

THE DIACONATE

Our English word 'deacon' and its cognates 'diaconate' and 'diaconal' are derived from the Greek, 'diakonos' meaning 'servant'. Thus it is that we may use the term 'diaconal ministry' in the Church to describe the servant ministry of Christians as they reach out to help others—both those within and those outside the Church—with their spiritual and material needs.

The deacon is one who is set apart to be 'servant to those in need'. Deacons are called to connect the resources of the Church to the needs of the neglected, reminding us of our true calling as followers of Christ.

The deacon is: **icon** or window into the sacred; **catalyst** for the whole Church's ministry of serving; **bridge** between the world and the Church; **enabler** of the Church's redemptive healing of society.

The ministry of deacons is to tell the Church about the needs, hopes, and concerns of the world, and call the Church to sacrificial ministry.

Who is called to the Diaconate?

The preface to the ordination rite to the Diaconate tells us, it is "a special responsibility of deacons to minister in Christ's name to the poor, the sick, the suffering and the helpless".

Deacons are the symbol of the Church's servant ministry to the world. They lead the Church into mission as commissioned by Christ. The deacon is exhorted in the ordination service, "You are to interpret to the Church the needs, hopes and concerns of the world."

As an ordained person, the deacon has a special leadership role within the Church—not to preside as the congregation gathers for worship, and not to oversee the management of parochial life from day to day—but, by precept and example to inspire, prepare, lead, and to support other Christians in their own servanthood and ministries.

As is the case with any ordained person, the deacon is ordained for ministry to the Church. In the case of a deacon, that ministry includes service to those in need within the Church - of equal or even greater importance though - it includes the function of leading the lay persons of the Church in their individual and corporate ministries to each other and to those outside the Church.

The deacon's ministry models to the Church and to the world, that in serving the helpless, Christ himself is served.

Relationship of Deacons to their Bishop

Traditionally, deacons have been in close relationships with their Bishops, as the special representatives of their Bishops in the Church's servant ministry. Although deacons usually are associated with a particular local congregation or institution, their real base is in the diocese and they serve directly under the Bishop's authority. This direct relationship with the Bishop is a constant reminder that the deacon's ministry is not limited in its focus to an individual local congregation, but also looks outward to society as a whole.

The ministry in the world

This “special ministry of servanthood directly under the Bishop” will be an assigned ministry which will generally include direct service in the world outside the local congregation. This initially will be a ministry which the individual has already been engaged in prior to ordination (such as visiting the sick, hospice work, prison ministry, food kitchens, other ministries to the poor and the homeless, etc.).

The deacon is an extension of the Bishop’s ministry in the world. For this reason, deacons serve under the direct authority of the Bishop, according to their gifts and the needs of the communities which they serve. Their assignment is subject to the Bishop’s oversight. The special nature of the relationship of deacons to their Bishop makes it imperative that they be accountable directly to the Bishop.

The ministry in the local congregation

Deacons may be assigned by the Bishop to function liturgically and to minister sacramentally in congregations. These assignments are made with the concurrence of the Rector and vestries/mission councils. A job description of the deacon’s duties and responsibilities will be negotiated by the Bishop, the deacon and the Rector. While the ministries of deacons will be non-stipendiary, job descriptions will specify any financial arrangements made for the services of deacons, such as reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, continuing education, discretionary accounts, and administrative expenses. In ministering in a congregation, deacons are under the immediate supervision of the Rector, and clear statements of the deacons’ duties will be communicated to the membership. The assignment of the deacons will be reviewed annually by the Bishop, deacon, and Rector.

Persons are ordained to the diaconate with the intention of serving in that order for the rest of their lives, having a permanent place as such in the structure of the Church.