

**INFORMATION FOR  
CONGREGATIONAL  
COMMISSIONS ON MINISTRY  
REGARDING**

**THE DISCERNMENT OF  
A VOCATION AS  
A DEACON**

**IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE  
OF  
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**



**Lead Enable Encourage**

**The Rt. Rev. Barry L. Beisner, Bishop  
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## Concerning the Order of Deacons

The Holy Scriptures and ancient Christian writers make it clear that from the apostles' time, there have been different ministries within the Church. In particular, since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been characteristic of Christ's holy catholic Church. First, there is the order of Bishops who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church. Second, associated with them are the presbyters, or ordained elders, in subsequent times generally known as Priests. Together with the Bishops, they take part in the governance of the Church, in the carrying out of its missionary and pastoral work, and in the preaching of the Word of God and administering his holy sacraments. Third, there are Deacons who assist Bishops and Priests in the governance of the Church and as itinerant mission leaders assigned by the Bishop to inspire, empower and enable members of the church to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant by serving the needy, the weak, the sick and the lonely in their communities.

The *Preface to the Ordination Rites* (BCP 510) provides the above discussion of the relationship among the three orders of ordained ministry. Differentiating between the three orders makes it clear that Deacons are members of a separate, distinct and equal order of clergy within the Episcopal Church.

The Diaconate in the Diocese of Northern California is an order of ordained persons serving as mission leaders in assignments within the Diocese as determined by the Bishop. The Deacon is ordained to a separate, distinct and equal order of ministry dedicated to:

- serving and enabling others to serve the needy, the weak, the sick, and the lonely,
- holding before the Church the needs of the world, interpreting those needs to the Church, and enabling baptized persons, to bring the ministry of Christ to the world, through fulfillment of their Baptismal Covenant,

- providing unique faculties of ministry which a Bishop may call upon as an extension of his/her ministry in the world.

The liturgical functions of the Diaconate are secondary to the social and justice ministry functions. If a Deacon is present, however, they are expected to proclaim the Gospel, set the table, clear the table and deliver the dismissal.

### **The Call to Diaconal Ministry**

A call to Diaconal Ministry is largely individual in nature and comes through an individual's prayerful communication with God. The call is reinforced by the individual's Congregation. The Church as a corporate body must recognize, test, and affirm an individual's call to ministry.

It is the Church which affirms God's call to explore the ordained ministry. This affirmation is accomplished by:

The individual's Parish Vestry or Mission Committee  
The Commission on Ministry  
The Standing Committee  
The Bishop

Some of the signs of a call to the Diaconate are an individual's demonstrated desire and ability to:

- serve and to enable others to serve the poor, the powerless, the weak, the sick and the needy,
- hold before the Church the needs of the world, to interpret those needs to the Church,
- be a symbol of and model for the ministry of all the baptized.

A strong personal ministry, empathy with those less fortunate and a strong spirituality are not by themselves adequate to determine a call to the Diaconate. Deacons must also have the innate ability to raise up and lead others in serving those in need.

## **Discerning the Call**

The process of discerning the call to the Diaconate begins when a baptized person approaches his or her Rector/Vicar and asks for information.

The primary responsibility for recognizing and developing a vocation to ordained ministry lies with the Parish/Mission. It may seem presumptuous to observe, question and judge another's call to ordained ministry. However, for someone aspiring to Holy Orders in the Church, this is not a private matter, but the proper concern of the entire Body of the Church.

The next step is to have the Rector, Vicar or Priest-in-charge bring or send the discerner to visit with the Bishop who may recommend that a Congregational Commission on Ministry (CCOM) become involved.

The CCOM meets with the discerner for a period of time not less than 3 – 6 months. If the CCOM discerns a call to the diaconate, the CCOM recommends the discerner to the Vestry/Mission Committee. If the Vestry/Mission Committee agrees, an application and supporting materials is sent to the Bishop who will make a decision about extending an invitation to attend a Discernment Weekend to meet with the Diocesan Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee  
Ministry and Standing Committee

## **Deacon Formation**

The Deacon Formation Program of the Diocese of Northern California is primarily through the School for Deacons in Berkeley, CA. Details of the training program are provided in the School for Deacons Catalog which can be accessed at [www.SFD.edu](http://www.SFD.edu).

With permission from the Bishop, a nominee may attend classes at the School for Deacons for one year as part of discernment.

Formation for Total Ministry and individual learning plans when attending the School for Deacons is a burden due to distance or other reasons is done in community. Permission for Distance Formation is the prerogative of the Commission on Ministry with approval of the Bishop. For more information contact the Archdeacon at [cookie.clark@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cookie.clark@sbcglobal.net)

## **The Ministry of Deacons**

The ministry of Deacons in the Diocese of Northern California is to inspire, empower and enable the people of the Church (within and without the Parish or Mission) to explore opportunities for their own ministries in the world. It is not just what Deacons say or do that inspires—it is their totality.

As leaders of outreach ministries, the Deacons build relationships within the life of their ministry assignment. The Deacon and Rector/Vicar will discuss and agree upon goals, areas of responsibility, and extent of participation that are most appropriate to the Deacon's skills and availability, as well as the needs of the community where they are assigned.

The Parish or Mission commitment of a Deacon is, first and foremost, to lead Justice and Social Ministry in their assigned communities. In addition, Deacons may assist in liturgical ministry as specified in the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. Deacons do not usurp liturgical roles normally assigned to Lay People: i.e. reading lessons, the Prayers of the People, and chalice bearer. However, some liturgical activities are appointed to Deacons by the Book of Common Prayer rubrics and the Bishop's directives. Specifically:

- Proclaim the Gospel
- Set the table
- Clear the table
- Dismiss the people
- Serve as the Bishop's chaplain

If there is a Deacon present, only the Deacon should perform these functions.

Other Ministry activities may include: (This list is neither exhaustive nor restrictive)

- Preach the diaconal message of Christ
- Inspire others to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant
- Empower others to do God's work here on earth
- Enable others to access resources necessary for God's work
- Raise up and support lay outreach ministers
- Support Outreach Committee
- Exemplify outreach in personal ministry
- Assist in gathering data on outreach alternatives
- Mentor follow-up groups to hands-on outreach
- Lead/facilitate participation in community programs
- Train and supervise Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors
- Teach and enable Christian Education
- Take Communion to the hospitalized and homebound
- Enable Bible study programs
- Train Acolytes
- Prepare Lay-readers and Lectors
- Duties appointed by the Proper Liturgies for Special Days (Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil)
- Perform other functions specific to the Bishop and the individual congregation.

Recommended reading;

*Discerning God's Will Together* by Danny Morris

*A Sacred Voice is Calling* by John Neafsey

*Weeds Among the Wheat* by Thomas H Green, S.J.

*Many Servants* by Ormond Plater

*Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, by James M. Barnett

*Unexpected Consequences: the Diaconate renewed*, by Susanne  
Watson-Epting

BCP: Ordination of a Deacon (Pg 537)

CCOM Guidelines found on the Diocesan website.

In addition to “*Possible Areas for CCOM Exploration and Prayer Before, Between and After Meetings with the Discerner*” in the CCOM Guidelines you might want to explore the following:

- ✓ What or who made you who you are? What persons? What events? Or...?
- ✓ In your personal dream, what kind of world do you live in?
- ✓ What gives you a sense of purpose or mission?
- ✓ What are your gifts? How are you actualizing your gifts?
- ✓ How have you exhibited leadership? At your work? In the world? At church?
- ✓ Does your family support and approve a call to the diaconate?

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Making Disciples, Raising up Saints  
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[www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon](http://www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon)

