

An Interview with Annette Sines, Training for the Vocational Diaconate
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CALLED TO SERVE

Annette Sines is a member of St Peter's Episcopal Church, Fernandina Beach and currently studying for ordination as a Vocational Deacon. She is enrolled in the Deacons School of the Diocese facilitated by the Rev. Deacons Jeanie Beyer and Marsha Holmes under the aegis of the Bishop's Institute.

INTERVIEW

1. What led you to the process of discernment for ordained ministry? Did it involve your ministry as a lay person in the church? How did it square (or not) with your professional (work) life? And family?

I have been a very active lay leader for many years. Several people had seen a “deacons’ heart” in me, but I hadn’t seen it in myself. I keep taking on any lay leader role I could to try and quiet the nagging feeling I had that God was pushing me to. My deacon finally took me aside one day and asked me to pray about it and consider that the diaconate might be what God was calling me to.

Ordained ministry was far removed from the work I did for many years in banking and finance but was reflected in my volunteer work during my husband’s career as a Naval Officer. Jeread was on submarines for 22 years and I was always volunteering to spearhead any activity that involved caring for the spouses and sailors. I served as an ombudsman looking after families while the submarine was deployed for months. Looking back now it was diaconal work and pastoral care I just didn't know it at the time. It was just something I felt called to do.

2. What was the first and decisive step that led you to where you are now, two thirds of the way through the Deacons School?

The first and most decisive step was finally listening to what God had been calling me to for many years and accepting it was something I needed to pursue. Once I really listened to Him, I was able to have an honest conversation with my rector and enter into discernment.

3. Along the way, did your parish discernment committee, or the Bishop or the Commission on Ministry ask you “why ordination?” as opposed to continuing to serve the church in lay ministry? I always find that an interesting but tough question.

Yes, I spent six months meeting with my parish discernment committee, and we often talked about this question and my desire to pursue Holy Orders rather than continuing as a lay leader. It is a tough question and one I have wrestled with for extended periods of time. Ultimately for me ordination isn't about validating any of my existing ministries but rather a means of forming a servant leader whose call it is to model servant ministry to all the baptized. Ordination enables me to expand my servant ministry and would be an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual call. It is answering a call I have to make a lifetime commitment to service over self.

4. What is the Deacons School all about? What does the curriculum cover? How long does it last? How is your work assessed?

Deacon School is a cohort of people pursuing Holy Orders either as vocational deacons or local priests. The comprehensive curriculum covers eight major areas of education. The modules are Spiritual Discipline, Practical Training & Experience, Understanding Diakonia & The Diaconate, Holy Scripture, Church History, Anglican/Episcopal Theology, Human Awareness & Understanding, and Pastoral Care.

Currently my cohort and I are in a one-year program. In previous years it has been as long as eighteen months. For each of the educational modules we are assigned a mentor who assess our work. A typical assignment would be to read several subject matter books and write a paper. Other assignments might be more creative such as designing an adult Christian education class.

5. What subject or subjects have most fired your imagination in the work you have done in the Deacons School?

As someone aspiring to be a vocational deacon the modules covering pastoral care, practical diaconal work and understanding Diakonia most energize me. I love learning more about the history of the diaconate and how the order has grown and changed. I am inspired by the work of Episcopal deacons in this diocese and around the country.

6. How do you think you will be better equipped for ministry once you have completed the Deacons School?

Deacon school is such a comprehensive academic experience. Each one of the modules equips me to do the work of a vocational deacon. I have a much deeper knowledge of each of the educational subjects than I did when I began, and I know when I am finished, I will be ready to serve on day one. I will also be equipped with a cohort of peers and mentors to call on which is incredibly valuable.