

## THE DEACON IN THE PARISH

### 1 Introduction

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**

Deacons exist to call the whole community into servant ministry. They are prophetic ministers who are called to challenge the Church to always look outside and beyond itself.

Applicants to the order of deacon need to have the character of a servant, and this character should be visible in the applicant's life and ministry. Ordination to the 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 others into servant ministry in the world. "Vocational" deacons, under any circumstances, will not be ordained priest without the normal discernment and preparation process for priesthood.

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% in 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.

#### **Ten components of clergy character**

Universal/Foundational Components of Clergy Character

##### 1. Perseverance

Constancy, steadfastness to call, to self and to one's task; persistence; capacity to grow; stamina, staying power amid dissonance and resistance; underlying is an assumption of committing oneself to an ongoing covenant relationship for a specific time period; discipline; ability to live with ambiguity; ability to be forgiving and forgiven; faithfulness.

## 2. Acceptance of Realistic Limitation

The struggle to be neither more nor less than what one really is; an awareness of sin; ability to live within the sense of the comic and the tragic in one's own life and in the lives of others; eschatological awareness; awareness of a theology of the cross; patience; adaptability; capacity to change and tolerate change; manifestation of joy, humor, laughter; wellness, both in self and in family/household.

## Ecclesial Components of Clergy Character

### 3. Discriminate Assertiveness

Being intentional about planning and implementing objectives; avoidance of a passive and/or dependent stance; resourceful; energetic; and commitment to follow through on tasks and goals.

### 4. Consultative/Participatory Leadership

Avoidance of either authoritative or laissez-faire approach to decision making; seeing process as important and of equal value to knowledge; ability to accept and tolerate divergent viewpoints; awareness of boundaries and the knowledge of when to ask boundary questions; ability to be collegial, both inter and intra denominationally; ability to integrate leadership styles and functions; not being threatened by others and their divergent styles of leadership; and an understanding of power and authority.

### 5. Capacity to be Nurturing

The capacity to be sensitive and empathetic toward people; pastoral ability, with skill to listen, to relate, to care, and to communicate caring.

### 6. Courage to do Mercy and Justice

The ability to demonstrate fortitude to witness to, and to act for the truth; the ability to peacefully work to change the dehumanizing structures of society; and the ability to arouse and prompt the laity to do justice and mercy.

### 7. Prudence

Presence of a healthy skepticism; willingness to question and probe one another's interpretation of doctrine, ethics, and behaviors; inquisitive; avoidance of rigidity; academic competence, not intellectualism, but wisdom and knowledge; vision or accurate perception; the capacity and ability to make right decisions; the ability to govern and discipline oneself by use of reason; discernment.

### 8. Integrity with Internal and External History

Integrating God's truth as revealed in history with the truth of one's own life and the life of the Christian community; connecting and integrating symbols; the ability to allow visions to emerge and to see them through; knowing and living

tradition beyond one's own experience and time; awareness of one's own agenda and politics from that of God's; self knowledge; sense of Christian (Anglican) identity and uniqueness, in terms of scripture, tradition and reason; independent trusteeship; trustworthiness.

#### Personal, Psychological Components of Healthy Character

##### 9. Appropriate Sense of Self Worth

Inner resiliency which enables one to stay composed amid adverse circumstances; sufficient ego strength to tolerate unresolved incongruence and conflict; ability to live with what is unchangeable.

##### 10. Appropriate Self Transparency

Integrity regarding one's inner being; willingness to become intimate and secure with the inner self; readiness to share selectively with one's coworkers about one's doubts, assessments, interpretations, values, commitments and visions; intention to disclose personal interests, conversational pieces, histories; connecting of life activities in a way that transcends professional functions.

#### 2 Discernment, formation and education of deacons

The process of discernment, formation and educational expectations for deacons is outlined in the [Bishop's directive \(7.2\) on discernment](#).

#### 3 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** As members of the Clergy, deacons are invited and active at meetings of deanery clericus. Some accommodation should be made to keep deacons informed of the content of clericus meetings when held during the working day. Deacons have an important integrated place within the "business" of the diocese. Deacons are to always look for opportunities to make, encourage and affirm ministries which connect the Church to the world and vice versa. Deacons are bridges and connectors. If not a diaconal responsibility, an opportunity may be missed. 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. Deacons vote as clergy when there is voting “by orders.”

## **Parish**

### **Role**

The Deacon is encouraged to attend meetings of the Parish Corporation without vote, but reports 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. The 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.

### **During parish interims**

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. The Deacon, under no circumstances, assumes the role of parish or congregational leadership. The outlined role of a deacon in the liturgy remains the same during a parish interim arrangement. 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, 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.

#### 4 Specifics for the (vocational) Deacon

##### a. Ordination of deacons

Deacons will normally be ordained in the Cathedral. The rite of the “Celebration of a New Ministry of a Deacon” may be used in the local congregation of appointment, especially when the ordination takes place elsewhere.

##### b. 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, other conferences and continuing education events may be offered especially for deacons. Deacons are expected to place a high priority on continuing education and formation.

##### c. Communication

Deacons are listed with diocesan personnel and receive mailings in accordance with the practice of the Diocese.

##### d. Covenants and license

Deacons and their supervising priest shall together design and approve a covenant outlining the specifics of the Deacon's ministry in that place renewed annually before the end of every calendar year. The Bishop or the Bishop's designee shall approve the Covenants. A deacon will be licensed to ministry by the Bishop. No deacon will function in ministry without a current license and covenant.

##### e. 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.

##### f. Titles and forms of address

These directives pertain specifically to “vocational” deacons, not “transitional” deacons. “Vocational” deacons are usually referred to in spoken address as “Deacon John Doe.” The appropriate form of written address for a deacon is “Deacon” before or after the person's name or formally “The Rev’d John Doe, Deacon.” “Deacon” will always appear in the Title.

##### g. Liturgical dress

Liturgical dress follows the tradition of the Church and local custom. The stole is worn over the left shoulder with an alb, or cassock and surplice (or cotta). Local

custom for other vesture should be followed. The traditional dress for sacramental ministrations is alb and stole or cassock, surplice (or cotta) and stole. The traditional dress for the Liturgies of the Word (non-sacramental), is cassock and surplice (or cotta).

h. Street dress

Clerical street wear is not the norm for deacons, however, such attire may be worn under the following circumstances:

1. When administering Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to the sick and shut-in.
2. For admission and recognition in hospitals, jails, other institutions, and in other specialized ministry situations when appropriate.
3. Under liturgical attire during the liturgy, and at events where such celebrations and services take place.

[Appendix A Deacon / Supervisor / Parish Covenant](#)

[Appendix B Celebration of a New Ministry of a Deacon](#)

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