

A Word About Deacons

Each week we will have a submission from a deacon that will explore topics like what a deacon is, what they do, their history, and other stories.

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The Rev. Patricia Marks was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacons on Nov. 22, 2003 and served at Christ Church, Valdosta. She retired in 2013.

Her diaconal journey began one Sunday in 2001, when The Rev. Nancy Mills brought a labyrinth to the Christ Church parish hall. She introduced its history and the spiritual practices one might wish to follow and then invited those present to make a pilgrimage by walking the labyrinth and opening their hearts to the living God. Patricia says, "To take that meditative journey, circling on a narrow path until you reach the center, means opening the door of your heart, mind, and soul to whatever happens as you pray your way around the circle. And so on one of my walks, I found myself unexpectedly asking 'What, Lord, should I do?'"



She was about to retire as a Professor of English from Valdosta State University and had grand plans to write, to travel, and to volunteer all over town. "What should I do?" She certainly hadn't planned to ask that. "Be patient," said a voice in her heart. "What do you mean, 'Be patient!'" she said-impatiently! "I want to roll up my sleeves and do something worthwhile. I don't like to sit still!" And God laughed. And so began her pilgrimage to the diaconate.

When Patricia completed her diaconal studies and preparation, she was told that she would be a "preachin' teachin' deacon"- and it was so. Through the years she has helped with services and preaching at Christ Church as well as assisting with services at nursing homes in the area, returning during the week to visit those who were ill and giving presentations, book reviews, and talks. She presented classes in sermon preparation at the Deacons' School for Ministry and developed a diocesan web page for Deacons. Locally she helped lead the Stitchers of Love, a group that makes knitted and crocheted gifts for those in need and developed a Stitchers web page on the Christ Church site.

She has served as the spiritual director for a number of deacons. Patricia says that without that experience and background, her first non-academic book, *They All Said Amen*-Bible stories retold from the perspective of those who are usually forgotten-would never have been written. In retirement she continues to write academic papers as well as meditations (next August Forward Day by Day will publish a month of her meditations), make prayer squares and shawls for those in the hospital and hospice, and when possible, visit nursing homes. She has also created a web page, sisters-in-faith.org, commemorating 19th and early 20th century deaconesses whose selfless service laid the groundwork for women to become deacons. As Bishop Benhase told her, "You never retire!"

About being a Deacon, Patricia says, "Becoming a deacon will change your life forever, as it should. You are the link between the church and the world; you bring the needs of those who hunger both materially and spiritually to the church; and you take the comfort of the church to them."