



# Called to Ministry

**Section 3: Holy Orders**

**Doc 3B: Diaconate**

**Guidelines for Ministry of all the Baptized,  
Lay Licensed Ministries, and Holy Orders**

**for the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe**

**Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized**

The Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized serves to guide and empower  
all baptized people in discerning their ministries.

**European Institute for Christian studies**

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## **Holy Orders: Diaconate**

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# Holy Orders: Diaconate

## Qualities and Roles of Ordained Persons – Diaconate

### **Specific characteristics of the Order of the Diaconate**

#### **Historical Background: The Diaconate in the Early Church**

In the first three centuries of Christianity, the Diaconate flourished. Deacons had a special relationship to Bishops, providing the servant ministry of a Bishop to his congregation and to the larger world, as well as assisting the bishop at the Eucharist. Following the conversion of Constantine, the church adapted itself to the hierarchical structures of Roman society, and the office of bishop gained prestige as the church became the Imperial Church – i.e., the Church modeled its structure on the Imperial model.

As the church flourished, priests, out of necessity, were called on to take over Eucharistic roles, which had formerly been the sole function of Bishops, with the assistance of Deacons. The Diaconate came to be overshadowed by Priests as ordained leadership came to be seen as an ascending progression of grades: Deacon, Priest, Bishop. By the Middle Ages, the Diaconate became a transitional stepping stone to the Priesthood. The vocational diaconate virtually disappeared from the ministry of the Western Churches.

Since the recovery of the diaconate by the Episcopal Church starting in the 1970s and confirmed in the revised Prayer Book in 1979, the diaconate – the increasingly preferred term, since all holy orders are “permanent” and “vocational” – has generally been viewed as a servant ministry, empowering the laity and serving as an example to become better servants in the image of Christ. Deacons, who are non-stipendiary, have a threshold role as bringing the Church to the world, where they work, and bringing that world back to the Church. They seek to draw the Church's attention to those in need, spiritually and materially, while also seeking to bring people into the Church so that they can meet Jesus there in the Sacraments and in the community gathered for worship. Deacons serve directly under the Bishop, whom, like Priests, they swear to obey.

The liturgical role of Deacons is no less important and helps underline their ministry in the world during the rest of the week. They proclaim and preach the Gospel, facilitate the Prayers of the People for the laity, call the people to confess their sins, set the Altar, help distribute Holy Communion, do the ablutions after the Eucharist, and dismiss the people at the end of the service, sending them out, healed and restored, to do God's work. They are usually responsible for ensuring that Communion be taken to the sick and shut-ins, and are active in the councils of the Church at every level.

More recently, the rapid changes in the institutional Church as well as extensive new research into the historical Diaconate have led to a new look at this ancient order. Authors like Dwight Zscheile, John C. Collins, Thomas Breidenthal and Phyllis Tickle have all called for a fuller definition of *diakonia*, arguing that the Diaconate should be viewed as a missional, rather than as a servant ministry. Deacons in the early Church were not so much servants, as servant leaders and messengers to the congregation and local community. In line with this thinking, one of the topics at the 2013 AED Diaconal Assembly in Williamsburg focused on the need for 21st-century deacons to be firmly rooted in their towns, cities and neighborhoods, helping their Parish reflect upon the realities of their local context.

The Deacon serves as a bridge between the church and the world, exercising the ministry of Christ and the Church in the world, “particularly as a servant to those in need.” The ministry of the Deacon is as follows:

- To “make Christ and his redemptive love known” to the world, and to “interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world”
- To “assist the Bishop and Priests in public worship and in the ministration of God’s Word and Sacraments”.

The locus of the Deacon’s responsibility is that fluid boundary between the church and the world, in the workplace and soup kitchen, the hospital and home – wherever there are people in need of Christ’s compassion. Even though the Deacon may serve in a local congregation, the Deacon is directly under the supervision of the Bishop. The Bishop may assign supervision to the Priest in charge or other leader exercising oversight of a congregation or other community of faith (see Canon III.6.4).

## **Becoming a Deacon**

### **Application for Postulancy**

When a Discernment Committee and an Applicant feel that they have reached some clarity that the Applicant may be called to the Diaconate, a formal nomination should be made to the Bishop. The Canons state that a person “may be nominated for ordination to the Diaconate by the person’s congregation or other community of faith,” and then names the items that need to be included in such a nomination [Canon III.6, 1(a)+]. The nomination shall include “an acceptance in writing by the nominated person.” Thus, three documents are needed: an application form, a nominating letter from the Discernment Committee, and a letter of acceptance by the Nominee.

The Bishop then chooses whether to admit the nominee as a Postulant. Postulancy for the Diaconate is a period “of exploration of and decision on the Postulant’s call to the Diaconate.” It includes a background check, medical and psychological evaluation, and an interview with the Commission on Ministry, which shall submit a

recommendation to the Bishop. The Bishop then chooses whether to admit the person as a Candidate. Candidacy is the period of formation.

### **Formation Program for the Diaconate**

The Formation Program for Deacons affirms any proficiency that Candidates for the Diaconate may bring to the formation process. COMB recognizes that individuals may come to the process with a variety of previous experiences and education that is pertinent to their diaconal formation.

Beginning with admission to Candidacy, the Commission on Ministry of the Baptized will work with each individual to design a program that suits his/her needs, and to provide adequate preparation in the canonical areas required and any others the Diocese may add. Before ordination each Candidate shall be prepared in and demonstrate basic competence in five general areas:

1. Academic studies including, The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church.
2. Diakonia and the diaconate.
3. Human awareness and understanding.
4. Spiritual development and discipline.
5. Practical training and experience. [Canon III.6.5(f)]

Preparation for ordination shall include training regarding

1. prevention of sexual misconduct.
2. civil requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse.
3. the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV thereof.
4. the Church's teaching on racism. [Canon III.6.5(g)]

The formation of Deacons reflects the fact that they are not as a whole Teachers of the Church, unlike the Bishops and Priests. Since they are usually people who continue to work in the world, their formation needs more flexibility than that of Priests.

Practical experience in the congregational setting will be the most important educational tool for diaconal candidates, as a rule. However, this is not to obviate the need for academic studies, especially to equip Deacons to become preachers and evangelists in the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious world we inhabit here in Europe. Diaconal candidates will benefit from distance learning, conference and seminars in order to help them gain the competence they need, as they do not need the level of education required of Priests. As a rule, seminary study is not necessary.

However, some criteria apply to all. Deacons must know the content of the Bible, and understand how the Creeds interpret the Scriptures' message. They must have a grasp

of exegesis, as well as good homiletical technique. They must possess not only a heart for the poor in body, mind or spirit, they must also have concrete training in meeting those needs. They must have training in evangelism, especially the hospitality evangelism that is the common practice in the Convocation. They should have some grounding in the history of the Church, and what is distinctive about Anglicanism, particularly in our context. Deacons should understand their Order well, and how they fit into The Episcopal Church's understanding of Orders in general.

The third "general area" in III.6.5 (f)(3) is vaguely titled "Human awareness and understanding." This should be taken to mean what we understand the canonical area of "Contemporary issues" to be in the formation of Priests. In other words, Deacons need to be very aware of the needs of the community around them, and how to go about getting the Church to pay attention to those needs and meet them with the gifts of the Spirit.

This does point out the need for good supervision by the field education priest, mentors, EICS and COMB shepherds, as well as the Bishop. Examination criteria need to be elaborated, in such a way that individuals can be examined for the competence as well as their academic knowledge. This is the clearest need for EICS to meet, as we move forward with developing the Diaconate in Europe.

The design of a program of study makes use of recommendations from the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), which recommends the following subject areas and suggested credit hours. For a fuller description of each, see the NAAD's *Guidelines for Deacon Programs, 2000*.

Diakaneo: Introduction, Theory, and Practice	160 hours/20%
Spiritual Formation	80 hours/10%
Scripture	160 hours/20%
Theology and Doctrine	40 hours/5%
Christian Theology	40 hours/5%
Moral Theology	40 hours/5%
Contemporary Issues	80 hours/10%
Church History, including Anglican Tradition Worship	120 hours/15%
Christian Evangelism and Education	40 hours/5%

In addition to the above "academic" portion, the following practical learning is also required:

Pastoral Training	one unit/400 hours
Supervised Field Work	200 hours

This should take place outside the Postulant's home parish.

## Bachelor of Diaconal Studies Curriculum

### Suggested Outline of Full-Time Enrollment

YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
Bible Studies I Christian Mythos I Enabling and Empowering Groups Prayer Book Studies I Liturgical Practicum I Spiritual Formation I	Bible Studies III Introduction to Pastoral Care Organizing for Social Change Homiletics II Field Education and Seminar I Spiritual Formation III	Christian Education Christian Social Ethics Social Ministry I Romans and John Liturgical Practicum III Field Education and Seminar III Spiritual Formation V
Bible Studies II Foundations of Social Ministry Homiletics I Introduction to Theological Reflection Prayer Book Studies II Spiritual Formation II	Anglican Theology Christian Mythos II Counseling Skills Liturgical Practicum II Organizing for Social Change Field Education and Seminar II Spiritual Formation IV	Romans and John Social Ministry II Deacon's Role in Liturgical Music Field Education and Seminar IV Senior Seminar Spiritual Formation VI

Reference: School for Deacons; Diocese of California; Berkeley, California.

Note: The above list of courses is given as an example of a well-rounded educational program. Courses may be taken on a full-time or part-time basis according to the specific situation of the candidate. The final choice of courses to be taken for the Diaconate will be decided by the candidate and the Bishop in consultation with the Advisers from the European Institute for Christian Studies. The final list of courses will be based on the environment in which the future deacon will be serving and based on the availability of resources in Europe and in the U.S.A. to which the candidate can attend.

### Resources

The Formation Program for Deacons includes, but is not limited to, the following resources that may be used for preparation:

- **Learning Contact Hours:** Time spent in a classroom setting, in a group, with an instructor. May also be accomplished through conference calls, video, or computer conferencing. This would include courses and workshops offered through the various seminaries in Europe and America.
- **Directed Study:** Time spent by a student in contact with a teacher or mentor, in a one-on-one exploration of a particular topic.
- **Formation and Experiential Events:** May include retreats, conferences, supervised practicum experiences, etc., whether in Europe or elsewhere.

- **On-Line:** This may include courses offered by the School for Deacons ([www.sfd.edu](http://www.sfd.edu)) and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California ([www.cdsp.edu/call.html](http://www.cdsp.edu/call.html)); also see Candidate Formation Guidelines of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe on the Convocation's website for a non-exhaustive survey of training centers available in Europe.
- **Teaching/Lecture Series:** Offered at other churches training programs.

### **Supervised Pastoral Education**

An expected part of the formation for the Diaconate in the Convocation is the completion of one unit of Supervised Pastoral Education (SPE). This program of approximately twelve weeks may take place in a variety of ministry settings, but most often occurs in a hospital. Essentially, the student serves as a hospital chaplain for a summer, while also engaging a variety of group and learning experiences. SPE is a form of experiential learning through the practice of ministry with persons in crisis and the reflection on that practice with supervisor and peers. SPE is intended to help a student develop skills for ministry, especially with persons in need or crisis, and the capacity to reflect theologically on the situations one encounters in ministry. (For more information on SPE, see the web site for the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., at [www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu).)

### **Demonstration of Proficiency**

The Candidate in formation for the Diaconate may demonstrate proficiency in the areas specified by the Canon of the Church at any time in the formational process. The method for demonstrating and evaluating a Postulant's proficiency will be determined by the Convocation's Commission on Ministry of the Baptized.

### **Reporting**

The Commission on Ministry of the Baptized will make a report to the Bishop concerning the Candidate's fitness and readiness, as called for under Canons III.6.1 and III.6.5(j), and will ensure that such a report is made by any other body charged with evaluating the Candidate's readiness.

### **Outline of the Ordination Process**

This is a synopsis of the ordination process as required by the Canons. Much detail has been omitted, in the interest of giving a general outline. Be sure to check the Canons of Title III for more complete information.

### **Deacon**

- A. Discernment process in local congregation or other community of faith
- B. Selection and nomination – no time requirement specified in Canons

1. Nominated by Vestry or comparable body to Bishop. See Canon III.6.2(a), for requirements of what needs to be included in nomination.
2. Bishop admits (or chooses not to admit) Applicant as a Postulant.

Background check; psychological and medical evaluations; Bishop, or Bishop's designee, may interview.

C. Postulancy – a period of selection, *not* of formation:

1. COMB, or designated committee, shall interview Postulant and makes recommendation
2. Bishop admits (or not) person as a Candidate.

D. Candidacy – the period of formation. It must be at least a year.

1. Bishop may assign Candidate to a congregation.
2. Bishop, in consultation with COMB, determines time and extent of formation.
3. Must take sexual misconduct, anti-racism/ diversity, and Title IV training.
4. Must demonstrate competence in five areas:
  - Academic studies, including Holy Scriptures, theology, and tradition of the Church
  - Diakonia and the diaconate
  - Human awareness and understanding
  - Spiritual development and discipline
  - Practical training and experience should include some kind of formation in community.
5. Formation should reflect the local community.
6. Candidate communicates with Bishop on Ember Days.
7. Progress evaluated from time to time by COMB and any others so authorized, with written report. When ready for ordination, final written report produced, in form determined by Bishop in consultation with COMB.
8. COMB recommends readiness.
9. Standing Committee certifies that all canonical requirements have been met for ordination.

**Candidate: Record**

1. Bishop assigns Candidate to congregation (optional) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Safeguarding God's Children training completed \_\_\_\_\_
3. Preventing Sexual Misconduct training completed \_\_\_\_\_
4. Anti-Racism/Diversity training completed \_\_\_\_\_
5. Title IV training completed \_\_\_\_\_

6. Clinical Pastoral Education Evaluation(s) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Certification of readiness from those in charge of formation program \_\_\_\_\_
8. COMB's Report on Candidate's fitness and readiness \_\_\_\_\_
9. Application for Ordination \_\_\_\_\_
10. Standing Committee certifies all canonical requirements have been met \_\_\_\_\_
11. Approval by Bishop for Ordination \_\_\_\_\_
12. Date of Ordination \_\_\_\_\_