

Deacons in the Episcopal Church

guidelines
on their selection, training, and ministry



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271 North Main Street / Providence RI / 02903

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Seventh Printing

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Preface

Guidelines on the selection, training, and ministry of deacons in the Episcopal Church were published in 1983 by the National Center for the Diaconate (NCD). In 1988 the General Convention substantially revised the Title III canons on ministry. On the principle that “the diaconate is a full and complete order in and of itself,” the convention treated the ordination of deacons in a separate canon. Based on this revision, and on the experience of the many dioceses with deacons, the North American Association for the Diaconate (successor to NCD) has prepared this new edition of *Deacons in the Episcopal Church*.

The guidelines are divided into four major parts: *Part I, The Ministry of All Baptized Persons*, sets the diaconate in the complete baptismal and eucharistic ministry of the church and suggests general norms for deacons and for a diaconate program in each diocese. *Part II, Recruitment and Selection*, applies the principle of God’s call to the canonical process whereby congregations and dioceses identify and choose deacons. *Part III, Training*, discusses the academic, practical, and spiritual formation of those preparing to become deacons. *Part IV, Deacons in the Church*, takes us through the ordination rite and deals with the roles of deacons, their deployment, their service, and their supervision and support.

Dioceses should feel free to interpret these guidelines for their own policy and use. Many dioceses of the Episcopal Church have drafted their own guidelines, in which they adapt these general principles to local needs of selection, training, and ministry. We have drawn upon several diocesan guidelines in drafting this document.

As used in these guidelines, the terms deacon and diaconate refer to those serving in the order of deacons, and not to those preparing to become priests. The term parish refers to all kinds of congregations.

These guidelines refer mainly to deacons ordained under Canon 6. “Local deacons” ordained under Canon 9 are called by congregations in “communities which are small, isolated, remote, or distinct in respect of ethnic composition, language, or culture.” They receive modified training, and they serve in the same congregations. Aside from these and other canonical differences, many of the principles set forth in these guidelines apply also to “local deacons.”

Feast of St. Laurence of Rome, 1988

I. The Ministry of All Baptized Persons

Each diocese shall make provision for the development and affirmation of the ministry of all baptized persons in the Church and in the world. [Canon III.1]

The ministry of Christ and his church

1. The ministry of Christ, which makes its ultimate offering in his sacrifice on the cross, consists in diakonia or service. Christ shares his ministry with his church. The ministry of Christ thus embraces the whole Christian people of God. Baptized and sealed into one eucharistic body, they are marked with an indelible character of priesthood and diakonia. Through their discipleship and their ministries, the people participate in the complete life of the church and thereby witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. This people, the laos, are the essential ministers of the church.

Within the laos exist many ministries. Some are symbolic, and some are functional. Some are the ordinary share of the Christian life. Some take place in families, and some at work. Some are specialized, and some recognized. Some are ordained.

Since the first century the church has ordained certain members of the laos to symbolize and embody in particular ways the various ministries belonging in a general way to all the people of God. The orders of bishops, presbyters or priests, and deacons are a gift of God created by the Holy Spirit acting in the church. By ordination these persons receive the church's official authorization and are given a unique gift of the Holy Spirit, the grace and mystery of sacramental symbolism.

Bishops symbolize the church's catholicism and orthodoxy, her unity and apostolic tradition, as they preside in baptism and the eucharist and lead the sacramental life of a diocese, uphold and teach the truth revealed by Christ, and join together, most visibly in synods or councils, as the single whole episcopate.

Presbyters or priests symbolize the church's praise and prayer as they lead the baptismal and eucharistic life in parishes, join with other presbyters in a college of elders, and share in the bishop's oversight of the diocese. In particular, priests express the royal priesthood of Christ which all people receive at their baptism.

Deacons symbolize the church's service. The distinct ministry of deacons, carried out in pastoral, social, and liturgical service, is to reveal the diakonia of Christ and his church and to bring into focus the great number and variety of Christian

service. In a tradition dating from Ignatius of Antioch, early in the second century, deacons are images of Christ. Our modern understanding is that deacons also lead people in service and point to the presence of Christ in the needy. “At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself” [Ordination of a Deacon, BCP, page 543].

All Anglican congregations, even though they are capable of worshipping and providing pastoral care for one another, are in union with the bishop, need the sacramental ministry of priests, and where possible the explicit servant ministry of deacons. [Council for the Development of Ministry, The Blue Book, 1988, page 245]

All three orders should be visible and active in every place throughout the church, every diocese and every parish, as part of the complete life in Christ. Especially in every parish, presbyters and deacons serve with all the holy people of God in a body with many members, each sent by Christ with special gifts to minister to one another and to others.

Types of deacons

2. There are at least three types of deacons in the church: parish deacons, diocesan deacons, and professional or special deacons.

Parish deacons are based in a parish, where they serve in the liturgy. They may assist in the pastoral care of parishioners, and they usually serve others in a ministry of social care outside the parish. Usually non-salaried and often part-time, they serve under the oversight of the bishop exercised through the rector. They are the most common type of deacon.

Where possible, every parish should have a deacon. It is often desirable to have two deacons. A parish needs to provide continuity in the diaconate, to avoid identification of the diaconate with any one person, and to signify the wide scope of ministry of service. The number of deacons should be related to the needs and dimensions of the congregation. The number may be more than two, provided that each deacon serves others in the world and has the opportunity to serve regularly in the parish liturgy. The focus of service in particular persons becomes blurred when the number of deacons in one place is excessively large.

Diocesan deacons are based in the diocese, where they serve in administrative or institutional work. They are assigned to the cathedral or to one or more parishes, where they serve in the liturgy. Often salaried and often full-time, they serve under the immediate oversight of the bishop or of someone appointed by the bishop.

Diocesan deacons help to strengthen the relationship between the bishop and the diocese. They symbolize the servanthood of the church to the diocesan family. And they provide diaconal ministries more appropriate or feasible for a diocese than for a parish. In some dioceses, the bishop appoints a diocesan deacon (or a parish deacon) as archdeacon, with duties of oversight among the community of deacons.

Professional or special deacons share many similarities with both parish and diocesan deacons. They are assigned to a parish as a liturgical base, where they usually serve without salary and part-time. But they are called to a professional service, to minister in prisons and other state institutions, or to help congregations relate more effectively to the government and public sector. The category also includes deacons who are members of religious orders.

Diaconate programs

3. Each diocese with deacons should establish a diaconate program. Before beginning the program, the diocese should consider these recommendations:

The diocese should already have a program of enabling the ministry of all its people. To have deacons, you must first have diaconal ministry.

- The diocese should have a clear theology of the diaconate.
- The bishop and the diocese should be committed to the diaconate program, in terms of:
 - people* (directing the program the major responsibility of one person or a substantial responsibility of several),
 - time* (the program continuing over several years),
 - money* (sufficient to carry out the program).
- The program should unite deacons and lay persons in a close cooperation. Deacons support lay persons in their vocations in the wider community. Deacons and lay persons should be involved in planning and administering the program. And deacons-to-be should have the opportunity to practice theological reflection with other lay persons.

- A separate diaconate committee of the commission on ministry should be formed for policy, recommendations, and monitoring the program.
- The program should use the ecumenical and secular resources of the area or region.

A diaconate program includes all the aspects of deacons in the diocese: recruitment and selection, training, deployment, and supervision and support. The diaconate committee does not displace the canonical roles of the bishop, standing committee, and commission on ministry in the selection and ordination process. But it may assist them.

As a program matures, wherever possible a deacon should be named director. Some bishops appoint archdeacons (who are deacons) for this purpose. The director works with the bishop and the commission on ministry to administer the program. Especially, the director helps the bishop in recruitment, deployment, and supervision and support. The director may chair the diaconate committee.

Ideally the director of training should be a separate person, with experience in adult education. Increasingly, deacons and lay persons are taking on this role.

The program should be designed to take account of the size and character of the diocese. What works for a large metropolitan diocese may not work for a small rural diocese, and vice versa. In particular, small dioceses tend to have limited resources of people and money.

Finally, the program should include provision for review and evaluation.

II. Recruitment and Selection

All Bishops of Dioceses and other Clergy shall make provisions to identify fit persons for Holy Orders and encourage them to present themselves for postulancy.
[Canon III.4.1]

The meaning of the call

4. Canon law reflects a theology of the church as the body of Christ, the creation of the Father through the Son and filled with the Holy Spirit. Ordained ministry is a product of the body of Christ. Each local church, each parish and diocese, should raise up deacons from its own membership. The outer call from God, proclaimed through the church, is just as important as the inner call, evident in a life of service and in willingness to serve as deacon. No longer are we to wait for applicants, to test them and screen them. We are to recruit those with the gift of service, select those who are qualified, and call them.

Selection of deacons should occur as part of a larger process whereby the church discerns the needs of the church's own life and of the world and the gifts of the church's people. Dioceses and parishes should help all people to discover and evaluate their own ministries.

A deacon is ordained to serve more than the place where the ordination occurs. A deacon is ordained to serve the Lord, the church, and the world, wherever the deacon is called and authorized now and in the future.

Some principles of the call

5. The process begins with recruitment and selection. Throughout the process the commission on ministry assists the bishop "[i]n determining present and future needs for ministry in the Diocese" and "[i]n recruiting and selecting persons for Holy Orders" [Canon III.2.2]. The bishop and other clergy may have a program to identify "fit persons" and to encourage them to apply for postulancy. The term "fit persons" means those whose ministries are already strongly diaconal. Identification may be part of a diocesan-wide recognition of many and various ministries. Identification may take place within congregations. Or identification may take place informally and periodically. Whatever the method, we are to encourage these persons. We are to point out to them that they are fit persons who should consider the diaconate and other diaconal ministries.

The process then focuses on the congregation. Those who wish to apply consult with the rector. The rector consults with other leaders of the congregation. They make a “careful inquiry” and gather data. What are the person’s physical, intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual qualifications? Has the person been a communicant in good standing of the congregation for at least one year? Shall we tell the person to persevere?

The initial stage of recruitment and selection is a delicate period. The congregation plays a crucial role in selection and must be willing to involve itself in the preparation of persons for the diaconate. The parish that has never seen a deacon must find out about deacons, inviting them to speak and serve in the liturgy. The parish where deacons are to serve must clearly want them as deacons. The rector must want them. The congregation must be carefully prepared, potential deacons carefully screened, and a consensus carefully reached. The persons must also be tentatively acceptable to the diocese and the bishop. Finally, the potential deacons may or may not have considered the diaconate before their selection. They have the right to accept or to refuse.

Similar principles apply to the selection of diocesan and special deacons. The process should involve the initiative of the bishop and other diocesan leaders. Those chosen should have administrative or institutional skills suitable for diocesan or special employment. The deacons must be fully acceptable to the diocese and the bishop and to any congregation in which the deacons may also serve.

Personal qualifications

6. Men and women chosen for the diaconate should be “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). They should be physically, emotionally, and spiritually mature. They should be stable in family, community, and church. (See also 1 Timothy 3:8-13.)

They should possess the following personal qualifications:

- Sound family life.
- If married, the approval and support of their spouse.
- High standards and good reputation in the community.
- Several years of diakonia, particularly of works of social care.
- Willingness to remain a deacon for life.
- Intellectual ability and competence. Lack of academic background should not be a barrier. The primary language need not be English.

Canonical steps

7. Recruitment and selection involve the following steps [Canons III.4.1-6]:

- *Identification*: The bishop and other clergy make provisions to identify fit persons.
- *Recruitment*: Those identified are encouraged to apply for postulancy.
- *Consultation with rector*: A person who wishes to apply consults with the person's rector.
- *Parish inquiry*: Consulting with other leaders of the congregation, the rector carefully inquires into the physical, intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual qualifications of the person. The person must have been a communicant in good standing of the parish for at least one year.
- *Parish recommendation*: If the rector concludes that the person should persevere, the rector counsels the person to apply to the bishop. The rector reports the findings to the bishop.
- *Application*: The person applies to the bishop in writing, giving:

Full name, date of birth, and marital status.

Length of time resident in the diocese.

When, and by whom, baptized.

When, and by whom, confirmed.

Whether application has been made previously for admission as a postulant for holy orders.

On what grounds the applicant is moved to seek holy orders.

The level of education attained, and, if any, the degrees earned, and areas of specialization.

- *Meeting with bishop*: The bishop confers in person with the applicant.
- *Examination*: The applicant takes a thorough medical and psychological examination. The bishop appoints the professionals.
- *Bishop's decision*: The bishop notifies the applicant and the commission on ministry (COM) whether the bishop is moved to proceed.
- *COM interview*: The COM, either as a whole or by committee, interviews the applicant. The purpose is to report to the bishop on the applicant's fitness to enter a program of preparation. The COM reviews the application, prepares an evaluation, and presents it to the bishop.
- *Paperwork*: The bishop and the COM must have the following papers:

The written application.

The COM evaluation.

If the applicant has attended a theological school, an academic transcript and the school's evaluation of the applicant's personal qualifications for holy orders.

A certificate from the rector and vestry of the applicant's parish.

- *Admission:* The bishop may admit the applicant as a postulant.

8. During the period of preparation for the diaconate, there are two major stages, postulancy and candidacy. The steps are as follows [Canons III.4-5]:

Postulancy

This stage lasts at least six months. Postulancy is a period of probation and early preparation for ordination.

Before beginning preparation, the postulant must present to the bishop and COM evidence of a college degree, or the equivalent, with an academic transcript. If the postulant does not have a degree, but has shown proficiency in an occupation or profession, the COM may require the person to obtain a college degree, to pass an academic exam, or otherwise to satisfy the COM of academic knowledge.

The postulant then enters a program of preparation and must be enrolled in the program at least nine months (an academic year) before applying for candidacy.

The postulant then applies for candidacy. The COM, as a whole or by committee, may interview the postulant. The COM reports to the bishop on the postulant's readiness to be admitted as a candidate (successful progress in a course of preparation).

The bishop must receive:

- A reaffirmation of the certificate from the rector and vestry (required for postulancy).
- An evaluation and recommendation from the theological school or director of the program of preparation.
- A report from the COM on whether the postulant is ready to be a candidate.
- The written approval of the standing committee (which may have interviewed the postulant).

The bishop interviews the postulant and may then admit the person as a candidate.

Candidacy

This stage lasts at least one year (although, with the consent of the standing committee, the bishop may shorten it to no less than six months). Candidacy is a period of final preparation for ordination.

9. During postulancy and candidacy the person must communicate with the bishop personally or by letter, four times a year, in the Ember Weeks, reflecting on academic experience and personal and spiritual development.

10. Ordination involves the following requirements [Canon 6]:

- The candidate must be at least 21 years old.
- The candidate must have been a candidate for one year (unless shortened to six months).
- The candidate takes a thorough medical and psychological examination. The bishop appoints the professionals. This may be a new exam or, if the bishop wishes, the previous exam may suffice.
- The candidate completes the course of study and training, and takes an examination in the academic portion.
- The COM, as a whole or by committee, may interview the candidate. The COM reports to the bishop on the candidate's readiness for ordination (successful completion of preparation) and personal qualifications.
- The candidate presents to the standing committee these papers:

1. An application for ordination, signed by the candidate. The application gives the person's date of birth. It also states "how the Candidate intends to exercise the ministry of a Deacon both in the Church and in the world and that there is no intent to apply for ordination to the priesthood."

2. Certificates from the bishop(s) who admitted the person a postulant and a candidate, giving the dates of admission. These state "in what manner the ministry of the Deacon is to be exercised."

3. A certificate from the rector and vestry of the candidate's parish.

4. A report from the COM that the candidate has successfully completed the course of preparation, and "giving an evaluation with recommendation as to personal qualifications for Holy Orders."

- The standing committee recommends to the bishop that the candidate be ordained deacon.
- The bishop receives the standing committee's written testimonial.
- The bishop decides whether there is "no sufficient objection on grounds medical, psychological, moral, doctrinal, or spiritual."
- The bishop "may take order for the ordination."

III. Formation and training

The process of preparation

11. Formation of diaconal character (service to God in the world) begins in infancy and continues for life. We are born with a natural *diakonia*, and we acquire a Christian *diakonia* at baptism. All the baptized are royal priests and servants in Christ; some are ordained as symbols of Christ and of what all the baptized are.

Canon law uses the term *preparation* to refer to the course of study and training for ordination. Preparation for ordination involves a specific application of diaconal formation, in which a person learns how to function in the symbolic role of deacon. The terms *formation* and *training* are widely used for the process of preparation. The process includes:

- *academic* study or education,
- *practical* training or experience,
- *spiritual* development or discipline.

The type of formation in each area depends on the person's background and present life and on the church's need for a particular ministry. A person may already have theological education, experience in diaconal ministry, and spiritual discipline. Even a strong diaconal character must continue to be formed for two or three years. Most persons will need to review the church's basic teaching (concentrating on scripture), sharpen diaconal skills, and participate in diaconal community. The primary focus should be on using scripture to reflect on life. But not all persons should prepare in the same way. The diaconate is a polychrome ministry with a great diversity of service. Dioceses should design programs which help persons to prepare in ways suitable to each person and to each proposed ministry.

Diocesan formation programs

12. The oldest type of formation is private study under the direction of one or more tutors. Solitary study does a poor job at preparing a person for communal ministry. Even in remote settings, other parishioners can be included.

Many dioceses are finding it desirable to form deacons in groups. In small groups people reflect on and share what they have read. They learn to think theologically

about their ministries of social care. They learn to deal emotionally and spiritually with pain, rejection, disappointment, and failure.

Three main types of formation have emerged:

- *Diocesan school for deacons*, which prepares primarily candidates for the diaconate, and sometimes others. This type helps to build diaconal community. In a few places, the diocesan school trains deacons for several surrounding dioceses.
- *Diocesan school of theology or ministry*, which prepares primarily persons who aren't seeking ordination, and also candidates for the diaconate (and even, in some dioceses, the priesthood). This type (and the preceding one) can take the form of theological education by extension (such as Education for Ministry, or EFM) used in many dioceses.
- *Combination of the two*. For example, a person studies for two or three years in a diocesan school of ministry and also studies, either for another year or concurrently, with other candidates for the diaconate.

In a common pattern of group formation, participants meet for a weekend once a month during the academic year. Meetings begin on Friday night and end on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. They include worship, spiritual formation, and courses on the Bible and other academic areas.

Those in formation for the diaconate also meet separately (if they do not already do so). They discuss the Bible in relationship to social issues. They train in the practical areas of pastoral and social ministry. They learn how to preach, and they practice their role in the liturgy. In addition to the weekend meetings, they take a unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE) or complete equivalent training in a practical specialty. They go on retreat once or twice a year. And they gather every summer, at the diocesan camp, for a week of specialized training and community with each other and their bishop.

With variations, this pattern is repeated in many dioceses.

The cost of formation often runs to several hundred dollars a year (fees, books, CPE, retreat, week at camp). The parish or diocese should be prepared to assist.

For those whose diaconal ministry requires one or more theological disciplines, seminary education (perhaps only one or two years) or some other college study may be necessary. Seminary education should never be denied to qualified persons whose ministry may benefit from it.

Content of formation

13. The canonical requirements for preparation for the diaconate are as follows [Canon III.6.4]:

Academic

Academic study or education takes place “for such time and to such extent as is judged suitable by the Bishop after consultation with the Commission.” The subject matter must include:

1. Holy Scriptures: contents and background;
2. Church History: a general outline;
3. Christian Theology: The church’s teaching as set forth in the Creeds and An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism;
4. Christian Ethics and Moral Theology;
5. Studies in contemporary society, including racial and other minority groups;
6. Liturgics: The contents and use of the Book of Common Prayer;
7. Theory and practice of ministry.

This list appears to require training modeled on that of a seminary. (The list is almost identical to the subjects required for those training for the priesthood.) But dioceses should avoid the seminary model. Professional theological education, even of a reduced sort, is not required for most deacons. And it is not desirable. The ministry of deacons is entirely different from that of priests. It is basically the ministry of ordinary baptized Christians. The training of deacons should be that of well informed and skillful Christians, with a few special additions. Traditional academic methods such as lectures may sometimes be used with good effect, but other forms of methodology, especially in adult education, should be explored. Adults (who include deacons) usually learn best when they train in short time segments for specific tasks needed in their work.

For all Christians, the core of academic training should be a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, including theological reflection about problems in the church and the world. They should know the church’s basic teaching in scripture, doctrine, liturgy, history, and ethics. They should have the skills to minister according to their gifts. Deacons need to know two other subjects. They need to study the history of the diaconate, including its biblical and primitive roots and its contemporary commitment to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and the quest for justice. And they need training in the role of the deacon in the liturgy, so that they can perform with skill and grace. Most deacons can learn to sing at least the Exsultet.

Practical

Practical training or experience must be “suitable to the Candidate’s occupation, and ministry in the Church and the world.” The canons specify no subject matter. Practical training usually refers to supervised practice in the particular ministry of social care proposed for the deacon. This can include clinical pastoral education in a hospital or prison, training in social work, or training in catechetical techniques. Deacons must also know how to work as part of a team, how to work with volunteers, and how to strengthen others in their ministry in the world. The training of a deacon must be appropriate to the person’s occupation, role in the community, and ministry. As “experience,” the training may already have taken place, but it may need refreshing.

Spiritual

Spiritual development or discipline is not covered in the canons. But it is an integral part of Christian life and should not be neglected. Traditional methods include worship, retreats, and the use of a spiritual director or confessor. Spiritual formation takes place especially through the Sunday eucharist, daily prayer, and the reading of scripture. It also involves the study of personal commitment, of the Christian as totally committed to God. And it involves participation in support groups including spouses, families, parishioners, and deacons, and in the total life of the community. Some dioceses provide a course in spirituality for deacons and others training for ministry.

Length of formation

14. The length of preparation for ordination normally ranges from two to four years. (Postulancy may begin before or during this period, and candidacy usually occupies the final year.) In many cases two or three years is sufficient time for the special preparation required for a suitably qualified person. An overly extended period deprives parishes and dioceses of the deacons they have selected. Deacons taking more than four years to complete training should probably be dropped from the program unless some special circumstance warrants an extension.

Formation does not cease after the specified time, with ordination. In planning the content and length of training, dioceses should remember that deacons are expected to continue their education during their diaconate.

Examination and evaluation

15. For *academic* education, the candidate must “pass an examination, the form and content of which shall be determined by the Bishop and the Commission.” The canons do not require the General Ordination Examination, and it is not expected. The exam may be written or oral or both. It may consist of essays or questions or true and false, or all of these. Examiners should remember, however, that candidates for the diaconate are not students in graduate school. Usually they have been long out of college and have forgotten how to take exams. Their academic background may be limited.

For *practical* training, no exam is required. “A record of all such training and an evaluation of the Candidate’s attainments shall be submitted in writing to the Commission.”

For *spiritual* formation, the only requirement is to report to the bishop in the Embertide letters.

Some priorities

16. In the process of ordaining a deacon, recruitment and selection are more important than preparation. If we select diaconal people, the diaconate will follow. For deacons the most important diaconal formation takes place after ordination, continues for the duration of the diaconate, and takes account of changing circumstances in the life and ministry of the deacons.

IV. Deacons in the Church

Ordination of deacons

17. Following the universal practice of the catholic church, dating from apostolic times, those chosen deacon are ordained by solemn prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop.

Ordination provides the church with a major opportunity to display the three orders as both unified and distinct, diakonia as central to Christian life, and all ministries as essential to our complete representation of Christ. The normal ordainer is the bishop of the diocese, surrounded by the people of the diocese. Deacons are diocesan ministers. It is becoming common for bishops to ordain deacons at convention or on some other major diocesan occasion. Deacons also serve in a congregation. Whether in a parish church or the cathedral, ordination should take place at a time when the congregation from a deacon's assigned parish can easily take part. Ordination should involve the spouse, family, and other persons in a deacon's area of service, as well as presbyters and other deacons. Finally, deacons are servants at the table. Although the liturgy of ordination should be solemn and corporate, rich in song, dress, and symbols, it should also express a ministry that is simple and modest.

Roles of deacons

18. In the ordination rite the bishop tells the ordinand what it means to be a deacon [BCP, page 543]. This address covers deacons in six roles: servant of the bishop, servant of the needy, student of scripture, symbol of Christ, interpreter of the world, and revealer of Christ.

Servant of the bishop

God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop.

19. A multitude of ministerial relationships makes up service to the church. The ancient and primary bond of deacons, stemming from ordination, is with the bishop of the diocese. Priests work "together" with the bishop in a college of presbyters, and lay persons are free to come and go and serve in all sorts of ways. Deacons are subject to the bishop because the bishop oversees diakonia in the diocese. In the early church deacons served as the bishop's eyes and ears and as members of the bishop's household or staff. According to Hippolytus in *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 215), a deacon is ordained "to serve the bishop and to fulfill the bishop's

command” and “is to acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful.” In our age bishops and deacons are seeking new expressions of this role which combine collegiality with discipline.

In many dioceses the bishop draws up a letter of agreement (or ministry) with deacons. The assigned parish should be involved in the agreement, since the rector and vestry must consent to the assignment. The initial letter should be drafted and signed before ordination. A typical letter covers: the bishop’s assignment to a parish or some diocesan position, liturgical and social-care functions, dress and title, financial arrangements (if any), hours of service, continuing education, and review or evaluation.

Servant of the needy

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

20. The main function of deacons is to serve those in need. Deacons “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9) in the performance of *diakonia*. They do this by their faith and their works of mercy and justice. Deacons share their service with other members of the church, who serve the needy in many different ways. The distinctive role of deacons is to hold up *diakonia* as a candle, so that the people, led and encouraged by example, will go into the world in service.

As servants of the needy, deacons should avoid special dress, titles, perquisites, and other symbols of a status which distinguish deacons sharply from those among whom they live and work and whom they serve. Street clothing is increasingly considered to be the norm for deacons. Some bishops allow clerical garb when a particular form of diaconal ministry requires it. In some dioceses the normal title or form of address is “Deacon.”

Student of scripture

As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them.

21. The essence of scripture is the *logos* or Word who is Christ. To study the Word is to feed upon Christ. To model oneself upon Christ is to adopt a life which is modest, simple, and humble. The bishop’s address requires deacons to study the scriptures but also to live in imitation of Christ. This is a life of recognition of Christ in the needy, of service, and of prayer.

The personal life of deacons should include spiritual discipline normal to all Christians: daily prayer (especially the daily office), family prayer (which includes all small groups), confession of sin, and the eucharist. The bishop's address also suggests that deacons should adopt a program of regular, even daily, reading of the scriptures and commentaries. Deacons may expand upon the requirement by forming and leading groups to study the Bible.

Symbol of Christ

You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship.

22. Deacons are not functionaries alone, but symbols of the diakonia of Christ and his church. Diaconal function gives life to diaconal symbol. As servants of the church, deacons hold before the church the whole ministry of the church as service. As symbols of Christ, deacons reveal to the people of God that they have been baptized as servants.

As symbols of Christ, deacons occupy a special place in the laos. They are a living challenge to symbols of status and hierarchy. Although members of the clergy in canon law, they are also, in the ancient tradition of the church, members of the laity. Hippolytus said that the deacon "does not take part in the council of the clergy." The existence of deacons in the church raises profound questions about the historical development of the clergy (bishops and presbyters) into a professional estate above and separate from the vast majority of Christians.

Interpreter of the world

You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

23. This statement is not a license to preach, which involves interpretation from church to world. Deacons interpret in the opposite direction, from world to church. They interpret the world because, as servants of the needy, they have access to needs, concerns, and hopes. But if they are to interpret, they must be able to see and hear. Part of the training of deacons should be to teach them to speak the many languages of the needy.

Deacons interpret the world when they "acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful." They interpret the world when they speak out in the forums of the church. Deacons are expected to use their voice in conventions and on church bodies such as commissions and committees and vestries. In many parishes outreach committees work with deacons. In the liturgy "interpret" means putting

the language of needs, concerns, and hopes into the language of bidding to prayer. This occurs in the prayers of the people. Deacons are to place before the people of God, in the ancient language of the church at prayer, names and concerns of great need, so that the people can intercede through Christ to our Father in heaven.

Revealer of Christ

At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.

24. The theological basis for the bishop's statement, which reflects the baptismal covenant, is Matthew 25:31-46. We are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison. And all the rest who need. Alongside that tabernacle in the sanctuary are those temples of the Holy Spirit clamoring at the door for food, shelter, and a listening ear. Christ is present in all the needy and helpless, and he can be found especially in those at the bottom of society. The distinct role of deacons in the church is to reveal the real presence of Christ in the needy and helpless, and to carry the message of that presence to the people of God.

This is what we mean by deacons enabling, helping, and encouraging Christian people to serve. Deacons are to give Christian people the Christian reason to serve. In the liturgy the revelation of Christ in humanity occurs vividly when the deacon comes among the people and proclaims the good news of Christ to the poor in whom Christ dwells.

Deployment of deacons

25. The bishop normally assigns deacons to one or more parishes. The rector and vestry must request, or consent to, the assignment.

The bishop normally assigns parish deacons to the parish which chose them, where deacons function under the surrogate leadership and authority of the rector (and in some places, the vestry). It is important to understand, however, that deacons in parishes are not "curates" or "assistants" (normally priests), selected by the rector to serve at the rector's discretion. They are "deacons," appointed by the bishop as the bishop's deputies in service.

In some dioceses the bishop appoints deacons to other parishes. The bishop may send deacons to other parishes every few years, or when the rector changes. Deacons must be ready and able to respond to the bishop's call to serve anywhere in the diocese.

Most parish deacons serve the church part-time without cash stipend, housing, and housing allowance. Some deacons are paid a stipend in a parish. The diocese or the parish may, at its discretion, pay for expenses incurred in ecclesial service, and may also provide for deacons to participate in the group life and group medical insurance programs of the diocese.

26. The bishop normally assigns diocesan and special deacons to the cathedral or to one or more parish churches.

Diocesan deacons may function as full-time paid employees of the church. They are administrators such as archdeacons, chancellors, treasurers, secretaries, business managers, directors of diocesan religious education, journalists, and holders of other bureaucratic or diplomatic positions. They are also institutional workers such as chaplains, social workers, and agency directors. Special deacons usually work as professionals in the world.

Even though diocesan deacons are usually paid by the diocese or by a church agency, they function also in the life of parishes, as members of a parish family and as deacons in parish liturgies. Their letter of agreement should reflect these different arrangements.

27. Ordination as deacon permanently confers the grace to symbolize the church's ministry of service. Assignment is not permanent. Deacons who move to another community or diocese, or who cease to function in a parish or diocese, lose the right to function as deacon and to symbolize diakonia in any way, unless they receive a new assignment.

Deacons who arrive in a new parish may not function as deacon until assignment by the bishop, with the consent of the rector and vestry.

Transfer to another diocese requires the written request of the bishop of the new diocese, with the written consent of the standing committee. The same applies to a license to function as deacon in another diocese. [Canon III.6.9(b)]

28. Deacons ordained under Canon 6 are specifically called to the diaconate. They present the standing committee with a signed statement "that there is no intent to apply for ordination to the priesthood." The canons consider deacons to be permanent but allow for a later call by the church to another order. To become priests, deacons must be recruited and selected for that order, undergo the complete process of postulancy and candidacy (usually attending residential seminary), and fulfill the requirements of Canon 7. [Canon III.6.10]

Service of deacons

29. Deacons serve in three primary areas: pastoral care (the church's own people), social care (society at large), and liturgy. Christ's washing of his disciples' feet in John 13:1-15 (the gospel and rite of Maundy Thursday) symbolizes the service which deacons perform in all three areas. A deacon's service in the church and the world may range among many possibilities but usually concentrates in one or two areas. In our age, the church expects deacons especially to lead and enable Christians in ministries of social care outside the church community.

Pastoral care

Deacons serve the church's own people by visiting the sick, infirm, and newcomers, leading music, teaching children or adults (especially in the preparation of catechumens), organizing retreats and other spiritual activities, training readers and acolytes, leading prayer and discussion groups, editing and writing for newspapers and newsletters, and working in parish or diocesan administration.

Social care

Deacons lead others in works of mercy and justice outside the church with prisoners, the old, the sick, the poor, the homeless, the handicapped, abused women, alcoholics and addicts and their families, and numerous others in need. Deacons are involved in politics, business, culture, and local community development. Some social ministries occur as part of the professional occupation of deacons, and not only with the obvious examples of deacon doctors, nurses, lawyers, and teachers. The church may decide to put some deacons on salary to perform a vital social ministry.

Liturgy

Deacons visibly enact the diakonia of Christ and his church in the eucharist. Representing both an angelic messenger and an ordinary table waiter, deacons proclaim the gospel, bid the prayers of the people, wait on the table, serve the wine, dismiss the people, and in general give directions and keep order. On the three days of the paschal feast (Maundy Thursday night, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil), deacons play a major role in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Deacons also take the eucharistic bread and wine to the sick and infirm, direct the lay eucharistic ministers, and assist in Christian initiation. In all liturgies it is proper for two deacons to attend the bishop and share functions, and two deacons are appropriate in the normative parish liturgy.

30. “Deacons by virtue of their order do not exercise a presiding function” [BCP, page 13]. Although the Book of Common Prayer permits deacons to take an Officiant role in a few limited circumstances, deacons symbolize service best when they act as servants.

Ordination does not automatically confer on deacons the right (or faculty) to preach. The bishop may license deacons (and lay persons) to preach liturgical homilies, after study and practice.

Deacons may preside at the so-called “deacon’s mass,” or liturgy including distribution of the reserved sacrament to a congregation [BCP, page 408]. The liturgy should be used only when no priest is available and the permission of the bishop has been received in advance.

Deacons (and lay persons) may anoint the sick “in cases of necessity” [BCP, page 456]. Deacons (and lay persons) may hear confessions of sin but not pronounce absolution [BCP, page 446]. In both sacramental rites, the normal officiant is a bishop or priest.

31. The distinctive vestments of a deacon are the dalmatic and stole. It is appropriate to wear a seasonal stole over a neutral colored dalmatic (over an alb). The stole is worn “from the left shoulder.” Deacons may wear the stole in any one of three ways: Roman (the ends tied or fastened under the right arm), Byzantine (a long stole with the middle under the right arm and the ends hanging from the left shoulder), and Russian or primitive (hanging straight down from the left shoulder). The stole may also be worn over a surplice or alb.

Supervision and support

32. The bishop directs the deacons of a diocese. In some dioceses the bishop delegates the task to a subordinate, a priest or a deacon (perhaps an archdeacon) or a lay person. Whether bishop or subordinate, this person is in charge of deacons in all their ministry in the church.

In ministry in a parish, deacons act under the authority of the rector, member of the clergy in charge, or vestry. This includes liturgical functions and all other ministry within the parish, to and with the parishioners. Yet deacons are not the rector’s curates, assistants, or servants. They have a distinct ministry of service within the parish leadership. In the parish they represent the bishop’s oversight of diakonia in the diocese.

In ministry outside a parish, not involving parishioners, deacons are not subject to the rector. It is not always clear where the parish ends and the rest of the church begins. There is also a delicate area outside the parish where ministry in the church (under the direction of the bishop) encounters ministry in the world (often under the direction of a secular person). Deacons must sometimes answer to several overseers.

Deacons should have voice in the diocesan convention. Should those who serve the bishop have vote? This is a question for diocesan decision.

33. Although the deacons of the ancient church were often the chief aides of their bishops, in the modern church many deacons seldom get to see or talk with the bishop. Deacons should seek special occasions to be with the bishop, not only in liturgy but in settings which foster mutual knowledge and understanding. If possible, a deacon and the bishop should sit down once a year for a discussion. They need to evaluate performance, share opinions, isolate areas of conflict, and set goals. This review can help in the revision of the letter of agreement.

34. In a parish, deacons should consult frequently with the rector. They need to monitor effectiveness, review assignments, and check spiritual and professional growth.

Deacons should have voice in the parish vestry. The parish which chose, or consented to the assignment of, deacons has the right to hear the deacons' voice, and the deacons have the duty to speak.

The parish should resolve areas of conflict between deacons and others. These may occur in liturgy, in which deacons and other baptized persons have been granted overlapping roles. Although deacons normally lead the prayers of the people and administer the cup, they should not exclude other persons from functions which the church finds useful or meaningful.

Deacons should never function in liturgical roles proper to priests or other persons. Priests or other persons of the parish should not exercise liturgical functions proper to deacons or wear vestments suggestive of the diaconate.

The parish should clearly set forth the terms involved in a deacon's service, the hours per week, and areas of responsibility. These can be specified in the letter of agreement (or a separate letter with the parish). Although there is no absolute standard for such terms, which vary from situation to situation, parish deacons who

are otherwise employed commonly serve the church ten to twenty hours a week without financial remuneration.

35. Support for deacons takes place in continuing education, meetings of deacons and other groups, and the development of spiritual life.

Like all other Christians, deacons should seek opportunity for continuing education. A long-range program of diaconal formation might include:

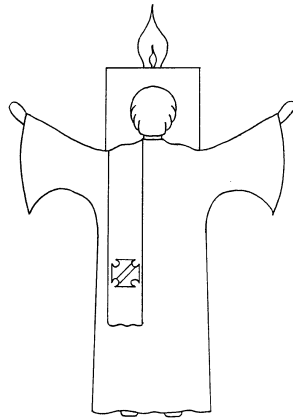
- Participation in ongoing programs for the diaconate, whether national, provincial, or diocesan.
- Two weeks each year for development of diaconal capability.
- Sabbatical leave for continuing education, research, and reflection. The letter of agreement may specify leave accumulated at the rate of four weeks per year of service.

36. Deacons should become members of support groups on several levels:

- With other persons, including spouse and family, both in and outside the parish. The best vehicle is a small group which meets weekly for prayer, study, or discussion.
- With other deacons. The deacons of a diocese, or at least an area, should get to know each other informally, with spouses, and should meet several times a year for diaconal and social purposes. One or two meetings should include the bishop.
- With presbyters. It is valuable to meet both socially and formally with the priests of the area. The local clericus (clergy of a deanery or convocation) should be asked to arrange at least some meetings convenient to the work schedule of the deacons.

In some dioceses the summer camp session, lasting several days to a week, is used to satisfy needs of supervision and support. Candidates receive special preparation and are integrated into the diaconal community. Deacons receive continuing education and mutual support. And the bishop gets to meet with, teach, hear, and worship with the deacons.

37. Deacons should have a spiritual director, to consult on a regular basis. Preferably the director should be someone other than the rector or other supervisor. The director need not be a confessor, and need not be a priest.



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