

Report of the Task Force on the Diaconate

‘My *brother/sister*, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.’

-The Book of Common Prayer, p. 543

The Role of Deacons: The Diaconate in Context

Holy Baptism is the source of all ministry in the church. By the action of the Holy Spirit gifts are lavished on all the baptized for building up the Body of Christ and extending the love and mercy of the Risen Christ to the world. While there are many distinctive gifts of the Spirit, they may be thought of broadly under three categories;

- Servanthood

The first and most characteristic category is servanthood, (*diakonia*). Jesus told his first friends that he had come not to be served but to serve. Since we are baptized into the image and likeness of Christ therefore, servanthood should be the most distinguishing Christian characteristic. As Deacon Ormonde Plater puts it, *diakonia* is lay ministry *par excellence*.

- Reconciliation

This category includes the variety of ways Christians are called to restore to unity with God those things which have been separated by sin. Members of the Body of Christ share in the exercise of the one priestly reconciliation to God which Jesus Christ has already accomplished.

- Oversight (episcopate)

This category focuses on the responsibility for overseeing the growth and healthy ordering of the community of faith (and by extension, families, work, society) for the sake of transforming the world.

Any number and combination of these gifts may be present in any single Christian person. They are the gift of Jesus to the *laos*, the laity, the whole and holy People of God. There are no clergy in the New Testament. When the word does appear in Christian usage (*kleros*) it is likely borrowed from the ordinary way of speaking about one's lot in life, or one's place to stand in the ordering of daily life. Clergy, in this sense are members of the laity who have a particular task to do and a particular place to stand in the Christian community, in order to further its mission.

When we ask questions of discernment about members of the laity whom we need to appoint to leadership roles in the church, we are asking about the ways gifts for ministry are arrayed in them. Are gifts for servanthood, or reconciliation, or oversight apparent in these persons in such a way that they can become animating signs of these gifts in the whole community? Can they be sacramental signs, communicating gifts already widely distributed among those who have been baptized into Christ? Can they lead?

Deacons are ordained to animate members of the Body of Christ in serving those in need, especially the "poor, the sick, the weak and the lonely." Deacons interpret to the church the needs, hopes and concerns of the world. This work of interpretation -- of leading the People of God as they gather around prayer, scripture and the Lord's table, and then out into the world -- provides the foundation for the liturgical role of deacons.

Deacons signify to us the compassionate ministry of Christ and our sharing in it. Deacons model Christian ministry effectively when they share it with the other distinctive leadership roles in the community. They exercise a ministry in direct relationship with the bishop, and in the same way, they exercise it in relationship with the presbyter(s) who serve their congregation and indeed with all those appointed to particular ministries for the good of the community. All ministers are mutually accountable to the mission of the church.

Relationships

The deacon's role is to lead others into their own baptismal ministries, as we strive together to build up the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

Deacons will have a robust vocabulary for their ministry in both liturgy and in the world, with a clear focus on relating the two. This ability to translate the work of the people in liturgy to the work of the people in the world will invite conversations leading to sound relationships between: deacons and bishops, deacons and lay people, deacons among other deacons, and deacons and priests.

Deacons will be equipped for conversations in which:

- Deacons articulate the ways they live their ministry regarding specific aspects of the role (modeling their lives upon Holy Scripture, making Christ's love known, interpreting the needs of the world to the Church, assisting in public worship, carrying out other duties assigned).
- Deacons articulate the ways they live their ministry regarding non-specific aspects of the role (preaching, pastoral care, organization, etc.).
- Deacons lead others into baptismal ministry.

Oversight: Leadership Team for the Diaconate

Description

The Leadership Team will be comprised of individuals from the three orders of ministry: lay, deacon, priest. Together with the Bishop, this group shares responsibility for oversight, support, and growth of the diaconate in the Diocese of Chicago. This group will work collaboratively to provide leadership in roles that have been held by individuals (Archdeacon, Director of Deacons' School) or a group (Bishops's Advisory Council on the Diaconate aka Deacons' Council).

The Team consists of seven members, appointed by the Bishop. The members of the Council are each responsible for a specific area, but work collaboratively to serve as a resource for deacons and prospective deacons, as well as faith communities. At least one member of will be a member of the Commission on Ministry and serve as liaison between the two groups.

Meetings

The Team meets monthly. Meetings are convened and conducted by a Convener, who is selected by the group. The Council provides reports on its work to deacons and to the wider diocesan community, e.g. newsletter for deacons, Diocesan Leadership News.

Membership

Members are appointed by the Bishop for terms of 4 years. All orders of ministry shall be represented in membership. Individuals or faith communities may nominate people to be considered for membership. A person may serve 2 subsequent terms then must rotate off. The team will create their bi-laws, in consultation with the Bishop.

Areas of Responsibility

Discernment

- Provide education about discernment process to individuals interested in the diaconate.
- Provide guidance and pastoral support to people in the discernment process, and to congregations.
- Monitor progress of discernment committees.

Formation

- Develop and provide information on formation requirements for ordination to the diaconate.

- Develop and monitor formation plans for postulants (in collaboration with Director of Life-long Formation).
- Oversee and monitor formation progress of postulants and candidates.

Deployment

- Provide resources and advice for Letters of Agreement for deacons and parishes
- Consult with Bishop and priests about potential assignments of deacons to faith communities.
- Assign deacons for liturgies, e.g. Diocesan Convention, Confirmations, and bishops' visits to parishes.
- Accompany bishop on visits to parishes with no assigned deacons.

Relationships

- Monitor status of deacons in parishes.
- Provide resources to develop and strengthen effective working relationships between deacons and rectors/vicars/priests-in-charge.
- Serve as pastoral resource and support to deacons and priests in situations of conflict or transition.

Mission

- Monitor activities of deacons and facilitate communication about their work to deacons and to the diocese.
- Support and coordinate collaborative efforts in new projects.

Growth

- Initiate and coordinate efforts to increase the size and diversity of the diaconate.
- Provide education about diaconate to congregations.

Continuing Education

- Provide information and resources for continuing education for deacons.
- Develop and monitor reporting structure for deacons' continuing education.

Formation

- Competency-based (as defined by Canon III, 6.5)
Before ordination, Candidates will demonstrate competence in:
 - (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

Candidates will also complete training such as anti-racism, prevention of sexual misconduct, community organizing and additional training based on specific ministries of an individual.

- Learner-centered
Postulants, in consultation with and supported by the Leadership Team, mentors and advisers will have individual formation plans.
- Accessible to people with diverse languages, educational backgrounds, ages, work schedules and obligations
- Flexible, using a variety of teaching/ e.g. on-line resources, independent and small-group work, classes.
- Include specific training such as anti-racism, prevention of sexual misconduct, and additional training based on specific ministries of an individual.

Once postulancy is granted, an individual will meet with the person(s) responsible for diaconal formation to assess skills, previous education/training and life experience in the competency areas. Together, they will develop a formation plan for the individual and assign appropriate mentor(s) to support and monitor the postulant's formation.

The Leadership Team will provide resources and support for developing community among those in formation, as well as with the wider community of deacons in the diocese.

Discernment/Recruitment

The Task Force affirms that people are called from all backgrounds, ages, races, and places to serve. We envision a diaconate that is represented in all or most of the parishes and missions in the diocese.

In recruiting future deacons, we are searching for people who:

- Can effectively interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.
- Are servant leaders.
- Hold the doors of the Church open to the world and to the people who are outside of it.
- Reflect all parts of our diocese, now and in the future.

The Leadership Team will create initiatives to increase the diversity and number of deacons in the diocese. They will develop and coordinate efforts to provide education about the diaconate to individuals and parishes, including: open meetings, one-on-one conversations, electronic and print resources, presentations and formation programs. All written materials will be in the languages used in the Diocese of Chicago.

The Team, in collaboration with the Commission on Ministry and diocesan staff, will provide resources and support to individuals and parishes for the discernment process.