

## A Word About Deacons

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

*From the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia's newsletter 8/18/21*

The Rev. John Warner was ordained a Deacon on July 9, 2002, the day after his 50th birthday. His ministry as a Deacon grew quite organically out of his work in the field of mental health, especially adult mental illness. He was employed by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health in 1977 and worked in various service and administrative roles with the mentally ill, developmental disabled and substance abusers until he retired in 2009. But that work was to lead to a dramatic shift in his priorities. Shortly before his 40th birthday, he was randomly shot by a patient of the Serenity Behavioral Services. For several days after, he was losing more blood than they could transfuse back into him. He was in a coma for three weeks. He spent two and one half months in the hospital and six months in rehabilitation to learn how to walk again. Everyone who talked to him after he came out of the coma told him he was a miracle. And, as John said, "How do you repay God for a miracle?" As he pondered this question, he sought to become more involved in the church and became a lay reader and Eucharistic minister. He became interested in the diaconate when the late Fr. Curtis Johnson was a postulant for the diaconate, which was before there was a Diaconal School of Ministry. He entered the discernment process and finally became a postulant.



Since his ordination he has volunteered with several mental health agencies including Friendship Community Services, a day program from severely mentally ill adults; the Augusta Coalition for Spiritual Mental Health Services providing healing and educational services regarding the mentally ill; and Mental Health of America - Augusta Chapter, providing advocacy and educational services regarding the mentally ill. Unfortunately, Friendship Community Center did not survive the Covid shutdown.

Throughout this challenging journey John says he has learned that God's grace doesn't require a response. There is no quid pro quo. The only thing he asks of us, says John, "is contained in Micah 6:8: 'to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with [my] God.' God doesn't necessarily expect a grand response; he only expects that we not waste the gifts that he gave us." For him, it was those gifts that were offered and used in what became his diaconal ministry.

As to being a deacon? John says, "Being a deacon is less about direct service, but more about helping others to recognize their spiritual gifts for the service of others."