

THE DEACON IN THE PARISH

This directive provides the practical context for the exercise of the ministry of the (vocational) deacon in parishes of the Diocese of Fredericton.

Role and Function of Deacons

A deacon needs to have the character of a servant, and this character should be visible in the deacon's life and ministry. Ordination to the vocational diaconate is not a way to recognize or validate existing ministries, but a means of forming living icons who illuminate Christ as the model of servanthood to all the baptized. Deacons are not ordained to do the outreach ministry for the Church, but lead all in the church community into servant ministry in the world. They are prophetic ministers who are called to challenge the Church to always look outside and beyond itself.

Deacons are under the authority of the bishop and of the supervising priest under whom they work. The liturgical functions of a deacon are not their primary ministry, but are symbolic and expressive of their central ministry:

- serving all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely;
- interpreting to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

The fundamental difference between priests and deacons according to Archdeacon Ormond Plater of the Diocese of Louisiana is that “priests tend to the ‘Church gathered’, deacons tend to the ‘Church scattered.’” Deacons will normally serve 80% of their ministry in the community and 20% with the church. Deacons will be servants who have a visible ministry to the dispossessed, are willing to undertake the role of prophet, and will strengthen the servant ministry of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Fredericton.

Relationships of the Deacon

Bishop

Traditionally, deacons serve immediately under the authority of the bishop. In this diocese, most deacons will be assigned by the bishop to a parish or chaplaincy and will serve under a supervising priest, normally the incumbent. Deacons may, however, be reassigned by the bishop and continue to function as deacons. Deacons are expected to negotiate a written covenant between themselves and the parish or institution in which they are serving, to be approved by the bishop. A new covenant is negotiated when there is a change of supervisor.

Diocese / Deanery

Deacons have an important integrated place within the “business” of the diocese. Deacons are considered members of the college of clergy and therefore are voting members of synod, may serve as clerical members of commissions and committees, and as clerical representatives. They vote as clergy when there is voting “by orders.” Deacons are invited and active at meetings of the deanery clericus, and some accommodation should be made for deacons who are working in other vocations during the day.

Parish

A deacon is encouraged to attend meetings of the Parish Corporation; without vote but reporting regularly and when requested on the on-going work. A deacon assigned to a particular parish is considered “assistant clergy” and, as such, will resign should the incumbent resign his or her appointment. A deacon may be re-appointed by the bishop to serve during the interim under the direction of the bishop and/or the territorial archdeacon and the parish wardens. Upon the appointment of a new incumbent, the deacon's covenant may be re-negotiated, or the bishop may appoint the deacon to another ministry.

Interim ministry is a perfect opportunity for a deacon to model servant ministry and help others to act on their roles and talents. The goal is to be a positive stabilizing influence for the congregation, avoid taking sides or being triangulated into difficulties. Under no circumstances should the deacon assume the role of parish or congregational leadership. The outlined role of a deacon in the liturgy remains the same during a parish interim arrangement. During this time, the deacon should:

- Attend all meetings of the parish corporation in order to assist in the discovery of options and needs. This is a time to listen and relay concerns to the bishop when appropriate. The deacon becomes a “coach” to assist the congregation in remaining mission-minded and focused on the future. The deacon also becomes an “encourager,” helping the wardens and vestry to assume the role as stabilizing influence for the congregation.
- Review resources in the church, and encourage volunteers to be lay administrators of Communion, lay visitors, teachers, servers, ushers, hospitality people. From buildings and grounds to hospital visits to Sunday worship, the parish remains constant in its functioning.
- Communicate with the bishop, regional dean and territorial archdeacon so they are able to assist with resources. Assist in communication within the parish so that, when appropriate, everyone is aware of information and decision-making meetings and the outcome of each. Maintain a relationship with the other parishes in the deanery, archdeaconry and diocese.
- Determine not to serve as a “volunteer interim” as tension develops between the congregation wanting the deacon to step into the role of leader and the deacon's call to servant ministry. The congregation will learn to look to the wardens as leaders while the deacon maintains the role of coach. This is a time for a deacon to take an intentional role of listener and define the role of conduit of communication between the bishop, wardens and the congregation.

Specifics for the Vocational Deacon

- a) Covenant and annual assessment: As a deacon prepares to begin in a parish, the deacon and the supervising priest shall together design and approve a covenant outlining the specifics of the deacon's ministry in that place. The bishop or the bishop's designate shall approve the covenant. Annually, an assessment, based on this covenant and the parish proposal, will be completed and forwarded to the bishop. Templates for the covenant and assessment will be provided by the bishop's office and are available online through the Clergy Resources page.

- b) License: A deacon will be licensed to ministry by the bishop. No deacon will function in ministry without a current license and covenant.
- c) Communication: Deacons are listed with diocesan personnel and receive mailings in accordance with the practice of the diocese.
- d) Stipend, reimbursement and allowances: Deacons are normally non-stipendiary although unique circumstances may exist. The reimbursement of incurred ministry expenses and the provision of resources for continuing education by the parish or institution is assumed.
- e) Conferences and continuing education: Deacons will be invited to the annual diocesan clergy conference and to other clergy educational and social gatherings. In addition to these, meetings and continuing education events may be offered especially for deacons. Deacons are expected to place a high priority on continuing education and formation.
- f) Form of address: The formal title for deacons is “The Rev.” or “The “Rev’d”. A deacon may apply a prefix or a suffix of Deacon if they wish.
- g) Liturgical dress: Liturgical dress follows the tradition of the Church and local custom. The traditional dress for sacramental ministration is alb and stole or cassock, surplice (or cotta) and stole. The stole is worn over the left shoulder. The traditional dress for the Liturgies of the Word (non-sacramental), is cassock and surplice (or cotta). Local custom for other vesture should be followed.
- h) Street dress: Deacons may wear clerical dress at any time, but it should be worn under the following circumstances:
 - i. when administering Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to the sick and shut-in,
 - ii. for admission and recognition in hospitals, jails, other institutions, and in other specialized ministry situations when appropriate,
 - iii. under liturgical attire during the liturgy, and at events where such celebrations and services take place.

Additional documents

Diaconal Covenant template (revised September 2015)

Annual Diaconal Assessment template (revised September 2015)

Celebration of a New Ministry of a Deacon

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