

## THE ROLE OF THE DEACON IN THE DIOCESE OF NORTH CAROLINA / 2005

### A. STATEMENT ON THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

#### DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE COMMUNITY

The central focus of diaconal ministry is service to the community outside the boundaries of a parish or mission. The ministry of deacon varies widely, taking such forms as hospital or prison ministry, counseling, ministry to the elderly, poor, dying, homeless, those with AIDS, etc. The Bishop approves the specific form of diaconal ministry at any given time, and the deacon is accountable to the Bishop for that ministry. Deacons may exercise their ministry in the community on either a volunteer or paid basis.

#### DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE CONGREGATION

The ministry of the deacon in a local parish or mission is carried out under the supervision of the rector/vicar. The deacon brings to the awareness of the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the community and the world; therefore, their primary function is to enable the servant ministry of the laity. The deacon helps lay people identify their gifts for ministry, assists in providing training in the use of those gifts, and suggests opportunities to empower the laity in their response to the needs of the community/world. This can mean a role in outreach development, training Eucharistic Ministers, and Christian education and formation (e.g., the catechumenal process).

#### DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE LITURGY

It is the deacon's privilege to read the Gospel, to receive the gifts at the offertory, to administer the chalice and paten, to give the dismissal, and to take communion to the sick and dying. Under extraordinary circumstances the deacon may officiate at baptisms and funerals. Details of the liturgical functions of the deacon may be found below.

#### ASSIGNMENT OF AND SUPPORT FOR THE DEACON

Deacons are assigned to a congregation by the Bishop with the agreement of the priest in charge and the vestry. The assignment will customarily be reviewed annually but may be terminated by mutual agreement or by the Bishop at any point. *Priests are encouraged to evaluate the deacon's work, offering encouragement and direction when appropriate.*

While deacons are not ordinarily compensated for their parish work, they should receive reimbursement for travel, and other expenses resulting from their parish ministry. Where feasible, deacons should also be provided with discretionary funds and assistance with continuing education. Of importance is a consideration of the number of hours a deacon will be spending in parish ministry. Many deacons work full-time and cannot be available, except at specific times. The availability of the deacon in relation to his/her work life needs to be considered in relation to parish expectations.

A written agreement incorporating the above is negotiated between the rector or vicar and the deacon. The final letter is submitted to the Archdeacon for consideration/questions, and then, if all is in order, forwarded to the Bishop for signature and final approval of the assignment.

## **NOMENCLATURE**

Persons ordained with the intent to serve permanently in the diaconate are called “deacons” and addressed by the honorific title, “The Reverend.” No qualifying adjectives, such as “permanent,” “vocational” or “distinctive,” are necessary. Deacons in process toward ordination to the priesthood are properly called “transitional deacons.”

## **DRESS**

It is customary in this diocese for deacons to wear clerical collars when they are performing clerical functions.

## **DIOCESAN PARTICIPATION**

Deacons, whether parochial or non-parochial, may vote at Diocesan Conventions. Deacons are eligible for appointment and election to clergy positions on all boards, committees, and commissions of the Diocese, including Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Trustee of the Diocese, and Deputy to General Convention.

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION**

Once ordained, all deacons shall take part in at least one continuing education/formation program/event each year. These courses can take the form of a workshop, course, or retreat that is devoted to a specific topic that will enhance the deacon’s ministry. Continuing Education for all clergy is required by the revisions to Title III Canons made in the 2003 General Convention. (There is no diocesan requirement for continuing education units.)

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

Each deacon shall submit an annual letter reporting to the Bishop on the deacon’s life and ministry. An outline of topics to be covered is available from the Archdeacon and is attached to this document. In addition, to the deacon’s letter, the priest of the parish where the deacon is assigned, is asked to write a paragraph the deacon’s role in the parish. This evaluation is to be submitted with the annual report (See Outline of Annual Report, attached.). Continuing Education is also to be reported in the annual letter. The Archdeacon records each deacon’s annual continuing education in a spreadsheet for the Diocese. Annual letters are sent to the Archdeacon for collection and then, when all are received, sent in one package to the Bishop. They will be due to the Bishop by April 1<sup>st</sup> each year.

## **RETIREMENT**

Deacons may retire from active service for reasons of age or infirmity with the consent of the Bishop. They may also retire for reasons of age or infirmity at the request of the Bishop. With the consent of the deacon, he or she may be asked by the Bishop or Archdeacon to take an assignment for a period not to exceed twelve months. Retired deacons may serve in liturgies when invited by the proper authority. Retired deacons are not required to fulfill the obligations of the requirements for continuing education, attendance at meetings, annual report and evaluation.

## B. LITURGICAL FUNCTIONS OF THE DEACON

### HOLY EUCHARIST

When serving at the Eucharist, the deacon will:

- Read the Gospel
- Offer the bidding of the prayers of the people, if not all of the prayers of the people
- Say the exhortation to the confession
- Prepare the Altar, including receiving the offerings and oblations from acolyte or lay person
- Prepare the vessels and perform the ablutions.
- Assist with administering communion, either the paten or chalice
- Pronounce the dismissal.

It is also appropriate and recommended that the deacon read the summary of the law, lead the confession, read the comfortable words, and elevate the cup at the celebrant's words, "*The gifts of God for the people of God*" as the priest elevates the paten.

When the deacon is administering the paten and comes to an adult or child who does not receive, it is appropriate for the deacon to say, "*Grace and Peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*" or to say one of the concluding sentences from the Daily Office, or simply say, "*The Peace of the Lord be always with you.*" The deacon may touch the child or adult, but should refrain from making the sign of the cross or laying a hand on the person's forehead.

Deacons **are not** to offer what is popularly termed, "A Deacon's Mass." *Only the Bishop may grant an exception to this rule.*

### HOLY BAPTISM

When the deacon serves at Baptism, the deacon will read the Gospel, *may* read the prayers for the candidate(s), and *may* assist the celebrant by pouring water in the font, holding towels, oil stock, prayer book and otherwise be of service to the priest. The deacon may also administer water baptism (but not the signation – p. 307, BCP). If the service continues with the prayers of the people, the deacon will, at least, read the bidding.

Deacons are not ordinarily the sole officiant at baptisms and must have the Bishop's permission to do so in each and every case.

### ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS FOR SPECIAL DAYS

**Ash Wednesday:** It is appropriate for the deacon to read the invitation (pg. 264, BCP) and to assist in the imposition of the ashes. It is also appropriate for the deacon to sing or say the Great Litany at any time it is used.

**Palm Sunday:** When a deacon is serving on this occasion, the deacon reads the Gospel and bids the people to the procession.

**Maundy Thursday:** The deacon prepares the towels, ewer and basin, assisting the celebrant with the washing of feet.

**Good Friday:** The deacon reads the solemn collects and biddings.

**Easter Vigil:** The deacon bears the Paschal Candle in the procession and will sing or say the Exsultet.

**Bishop's Visitation and Diocesan Eucharist:** All of the above apply when the Bishop is celebrant.

Deacons precede the Bishop(s) (or when, applicable, the Bishop's Chaplain who may be the Archdeacon or a deacon from the parish or convocation).

At diocesan events, and especially at ordinations, a deacon should be available to carry out their liturgical role. The Bishop's Chaplain for the Eucharist at Convention is the Archdeacon.

**Related Liturgical Issues:** In the absence of sufficient deacons and priests, laypersons licensed by the bishop according to the canon may administer the Chalice. (BCP p. 408)

**Deacons and the Marriage Rite:** When assisting the priest at a marriage ceremony, the deacon may, as the rubrics suggest, deliver the charge, request the declaration of consent, read the Gospel, and perform those assisting functions outlined under the section concerning the Eucharist.

**Deacons and Ministration to the Sick:** In the absence of or at the request of a priest, the deacon may appropriately anoint with oil while praying for the sick. In a public service of healing, the priest should anoint with oil while the deacon may assist in the laying on of hands and prayers.

**Preaching:** Deacons are ordinarily licensed to preach.

**Funerals:** In the absence of a priest, a deacon may officiate at a funeral.

### **C. PROCESS FOR ASSIGNING DEACONS IN THE DIOCESE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

The process leading to the Bishop's assignment of a deacon to a particular congregation can be initiated in several ways:

- Deployment usually begins with the Archdeacon
- A priest may contact the Archdeacon (or the Bishop) to request a deacon be assigned to the parish.
- A priest and deacon may discuss informally the possibility of the deacon's assignment to the parish and then work with Archdeacon to set up the assignment.
- The Bishop or the Archdeacon may suggest the possibility of a particular congregational assignment to a deacon or a priest.

- Any contractual agreement made between a parish and the deacon is to be sent to the Archdeacon for signature before being sent to the Bishop.
- Deacons are assigned as available. Assignments are made in consideration of the location of the deacon's home and work.

Regardless of how the process is initiated, the following steps are essential to an effective beginning and implementation of the deacon's ministry in and to the parish.

1. **Rector and vestry develop a clear understanding of the ministry and role of the deacon.** The priest and vestry need a clear understanding of the primary focus and thrust of diaconal ministry in this Diocese. Lack of clarity concerning the deacon's role will have a negative effect on the perception of, if not the actual, responsibilities of diaconal ministry within a parish.
2. **Rector, vestry and members of the congregation are desirous of and prepared for the assignment of a deacon to the congregation.** Once a rector and vestry have determined that they want a deacon assigned, it is very helpful to provide parish education and preparation before the arrival of the deacon. This can be accomplished through Sunday morning education programs, sermons, information on orders of ministry in newcomer programs, confirmation classes, newsletter articles, etc.
3. **Letter of Agreement is drafted and approved by Bishop, Archdeacon, Rector, Vestry and Deacon.** The Letter of Agreement is designed to make the duties of the deacon specific; i.e., number of hours to be served; number of Sundays/month; frequency of preaching; sabbatical, etc.) as well as an outline of funds for the deacon's financial support (expense reimbursement, continuing education and discretionary funds). The parish will want to make this a budget item. (A sample blank form of the Letter of Agreement is attached to this document and may be modified as appropriate. It is also available electronically from the Archdeacon.) When the Letter of Agreement is finalized in the parish, it is submitted to the Archdeacon who will sign the letter and forward to the Bishop for signature.
4. **Background check on the deacon must be completed** before the assignment is official. Background checks are usually done prior ordination. Deacons transferring into this Diocese are required to have a background check completed before an assignment is made. The congregation covers the cost of the background check.
5. **Official date for the deacon's assignment to begin.** The Letter of Agreement must be executed and signed by all parties. The assignment is official when the Bishop signs the letter. The official letter of Institution will not be issued until the Bishop receives the Letter of Agreement.
6. **Letter of Institution for a Deacon.** (Sample is included in this packet.)
7. **Celebration of Deacon's Ministry held during Sunday morning service.** Three forms for the celebration are included in Section 3-2 of the handbook and may be modified as

appropriate. This celebration should be held as soon as possible after the arrival of the deacon in the parish.

8. **When a Rector or Vicar leaves the Parish.** As soon as the deacon learns of the resignation of the rector or vicar of his/her parish, the deacon is advised to call the Archdeacon or the Bishop. An important step, this call initiates the process to support the deacon during a time of change. While the custom has been for a deacon to leave upon the departure of the rector/vicar, in many cases, a new letter of agreement can be negotiated for the interim period. Such a contract will be completed only if the deacon wishes to stay on in the parish. In many cases, especially in large parishes, the deacon can provide continuity during the interim period. When a new priest is to come to the parish, the deacon is expected to resign.

#### **D. EVOLUTION OF THESE GUIDELINES**

With the advice and counsel of the Bishop's Committee on the Diaconate and in compliance with the Title III canonical changes regarding the diaconate made at the 2003 General Convention these Guidelines have been revised by the Archdeacon and the Committee in **December, 2005** and submitted to the Bishop for approval. Revisions will be made to this document, as needed.