

➤ The Church as Diaconia. One View of the Reformed Understanding of Diaconia

MARIANO AVILA & ESKO RYÖKÄS

Abstract

The Church of John Calvin in Geneva is nowadays known as the beginning of the Reformed Church tradition. When we strive a general description of the central elements of the reformed view of deacons and their tasks of today (diaconia), which is the goal of this article, we have it difficult to define an adequate source for this information. In this article, we analyze the way of diaconal thinking, presented in the modern documents of one very mainstream Church in USA and Canada: The Christian Reformed Church in North America. As a result, we see how the Calvinistic way of understanding the Gospel lead to an understanding of the Church as Diaconia. However, there is some dogmatical tension, too.

One important source for the Protestant understanding of ministry goes back to the Institutes (*Institutio Christianae religionis*, 1536/1559) of Jean Calvin. Analyzing Rm 12, 8, he concludes: "... there will be two classes of deacons, the one serving the Church by administering the affairs of the poor; the other, by taking care of the poor themselves" (Institution 4.3.9; Calvin, 1964; Calvin, 1559:389; McNeill, 1943:80; McKee, 1984; McKee, 1996:89–100; Latvus, 2017:54–59.) Formulation and decisions based on this way of thinking were the background for the ministry of a deacon in the Reformed Churches. The office of a deacon and similarly the charitable and other work of deacons have been and are an integral part of the Reformed tradition and life in the churches (McKee, 1996:105–123; Small, 2009).

The importance of this structural disposition of church activities could be seen in the Netherlands of the 19th century, where the German Theodor Fliedner visited reformed houses led by a deacon or deaconess, such as in Amsterdam (Fliedner, 1831:192). After he went back to Kaiserswerth in the Rhineland, he founded the first deaconess houses, and the rest is history (e.g. Latvus, 2017:60). Since the mid-19th century, the deaconesses and deacons have been more and more an important part of the church offices in other Protestant churches, too. After the Lima document “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” of the World Council of Churches (BEM, 1982), a threefold ministry of bishop, priest (elders), and deacons has been understood as a common goal for the development of the structure of the ministry in most Christian churches (cf. McKee, 1996:118–123).

The Church of John Calvin in Geneva is nowadays known as the beginning of the Reformed Church tradition. When we strive for a general description of the central elements of the reformed view of deacons and their tasks of today (diaconia), we find it difficult to define an adequate source for this information. There are too many different churches in the Reformed tradition to get an accessible overview. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is the largest association of Reformed Churches in the world. It has about 230 member denominations in nearly 110 countries, together claiming about 80 million people (World Communion, 2018).

The WCRC can be seen as the third-largest Christian communion in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. It has no joint statement about deacons, nor a common publication. Although they all have a common background in the Reformation movement of 16th century Switzerland, there are variations between churches, due to the character of the churches and denominations. For example, in the report that the WCRC published from the Joint Commission with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), “On Being the Church,” the only notice about deacons says, “the threefold pattern of the ordained ministry ... cannot claim to be the only one authorized in Scripture” (On Being, 2014:33). Although the threefold pattern can be seen as typical for some Lutheran Churches, we can see here some openness to variation between the Reformed Churches, too.¹

Therefore, we are not offering a broad Reformed way of theological thinking, but we are concentrating on one church. The goal of this article is to shape an overview and strive for a general description of the central elements

of the view of deacons and their tasks of today (diaconia) in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). We will manage aspects of the organizational position of a deacon in the CRCNA; however, this is not central to our goal. This particular church has played a central role during the latest few decades in the Reformed tradition. The ecumenical Christian body of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was formed in June 2010 by the union of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). The former has its background in Europe and more liberal theology, the latter more in the United States of America. The merger of these two corporations happened based on a joint meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, hosted by the theologically moderated Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) (World communion, 2018; Saarinen & Pokki, 2005:276).

To get different movements to unite, one has to have an understanding of all of the various organizations and be somewhat in between them. This understanding gives us a motivation to describe the way of thinking in this hosting church (CRCNA), which is not a small reformed church, with about 230,000 members.² As material, we use all the official statements of the CRCNA Synod about the role and tasks of deacons since the founding of the WCRC (2010).³

Theologically, the CRCNA has been characterized as being between the liberal and fundamental wings of reformed theology (Saarinen & Pokki, 2005:276), which makes it easy to understand why the different reformed traditions could unite exactly in Grand Rapids. For our goal, it is helpful that during the last few years, the CRCNA has, in its documents and synodical decisions, reformulated its understanding of the role of deacons in a way that is useful for understanding its theology. We concentrate on this as an example of the modern reformed theology of deaconship.

Development in the CRCNA

The Christian Reformed Church of America has about 1,000 congregations in Canada and the USA. The background of this particular church is mostly in immigrants from the Netherlands. Its theological position is Calvinist (History, 2018), and it has not been very conservative but not very liberal either, although it has ordained women since 1996 (Memorable events, 2018).

Following the more traditional Reformed way, congregations usually have both ordained ministers (in ecumenical terminology, “priests”) and elders.

Most of the ministers are employed full-time in this church, and the deacons are volunteers in the service of their churches. In the middle of the year 2018, the number of active (not retired) ministers of the Word in the CRCNA was 1,256. (Retired ministers add about 715, and there were about 285 active commissioned⁴ pastors). The CRCNA yearbook office does not ask churches to submit statistics on their number of elders and deacons, but it is possible to give an approximate number based on council members. Currently, they report approximately 8,830 council members. Most but not all councils have the same number of elders and deacons. Therefore, the estimated number of deacons is about 4,000. Based on these facts, the results show an average of about 1.3 pastors in each parish, together with about five elders and four deacons (Smith, 2018).

The continental Reformed tradition followed the way of Jean Calvin, featuring “the four offices of doctor, minister of the Word, elder, and deacon”, while the Presbyterian tradition “insisted on the priority of preaching and teaching elders.” (Agenda for Synod, 2015:384–385). There has been some discussion on the relationship between the different officebearer. The CRCNA has set a goal of parity of office, not only parity within an office (Agenda for Synod, 2015:386). This has been a long process: already, the Church Synod in 1997 recommended a delegation of deacons to the local synods, known as “a classis” (with the character of a “working unit”) (Agenda for Synod, 2015:387). After more than ten years of debate concerning the role of deacons in the ministry in various Synods of the CRCNA, the Synod of the CRCNA on June 12-18, 2010, got an “overture” (proposal) about the role of the deacon (Agenda for Synod, 2010:690–692; Acts of Synod, 2010:829). The question was whether the structures of the church are adequate to enable a flourishing diaconate and, in particular, whether deacons ought to participate in the major assemblies of the church (Agenda for Synod, 2013:263). The practical goal was “to propose changes to relevant Church Order articles which would allow for an expanded role for deacons and a revitalized, more robust diaconate that is better able to meet the challenges of our hurting world” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:263). No explanation of what could be an “expanded role for deacons” is given.

As an answer to the presented overture, a task force (later TF 2010) was charged by the Synod 2010. In its report, named *Diakonia Remixed: Office*

of *Deacon*, TF 2010 presented many revisions to the Church Order and its Supplement⁵. In these modifications, we see that the role of deacons would be modified in the church general meetings (classis, synod), and that could perhaps be one of the reasons for this process. The task force points out that grounds offered for the process were twofold: there was a disconnection between Church Order articles and the church's self-understanding of its diaconal calling; and the diaconal mission should "be described in more complete, holistic, and robust terms" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:276). However, the practical formulations are less critical for our goal than the principal lines, and therefore, we will concentrate on those, as the most important theological and ecclesiological conviction is the exceptional understanding of the church. According to TF 2010, "the church does not simply have deacons but is by its very nature and calling a diaconate—that is, a community created by the triune God to be a servant people in the world" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:264).

This understanding of the Church is not very common. More often, diaconia has been understood as the visible form of the Church, not necessarily as its very nature (cf. diaconia as "Wesens-/ Lebensäußerung," "sign of nature/life," Reiz-Dinse, 1998:23–91). Therefore, this alignment needs to be decoded further. In its documentation, TF 2010 crystallizes six guiding principles for its presentations. This is a summary of the main contents.

The first and most central understanding for the revision of "the church's mission as diaconia" in the world is based on Eph 4:11–13:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service [Greek: *diakonia*], so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

TF 2010 pointed out, with the help of this verse, that the whole church *itself* may be "called to diakonia", not only that the church *has* deacons (Agenda for Synod, 2013:276). "The entire biblical narrative can be understood as an extended commentary of what it means to render service to God, others, and the whole creation" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:277). This statement is motivated, following the Reformed theology, by biblical elements, starting with Genesis, "with the summons to be in the right relationship (shalom) with God

and one another and to care for the creation.” In the end, there is the teaching in the New Testament, with the Christian summons “to follow Jesus into the world-renewing life of the kingdom, marked by both humble, sacrificial service and radical neighbor love” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:277).

Secondly, the position mentioned above gives background for the right understanding of “diakonia”. It “cannot be reduced to simple acts of charity and the distribution of alms (as suggested by the use of Acts 6 in the form for ordination) but includes a much broader and richer mandate” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:277). The Church has a broad and comprehensive mission as a people gathered “to live out the story of God’s reconciling love ... working for a world of justice and peace.” The ministry of deacons is not “called simply to perform acts of service on behalf of the church but to lead the whole church in faithful obedience to its multifaceted participation in the mission of God” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:277).

The main idea is that the deacons shall help the members of the church in their life in the kingdom, which is a logical Reformed standpoint. Already the Scottish Confession of Faith (1560) states that the Church needs true preaching, the right administration of the sacraments, and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered (§ 18, The Book of Confessions, 1996:42). The lifestyle of all of the members of one church is important.

Thirdly, when the Church has that kind of role in the plans of the Lord, a logical consequence is that “the church’s role in society is described thus not only in terms of mercy but also in terms of justice, reconciliation, and peacemaking.” In diaconal outreach to the poor, the point is not only to help the people with problems, but the restoration of shalom, justice in society. The form for ordination charges deacons to “be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and to be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:277–278).

For the fourth principle, in terms of church participation, TF 2010 recommends the “principle of parity” between different offices in the church, according to general assemblies. It fits that deacons be present in several classes and synods of the church (Agenda for Synod, 2013:278). This is a logical deduction from the arguments above. In this article, we concentrate on the view of deacons and their tasks today, but we may notice that deacons, in this way, may get ways to have representatives in the official organizational meetings of the church.

When discussing the delegation of the deacons to major assemblies, for the fifth principle, according to TF 2010, it is not about equal representation. The central problem is not in this category, but “it is a question about the full representation of the whole church which these offices represent” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:279). We see here consequences from the first point and its ecclesiological understanding of the character of the Church.

For the last principle, TF 2010 uses the basis of a formulation of John Calvin: “If the church requires it, we may not only without offense allow something to be changed but permit any observances previously in use among us to be abandoned” (Calvin, Institutes, 4.10.32; Agenda for Synod, 2013:279). In this formulation, TF 2010 sees a motivation to change Church Order, so it recommends:

removing structural hindrances that inhibit flourishing diaconates. An example is presented providing greater flexibility concerning the length of terms of office. At the moment the tasks of a deacon are limited by its length. (Agenda for Synod, 2013:279)

Theological position

The argumentation of TF 2010 presents a view of diaconia that follows the way of thinking known since the mid-19th century. “Diakonia” can be discussed with formulations similar to those of charity. While TF 2010 does not see it as its task to offer a biblical, theological, and historical reason for its arguments (Agenda for Synod, 2013:263), the exegetical position of TF 2010 can be appreciated by means of a presentation written by a member of the team, Prof. Mariano Avila (Avila, 2013). At the beginning of his presentation, Avila gives definitions of the key terms. He points out that the word “service” provides “the background for a proper understanding of diakonia.” This later term gets its definition as a citation from the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT):

As distinct from other service terms, the verbal form *diakoneoo* has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another ... but in *diakoneoo* there is a stronger approximation to the concept of a service of love. (Avila, 2013:3)

Although this citation from a book (TDNT) does not look very old (printed in English 1964–1976), it is originally from the German dictionary of Kittel, published in 1935, and it has a clear understanding of the meaning of the verb in the categories of helping service. As presented by Latvus and Collins, Kittel’s understanding can be seen as a reproduction from an earlier book by Berger, published in 1931, based on the experience the later writer had in the kaiserswerther Mother House tradition (Latvus, 2017:17; Collins, 2006:15). This background is something Brandt himself mentions (Brandt, 1931: foreword).⁶

As a second definition, Avila points out the meaning of “minister/ministry.” According to him, “Calvin and the Calvinist reformation avoided translating the Latin term *minister* as a *priest* and opted for the literal Latin word *minister* to describe Church officers.” The noun characterizes a minor servant who acts for the benefit of others (Avila, 2013:3). In the Lutheran part of the Reformation movement, the method of translating terms was different, due to their use in the Early Church: there, bishops and elders were part of the *klerikos*, but deacons and the lower positions were only ministers (Ziegler, 2014:30–31, 35).

Avila uses this understanding of service and “*diakonia*” when developing the theological position of his presentation. When describing the background to *diakonia* in the Old Testament, the question is how the aspect of service can be seen there. The key is to interpret the Hebrew words as describing the correct relation between human beings and God. As Avila points out, the “crucial passage in the first book of Kings 12:7 illustrates this fact: ‘If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants’” (Avila, 2013:7). It is essential to make relationships correctly. Therefore, it is logical to summarize:

In summary, service is the foundational vocation of humanity and must be expressed in all areas of life. *Service* is the search for the wellbeing of creation, of our fellow human beings and the glory of God. We are called, in a fallen world, to model with our life and in all of our relationships, a central value of God’s upside down Kingdom: *diakonia*. We must aim for the *deaconship of all believers*. (Avila, 2013:9)

This understanding of the Old Testament leads to an analysis of the New Testament “in the Horizon of God’s Kingdom” (Avila, 2013:9), a formulation typical of the Reformed tradition. Life and action are now analyzed in the categories of *Servant-Kingship* (Mt 10:45 par.). Avila uses texts like Matt 11:28–30 (Jesus says: “I am gentle and humble in heart”) to characterize Jesus as one who “rules by serving, using his power to the benefit and shalom of others” (Avila, 2013:15). In conclusion, he states that “imitation of Christ is fundamental for citizens of the kingdom, for the members of the Father’s household” (Avila, 2013:15). This means that the “diakonia” of all members of the Church comes before all kinds of office of deacons (Avila, 2013:16).

Avila uses this understanding of the life of Jesus when analyzing Paul’s understanding of “diakonia”. Paul uses the noun in the meaning of “humble and silent service in search of the well being of others” (Avila, 2013:19). In conclusion, he states that Christians “are called to follow in the steps of Him who knew the real value of those who are made in the image of God, and accordingly gave his own life to redeem them” (Avila, 2013:22). After this, it is logical to come to our ecclesiological starting point and see Ephesians 4:11–13, as presented above, as a key to the diaconal life in the Church (Avila, 2013:22–23). The Church has to have its ecclesiastical life in clean condition.

We may see here the main structure of the Reformed tradition. The church must have preaching of the Word, sacraments, and discipline. The role of the leaders of a parish is understood similarly to Calvin: “the ministry of men, which God employs in governing the Church, is a principal bond by which believers are kept together in one body” (Institution 4, 3, 2; Calvin, 1964; Calvin, 1559:387). The ministry helps the members of the Church to be one body of Christ. Here it looks on the discipline in the Church. All this means that the ministry helps the Church to be a Church.

Practical consequences reveal more theology

The discussion in the Synod in 2013 was not the end, but it led to another task force (later TF 2013) with the purpose of studying the offices of elder and deacon. In its documentation, we can see a structure, which reveals a dogmatic position, which is vital for understanding its reformed position.

The new task force (TF 2013) gets a mandate to answer a list of questions. For us, the first one is of particular interest, where the topic is on the principal

level. The issue had five parts, but its main focus was the grounds for the tasks of an elder and a deacon, and which ones are assigned collectively and which separately (Agenda for Synod, 2015:381). According to TF 2013, this “parity of office” means equality in dignity and honor, but with distinctive mandates. To motivate this position, TF 2013 presents material from its biblical and confessional basis (Agenda for Synod, 2015:382).

For us, the way of reading the Acts is of particular interest. According to TF 2013, Acts 2 presents the first community of believers, which was rapidly growing. This community devoted itself to three things: to “the apostles’ teaching,” “to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer,” and to a common life that could be characterized by having “everything in common” and giving “to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:42–45). This way of helping (“giving”) was a part of the life of the communion. In this, TF 2013 can see what “does appear to be normative for the church of all times: the three dimensions of the church’s mission” (Agenda for Synod, 2015:382–383). These three dimensions, preaching or teaching (“kerygma”), fellowship and the sacraments (“koinonia”), and giving to those in need (“diakonia”), are, according to Agenda for synod 2015 (382–383), all part of the one mission of the church.

TF 2013 sees consequences for its way of understanding the mission of the church. The church “must re-examine our traditional assertion (especially in our liturgical forms) that Acts 6 presents us with the origin of an institutionalized office of deacon.” According to TF 2013, Acts 6 can show –not with any hierarchy nor with permanent distinctions between various offices – how the community needed to share the tasks of the office. It was a question of practical leadership and a very practical matter: “when daily food was not distributed fairly, the ‘seven’ were appointed to make things right” (Agenda for Synod, 2015:383). The tasks of a deacon may not be understood too narrowly. “There is nothing in this chapter or in the entire book of Acts that would compel us to believe that the ‘seven’ served in distinctly diaconal roles” (Agenda for Synod, 2013:383).

We can see here an understanding of the ministry of the church as one ministry. There are different tasks, but an office is not differentiated from separate parts. TF 2013 gives examples from different Reformed confessions (e.g., Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession) to motivate its way of thinking. The “leadership or the equipping of the saints is not within the ‘job de-

scription' of one office, or two, or three, but is the shared task of all who are ordained" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:384). There are different Reformed traditions around which different churches organize leadership. However, according to TF 2013, there "is room to adapt and change as circumstances require" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:385).

The main idea is that the different offices in the Church are all part of one common office, and these various offices belong together. This means, for example, when discussing the representation in the Synod of today, that it is possible to give the following statement: "When deacons are missing from major assemblies, the full voice of the church is not heard, nor is the full ministry of the church under discussion" (Agenda for Synod, 2015:386). As mentioned in the earlier document, extra motivation for this way of thinking is seen in Eph 4: "It is all about equipping the saints for ministry" (Agenda for Synod, 2013:386).

The renewed line of the CRCNA

The paper presented by Task Force 2013 was discussed in the Synod of the CRCNA 2015. Most of its recommendations could be accepted without discussion. None of the (minimal) changes made in the meeting changed the way of thinking about deacons and diaconia. The Synod commended Appendices A and B of TF 2013⁷ to the churches as excellent resources (Acts of Synod, 2015:670).

As a result of the process, the CRCNA now describes how "officebearers are 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up' (Eph. 4:12)" (Acts of Synod, 2015:658). The different officebearers are now clearly, more than previously, all part of one and the same ministry (as seen in the modification of, i.e., Article 42-b and 74-d: Acts of Synod, 2015:664, 667). The tasks of a deacon are now defined broader than previously. We give here the modified Article 25-C, with the new part of the text italicized:

The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers. *Deacons shall lead the members in ways that inspire faithful stewardship of their time, talents, and resources and so give life in this world the shape of God's kingdom.*

Thus deacons shall create and encourage participation in structures and ministries of mercy, justice, and reconciliation, both locally and globally. All of this shall be done with words of biblical encouragement and testimony, which assure the unity of word and deed, which assure the unity of word and deed. (Acts of Synod, 2015:661, emphasis in original.)

As defined in the grounds for changes to Articles 73–77, these changes “grow out of the belief that the whole church is called to diakonia” (Acts of Synod, 2015:668). As noted in the grounds for the renewed article 42-b, ministers, elders, and deacons may now all be understood as equal, for example, when speaking about the oversight of officebearers at the congregational level and at the classical level (Acts of Synod, 2015:665). In this way, these documents illustrate a development that is logical and based on a consequent reading of Reformed sources. As also noted in the grounds for articles 73–77, the “new language is inclusive of all the denominational ministries, not just select ministries,” and the “changes reflect a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the church’s ministry” (Acts of Synod, 2015:668).

Therefore, we can say TF 2013 can be seen as representative of a modern way of thinking about deacons and diaconia in the Reformed tradition. That thinking is based on the earlier documents of the Reformed tradition. This theology will understand the office of the church as necessary. Similarly, it will point out the role of the church in the plan of its Lord. The office has been understood as one, not divided. The meaning of the word diaconia has a strong connection with charitable tasks. However, the responsibilities of a deacon have been understood as those of a leader, and in the areas of justice, reconciliation, and care of creation.

Characterizing the Reformed position

As the material presented above shows, in the theology of Reformed tradition, its ecclesiological understanding can be seen as essential. In this material, that way of thinking is based on Eph 4, as presented above. Christians live in the Kingdom of God, and there is an agreement between humans and God about a covenant. The arguments of the Old Testament can guide Christians to the right understanding of life, and the examples in the New Testament show how to live as Christian. When using the definition of “diakonia” in the

form in which Kittel's dictionary has put it, it was logical to accent the life of a Christian as residing in a servant position. This can describe the most profound meaning of life, and therefore the presence of a parish can also have the character of humble service.

In the material described above, the deacon works in the office of the Church as a part of the oneness of the office. He is no longer somebody who only does charitable tasks in the community, but is still active, especially on that topic. When looking from outside of the Reformed tradition, there is some tension between the role of a deacon as a leader and the understanding of the word "diakonia," describing humble service. For the Reformed way of thinking, this tension is minimal, at most, because every Christian has a humble role in the Kingdom of God.

In this way of thinking, there is perhaps also another tension. The role of a deacon in the ministry of the Church is still characterized by an understanding of charity as an essential part of it. According to the most modern theology, the word "diakonia" in the original Greek could be understood as representing the actions of a leader in a parish (Koet et al., 2018). That means a deacon would have the function of an important person working in many different areas. The position shaped by John Collins and Anni Hentschel could give some new light on this traditionally colored thinking about diakonia (cf. Latvus, 2017; Collins, 1990). The changes would perhaps not be extensive, but a Christian could be freer to be proud of their position and about their right to work autonomously. In the society of today, this could also provide a more modern way of understanding life.

Footnotes

- 1 On the homepage of the WCRC, there is no other common statement about deacons or diakonia. <http://wcrch.ch> (26.8.2019).
- 2 Although this estimate of members seems, especially in comparison with the Scandinavia folk churches, not to be very big, according to Saarinen and Pokki, 2005:276, the CRCNA is one of the biggest among Reformed Churches in the USA.
- 3 The Uniting General Council of the WCRC was held in Grand Rapids on June 18–28, 2010, immediately after the Synod of the CRCNA on June 12–18, 2010. Our analysis starts with that Synod. Daphne, 2010; Agenda for Synod, 2010.
- 4 A “commissioned pastor” is a non-ordained pastor who has not done the required studies (Master of Divinity) but is functioning in a church as a pastor and has been commissioned by the regional classis (local synod). In the classis and synodical meetings, they do not have a voice or vote. Usually they are full-time like the ministers. The terms “minister” and “pastor” are used interchangeably for the same person: an ordained minister or pastor. They are also full-time.
- 5 In 2013, the task force reported to the Synod, and after a long discussion Synod 2013 decided to appoint another task force to include a revision of the role of elders (Acts 2013, 623–627). In 2015, the report was finally accepted (Acts 2015, 658–670). The report of the task force does not include any dissenting opinion, nor the decisions made by the Synod. There was discussion on the way in which the leader of the Synod may put into practice the idea of parity, but this did not result in a dogmatical decision.
- 6 The latest research (Collins 1990, 2006; Latvus 2017) does not agree with the understanding of Kittel’s dictionary. The verb “diakonia” is moreover defining a relationship in which one, for example, gets tasks from another. However, there are some common elements, especially with the position of Brandt and differently from Beyer (Differences between Brandt and Beyer, see Ryökäs 2020). Here we are only discussing how the CRCNA understands its position. We will return to the conclusions from the latest research at the end of this article.
- 7 Agenda for Synod, 2015:401–404, gives “Resources for Elders and Deacons” as Appendix A, and 404–410 summarizes its Appendix B “Deacon/diaconate, elder/consistory, council, classis, and synod roles and responsibilities from the Church Order”.

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Authors

Mariano Avila

Dr., Professor, Pastor

Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

mavila@calvinseminary.edu

Esko Ryökäs

Dr., University lecturer

School of Theology, University of Eastern Finland

esko.ryokas@uef.fi