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# Deacons are about the Church serving the World

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*Sermon by the Venerable Patricia Soukup, Archdeacon of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande*

Do you remember the first time that you went roller skating on the sidewalk? I had some of those skates that fitted over your shoes,

and you tightened them down with a key. I just hoped that they would stay on as I raced down the driveway and hit that bump at the edge of the street. Oh, yeah, then there was that layer of gravel that had washed down in the gutter from the neighbor's driveway. It's a wonder that my knees lived to tell those tales!

The first time I went roller skating at a roller rink was when I was about nine or ten years old. Wow! Things were really different now! The skates laced up, so I didn't have to worry about them falling off of my shoes. The floor was very smooth and flat, so I could go really fast. And if I did happen to fall, the wood or the polyurethane surface provided a much more comfortable landing than concrete. And they played music and had a light show! What could be better?

After about half an hour of zooming around the rink with my friends, the MC called everyone to the center

of the floor and told us to form a big circle. Whoa! What was this? The music started up, and everyone began laughing and clapping. I guess I was the only one who didn't know what was going on at that point. But I found out very quickly! "You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and you shake it all about; you do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself around; that's what it's all about!" You're kidding! I'm supposed to do all of that while trying to keep my balance on these roller skates?

Well, apparently so, because by the end of the song, I was attempting to put my whole self in, to put my whole self out, to put my whole self in, and to shake it all about. That was the Hokey Pokey, and that was what it was all about! Well, I wasn't alone in my efforts! Everyone else was trying to keep their feet from going out from under them while dancing on roller skates. And soon people were bobbling and laughing so hard they ended up sitting on the floor.

I had been pretty good at skating along the sidewalk, avoiding gravel and bumps, and I was quite adept at speed-skating around the rink, going in one direction and passing by other skaters who were having difficulty getting their balance. But now I found that my attention was focused not only on what my own feet were trying

to do but on my fellow skaters and the challenges they were facing trying to do the same thing. The moves of each individual person in that Hokey Pokey circle affected the entire group. We each had to put our whole selves in without knocking one another down. That's what it was all about!

Well, here are a few things to note about the Hokey Pokey: you can't do it if you are sitting on the sidelines, and you can't do it alone. The more of yourself that you put into it, the more challenging it becomes. You have to be willing to take some risks: the risk of not getting it quite right; the risk of doing something different from what other people are doing; the risk of falling; the risk of bumping into someone else who is also trying to keep their balance; and the risk of having other people see you struggle. But in the end, the crazier it gets, the more you want to do it.

So, Ordinands, we have come to this day! When you began your discernment process, the going was sometimes a bit rough, with cracks and bumps that you had to navigate. But you kept rolling forward, and you entered seminary or the Iona School for Ministry. You learned to overcome the obstacles in your path. You began to glide along with your fellow seminarians,

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gaining momentum and confidence. You have spent the past several years praying, reading, writing, praying some more, studying, reading some more, writing

sermons, praying a lot, and yes, spending a lot of time in church in a variety of capacities. I imagine that you have been doing things like serving at the altar, leading Bible study, serving on the altar guild, coordinating various groups within the church, and teaching the adult forum.

And I am guessing that you are probably getting rather nervous right about now, and are wondering, "What am I really getting myself into?" Well, remember this: as you are ordained a deacon, you are not being elevated; you are being set apart – set apart for the service of Christ. The philosopher and theologian Albert Schweitzer said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

When you go to your congregations tomorrow as deacons, you are going to have several new roles that you will be taking on. Yes, deacons have a ministry of service, but you do not take on that ministry by yourselves. Let me give you an idea of your new job description:

1. Deacons are bridges: they have one foot in the church and the other foot in the world, and they bridge the gap between the two.
2. Deacons are trees: with strong roots in Christ, they reach out into the world. The deeper your roots in Christ, the broader your reach will be, and the broader the reach of the church will be.
3. This one may come as a surprise: deacons are not about serving the Church. Deacons are about the Church serving the world. Your job is

not to stay in the church and serve people there, your job is to bring the church with you out into the world.

4. The ministry of the deacon is as organic as the world around him or her. The world is very unpredictable, and so is this ministry! As needs in the world change, your ministry will change. But that's what keeps it exciting!
5. Deacons are dancers – we are always doing the Hokey Pokey! We put our foot in the church, we put our foot out into the world, we put our foot back in the church, then we shake things up in there so that people notice. Then we turn around and do it again.

Now I am going to ask Mike, Regina, Brian, Ryan, and Stephen to stand. You have a big job ahead of you, and it is not going to be without challenges. Like doing the Hokey Pokey at the roller rink, you can't sit on the sidelines, and you have to take some risks. You won't always get it quite right, and the more of yourself you put into it, the more of a challenge you will have. But like the Peace Corps, it's the toughest job you will ever love. When Bishop Hunn lays hands upon you in a few minutes, you will be set apart. You will have a specific purpose – to be an icon of Christ – a visible symbol of his love for the world. And perhaps most important, as an icon of Christ, you will be the person in whom the Church and the world – the sacred and the secular – meet.

So, my brothers and sister, I leave you with this: as you open your hearts to the service to which Christ has called you, don't be afraid to dance. Don't be afraid to put your whole self in the church, then put your whole self out in the world. Don't be afraid to struggle. Don't be afraid take some risks. If you fall down, people will help you get back up. And never give up on yourself. Remember – you are not dancing alone. Every time you reach out to someone in need, you reach out to Christ. And that, my friends, is what it's all about.

Amen.