



Called to Ministry

Section 3: Holy Orders

Doc 3C: Article on the Diaconate

**Guidelines for Ministry of all the Baptized,
Lay Licenced 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.

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Article on the Diaconate

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As the Convocation moves toward the regular formation and deployment of Deacons, there is much to understand about this distinctive Order.

The key to understanding the Orders of the Church begins with Baptism, in which all are given the same Spirit (I Cor. 12), and individually receive different and unique gifts. Put together as a whole community, the baptized become the Body of Christ.

Each Order enables facets of the ministry of each Christian, and of the Christian community. The ordained function to “equip the saints for ministry,” not only by providing formation for ministry, but more deeply, by helping to “stir up” the gift of the Spirit given to each of us at Baptism. This gift makes us like Christ, and so the Holy Orders each reflect and embody some aspects of Jesus’ ministry as Servant, Healer, Forgiver, Prophet, Teacher, Leader, Priest, and Lord.

Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “Where I am, there my servant will be also” (John 12:21). Thus, identifying himself with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, Jesus is first and foremost our Servant, meeting the need we have for salvation that no one else could provide. Thus the Deacon (Greek for “servant”) is the first and most important of the three Orders. All the ordained are to serve the needs of the Church, and to be both examples and teachers of servanthood in the image of Jesus.

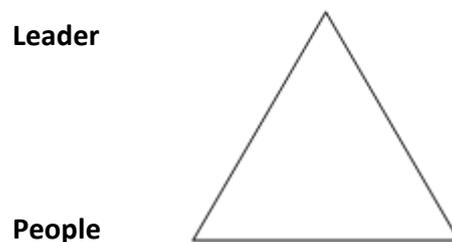
It is therefore essential that Priests and Bishops also be ordered first as Deacons. The relegation of the Diaconate to a minor order has been a major stumbling block for the Church, as it either allowed for the collapsing of the three Orders into the Priesthood— Priest as primary order, Bishops being Priests with a little added, Deacons being failed priests. The Reformed reaction made the Diaconate into a lay order, as in John Calvin’s scheme of pastors, ruling and teaching elders, and deacon, or completely collapsed into one office in the Lutheran understanding, that of pastor.

The recovery of the Diaconate in The Episcopal Church is helping restore all four orders to their rightful place: the Laity as the principal ministers of the Church, doing the work of the Church; the Deacons, helping the Laity become better servants (the primary ministry of us all in the image of Christ); the Priests, connecting the People of God and the Holy Trinity through Word and Sacrament; and the Bishops, servants to the rest of the Church, connecting and holding the congregations together as a living sacrifice and a royal priesthood for the life of the world.

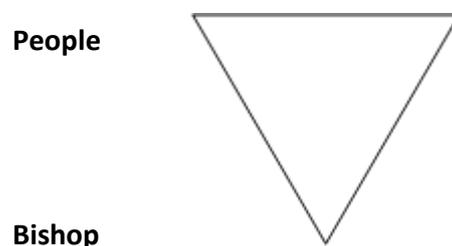
In particular, Deacons have a “liminal” or “threshold” role as being in the World for the Church and in the Church for the World, as opposed to Priests and Bishops, who summon the community(ies) together for Word and Sacrament and then send the people out into the world, to do the work that God has given us to do (BCP 366). The Deacons therefore seek to draw the Church’s attention to those in need, both spiritually and materially. Conversely, they also seek to bring people into the Church, so that each might “come and see” Jesus and decide whether to stay (John 1:37-40). The Deacons serve directly under the Bishop, whom they, like Priests, swear to obey.

Liturgically, Deacons read the Gospel and can preach, call the People to confess their sins, set the Altar, help distribute the Holy Communion, do the ablutions after the Eucharist, and send the People forth into the World. This liturgical role helps underline their ministry the rest of the week. They may be put in charge of congregations; conduct weddings and funerals, and lead the Offices. They usually are responsible for seeing that Communion is taken to the sick and shut-in. In the ancient Church, Deacons were also administrators, following upon the institution of the Order by the Apostles (Acts 6).

In the world, organizations are usually arranged in some pyramidal hierarchy:



But the Church is arranged differently:



The people are “on top,” and the Bishop is “at the bottom.” This understanding is what the Diaconate does for the Church as a whole.

The canons now speak of “Deacons” and “transitional Deacons.” This should be the usage we adopt in the Convocation, rather than “permanent,” “distinctive,” or “vocational” Deacons. The change reflects the Church’s dissatisfaction with labeling Deacons as “permanent,” whereas all Orders are permanent and irrevocable.

Thus the formation of Deacons is extremely important, especially as the Order prescribes the right relationship of all Christians one to another.

Canon III.6 concerns the calling and ordering of Deacons. Deacons are normally non-stipendiary, because of their liminal role as being in the World for the Church and in the Church for the World.

Before ordination each Candidate must 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.

Preparation for ordination shall include training regarding

- (6) prevention of sexual misconduct.
- (7) civil requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse.
- (8) the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV thereof.
- (9) the Church’s teaching on racism.

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.