

## **DISCERNMENT LEADING TO ORDINATION TO THE (VOCATIONAL) DIACONATE**

### 1. Introduction

#### A. The “vocational” deacon

According to the Catechism, the work of the deacon is "To assist the Bishop or Priest in Divine Service, and in other ministrations to the people of God" (BCP p. 554). The ordination rite furthers this saying that the deacon is “to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely [and to] interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.” (BAS p. 655) The North American Association for the Diaconate, which represents Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Anglican deacons, in 1997 adopted a fuller statement: "A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Christian Community to be an icon-illuminating Christ as a model of servanthood for all people. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors the role of the deacon in church and world."

The deacon fulfills this calling through action and example as servant leader, intercessor, facilitator, visionary, nurturer, and interpreter among diverse people. The deacon is messenger and proclaimer of Christ's presence among us.

#### B. Guarantee of ordination

The process of preparation for the vocational diaconate is extensive. The discernment process is essential to the goal of ordination and unique to each individual. The final decision to ordain belongs to the Bishop in consultation with and as advised by all involved in the discernment of a potential candidate. There is no guarantee of ordination prior to reaching the status of candidate. Ordination depends also on the availability of an appointment (license) to a specific ministry.

#### C. Responsibility for process

- i. Authorization and Release. Potential candidates submit the “Authorization and Release” early in the process enabling the request for information in the discernment process.
- ii. Records and files. All files and information requested is the property of the potential candidate in accordance with the Diocesan Privacy Policy. All files are kept confidential at the office of the Bishop and used for the purpose of the discernment process.

iii. Initiative. It is the responsibility of the potential candidate to maintain the momentum of the steps of the discernment process. Applications for status, required forms and documentation and the completion of study requirements will set the pace for movement toward the goal of ordination but at no time restrict the Bishop in his permission or agreement with outcomes. At no time, before candidacy, is there guarantee of ordination.

## 2. The Identity of the Deacon

The Deacon is a catalyst for the Church's diaconal ministry. A deacon cannot possibly perform that service alone. A deacon models diaconal ministry in the world, but more importantly, the Deacon challenges, arouses, trains and sends forth committed laity to serve the festering sores of society and to fight against and change its injustices. In contrast to the Deacon, the laity's primary place of presence will always be in the world. The focus of the Deacon's ministry is both in the Church and in the world as one who enables the Church's redemptive healing of society. The focus of the laity's ministry is in the world - the place where they are called to use their "gifts of grace God has given ... to pray, work, and give for the spread of the kingdom." (The Catechism BCP p. 554)

An ideal might be that every congregation would have at least one deacon serving collegially with a priest. As a ministry team, the deacon and priest nurture, teach, train and send forth the people of God into the world. One of the reasons that parish priests have had a tendency toward burn out is that they have been trying to do a ministry that really belongs to two orders. The role of the priest and the deacon are separate and distinct but their roles are meant to work together. The parish partnership of priest, deacon and laity under the authority of the bishop symbolizes and models to the world what it means to be a diverse community in the unity of Christ.

The Deacon is the Church's primary catalyst for lay ministry. A deacon nurtures the energy of the gifts of the people, and converts them into a dynamic power of service to the world. As the Priest nurtures the transformation of the People of God with a ministry of knowing (Word and Sacrament), so the Deacon enables the transformation of the People of God through a ministry of doing (caring and advocating justice). Knowing and doing both lead to new being. Priest and deacon each play their particular role in building up the People of God and enabling the church to be God's agent of reconciliation in the world.

The Deacon is unique and stands apart from other ordered ministry and the laity as one who balances the gift to effectively care with the gift to effectively do justice and mercy. Many are called to be expert in either one or the other of these tasks, and do that task well. The Deacon does both. Deacons' caring informs their

ministry of doing mercy and justice; just as their active doing of justice and mercy feeds their ability to care.

*(Excerpted paragraphs from Bishop, Priest or Deacon: Differentiating a Distinctive Character for the Ordained Roles of the Emerging Twenty First Century Church, by Edwin M. Leidel, Jr., Diocese of Minnesota, 1992.)*

### 3. Prerequisites for Inquirers

#### Character Attributes of the Deacon

- Has been a confirmed member of the Anglican Church for at least three years.
- Has been an active member of the parish for at least one year.
- Is perceived by the congregation as a "care-giver" who cares for others naturally, empathically and consistently.
- Empowers others around them to be caring – "to seek and serve Christ in all persons."
- Empowers others around them to act in the community – "to strive for justice and peace."
- Is intrinsically connected to the secular social order, and is keenly aware of its needs.
- Is intrinsically connected to the Church, and is aware of the talents of the whole People of God.
- Is able to be obedient to the authority of the bishop and willing to work in collegiality with the local incumbent.
- Has good communication skills both written and verbal.
- Is not a loner. A deacon is a team builder and encourager who works well with groups.
- Is courageous and prophetic.

#### Discernment Leading to Ordination to the (vocational) Diaconate Expanded Checklist

##### A. Inquirer to Aspirant

###### i. Initial meeting with parish incumbent

The inquirer meets with the parish rector, priest-in-charge or interim to discuss possibilities and the sense of call. The incumbent should discuss the ministry options within the Church and clarify questions concerning processes of discernment, educational options and formation requirements of the Diocese.

ii. Parish discernment process

a. Incumbent initiates Parish Discernment Committee (PDC)

If the incumbent believes there is a call requiring testing, he or she initiates the formation of the Parish Discernment Committee according to the outline in “B-9 Parish Discernment Committee.” Membership on this committee is important and should be determined and appointed in consultation with the inquirer. The PDC meets first with the territorial archdeacon who assists the Committee with orientation and the outlining of the task ahead.

b. PDC meets with the archdeacon

The Archdeacon assures that the required materials are available, negotiates a time for the first meeting which confirms that the Committee clearly understands the process and its importance. Committee leadership roles are decided upon at the first meeting. The work of the Committee is as much an educational endeavour for the parish as it is a ministry to and for the inquirer. Committee members should become familiar with the parish discernment process materials in advance to make opportunities for clarification possible during the meeting with the Commission.

c. PDC meets in sessions with the inquirer

As outlined in the “B-9 Parish Discernment Committee,” the Committee meets as specified using the session outlines provided.

d. PDC meets and prepares report

The PDC meets without the inquirer present to compare notes and prepare the report as outlined. Committee members may be assigned specific parts of the report to prepare in advance and seek consensus of the other members.

e. PDC meets with the inquirer to review report

The final meeting of the PDC with the inquirer is an opportunity to present the report and review the process with the inquirer. The Committee should not feel compelled to alter the report following this meeting but should be able to provide truthful justification for its findings. The report becomes the property of the inquirer at the end of the parish discernment process and will be submitted to the Bishop for reference.

f. PDC makes request to the parish corporation for Parish Commendation and Nomination to Holy Orders.

iii. Inquirer submits to the Bishop:

a. Application for Status as Aspirant

b. Parish Discernment Committee report

c. Parish Commendation and Nomination for Holy Orders

The Application for status makes a request for a meeting with the Bishop. With the Application, the Report of the Parish Discernment Committee, and the Parish Commendation and Nomination in the hands of the Bishop, a meeting with the Bishop will be scheduled.

iv. Inquirer meets with the Bishop

v. Bishop gives permission by letter for status as aspirant

The Bishop grants aspirant status for the inquirer or offers advice as to other steps that might be taken prior to granting status. Inquirers should not be discouraged should remedial recommendations be made. The discernment process is a testing, sorting out, and affirmation of call both individual and in community. Early recognition of the possibility of a valid call to ministry is essential in discernment leading to ordination.

## B. Aspirant to Postulant

Aspirant meets with incumbent for preparation of parish proposal

- i. Incumbent facilitates the creation of the parish proposal for diaconal ministry
  - a. The parish identifies an outreach mission into the community. This outreach mission is to be separate and distinct from the ministry of the incumbent.
  - b. The parish will submit to the Bishop's Office a written proposal outlining the outreach mission as it relates to the gifts, abilities and situation of the aspirant proposed for the ministry. This will be accompanied by a letter from the parish corporation supporting the proposal. The following questions may guide its preparation:
    - What do you understand your parish's diaconal ministry to be?
    - What do you understand the symbolic and functional roles of a deacon to be? (in the parish, in the community, in the diocese)
    - What do you see as the differences between the role and function of the three orders of ministry? (diaconate, presbyterate, episcopate)
    - What diaconal ministry might this candidate carry out in the parish and in the wider community?
    - What skills and gifts would this person bring to a diaconal ministry?
    - What limitations would this individual bring to a diaconal ministry?
    - What does the parish understand to be the main differences between the present ministry of this individual, and what her/his ministry might be as a deacon?
    - What education has or will be offered in the parish as it embarks on support of parish diaconal ministry?

- What difference would it make to the life of the parish and to the wider community to have this candidate ordained to the diaconate?
- ii. Aspirant submits “Authorization and Release” with the parish proposal to Bishop
  - iii. Commission appoint a “Chaplain to the aspirant” and assures that the aspirant has necessary forms and outlines for required documentation.
  - iv. Aspirant begins to prepare and collect necessary required documents:
    - a. Resumé (using prescribed format)
    - b. Certificates of Baptism and Confirmation
    - c. Essay outlining the aspirant’s sense of call, devotional life, current ministry and financial plans for educational requirements
    - d. Security and background check
    - e. Medical examination with “Medical Declaration and Report”
    - f. Credit check or bureau
  - v. When documents have been submitted, an interview with representatives of the Commission on the Diaconate will be scheduled. The interviewers submit a report to the Bishop.
  - vi. Aspirant meets with Bishop to review the report of the Commission
  - vii. Bishop confirms advice re education and next steps by letter
    - a. Aspirant completes psychological examination and report scheduled through the Bishop’s Office. The cost of this assessment is normally shared by the aspirant and the parish.
    - b. Aspirant attends diocesan discernment day for the vocational diaconate when offered
    - c. Aspirant makes “Application for Postulancy” to Bishop
    - d. Aspirant receives confirmation of status as postulant from the Bishop (or direction or advice on re-application for postulancy)

### C. Postulant to Candidate

Current requirements for ordination are the completion of:

1. At least 4 approved course credits and/or a certificate in theological studies (or their equivalent\*)
2. At least 6 units offered by way of a [Diocesan Formation Programme](#) (or their equivalent\*) as provided by the Diocese

\* equivalency to be approved by the Bishop through the Commission on the Diaconate

#### Post-training

- i. Postulant meets with appointed chaplain and a representative of the Commission on the Diaconate to confirm educational requirements and prepare "Application for Candidacy."
- ii. Postulant submits application for candidacy to the Bishop.
- iii. Bishop meets with postulant to discuss future ministry and grants candidacy status if possible.

#### D. Candidate to (vocational) Deacon

- i. "Si Quis" read and completed by parish and submitted
- ii. "Letters Testimonial" (three) are completed and submitted
- iii. Ministry appointment is arranged including first covenant with parish and supervisor
- iv. Details of ordination arranged by the Bishop's Office and ordination host

#### E. Post-ordination Training

Completion of components of post-ordination training as set by the Diocese, including but not limited to:

- Conflict management
- Pastoral liturgy (Funerals, Reconciliation, Ministry to the Sick)
- Sacramental liturgy (Marriage, Baptism, Confirmation)
- Christian Education
- Sexual Misconduct Policy Training
- Professional Conduct
- Parish Administration
- Diocesan legislation (Constitution, Canons, Regulations, Policies and Directives)
- Preaching
- Spirituality

#### F. Annual and On-going Requirements

All deacons are expected to attend to continuing education and development. Review of these opportunities should be part of the annual December covenant renewal. The Diocese will endeavour to provide learning and fellowship opportunities for deacons as needed.

All deacons will be members of the North American Association of the Diaconate and may rely on this network for educational and support opportunities.

Yearly renewal of incumbent / deacon / parish Covenant must be completed by the end of each calendar year. No deacon will function in ministry without a current covenant approved by the Bishop no later than 31 December of each year.

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## Appendices

[Appendix A Discernment Leading to the Diaconate Checklist](#)

[Appendix B Study and Reading List](#)

[Diocesan Formation Programme](#)

[The Ministry of Deacons - February 2009 Information Pamphlet](#)

[Discernment Process Flowchart](#)

[Documentation Required by Aspirants](#)

[Discernment Authorization and Release](#)

[Medical Declaration and Report](#)

[Discernment Status Applications](#)

From the Office of the Bishop

Si Quis

Letters Testimonial