

DIAKONEO

TO BE A SERVANT; MINISTER TO ANOTHER'S NEEDS



ASSOCIATION FOR
EPISCOPAL DEACONS
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

FEBRUARY 2026

The Association for Episcopal Deacons equips deacons for ministry through gatherings, publications, learning opportunities, and leadership support.

Dear Friends,

Each February, *Diakoneo* magazine is shared beyond the membership of the Association for Episcopal Deacons. We do this as an invitation - to deacons, deacon supporters, and church leaders across the Episcopal Church - to stay connected to the life and ministry of the diaconate.

The Association for Episcopal Deacons (AED) exists to support, sustain, and strengthen the diaconate through Church-wide formation, communication, community, leadership development, and advocacy. Because deacons serve in widely varied contexts across the Church, AED provides shared resources and connection that complement diocesan life and extend beyond what any single diocese can offer.

Through gatherings, publications, learning opportunities, and leadership support, AED works to equip deacons for ministry and to foster connection across geographic and institutional boundaries.

This issue of *Diakoneo* reflects the voices and experiences of deacons engaged in ministry in many different settings. We hope it offers encouragement, reflection, and insight for your own vocational journey.

If you are already a member of AED, thank you. Your membership makes this shared work possible.

If you are not yet a member, we invite you to consider [joining AED](#) and becoming part of a Church-wide community committed to the future of diaconal ministry.

With gratitude for your ministry,

The Rev. Carter Hawley (she/her)
Executive Director
Association for Episcopal Deacons

Become a member of the Association for Episcopal Deacons

JOIN AT episcopaldeacons.org

If you're already a member, thank you!

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THE COURAGE TO GO FIRST: LEADING WITH GRACE AND GRIT

2026 Archdeacon & Deacon Directors Gathering
 April 30 – May 3, 2026 • Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI

At the end of every Eucharist, the deacon proclaims the dismissal — sending the Church into the world to love and serve. That moment of faithful courage inspired the theme for this year’s gathering: The Courage to Go First: Leading with Grace and Grit.

This gathering invites all who guide, form, and support the diaconate to explore what it means to lead courageously and faithfully — often from the middle space between bishops and deacons, between Church and world. Together we’ll ask:

- What does leadership look like when the path isn’t yet clear?
- How do we sustain grace and hope while leading systems through change?
- What practices help us act boldly without losing our center?

The event will combine structured storytelling, guided conversation, and collaborative problem-solving, so that every participant contributes, learns, and takes home something practical. Expect worship, honest dialogue, creativity, and renewal — a space to name what’s real and imagine what’s next for the diaconate and the wider Church. Come ready to listen, share, and leave with one concrete act of courage for your own ministry context.

Many deacons in leadership roles carry a quiet kind of loneliness.

Not because they lack colleagues. Not because they don’t care deeply about the work. But because the role itself is often complex.

Responsibilities differ widely from diocese to diocese. Expectations are shaped by context, relationships, and history. Much of the work happens in spaces that are relational, adaptive, and not easily named or standardized.

When archdeacons and deacon leaders last gathered in a dedicated space, there was thoughtful engagement with strategies and best practices. In addition, what resonated most clearly was relief at being in a room where shared experience was assumed, and less time was spent explaining the role and more time listening to one another. This Conference is intentionally shaped around that reality.

This is not a content-heavy or solution-driven event. It is a carefully held gathering for archdeacons, deacon directors, and deacons in leadership who are navigating responsibility and discernment within varied diocesan contexts. There is space to slow down. Space to listen. Space to discover shared language for work that is often carried quietly.

Registration is limited to 65, and the deadline is February 28.

DETAILS & REGISTRATION

(www.episcopaldeacons.org/A3D-conference)



[SIENA RETREAT CENTER](#)

Churches open “Prayer Boxes” to the neighborhood

Archdeacon Grace E Swinski | September 2025

Last fall, St. Luke’s and Good Shepherd Episcopal Churches in Pawtucket, RI began reaching out in a new way, by placing “Prayer Boxes” outside their buildings for neighbors to use.

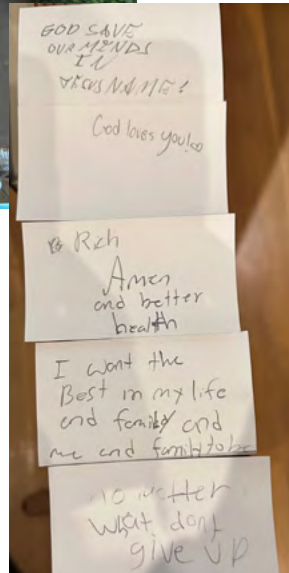
The idea, inspired by book-exchange mailboxes, was brought forward by Deacon Mary Ann Mello and embraced by both vestries. With support from vestry and clergy team members for both churches, the Rev. Dennis Bucco and the Rev. Alvin Marcetti, the project became a team effort. Funding came through a grant from Good Shepherd’s Advent Fund.

Long time parishioners Danny B. of St. Luke’s and Vincent C. of Good Shepherd built the boxes and Bob Lundgren of St. Luke’s painted the prayer boxes to match the individual churches.

The goal is simple but powerful, to create a space where neighbors can “Take a Prayer, Leave a Prayer.” Commuters and passersby are welcome to take a prayer card with them as a reminder that God is present in their daily lives. In turn, people can also leave their own written prayers, which will be included each week in the churches’ Prayers of the People.

“In a world moving so quickly, where many carry heavy burdens, we want to offer a sign of hope and connection,” Deacon Mello said. “These prayer boxes are a way of reminding our neighbors that the church is here for them and that God walks with them.”

Archdeacon Grace serves in the Diocese of Rhode Island.



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Coming this fall

AED BOARD ELECTION

October 5 - 25, 2026

AED elects new board members every two years, by ballot of our membership. Voting will be online, with ballots being emailed to AED members. Full details to come.

For information about standing for election to the board, [please contact us](#).

IN MEMORIAM

AED mourns the death last November of [Deacon Dutton Morehouse Jr.](#) Dutton, from the Diocese of Atlanta, served as AED’s magazine editor from 1999-2013.

JOB OPENING - GRANTS ADMINISTRATOR

The Fund for the Diaconate is accepting resumes for a part-time Grants Administrator. See page 16 for details.

The Association for Episcopal Deacons is a membership association of persons within The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Church of Canada. Our mission is to increase participation and involvement of all baptized persons in Christ’s diaconal ministry, especially by promoting and supporting the diaconate.

THE MINISTRY OF ARCHDEACONS

Archdeacons are valuable to the Church, yet we know that not every diocese has archdeacons. In an effort to provide a snapshot of their ministry and help promote archdeacons, we've reached out to a large group, inviting them to write about their experience. We begin sharing their reflections in this issue, and will continue in subsequent issues.

Blessed to serve under four bishops in ten years

Archdeacon Diana Leiker | January 2026

“I’d like you to be the next Archdeacon”, my new Bishop said to me when I had been a Deacon for only three years. The Bishop who had ordained me three years prior in December 2016, had retired, and I was very aware that the previous Archie had done a lot of scheduling of deacons to assist the Bishop at every Sunday service, confirmation, funeral for clergy, or event at which he celebrated. It was a wonderful way for parishioners to see a Deacon at the altar, but I knew that the scheduling was often a nightmare. The Archdeacon had to often fill in when there were no deacons available. At the time, I didn’t have the words or experience to explain that I while I was capable of filling that role, it was not where my energy wanted or needed to be. The three Archdeacons before me, all vocational deacons, each had a different role to play in developing our order from something new in the Diocese to a more respected order, diverse in responsibilities within a parish, then expanding to include a deanery, or the diocese. It had only been two years that the Archdeacon was allowed to sit on the C.O.M. I may have been a new deacon, but I was already realizing that our roles needed to continue to grow outside of the church walls and in collaboration with each other and other entities in the community, if we were to honor and live into our vows.

“What would being the Archdeacon look like?” I asked. The new Bishop replied “We’ll find out as we go along.” That was the answer I needed! What I know about myself is that I have always been the square peg that doesn’t fit into the round hole without a hammer. As a retired art teacher, I could never repeat lessons or events without assessing the outcomes, changing and improving them, while being more creative and above all, engaging more people. Throughout my life, I have had people tell me they run the other way when they see me coming because it means more work for them! Can I assist in liturgical work? Absolutely. But while I love it, and I really do, that can’t be all I focus on; I need time to be serving in the community with marginalized people too. For me, that has always been my call and why I became a Deacon.

I was appointed the Archdeacon in the Fall of 2019 and was eager to discern what I could do in this position. Then the pandemic hit and life was turned upside down. The deacons of the diocese were feeling frustrated and some reached out to me, looking for ways to be productive and feel needed during the shutdown. I organized a weekly zoom meeting and we began a 4 ½ year “season” of gathering every Monday morning with deacons from the Dioceses of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Western New York, and the Diocese of Niagara, Ontario. The Episcopal and Anglican Deacons shared “all things diaconal” as they read and discussed scripture, talked canons, listened to and encouraged ministries, and friendships and a true support system was developed. We even got together in person four times on both sides of

the border, discovering that we Deacons have bodies! Just this January, a decision was made that for now, the weekly meetings have run their course and we are taking a long pause, but we will zoom in the Fall and catch up on all that has happened over the months. Everyone’s schedules are filled with funerals, doctor appointments and meetings, travel, family life, and of course the various time-consuming but most needed ministries in the community. As life has resumed to a new normal in the church, it has become more difficult to attend regularly, so it is time to let go of the great season we had and make room for the Holy Spirit to usher in the new. One thing I know with all my heart is that the regularity of the conversation has brought us together as deacons who love what we do and we most definitely love each other.

Each Bishop focuses on bringing about their own sense of call to the role, and as a Deacon, I always have something new to learn from them.

During my first five years as Archdeacon, a new covenant between the parish priest and deacon was written, we met as a group yearly with the Bishop to discuss what we were all doing and what we needed from the diocese to support our ministries, we were always included in the clergy zoom meetings and yearly retreats, and we had the opportunity to engage in continuing education. I see my role as a gatherer, cheerleader, educator and pastoral support as the deacons of the Diocese discern their next steps when they need to change assignments, begin new ministries, or are changing their mindset from a deacon who serves inside walls to a Deacon who serves outside. As we are all aging, we find that we are looking for new ways to feed our souls and fill our hearts while at the same time, upholding vows taken at Baptism and Ordination and serving our Bishop in the Diocese.

And just like that, I was without a Bishop and the Diocese was in transition mode. This past summer, we enlisted the help of a Bishop Provisional to guide us as we discern and call a new Bishop Diocesan. Our newest Bishop is also very supportive of Deacons and would like to see the process for ordination revised to meet the needs of our Diocese with its specific nuances. Familiar with designing a process, our current Bishop Provisional has spoken with deacons and priests who have done this work before so that we have made some headway towards an ordination process that works for us, before a Bishop Diocesan is called.

We have 13 active deacons who were able to meet for lunch with the interim Bishop in October and we are now meeting with him one on one to make sure we are in compliance with the canons and have paperwork in place, especially those of us over 72. We are also trying to present ourselves as a unified body to the Diocese, to both educate those who don’t know what we are really about and inspire lay leaders

continued

who are experiencing the nagging of the Holy Spirit to discern if they are called to be a Deacon. The “Just One” challenge, spearheaded by the Deacons, was an opportunity to be visible and include the entire diocese. We simply asked every person in the diocese to give one item of winter clothing to our Cathedral’s Ministry to the Homeless. A suggested offering of \$16 was an option for our tiny outlying churches, and it would cover the cost of one “below freezing” sleeping bag. The generosity of folks exceeded anything we imagined as we collected bags and bags of clothing and over \$6,000 to purchase necessary items for our most vulnerable. As the Archdeacon, I have become the main transporter of the clothing because I regularly serve and promote the ministry to the unhoused and poor in the city through a weekly clothing give away, feeding ministry, art program, and a weekly ecclesia service. The ministry itself is growing with the help of two deacons, a candidate for ordination, and lay people from seven congregations who contribute by making sandwiches, sorting and hanging clothing, and making soup.

A year from now, whether I am still the Archdeacon or not, I will be serving under my fourth Bishop in ten years. As an educator, I learned a long time ago to glean what I could from faculty meetings and school or district conference days that didn’t pertain to my area of expertise at

all, because the conversation connected me with the other teachers, and I could empathize with them and support them in their own challenges. Listening to what others know and do, formed me into a better teacher and colleague. I believe that working with different Bishops and Priests is the same for me now that I am a Deacon. Each Bishop focuses on bringing about their own sense of call to the role, and as a Deacon, I always have something new to learn from them. I have been blessed to work with people who have been patient with me, supported my ideas, guided me and listened to my concerns, whether mine personally or those of the Deacon cohort. Each Bishop, with their own personality, brings a depth of knowledge and a wealth of experience that is unique, and I believe that my job as Archdeacon is to remain open and flexible, connecting the Deacons to each other, the wider church, and the Bishop in a way that they can appreciate and value whatever that Bishop expects from us, shares and brings to our table. We in turn are entrusted with the most precious challenge of bringing God’s love and message of redemption to the world in the name of Jesus through the Episcopal Church.

Archdeacon Diana currently serves under Bishop Provisional The Rt. Rev. Stephen Lane in the Diocese of Western New York.

LIFELONG LEARNING



AED’S VIRTUAL BOOK CLUB

Continues into May

Members of AED are invited to join in reading and discussing “Reading the Psalms Again for the First Time: A Spirituality for Justice Seekers and Peacemakers,” by Dr. Clint McCann.

- 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month, 7-8:15 pm ET
- Live on Zoom; Discussion in the AED Facebook group
- We’ll pause for Holy Week/Easter

Schedule - Join at any time!

Oct 14 - Jan 27 (Ch. 1-6), Feb 10 (Ch. 7), Feb 24 (Ch. 8), Mar 10 (Ch. 9), Mar 24 (Ch. 10), Apr 14 (Ch. 11), Apr 28 (Ch. 12), May 12 – Closing with author Clint McCann.

Registration, the book, and details are [on our website](#).

AED’S “DEACONS TALKING ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS”

Join the conversation on the first four Mondays of every month, from AED and Bexley Seabury.

4:00 pm Pacific / 7:00 pm Eastern, (1 hr), Zoom.

[Details and link](#)

1st and 3rd Mondays Worship, reflection, scripture discussion, and fellowship

2nd Mondays Seasoned deacons tell their stories of ministry and lessons learned.

4th Mondays Authors and content creators share their newest thoughts on a variety of hot topics and how to tackle them with a diaconal lens.



MISCELLANEOUS

AED’s [Deacon Competencies](#) Outlines areas of competency in Diaconal Formation.

CDSP’s [Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership Online Courses](#)

Spring 2026 (April 6 – May 25) classes include:

- The Diaconate, *with Archdeacon Tim Spannaus, PhD*

The Book of Common Prayer in [Spanish and French](#)

Lifelong Learning at VTS [On-demand courses](#).

[Pathways for Deacons](#), from Bexley Seabury

[Toolkits for Faith Leaders and Communities](#), from Episcopal Relief & Development For study, worship and action guiding you to make lasting change.

[Additional resources](#) available on our website.

Sharing an invitation to consider the diaconate more clearly

Archdeacon Cindy Campos | January 2026

As Archdeacon in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego (EDSD), my ministry is rooted in preparing, encouraging, and resourcing deacons for the heart of the ministry: sharing the love and ministry of Jesus Christ in the world, especially among those who are most vulnerable. Deacons are ordained not primarily for the work within church walls, but for service beyond them—to carry the Church into places of need, uncertainty, and hope. Our calling is to stand at the intersection of church and world, translating faith into action and reminding both the Church and our neighbors that Christ is present, active, and near.

I was ordained a deacon on September 12, 2020, and appointed Archdeacon in 2022. In the years since, my ministry has taken me into spaces that are often raw and unfiltered places where the love of Jesus Christ is not an abstract idea, but a tangible, necessary presence. As Archdeacon, I have been privileged to help lead and support ministries that do more than demonstrate compassion; they actively share it, face-to-face, hand-to-hand, and heart-to-heart.

One of those ministries began in 2022 with something deceptively simple: warmth.

In the Imperial Valley and Coachella Valley, migrant farmworkers labor long, difficult hours, often facing cold mornings and evenings with limited protection. In response, deacons across the diocese, joined by volunteers from congregations throughout EDSD, began assembling Beanie Bundles – carefully prepared packages to warm hands and feet.

Over the months, we distributed thousands upon thousands of these bundles. Each one was assembled with care, prayer, and intention. And time and time again, I found myself brought to tears by the response. A simple gift of warmth – a hat, a pair of socks – communicated something far deeper than its material value. It said: You are seen. You matter. We all deserve to be warm. It was an honor to share that gift with the world.

Another ministry that has deeply shaped my understanding of the diaconate is a court accompaniment program that places clergy and lay leaders alongside individuals facing deportation. Today, in the Diocese of San Diego, an unknown number of people move through the immigration court system, often carrying fear, uncertainty, and exhaustion.

In response, an ecumenical body of people comes together to offer a calming, prayerful presence. We stand quietly in courtrooms, pray with those awaiting hearings, and remind people—simply by being there—that they are not alone.

What surprised me most was not only the response from those facing deportation, but the reaction of everyone else in the room. I saw relief and understanding in the eyes of attorneys, court reporters, judges, and courtroom security. The weight of an endless stream of cases presses heavily on all who participate in this system. Our presence, quiet and faithful, seemed to ease that burden—if only a little.

As the Rev. Gigi Miller, a deacon in EDSD who participates in the program, shared: “I’ve been told by other volunteers that we are making a difference to the lawyers and judges as they consider the cases before

them. I’ve seen the smiles of relief on the faces of folks waiting for their hearings when we arrive with tangible expressions of faith.”

This is the work of a deacon in action: bringing the Church to the world, not with answers or solutions, but with presence, prayer, and love. It is a service that does not seek recognition yet makes a difference precisely because it shows up where few others will.

Nearly every week, I visit a church somewhere in our diocese – sometimes alongside the bishop, sometimes on my own. Everywhere I go, I share the good news of the diaconate: that it is a calling rooted in service, compassion, and the sharing of Christ’s love in hard places.

Often, I feel like I’m demystifying the diaconate. What does a deacon do? How is this different from a priest? What makes the diaconate unique? These are honest and important questions. Over the past several years, I’ve spent time with discerning lay members across the diocese, patiently uncovering these mysteries together.

I want to be clear: I do not recruit people. But I do share an invitation – to consider serving Jesus in a new and deeply fulfilling way. When people understand the diaconate more clearly, they are better able to discern where their own gifts and call might reside. It is a joy to stand beside our bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Susan Brown Snook, who is a strong and faithful supporter of the diaconate in this diocese, and to watch people begin to recognize this calling within themselves.

Over time, we have seen a significant increase in those entering the discernment process. While growth is not the goal, it is deeply encouraging to see people discovering their place as leaders in service and love.

Today, the diaconate is more important than ever. The world is filled with margins and dark places that desperately need the hands and feet of Jesus. In this moment – in the midst of displacement, hunger, fear, and injustice – deacons are stepping into the breach.

They serve in essential and often invisible ways. They show up quietly. They stand beside. They warm hands and hearts. And to me, that is exactly how it should be.



Archdeacon Cindy Campos with Bishop Susan Brown Snook.

Archdeacon Cindy serves most Sundays with the Rt. Rev. Dr. Susan Brown Snook, visiting churches throughout the diocese and where invited when the bishop is away.

Spiritual Adviser for a Death Row Inmate

Archdeacon Charles deGravelles | November 2025

Dear Feltus,

I know you don't live on Death Row anymore, but I don't know how else to send you these memories. I'm dedicating this section of my memoir to you, and also to your victims, Keith Clark and Donna Ponsano. And their families and friends. I know that's the way you'd want it.

Charlie

Feltus Taylor was born March 17, 1962 in a New York hospital. He would never know his mother, a drug addict and prostitute, and he would carry with him no memories of her. Feltus grew up in the care of his grandmother, Ms. Henrietta Rowan, on N. 37th Street in Baton Rouge. In the year 2000, at the age of 38, as his execution date was approaching, Feltus was trying to tie up the loose ends of his life. He wanted, if possible, to find his mother and make contact. It took a while, but investigators for his attorneys located her address, still in New York. What he wrote to her was simple and straight forward. He was all right, he wrote her. He hoped she was okay. He was sorry for what he had done. He knew she had lived a hard life, and he felt bad for her. He forgave her for giving him up. He loved her in spite of everything. He would be gone soon. Would she think about him after he was gone?

His grandmother had done her best. Feltus was developmentally delayed—slow to crawl, slow to talk. Maybe it was alcohol-fetal syndrome. Maybe he was a crack baby. Both? As a child, he felt isolated and taunted. Serious speech impediments made him a target for bullies; his speech problems didn't clear up until high school. To escape, Feltus would withdraw into an imaginary world where he was safer, where he was okay. Ms. Henrietta took him to church—True Light Baptist on North Street—and kept him in school as long as she could.

Despite its name—Eden Park—and its many churches, it was a rough neighborhood. Poverty, blight, joblessness, crime, violence. Ms. Henrietta lived in a tiny shotgun house, and was able to clothe and feed him, but as he grew older, Feltus didn't stay at home much; he mostly hung out on the streets, alone or with a few “friends” who would take advantage of him. There was nothing to do on the streets anyway but get into trouble. By the time he was a late teen, after several scrapes with the law, he was serving time in parish prison on a gun charge.

Even for a boy who grew up on the streets, jail was an advanced education in hard knocks. His first week in jail, Feltus witnessed a rape, one man beating another until the defeated man, bleeding and exhausted, relented and did the bidding of the victor. Many others—not just Feltus—watched.

A few days after his 29th birthday, Feltus was out of work, strung out on drugs, and broken-hearted; he'd fallen for a girl who quickly “used him up” for what little money he had, then dumped him. He decided to go back to the last place he'd worked, a fast-food restaurant named Cajun's Fabulous Fried Chicken on Florida Blvd. Maybe he could get back his old job.

The store owner, Keith Clark, met with Feltus on a Saturday morning, at 7 a.m., long before opening time. Keith declined to take Feltus back; he liked him personally, he said, but he needed employees who were reliable. Keith offered to go through the classified ads to see if there might be another job out there for Feltus. As they sat next to one another

a table, the paper spread out before them, the restaurant's cook, Donna Ponsano, came in, went behind the counter and started prepping for the day. Feltus, suddenly weary of looking through want ads, remembered he had a pistol in the glove compartment of his car and excused himself for a moment. When he came back, he took Keith and Donna to a back room, tied them up, and shot them both in the head. He took what little money was there, under a hundred dollars, and ran away.

When I met Feltus Taylor in 1997, his lawyers were trying to save his life. Because he had admitted from the beginning to first degree murder and attempted first degree murder (Donna had died, Keith had somehow survived), there was nothing else to argue about. He would either get life in prison without pardon or parole, the best option. Or he would get death. Sometimes Feltus himself wondered which was best.

One of his lawyers, Jean Faria, went to my church. She is a little lady with a feisty sense of humor and a lion's heart. I admired her greatly: arguing capital cases for the Public Defenders Office is definitely “in the trenches.” Feltus Taylor was one of her clients. She knew I did prison work, and she asked if I would consider being his spiritual advisor. He wanted a spiritual mentor, she said, and he definitely needed one.

It was a big ask—even for me. I had been doing prison ministry for over six years but knew nothing about the case. The crime was certain to be horrific. Although I passed it every time I drove through the front gates, what little I knew about Death Row came from reading *Dead Man Walking* by Sister Helen Prejean. Sister Helen, another woman I mightily admired, had done just this work with several death row inmates at Angola, and her book detailed its many difficulties and pitfalls. But I also knew no book could prepare me—how could it?—for what this experience would entail. I said yes.

At first, Feltus and I traded letters in order to get to know one another a little. In an early letter, he expressed concern for me. Did I think I could handle it? He knew I'd spent a lot of time at the prison, but Death Row, he said, was different. Could I handle watching him die—this would certainly be one of my responsibilities. As I was to find out as I came to know him, his concern for me was genuine, the first of many surprises. I'll be okay, I wrote him. Let's just see if I can help you.

Even before we met for the first time, I sent him two items I knew would be useful in our work together. One was the novel by Louisiana great, Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*. The other item was a new study Bible. The character in Gaines' novel who is condemned to death, Jefferson, didn't commit the crime for which he eventually dies—and Feltus did commit his—quite a large difference. But the novel nonetheless raised many questions, among others, how do you find your true self and what does it mean to die with dignity. These questions would serve as entry points into our explorations and discoveries. The Bible would also help us, of course, to explore and discover much else besides.

As it turned out, Feltus loved the reading and talking we did together. He had earned a GED while in the parish prison, and for all his developmental delays, he understood well and could discuss what he was reading. He had an inquisitive mind, a gentle sense of humor, and, most of all, he truly wanted to somehow understand how he had done what he'd done, how he'd landed where he'd landed, and how, if it were possible, to make peace with it all.

I understood from Sister Helen's book that one of my difficulties would be in the perception that I had somehow “taken sides,” that I didn't care about the victim and survivors of this terrible crime. Of course I did care. But simply by virtue of my role, I was seen (or I felt that I was seen) as the enemy. In various court proceedings, family and supporters of the prosecution sat behind the District Attorney,

continued

and anyone there for Feltus sat on the defendant's side. Sometimes there was only me. The system is designed to be adversarial, and I understand and appreciate why it is the way it is, but it made reconciliation of any kind nearly impossible. Feltus had written many letters to Keith Clark and the Ponsano family expressing his sorrow and remorse, but rules prohibited their delivery. Every week for three years, when Feltus and I met on Death Row, we prayed for Keith and Donna and the families and friends of both. We prayed that somehow they would find forgiveness—not for Feltus' sake but for their own.

Feltus and I became close friends. What else could I do for him? One thing was to encourage people in my church to not only pray but to write him. In the process, he acquired a number of friends. One was Tim Spruill, then a sixteen-year-old high school student. Another was Ann Gonzales, a faithful member of our Episcopal team that ministered at the prison. Another was my daughter, Meg, and my son, Will.

Another thing I could do was to encourage him to write his story. Feltus did this with a relish. Cecile Guin, director of the LSU Office of Social Research and Development, found a young graduate student in creative writing named Ronlyn Domingue to help him. With her help, Feltus eventually finished an autobiography. He called it "Waiting to Die." (Another young woman, writer Monique Morrison, has since taken an option on Feltus' book and is working to sell her screen play.)

I helped him with other writing—principally cautionary essays which we compiled and titled: "Letters to Young People from Death Row." Another friend, Richard Thompson, and I brought in a film crew and spent the day with Feltus, documenting his thoughts and feelings and the routine of a "normal" day "on the Row."

I can say without qualification that watching my friend die is the hardest thing I have had to do. I got back to Camp F, where the execution chamber is located, early in the morning of June 6, 2000. As the sun began to stream through the barred windows of the tier, I sat outside his holding cell, and we drank coffee and talked. The rest of the day seemed long (to me) and hard, it was all hard. My only hope was that my presence would make it somehow a little easier for him.

Later in the morning, we moved to a large room with folding tables and chairs set up. Relatives were allowed to visit for a while, but Ms. Henrietta was not well enough to be there. Feltus was relieved; of course he wanted to be able to say his goodbyes, but he knew it would be unimaginably difficult for her. Cecile Guin of LSU, Jane Smith, another wonderful social worker and friend who had helped Feltus through the years, also came to visit.

When everyone else left, the "strap team," security officers who would insure that Feltus was securely and safely strapped to the execution gurney—came in. My dear friend, Jean Faria, his lawyer, and I stayed. We would stay to the end. We were able, several times during the day, to stop and huddle and pray with Feltus. We sat next to him during his last meal (he had ordered boiled crawfish, fried catfish and shrimp). In what was for me a surreal touch, the strap team shared in the meal, sitting together at a different table but close by. Jean and Feltus and I did our best to stay casual and light.

When we stood together for the last time, Jean and I each hugged Feltus, and we all expressed our love. Jean and I were ushered into the visitor portion of the death chamber, separated from the injection gurney by a glass partition. Now, on our side of the partition, also sat Keith Clark, in his wheelchair (he was rendered a paraplegic by the shooting), his mother and father, and members of the Ponsano family. Members of the Governor's office were also there. I nodded to my friend and fellow church member, Cheney Joseph, who was executive counsel for Governor Mike Foster.

Eventually, Feltus was led in, shackled hand and foot. He was brought to a podium with a microphone. He held himself erect as he faced all of us—his lawyer, his spiritual advisor, his victims, and representatives of the state. This was his chance to make a final statement; he said this. "I want to tell you, Keith, and the Ponsano family, that I always regretted what I've done. It was my own doing. After this is over with, I hope you can find the peace to move on." I was very sad, and I was very proud.

The strap team helped him down onto the gurney. An IV, connected by tubes running to another room, was inserted into Feltus' arm. He kept eye contact with Jean and me throughout (Jean and I were holding hands). Warden Cain stood next to Feltus; he would make the ultimate decision to begin the execution by nodding to an unseen (and, to us, unseeable) executioner on the other side of a two-way mirror. At the warden's nod, the poison would begin to flow into Feltus' body. Just before he made that nod, Warden Cain bent down and said something in Feltus' ear. We couldn't hear it, of course, but I would later find out what the warden whispered. Then the warden nodded, Feltus slowly shut his eyes, and a curtain was lowered. When the curtain was raised, Feltus was gone.

I was invited to preach and to sing at Feltus' funeral. True Light Baptist on North Street was still very much his church, but there were many people there from my church, Trinity Episcopal, as well.

I asked my friend, David Spruill, to sing with me. We sang acapella a hillbilly Gospel tune by Ricky Scaggs called "Talk about Suffering." It stood out by contrast from the wonderful African-American Gospel music that was part of the service, but the message was the same. Here's a little bit of how it goes:

Talk about suffering here below, and let's keep a followin' Jesus.

Talk about suffering here below, and let's keep a followin' Jesus.

Hear that gospel train is comin', Now don't you want to go

And leave this world of sorrow, And troubles here below...

For my sermon, I chose the story of Joseph, a boy sold into slavery by his older brothers but who manages to survive and eventually, many years later, even to flourish in Egypt. The brothers go to Egypt during a famine, hoping to find grain to keep their families alive. They have no idea that the powerful Egyptian to whom they are making their request is their long lost brother, Joseph. With the power of death over the brothers who betrayed him, Joseph, instead of having them killed, forgives them, embracing each, in turn and saying, "It is I, your brother Joseph. What you meant for evil, God has turned to good."

About three years after Feltus' execution, I talked with Keith Clark for the first time. I had seen him, of course, during appeals, pushed by his mother or father in and out of the courtroom in his wheelchair. His expression—and theirs—was always rigid and stern. I had also seen him on TV after every hearing, lashing out directly through the camera, telling Feltus to quit these interminable appeals and just die like a man. As you might expect, I had been afraid to approach him. But now that some time had passed, and I saw him across the lawn at a prison event, I grit my teeth and told myself, "Okay, it's time to do this." I was in for yet another surprise. When I reached my hand out to introduce myself, I braced for a tongue lashing. "I know who you are," he said. "and I've wanted for a long time to thank you for helping Feltus. We were friends, you know." I didn't know what to say. I said nothing. He continued casually. "Do you remember how the night Feltus died, the warden whispered something in his ear?" I nodded, "Yes, I do." "Well, it was a message from me," Keith told me proudly, "from me to Feltus, that I forgave him."

Archdeacon Charles serves in the Diocese of Louisiana.

Digital Diakonia: Serving in a screen-shaped world

Deacon Kay Dennis | November 2025

On any given morning, the Church scrolls alongside the world. A prayer request flickers across Facebook. A family livestreams Morning Prayer from their kitchen table. A deacon texts a parishioner in the hospital waiting room. What was once confined to parish halls and pulpits now unfolds through pixels, profiles, and private messages. This is the new frontier of diaconal ministry—the digital threshold where compassion meets connectivity. The vocation has not changed: to serve, to proclaim, to bring Christ to the margins. But the margins themselves have shifted. They now include people isolated by distance, anxiety, disability, or disillusionment, whose only doorway to community might be a glowing screen.

The word diakonia means service, but it also implies mediation or standing in the space between. Deacons have always been translators between sacred and secular, altar and alley, and pulpit and pavement. In today's world, that in-between space often exists online.

When a deacon leads Evening Prayer on Instagram Live or facilitates a grief support group over Zoom, they are embodying a very old truth in a very new form: the Word still becomes flesh, even through fiber-optic cables.

A priest may preside at the altar, but the deacon's liturgy begins in the comment thread. It is in the private message to a struggling mother, the shared post advocating for housing justice, and the online petition for climate action. Each digital act can become a small sacrament—an outward and visible sign of inward grace.

Still, digital presence is not just about producing content. It is about presence itself. In the early Church, we met in homes. Now, some of those homes are virtual. Our ministry is to make sure Christ is welcome there too.

Of course, this frontier brings new challenges. The online world can amplify division as easily as dialogue. It can tempt us toward performance rather than authenticity, reaction rather than reflection. Deacons, grounded in prayer and service, are uniquely positioned to model a different rhythm—to be voices of civility and compassion amid the noise.

To serve online is to practice restraint as well as proclamation. It means asking: Is this post building up the Body of Christ or fracturing it? Am I sharing information, or am I feeding outrage?

Digital diakonia requires discernment as surely as any street-corner ministry. The screen is not neutral—it shapes how we see one another. A deacon's task is to help people remember the human face behind every profile picture, the imago Dei behind every username.

In some ways, the digital world mirrors the Incarnation itself: the infinite translated into the finite, the unseen made visible. When used with care, technology can extend the reach of compassion in ways the early Church could scarcely imagine. A livestream can bring Eucharistic prayers into hospital rooms. A recorded sermon can reach across continents. A text message can remind a caregiver they are not alone.

But as with all tools, the goal is not the technology itself—it's relationship. The holy risk of the digital age is that we might confuse connection with communion. The deacon's role is to call us back to the deeper purpose: to make sure that every virtual gesture of grace eventually leads us back to real human encounter.

When the Church embraces digital diakonia, it doesn't abandon tradition—it extends it. The same Spirit who hovered over the waters now hovers over Wi-Fi signals, redeeming even the bandwidth for holy use.

In a world where many feel unseen, a deacon's gentle presence—whether through a phone screen or a handshake—reminds us that God is still speaking, still connecting, still calling us into communion. I may not always wear a stole online, but I still carry one in my heart. Every post, every prayer, every conversation—it's all part of the same service.

In this screen-shaped world, diakonia continues—not diminished by distance but deepened by grace.

Deacon Kay serves at two parishes in the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. Her ministry is human trafficking awareness. She works at the City of Marianna as a certified planner as Municipal Development Director.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

AED is looking for writers! Share your thoughts and experiences by contributing to this magazine.

Choose your topic, or we can provide suggestions. Maybe you have a diaconal ministry to share, or are drawn to offer a theological reflection or book review. Describe a mission trip; outline steps to start (or resurrect) a ministry; share a transformative experience; explore serving on a diocesan body... it's your choice.

Offer your thoughts and inspire us all! [Contact Deacon Anne.](#)

The Café Ministry

From a pot of coffee to expanding partnerships

Deacon Elvira Beracochea | January 2026

As I write this, I have been a deacon for a little over two years. I discerned my call to the diaconate when I was in my 60's and had been contemplating retirement, traveling with my husband and finally finishing the family memoir I had been working on for a few years. God had another plan for me. One thing I can say is that God always surprises me. These past two years God has taught me many things about myself and God's kingdom at a time when my hubris had made me think I was wise enough and had figured out life. This article is about how God has transformed my life for ministry and the joy. God gave me new life and keeps working on me. Talking about

"Fellowship, trust and progress are our main goals."

transformation and new life might sound grandiose, but I cannot explain the changes in my life any other way. Here I share three main lessons God has taught me these past two years in the hope that they may help you in your own ministry too.

First, early in my ministry, I realized I had a baggage of knowledge and experience that I had to unlearn. I thought I had much experience and many skills that I could use to help others. After all, I had a career of over 35 years as a physician and global health consultant teaching and advising others how to improve how they deliver and manage health services. I was humbled by the realization that the skills I learned in the world do not translate to God's Kingdom. I did not learn this alone. Ministry is a team sport. I am thankful I have a wonderful ministry partner in my rector, insightful and generous mentors, a supportive congregation and an awesome Spiritual Director who patiently listens to me, encourages me and prays for me. I am also truly grateful to God for all my fellow deacons with whom we share our experience and help each other.

I learned that God's plan was to use me but not because of my knowledge and experience but because of my love for those in need. I humbly realized I could not use my professional knowledge and management experience to solve other people's problems. It is now funny to type this but I thought that if I could show people ways to find work and access social services, then they would be able to get out of poverty and homelessness. Instead, God taught me I had been called to love and humbly serve those in need, get them a pair of shoes, if possible, but not lecture them. I have learned to meet people where they are, in their world, and not try to bring them to mine. Most times, all that is needed from me is to be present to them and listen and pray with and for them.

Second, I have learned that God sends my way those I am to love and serve and my job is to welcome them. Hospitality matters. Soon after ordination, a number of Spanish-speaking persons started to come to our church asking for help, work, and prayers. Spanish is my native language so I was happy to have a skill I could use to find out if and how I could help. God surprised me by also showing me the way to serve them. The Café Ministry got started by me making a pot of coffee and sitting down to chat with my new friends. The number of persons attending the weekly Café Ministry grew from 2 or 3 to more than 15 in a few months. I shared the work God

was doing in me and the Café in my sermons and invited several members of the congregation who have become regular participants and now are leaders of the Café Ministry too. We started providing a snack and then a meal. A parishioner donated a whiteboard and I started giving free lessons of English as a Second language, which has become the main focus of the ministry. We now also distribute donations of clothing, shoes, and toiletries. The Diocese of Virginia provided a \$2,000 grant to develop the ministry and we were able to give supermarket gift cards and metro cards to go to work or doctor's appointments. To close the Café, we read scripture in English and Spanish together using the Lection Divina method and pray together.

Participation of members of the congregation makes this ministry "with" and not "for" others very special and transformative in many ways. Some parishioners are learning Spanish and help our Café friends practice their English, others organize supplies and donations, others are called to welcome our friends. Volunteers and Café friends get to know each other by their first name and pray together. Two of our friends passed away, one hit by a car on the way to church and the other due to disease. We all grieved and prayed together for them. Some of our friends come every week, some have left the group and some come back now and then, and there are always one or two newcomers. Some are native speakers. I think they like the Café because they keep coming back. All are welcome.

The Café Ministry now reaches over 20 to 25 regular participants most weeks. Fellowship, trust and progress are our main goals. We encourage everyone to take at least baby steps and learn at least one new word every week. The Café keeps evolving but we always start by welcoming everyone, have a meal and a cup of coffee and conversation, move on to the ESL class and Lectio, and then end in prayer. We have recently started a partnership with local organization that brings a trailer and offers warm showers and a hygiene kit to those that are willing.

Third, I look forward to God's surprises. The most important surprise is that The Café Ministry has become the focus of my preaching and my way of proclaiming and living Matthew 25 and 28 as a deacon. The Café has become the way God keeps transforming me into the servant I am called to be and provides a place for the congregation to offer hospitality and love our neighbors. Thanks be to God!

I trust God is not done with me and will keep surprising me and teaching me more lessons. I thank God the Café will keep evolving and always be a part of my life. Former Presiding Bishop Curry always says "if it is not about love, it is not about God." I now understand what that means in practice. The Café Ministry is about love and God is in the Café. God's love sometimes is in a cup of coffee.

Deacon Elvira serves in the Diocese of Virginia.

Upcoming General Convention resolution would add abolitionists to the Church calendar

Deacon Mary E. Cushing | January 2026



Deacon Thomas Clarkson



Olaudah Equiano

LEARN MORE

- [The Wisbech and Fenland Museum](#)
- [The Wisbech Society: Clarkson](#)
- [Thomas Clarkson's writings, books](#)
- [Olaudah Equiano's autobiography](#)
- [Equiano's World](#)
- [Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man](#) by Vincent Carretta

Two leading abolitionists in Great Britain's antislavery movement—one of them a deacon—would be honored with commemorations on the church calendar if a forthcoming resolution is approved at the next General Convention (GC). These saints of God are Thomas Clarkson, the deacon, and Olaudah Equiano, a formerly enslaved individual. Both were associates of William Wilberforce, the well-known abolitionist parliamentarian. The three together share a commemoration on the Church of England (C. of E.) calendar, but only Wilberforce is currently recognized on the calendar of The Episcopal Church. The resolution would remedy this omission and add Clarkson and Equiano to the commemoration for July 30.

Summary information about the lives and witness of Clarkson and Equiano is provided in a resolution adopted in November 2025 at the 231st Annual Convention of The Diocese of Virginia. [It is available here.](#) It directs the Diocese of Virginia to present, in turn, a comparable resolution to GC82. The diocesan resolution was approved as part of the convention's consent agenda, reflecting strong local support for this proposed calendar addition.

The origin of this resolution lies in an assignment I completed while in postulancy at St. Phoebe School, the diaconal formation program for the Dioceses of Virginia and of Southwestern Virginia. The task was to choose a "diaconal saint" from Ormonde Plater's "[Calendar of Deacon Saints](#)," research the person in depth, and then introduce them in some way to the parish. At that point in my formation I was interning at St. Thomas, McLean (VA) and so I looked for someone on the list named Thomas. Clarkson was the only one. I had not heard of him before, and I quickly came to regret my prior ignorance. He was truly a giant in the abolitionist movement and a shining example of Christian witness. Researching him naturally led me to learn about Equiano as well. His own experience as a victim of slavery was wholly different from that of Clarkson, and it gave him a unique, powerful voice. Together, Clarkson and Equiano were pivotal in turning public opinion against slavery—which thereby enabled Wilberforce's legislative success. They clearly merited their inclusion on the C. of E. calendar, and it seems unjust that they are not on ours when Wilberforce is.

From a practical standpoint, Clarkson and Equiano appear to meet the [criteria for inclusion](#) on the calendar as set out at GC78 in Resolution 2015-A056. The criteria, and how Clarkson and Equiano appear to align, are as follows:

1. Historicity: Nominees should have been actual people, as these two were.
2. Christian discipleship: Their story is "uniquely and identifiably a Christian story," with their actions mirroring the Baptismal Covenant. Clarkson and Equiano undoubtedly resisted evil, sought and served Christ in all persons, and strived for justice.
3. Significance: "Those remembered should have been in their lifetime extraordinary, even heroic servants of God and God's people." They were: Clarkson survived attempts on his life by opponents who profited from the slave trade; he persevered in his work despite the personal risk. For his part, Equiano penned an autobiography that became a bestseller—with publication abroad in multiple languages—attesting to the extraordinary reach of someone formerly enslaved.
4. Range of inclusion: There are several elements to this criterion. First, those commemorated should be from the Anglican Communion. Clarkson and Equiano both were, but with asterisks. Clarkson distanced himself from the C. of E. as an act of conscience because of its involvement in the slave trade. He associated more with the Quakers, while Equiano found a home among the Methodists. In these affiliations, they represent "ecumenical partners" who may also be considered for inclusion on the calendar. Additionally, commemorating Equiano—a person of color—meets another aspect of inclusion. And, the relative obscurity today of both men puts them in the category of saints "whose memory may have faded in the shifting fashions of public concern, but whose witness is deemed important to the life and mission of the Church."
5. Local observance: "Normally, significant remembrance of a particular person already exists within the Church at the local and regional level." Their current inclusion on the C. of E.

continued



READ THE RESOLUTION

¹Walvin, James. "Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Churches." *Quaker Studies*, 12:2, 2008. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1221&context=quakerstudies>, accessed 31 Dec. 2025.

²"The Church and the legacy of slavery." 19 Jun. 2020. <https://www.churchofengland.org/church-and-legacy-slavery>, accessed 31 Dec. 2025

Images of Clarkson and Equiano: ©The United Kingdom National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London. Printed with permission; licensed for use in non-commercial projects including scholarly and non-profit publications.

calendar meets this criterion. Both are also remembered in parishes with which they were affiliated, and—in a secular observance—they were included on British commemorative postage stamps issued on the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.

- Perspective: "Names added should show a broad influence upon the Church and should result from a widespread desire expressed across the Church over a reasonable period of time." The influence of Clarkson and Equiano on the Church per se seems to have been indirect. Their direct influence was on public opinion, which led to a general societal shift toward a Christian ethic opposed to slavery. The Church followed suit over time and continues to grapple with its legacy as an institution that profited from slavery. In 2006, the C. of E. voted to apologize for its role in the slave trade, and it continues to pursue truth-telling and racial reconciliation activities.
- Combined remembrances: "Where there are close and natural links between persons to be remembered, a joint commemoration would make excellent sense." The proposed joint commemoration with Wilberforce addresses this.

If GC82 passes the resolution, Clarkson and Equiano would be added to the calendar on a trial basis for three years. GC83 in 2030 would then take up a resolution to add them permanently. God willing and the people consenting, Clarkson and Equiano will soon join Wilberforce on our calendar.

Deacon Mary was ordained in August 2024. She serves two parishes in the Diocese of Virginia: St. John's, Arlington, and St. Patrick's, Falls Church.



Deacon Management

We have resources for Archdeacons, plus Deacon Handbooks, sample Letters of Agreement [here](#).

Deacon Update

Sign up for our monthly email newsletter. Each issue includes news, continuing education, events, and other resources related to deacons and diaconal ministry.

Deacon Compensation

Several dioceses have passed a Deacon Compensation Resolution that includes remuneration for deacons, plus CPG assessments.

[Check them out here.](#)

General Convention 2024 passed Resolution A135, encouraging each diocese to pay active non-stipendiary clergy under age 72 a minimum of \$25 per month, plus assessments to the Church Pension Fund.

DEACON MINISTRY CHANGES



Deacon Daniel Tamm has been selected as Board President of [Stillpoint: The Center for Christian Spirituality](#).

[Send us your ministry changes](#)

BOOKS



From Dust We Walk Together: Reflections for the Lenten Journey

by Deacon Kay Dennis
A Lenten devotional that offers daily reflections shaped by Scripture, honest storytelling, and prayer.

[Amazon](#)

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PLANNED GIVING supports the life and work of deacons and those in formation. Visit The Fund for the Diaconate, our sister organization, for details at www.fundfordiaconate.org.

Doors opening: My diaconal journey

Deacon Lauren P. McCombs | December 2025

I was first introduced to God as a little girl in the redwood trees in Napa, California. My paternal grandmother, Dorothy Simonds McCombs, who was known as Mimi to me, would read her father's sermons on Sunday mornings rather than for us going to a church to worship. My great grandfather, Royal Simonds was a Methodist minister.

For me, God was never contained in the four walls of a church but was rather found in the natural peaceful beauty of the outdoors.

My father's family was Methodist and my mother's family was Episcopalian. My parents divorced when I was young. As a child, I didn't attend church on a regular basis until I was in my thirties and had two children of my own.

My son, Alex, was four when he was baptized and my daughter, Katie, was two. I had them baptized in a small intimate ceremony at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Belmont, California.

Alex started attending Notre Dame Elementary, which was Catholic. The principal at the time, Sister Dolores said, "You have the children baptized in the Episcopal Church, why aren't you attending one?" She went on to say, I have heard good things about the priest at Transfiguration Episcopal Church in San Mateo."

I am still in touch with Sister Dolores and she knows that her simple suggestion to attend church changed my life and opened-up a journey and a door for me that I could never have imagined.

At Transfiguration, I was very involved and committed to serving in the parish. I was the Junior warden, a Eucharistic minister, on Altar Guild as well as director of the Flower Guild.

Creating and arranging flowers at Church gave me an incredible opportunity to have a tangible artistic expression in showing my dedication and love of God.

God's gift of floral expression to me allowed the door opened for me to buy Carlmont Village Florist. Years later, after I closed the doors on my shop in 1995, I have come to realize that as a florist, I was performing all the sacraments of our church through the expression of flowers from baptisms to First Communion to weddings as well as with memorial services.

Each time a customer walked into my shop with a particular floral request, I was able to listen to them from a pastoral point of view and then determine what flowers would best meet their needs.

The door to my physical flower shop is now closed, however, thankfully the door to my floral expression was not.

Another door opened to me while I was traveling in Australia in January of 2005 after the horrific Indian Ocean tsunami that hit Thailand on December 26th.

It was an extremely difficult time for me as on that trip, I had told my husband that I wanted to divorce him. The door on our twenty-three-year-old marriage was closing. It was one of the most difficult decisions of my life to make.

I was walking by an Anglican church and the front door was open, with piano music filling my ears just like it did when I was a child. My grandmother, Mimi, was a concert pianist. As a little girl, I would curl up under her piano and listen to her play with beautiful music swirling around me making me feel safe and protected.

I walked into the church as I was rather distraught because of the difficult decision that I had made to divorce my husband.

The woman who was playing the piano told me that there was a healing service that was happening that night. I responded that tonight, "I was going to watch the Australian Open Tennis tournament." She replied, "I will leave my white sweater in the front pew so that you can attend the healing service and the Tennis Open.

It was a lovely healing service and offered me just what I needed at that difficult time in my life. I brought back what I learned from that healing service and started a healing ministry at Transfiguration. The door was now opened for me to lead healing services at my church.

God's voice got louder and louder that there was more work for me to do. I could no longer just sit in the pews. I considered the notion of being a priest but I didn't want to do the managerial aspects of being a rector. I wanted to create hands on pastoral connections with people. I learned about the diaconate and realized that ministry was a good fit for me.

One of my favorite scriptures verses is from Psalm 32, which says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you." (Psalm 32:8)

I attended the formative School for Deacons in Berkeley, California from 2008 to 2011. I graduated with a BA in Diaconal Studies and was ordained at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

Over the years, I have served at four different Episcopal churches and was the Lower School Chaplain at an Episcopal Day School.

Initially, my outreach ministries at the various churches, was hands on from serving meals to families whose loved ones were having surgery at the Palo Alto Veterans Hospital to collecting children's books for a library in East Palo Alto to canned food drives. At each church where I served as a deacon, I learned how to have an impact beyond the four walls of the church by lifting up parishioners to become involved in outreach.

Then the Covid pandemic hit in 2020 and another door opened to me that I never would have imagined without God's guidance and direction.

At that time, I was involved, through my Peninsula Interfaith Clergy group about Faith in Action Bay Area (FIABA). I joined their efforts, learning about all of the various hardships that our underserved neighbors were facing during the pandemic.

At a Zoom meeting, one of our Latina leaders from Daly City said, "We speak to our San Mateo County Board of Supervisors individually about the issues that we are facing. Individually, they respond that they will help us. However, when the Supervisors come together, they ignore us and don't bring up the issues that we had raised. We want a white wealthy woman to speak for us." The fifteen leaders, who were attending, all knew that she was directing her comments to me.

I then started attending meetings for both the Redwood City Council as well as for our County Board of Supervisors.

I would always begin my public statements noting that I was a deacon speaking on behalf of my church and other community organizations that I represented. My comments would set the stage to bring up the social justice issues that the Covid pandemic created for our underserved community.

Over the years, I have come to realize the collective power of people sharing their individual stories of hardship, which has changed public

continued

policy regarding renters' rights and protections. Compassion has changed the hearts and minds of our government officials. I have been able to use my connections with government officials to cause change and to lift up the stories of those who were unseen and unheard before.

In 2021, I was very involved in speaking out against the illegal transfer of our counties' incarcerated persons to ICE. In November, we had a demonstration on the County steps with speakers describing what it was like to have their family members just disappear without any knowledge of where they were. They and their children were frightened and filled with distress.

We were able to stop our County's Sheriff's ICE transfer policy through many community organizations and people speaking up. This essential policy is still being implemented at this crucial point of time now, when immigrants' rights are being challenged by inhumane and illegal Federal policy.

The next door that opened for me was that I got involved with a community organizing group called Fixin' San Mateo County. The purpose of this organization is to create trust and transparency within the Sheriff's Department. We want San Mateo County to hire a permanent Inspector General with subpoena power to look into the issues within the Sheriff's office that is affecting our community.

Fixin' SMC shows up at nearly every Board of Supervisors meetings to make public comments. I have been told by one of the Board of Supervisors that we consistently show up and that our main message hasn't changed in all the years that we have been attending.

We now have the new sheriff's attention, who said after he was

appointed at the Press Conference that he would work with Fixin' leaders. In addition, we are also meeting with the captain in charge of our jails to create a collaborative effort to solve some of the issues that our jails are facing since our old sheriff was removed from office due to misconduct.

My public comments have been quoted in The Los Angeles Times, The San Jose Mercury, and our local papers. I have written numerous Op-Ed pieces on various social justice issues for our local paper, The Daily Journal. Each time that I speak in public or write an article, I always identify myself first and foremost as an Episcopal deacon serving at Christ Episcopal Church in Portola Valley and Woodside.

Over the fourteen years since I was ordained, I have witnessed God in my life as forever present opening new doors for me to serve. Community organizing and public speaking has given me the opportunity to spread Jesus' message of compassion and love out in the world. As it says in Matthew's Gospel, "Ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door shall be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

Deacon Lauren serves at Christ Episcopal Church in Portola Valley and Woodside in the Diocese of California. She is a member of Peninsula Solidarity Cohort, an interfaith Clergy group working on social justice issues; and a member of Fixin' San Mateo County, working on creating trust, accountability, and transparency within the Sheriff's Office.



Deacon Stephen Bentley with St. John's the Evangelist Episcopal Church, joins others during a prayer vigil at the Stockton, California ICE Processing Center on Oct. 28, 2025 to pray against and protest ICE policies and practices.



Worshippers at a recent Sunday afternoon service of Water and Wilderness Church, which meets at Fletcher's Cove on the banks of the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., are led in song by (from left) Deacon Melissa Sites, the Rev. Pete Nunnally, Mike Bass and Gariné Adams. Photo: Courtesy Pete Nunnally

The liturgical role of a deacon and a deacon's missional purpose

Deacon Peggy Samuels | October 2025

In the Acts of the Apostles chapter 6, the apostles laid their hands on seven men who became the first deacons. They were called to serve and distribute food to the Hellenists' widows. The word deacon means servant. The deacons were called to "wait on tables." So, the missional purpose of deacons was established. Deacons were called to go out into the community and serve the community.

Deacons are to bring the needs of the community to the Church and are called to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely. We are called to feed the homeless, minister to those who have been ostracized, and to seek social justice. Deacons are called to be the eyes, ears, heart, hands, and feet of Christ and to carry out their Baptismal Covenant in treating everyone with dignity and respect. Deacons are called to share the Good News of Christ. Deacons are called to practice creation care, environmental stewardship, hospitality, prison ministry, educational ministries, hospital ministries, and social justice ministries. Deacons are called to be advocates for people who live on the margins of society.

Deacons also have a Liturgical role in proclaiming the Gospel, leading the Confession, offering the Prayers of the People, Setting the Lord's Table, and the Dismissal, and occasionally preaching, and for when there is no Priest, offering Communion from the Reserved Sacrament. So, how does the Liturgical role of a Deacon mirror his mission in the world?

The proclaiming of the Gospel acknowledges the Christ who humbled Himself to become human, and the Incarnate Son of God who served the community by ministering to the sick, the homeless, the poor, the hungry, and those ostracized from society. The Deacon reads the Gospel to the Congregation because the Deacon is Christ's servant in the community. The Gospel portrays Christ's ministry, teachings, parables, life, and His Resurrection. The Deacon proclaims the Gospel of Christ to share the Good News of the Gospel with the Congregation and to lead the Congregation to go out into the community to serve Christ in all people and to carry out their Baptismal Covenant to treat all human beings with dignity and respect. Since the Deacon is a servant of Christ, the Deacon proclaims the Gospel of Christ.

The Deacon offers The Prayers of the People because the Deacon is a minister and servant to Christ and leads the Congregation in praying for the Church and the whole world. Since Deacons are called to serve the community and to bring the community's needs to the Church, the Deacon offers the Prayers of the People. Deacons offer prayers for the sick, the poor, the homeless, and the hungry in the Church and the community. The Deacon offers prayers for the Church and the community.

The Deacon leads the Congregation into the Confession of their sins because the Confession is a prayer to ask for God's forgiveness and to be mindful of what we have done or not done for God and our neighbors. The Confession is the acknowledgment of our shortcomings as a Congregation. The Deacon leads the Confession as the humble servant of Christ. The Deacon acknowledges their own sin in falling short in serving the Lord.

The fourth Liturgical role of the Deacon is to Set the Lord's Table. The first Deacons "waited on tables," so the Deacon sets the Table in

the spiritual act of hospitality in welcoming the Congregation in the sharing of the Holy Communion. The Deacon brings the bread to the Table, pours the wine, pours some water into the chalice, opens the Liturgy to the Eucharistic Prayer, and washes his hands to purify his soul. The significance of Setting the Table is one of the missional purposes of the Deacon in going out into the world to offer bread to the hungry and hospitality to all human beings. Deacons can also serve the wine to the Congregation and offer "the Blood of Christ and the Cup of Salvation."

In the absence of a Priest, a Deacon can offer Communion from the Reserved Sacrament and preach the sermon. A Deacon cannot absolve, bless, or consecrate for that is the Liturgical Role of a Priest. A Deacon can articulate the teachings of Christ, build the Body of Christ in community, and care for people with disabilities, the weak, the sick, the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, and those marginalized from society.

The fifth Liturgical Role of a Deacon is the Dismissal. Deacons call the Congregation to go forth into the world to serve the Lord. The Deacon leads the Congregation into the community to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to carry out their Baptismal Covenant in treating all human beings with dignity and respect. The Dismissal is the calling forth of God's mission for the Church. As a servant of Christ, the Deacon leads the Congregation to carry out God's mission to spread the love of Christ and His Kingdom.

So, the Liturgical Role of the Deacon mirrors his missional purpose in the community by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ in the world, sharing Christ's love, and living out the teachings of Christ, and serving the community. The Deacon is to be Christ's minister and servant in the world to heal, pray, and minister to the sick, the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, and those who have been ostracized from the community. Deacons are to seek social justice and to be advocates for the homeless, the poor, the needy, people with disabilities, and those living on the margins of society. The Gospel of Christ portrays Christ as a servant going out into the world to heal the afflicted, the sick, the poor, the needy, and those who live on the margins of the society. The Deacon carries out Christ's mission in the world. The Deacon is a prayerful servant full of the Holy Spirit who brings healing to the community through humility, discipline, obedience, sacrifice, and service. The Deacon welcomes the stranger, ministers to prisoners, advocates for those marginalized, practices environmental stewardship and creation care, and promotes social justice. The Deacon is Christ's servant and minister in the world. The Deacon serves the community and brings the needs of the community to the Church leading the Congregants to go forth and serve the community.

A Deacon is the eyes, ears, heart, hands, and feet of Christ in this world and is called to serve the needs of the community and carry out God's mission. Deacons have a significant role in Liturgy and in the world and their Liturgical Role mirrors their servant work in the world.

Deacon Peggy was ordained in 2020 and works as a Deacon at Shrewsbury Parish Church in Kennedyville, MD in the Diocese of Easton. She works in Social Ministries.



The Fund for the Diaconate provides vital help to Episcopal Deacons – working, retired, disabled – and those in diaconal formation – who have insufficient funds for their needs.

JOB OPENING GRANTS ADMINISTRATOR (PT)

The Fund for the Diaconate is accepting resumes for a part-time Grants Administrator, to provide one-on-one assistance to grant applicants, and make recommendations to the Board.

Respond by Feb 10.

[Read the full job description on our website.](#)

APPLY FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ATTEND THE ARCHDEACONS & DEACON DIRECTORS CONFERENCE.

The Fund for the Diaconate's Hallenbeck Fellowship assists deacons who have demonstrated financial need, making it possible for them to attend conferences - including AED's Archdeacons & Deacon Directors Conference.

Applications due April 15. [Details available on the website.](#)

ADDITIONAL GRANTS AVAILABLE FROM THE FUND FOR THE DIACONATE

Supporting: Assistance with basic living expenses, as a monthly stipend or one-time grant.

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Declared Emergency: For financial losses due to a Federal-, State-, or Local-declared emergency such as weather and health events.

Diaconal Formation: Helps postulants and candidates for the diaconate with expenses including diaconal formation program tuition, books, fees, CPE, workshops, materials, travel/lodging, childcare/eldercare, etc.

[Grant details and applications on our website.](#)

DEACON HISTORY BUFF?
Check out the stories of *Episcopal Deaconesses* on our website.

BOARD REPORT | WINTER 2026 | by Deacon Keith McCoy, *president*

The Board held its annual reorganization meeting via Zoom on January 13, 2026. Re-elected as officers for 2026 were: Dn. Keith McCoy, president; Dn. Geri Swanson, vice-president; Dn. Amy Bryan, secretary; Jessica Dunlap, assistant secretary; Dn. Brian Nordwick, treasurer; Dn. Fatima Yakubu-Madus, assistant treasurer. On August 1, at the beginning of our fiscal year, Dns. Nordwick and Yakubu-Madus will switch roles.

This will be a year of transition for the Fund. In addition to the change in treasurer, Dn. Theresa Lewallen will retire as our part-time Grants Administrator on July 31, after over seven years in that role. A search is underway for her successor. Also, Dn. Lou Thibodaux stepped down in January as our Pastoral Correspondent, where she wrote to our grantees at Christmas, birthday, and ordination anniversary. Lou had previously served as a director and as secretary of the Fund's board. Dn. Roxanne Klingensmith will take on the Pastoral Correspondent role, and remain on the board as a director.

As part of the planning process the Fund is undergoing, under the leadership of Dn. John Ray, the Fund consolidated its various committees down to five: Finance, Grants, Development, Nominations, and Personnel. With more work being done in the committees, we believe we can shorten the semi-annual board meetings by a day, and be better stewards of time and money.

The Fund has a F26 budget of \$627,150, of which 59% goes to support of deacons, and does not include the salary of the Grants Administrator, who helps deacons apply for the grants. Funding for our work comes from the endowment of \$8.5M, managed by Boston Common Asset Management.

The Spring Board meeting will be May 12-13, 2026 at the Church Pension Group offices in New York City. Several sites are under consideration for the Fall meeting.

www.fundfordiaconate.org

The Fund for the Diaconate is an independent 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, not part of AED.



STUDYING THE BIBLE: Historical fiction set in biblical times

Deacon Bernie Jones | December 2025

In the Episcopal church tradition, those pursuing Bible studies might undertake any number of varying approaches, including a lectionary study, or a study of a specific book of the Bible. Others might pray the Daily Office as their approach to Bible study or refer to devotionals and Bible study guides in determining which books of the Bible to read.¹ In this theological reflection, I am assessing a different approach to Bible studies, reading historical fiction set in biblical times.

Several years ago, I turned to popular fiction for inspiration in reading the Bible. I'd been watching *The Chosen* television series about Jesus' life and ministry. I'd also learned about Christian writers of fiction who had an interest in historical fiction set in biblical times. I began reading their books and listening to contemporary Christian music.

Taking a popular cultural approach to Bible study enables me to think creatively about the Bible in ways I hadn't imagined while contemporary Christian music infuses daily praise with a lively energy. These are in addition to weekly Eucharist in church on Sundays, praying the Daily Office in the morning before starting the day, and routinely reading books on Episcopal/Anglican church history and theology.

In the mid twentieth-century, Americans experienced a strong connection between popular culture and Christian faith. Nonreligious producers of popular culture were familiar with Bible references, and many people saw movies like the *Ten Commandments*. *Jesus Christ Superstar* was a rock opera that eventually became a film. *Godspell* the musical followed in its wake.

In today's world, however, more people are unchurched, and producers of popular religious culture are found more often among laypeople in the evangelical Christian traditions. They are quite clear that their work stems from their faith and their conviction that their work must honor God and support evangelism.

Why does this matter?

Fredrica Harris Thompsett once argued that the laity had "disappeared from much conventional theology, ecclesiastical history, and even popular biblical imagery."² She explains though, "historians have begun to pay attention to the common folk, to what has been described as 'popular religion.'"³ With respect to historical fiction set in biblical times or films like *The Chosen*, evangelical Christians are creating artifacts of popular religion in accessible forms, and they are producing them for a public that isn't necessarily faith-based.

More than 280 million viewers in 175 countries have seen Jenkins' biblical drama "*The Chosen*." The fifth season of the series, which debuted in theaters in March, made more than \$42.4 million in domestic ticket sales, pushing the franchise past \$100 million at the box office... The fifth season, which premiered exclusively on Prime Video in June, climbed to number one in the United States.⁴

Notwithstanding current differences between Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants over theology and politics, the evangelical tradition belongs to Episcopalians as well.⁵ In the Episcopal Church,

being a Christian is a lifelong process that begins with Baptism, "the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God."⁶ We are called to "renounce all sinful desires" that turn us away "from the love of God."⁷ In addition, we "turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as our Savior."⁸ Key to reinforcing our life in faith, the "liturgies, rites and sacraments" are our supports in salvation and in developing our character as Christians—"piety and Christian living."⁹

Evangelical Episcopalians of earlier periods believed conversion was an absolute prerequisite to becoming a Christian: "Episcopal forms, according to them, had to be enlivened by an inward and spiritual experience of new birth."¹⁰ The change in one's situation had to be obvious. What were our lives like before conversion, and what was the effect of conversion afterwards? Answers to these questions indicated that one had been converted towards a stronger life in faith through Jesus Christ.

I strongly agree with the evangelical Episcopalian perspective on conversion, in that I believe it is possible to identify those experiences of regeneration that change our lives around. For me, it was during the pandemic when I was facing the greatest challenges of my life as a caregiver at home but with no access to the Eucharist in Sunday worship. I could only turn to the Daily Office to sustain my life of faith as I prayed and read my Bible. I believe that when we are dealing immense personal struggles, praying for God's grace is all we have. Upon emerging on the other side, we are humbled and full of thanks for God's love and care. As we pray daily, it's a life lesson we never want to forget, our own conversion experiences that have been blessings in our lives.

These conversion experiences can provide a foundation for our theological reflections and reading Bible stories enables us to find parallels to our own experiences. They matter because we are "shaped implicitly by our experiences as embodied human beings with emotions, brains, and histories, who are always embedded in social and material environments."¹¹

Fredrica Harris Thompsett once observed that:

The value of education increases when we allow ourselves to become part of the conversation... Unless we bring our experiences to learning, education will remain disconnected, pertinent only to others. It is important that we start with ourselves, begin with our experiences, and ask our questions.¹²

Writers of historical fiction set in biblical times highlight the conversion stories of the early followers of Jesus. As I watched *The Chosen* then read books written by Christian authors like Tessa Afshar, Angela Hunt, Francine Rivers, or Davis Bunn writing with Janette Oke, I found myself flipping through my Bible. I reviewed the stories we heard throughout the church year, and especially during the seasons of Lent through Easter. What drew Jesus' followers to his ministry? How did he touch their lives? In the book of Acts, how did the early followers of Jesus become a community of faith

continued

after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?

In the fictional stories, the writers’ “what if” questions provide an opportunity to reflect upon the biblical and historical scholarship they drew upon to imagine what the biblical characters could have been like outside of what we already know. In a parish context, this approach to Bible study means “thinking outside the box.”

Drawing upon Harris Thompsett, discussing what we read in the stories can lead to interesting small group conversations about the lectionary. We heard the readings on Sunday, and we know the stories from the Bible. How were they covered in the sermon? What did the participants think about the readings, the sermon, and the fictional version of the stories?

These conversations are especially meaningful if the participants had never heard of historical fiction set in biblical times. What conversion experiences from the Bible did the authors focus upon? Why did the authors choose those specific biblical figures? What were the timeless messages of faith that the authors conveyed through their writing? Did the messages resonate with the participants and their own lived experiences?

Reading historical fiction set in biblical times is a useful tool for

engaging in Bible studies. It is a practice we should embrace in enlivening our reading of the Bible.

Deacon Bernie is a vocational deacon in the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia.

¹See i.e., Melody Wilson Shobe and David Creech, *The Path: A Journey Through the Bible* (2016), or Lindsay Hardin Freeman, *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter*, (Expanded Second Edition, 2023). Forward Movement publishes a number of devotionals as well.

²Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *We Are Theologians: Strengthening the People of God* (2004), 3.
³Id.

⁴Margaret Darby, *Dallas Jenkins reflects on 15 years of ‘What If...’ and its impact on faith-based media*, *Deseret News*, August 5, 2025.

⁵See i.e., Robert W. Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 69-99, 157-163 (Third revised edition, 2014).

⁶The Catechism, page 858, 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

⁷Holy Baptism, page 302, Id.

⁸Id.

⁹Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (1995), 13. See also, Gerald L. Bray, *Anglicanism: A Reformed Catholic Tradition* (2011), and J.I. Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology* (2021).

¹⁰Hochstedt Butler, 13.

¹¹Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, (2020), 15. See also, Ian S. Markham and Kimberly E. Dunn, *Experiencing God: Faith Narratives of Episcopalians*. (2024).

¹²Fredrica Harris Thompsett, 19.



Western North Carolina Bishop José McLoughlin (center) raises a chalice during the Sept. 27 “Bearing Witness” service that marked one year after the diocese was hit by Hurricane Helene. Far right is Deacon Michael Ashmore, of the Cathedral of All Souls in Asheville. Photo: Katie Knowles



Deacon Lydia Bailey, Diocese of Ohio, was selected as one of Greater Cleveland’s “High 5 winners of 2024-2025” for her work as Volunteer Coordinator at the Men’s Shelter of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. Shown with Archdeacon Bryan Gillooly and Bishop Anne Jolly.



Deacon’s Booth at the Diocese of New York’s 2025 Diocesan Convention

CPG's first Deacon's CREDO was held in November 2025 at Bellwether Farm in the Diocese of Ohio.



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