to a judgement about the use of analytical and consultancy processes in their work and in Convocation; some members had hands on experience of facilitative and consultative skills which they now wished to use and develop; the Order increased its repertoire of operational skills; a development unit was established.

Element Four: Work-Views (cf pp 51-71). Much of the reflection and sharing was about the work-views of the members of the Order and about mission statements that properly represented their collective work-view. But the term was not used because it was only later that the consultant started to use it. Had it been available it could have been useful. It would have been interesting to see what the members would have made of it.

Element Five: Thinking Together (cf pp 71-101). All four approaches described in the exposition of this element were used in this project. The consultant was involved in:

1.   thinking things out for consultors alongside them, e.g. facilitating structures and some implications of the evaluation of the process;

2.   accompanying consultors as they thought things out , e.g. the private and group work on their experience of and ideas about diaconal ministry;

3.   promoting and facilitating consultors to think;

4.   thinking things out with consultors.

Approaches three and four were the main approaches in play throughout the project as can be seen from the description above. A number of the technical and analytical thinking aids discussed in relation to Element Five were used.

The work was done in different thinking modes: analysing and designing (particularly the process); meditating and reflecting (at all stages); praying (throughout); formulating learning (particularly through the evaluations and the subsequent discussions of findings); doing theology (the members did exercises of applied theology on their own ministry, the nature of diaconal ministry and the nature of religious life in their Order and the relationship between these things).

Careful attention was paid throughout to "interpersonal aids to interactive thinking" as can be seen from the discussions during the 1994 Convocation. The face-to-face work involved getting people of differing abilities and in varying moods thinking on subjects of vital importance to them on their own and in groups ranging from three to upwards of a hundred and fifty. This called for a range of skills including those related to purposeful non-directive group work—and to establishing and maintaining a complex of interrelated working relationships with different individuals and groups and the boundaries between them.

The backroom work played a key role in helping members to think separately and together about each other's thinking and to formulate collective thought. It involved making representative, classified collections of what people had said in small and large groups or a series of meetings. This was hard and tedious but fascinating work. (Many of these records took two days. Summarising the evaluation by the members of Convocation 1994 was the best part of a week's work.) This back-room work and reflective preparation made enormous contributions to the face-to-face work.

A common cause of failure is the neglect of the backroom and reflective work. Sometimes this occurs through facilitators assuming that *all* really creative work is done in and through face-to-face working relationships with participants. This leads some people, especially those committed to the non-directive approach and good at interpersonal relationships, to over rely on face-to-face work and neglect background work. Doing the kind of work described in this case study requires more not less backroom work.

Apart from greater all-round thinking ability, two things would have made for greater effectiveness. A better understanding by the members of the processes would have enhanced participation. To do this it would have been necessary to overcome the well-known difficulties of communicating the essence and feel of the approach to those who have not experienced it and especially those who have had bad experiences of its counterfeits. The other thing that would have helped would have been agreement in the Order about the respective uses of reaching decisions through consensus and through majority votes—and when and how to move from the one to the other. Late in the process the consultant came across the excellent schema produced by the Uniting Church in Australia.[7] Had this been available earlier it would have given all the participants in Convocation 1994 a way of dealing with the clamour for a democratic vote with more understanding.

Element Six: Systemics and Logistics (cf pp 101-122). Amongst the aspects of this element illustrated by the project are: making and concluding contracts; designing, forming and re-forming consultancy systems, phases and sequences (e.g. Figure 3:2); sculpting sessions (e.g. 24 hour residential meeting in April 1993); the evaluations of the consultancy as a whole; facilitative group work.

The logistics were difficult to manage. Time and again plans had to be revamped to take account of new factors. An example is working to the reduced time available at Convocation 1994. Coping with this stretched the ingenuity and patience of the consultant and the facilitating team almost to the limit, but with hindsight it is clear that had more time been given to this process in Convocation some people would have become disaffected and opted out and others would have found the pressure too great. These restraints were overcome by imaginative and scrupulous planning and preparation geared to the realities of the situations in which the processes were to be promoted.

Element Seven: Beliefs, Ethics, Values and Qualities (cf pp 122-145). Beliefs, ethics, values and qualities infused the subject matter and the consultancy processes

in this worked example. Throughout the consultancy processes were engendered through approaches and action which:

- aim to work for the well-being, development and effectiveness of the whole and the parts of constituencies such as the MDO, so *that they are holistic;*

- work with constituencies in relation to the environment in which they are set, so *that they contextualise;*

- take seriously the interaction and interdependence of people and groups in organisations and communities through treating them as systems, so *that they are systemic;*

- promote all round egalitarian participation, so *that they are genuinely participative;*

- facilitate the opening up, sharing, gathering in and enfolding of thoughts and ideas, so *that they synthesise;*

- work for deep seated consensus between as many as possible of those involved and implicated, so *that they are consensual;*

- get people to think for themselves, critically and open mindedly, in the light of as much information as they can handle, so *that they are non-directive;*

- search out what individuals and groups believe God is urging them to be and to do, so *that they are means of theological discernment;*

- promote creative exchanges between people whose beliefs and ideas differ and conflict, so *that they are means of theological dialogue and critique;*

- build up orders of ministry and religious orders and communities so *that they are part of the methodology of pastoral theology.*

These attributes model essentials of the commitments underlying the modes of action and the processes. Combined they embody and create patterns of belief and behaviour. For instance, the processes have the potential to refine democratic processes by moving from the rule of simple majorities towards majorities and minorities working together for mutually acceptable consensual arrangements. That involves enormous changes in attitudes and procedures. A better general understanding of the approach would have helped to reduce some of the confusion surrounding it.

Another significant feature relates to the dynamic for change. Whatever the point of intervention, the interactive consultative process moves through the system in all directions, like blood flows through (and out of) living bodies. So it is not simply hierarchical, from the "top" downwards although, as in this case, the initiative came from the Warden. Neither is it a grass roots upward process. It is by intention and design systemic as is shown by Figures 2:1 and 2 and by the emphasis at the end of Chapter Two on "getting it together", that is, deploying the seven elements so that they interact harmoniously, integrate systemically and facilitate imaginative and constructive action.

Theologically speaking, the model could be described as incarnational and experiential and existential. It is based on the belief that God speaks through individuals as well as through the Church's official pronouncements and that truth

is most likely to emerge from broad based open theological dialogue. It is therefore revelatory as well as salvatory and resurrectional, creational and sacramental.

ENDPIECE

Participating in this project epitomized vital aspects of my ministry in ways which for me were deeply significant, satisfying and moving. By one of those meaningful coincidences I was present at the 1978 Convocation as a guest lecturer on the non-directive approach to church and community development. 1 arrived early and was invited to sit in on the session which was taking place in the conference hall in which the 1994 Convocation met. The business was the future of the Order. Standing in a cluster around the microphone in commanding positions on the platform were the Warden (a Methodist minister who was the only man present apart from myself), the Associate Warden and one or two of the principal deaconesses. As 1 recall it the substance of what they said was that they did not know what the future of the Order should be and therefore proposed that the Church be asked to decide its future. The decision was made without discussion or vote. 1 was shaken to the core. 1 had come to talk about people, individually and collectively, being deeply involved in doing their own thinking and making and taking decisions which affect them and their destiny. Here they were, immediately before my first session, a women's order handing over critical thinking and decisions about their future to male dominated committees.What was happening contradicted everything that 1 held most dear. My heart bled. My whole being was deeply offended and in rebellion. It was hard not to be in a position to protest. In the next two days 1 sowed my non-directive seed. Some deaconesses were committed to the approach 1 was advocating. Over the intervening years deaconesses came on Avec courses and 1 had various discussions with the leaders. Then in 1992 came the invitation to share in helping the Order "to do its own thinking and find answers for itself". My heart leapt with joy. After all that time, 1 was given an opportunity to see done, sixteen years later, what 1 had yearned for in 1978. 1 had lived and worked through a full circle of the kind for which 1 continually labour.

NOTES AND REFERENCES: Chapter Three

1. This case history is based upon and draws heavily upon a published account of the project:Lovell, George; Middleton, Jane; Smith Hilary (1996) *A Process Model for the Development of Individual and Collective Vocations* Methodist Diaconal Order Occasional Paper No. 1 (Printed for the Methodist Diaconal Order by Methodist Publishing House.) That account has been extensively edited to bring out more clearly the consultancy processes and to highlight the consultant's role. Christine Walters contributed an article entitled "To the Circuits: The Methodist Diaconal Order" to the *Epworth Review* Vol 23/1 January 1996 about the MDO as a religious order.

2. A key document in relation to these developments was: *The Ministry of the Whole People of God.* The Revd Trevor Rowe has described the events and thinking which led to the decision to reopen the Diaconal Order: see "The Re-formation of the Diaconal Order" *Epworth Review* (Vol.24/2, April 1997) pp62-71.

3. See Faith and Order Report to Conference 1993, *The Methodist Diaconal Order.*

4. Members of the Staff Meeting were: Deacons Christine Walters (Warden) and Rosemary Bell (Vice-President of the Order); Revd David Blanchflower (Chaplain); Deacon Jane Middleton (Training Coordinator); Deacon Hilary Smith (Pastoral Secretary); Mrs Gill Woolf (Personal Assistant to the Warden).

5.   The criteria were that mission statements must be "portable", *i.e.:* members can carry them around in their mind and recall key features. They must give direction to the organisation and define what it is and does and for whom it exists and articulate the values and beliefs it represents. They must be readily understandable to the constituency with which the organisation wishes to communicate about itself.

6.   Methodist Recorder 14 December 1995.

7.   The Uniting Church of Australia has an excellent model for making decisions by consensus. The flow chart they have produced has slip roads which enable groups to take other routes when they fail to reach a consensus. When all other possibilities fail they lead to "decision by a formal majority": cf *A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church* (Uniting Church in Australia, 1994).