

# HANDBOOK FOR DEACONS

IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF  
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



Inspire Empower Enable

**The Rt. Rev Barry L Beisner, Bishop**  
**The Ven. Cookie Clark, Archdeacon**  
**The Ven. Gary Brown, Archdeacon**

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## **The Ministry of Deacons**

The ministry of Deacons in the Diocese of Northern California is a ministry of servant leadership inspiring, empowering and enabling the people of the Church (within and beyond the Congregation) to realize their own ministries in the world. Deacons are to be an “example” and it is from the honesty of that example that Deacons lead others to fulfill their baptismal vows. It is not just what Deacons say or do that inspires—it is their authentic living of the Baptismal Covenant.

The Deacon serves directly under the Bishop, who makes an assignment to a parish or other ministry. When assigned to a congregation, the Deacon and Rector/Vicar/Priest in Charge will discuss and agree upon goals, areas of responsibility, and extent of participation most appropriate to the Deacon’s skills and availability, as well as the needs of the community where they are assigned. As leaders of outreach ministries, the Deacons should build relationships within the life of their ministry assignment.

The commitment of a Deacon is, first and foremost, to lead transformational social ministries in their assigned communities. Deacons may assist in liturgical ministry as specified in the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer

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 Committees
- 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 worship leaders and lectors
- Write a column for the congregation's newsletter/website.
- Administer Healing in accordance with BCP Pg. 456
- Conduct the service of burial of the dead
- Conduct the service of Holy Baptism
- Perform duties appointed by the Proper Liturgies for Special Days (Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil), and
- Perform other functions specific to the Bishop and the individual Congregation, but will not include Public Eucharist with pre-consecrated elements (Deacon's mass).

### **Liturgical Practices**

The liturgical functions of Deacons are secondary to their ministry work in the community where they are assigned. When a Deacon is assigned to a Congregation, they should function as appropriate to his/her Order. When a Bishop is present, or when the Deacon is accompanying the Bishop on a visitation, the only variation in the liturgy is that the Bishop takes the role as the Celebrant of the Eucharist, with a Deacon functioning with the Celebrant as is normal in that congregation. It is generally appropriate to approach the Bishop for blessing before proclaiming the Gospel. It is the prerogative of the Bishop whether or not he wishes to carry his crosier or have the Deacon carry it. Deacons must not usurp liturgical roles normally assigned to Lay People: i.e., reading lessons, the Prayers of the People, and chalice bearer.

. Some liturgical activities are appointed to Deacons by the Book of Common Prayer rubrics and the Bishop's directives, specifically:

- Proclaim the word of Christ by reading the Gospel
- Bid the Nicene Creed
- Bid the confession
- Set the table
- Clear the table
- Dismiss the people, and
- The Exsultet

When there is a Deacon present, only the Deacon should perform these functions as well as serving as the Bishop's primary chaplain.

### **Preaching as a Deacon**

Deacons have a special responsibility to preach the diaconal message of Jesus Christ. Often, Priests will focus on theological concepts in their preaching, but Deacons have a responsibility to emphasize the diaconal aspects of Christ's teachings and motivate the congregation to serve the poor, the weak, the sick, the suffering, the helpless, and the lonely in their congregation as well as in the world as a whole.

### **Accountability**

Deacons are directly accountable to the Bishop. The Rector/Vicar/Priest in Charge of the Congregation where a Deacon is assigned by the Bishop will have administrative authority, in the name of the Bishop, over the day-to-day congregation life and ministry relationship of the Deacon.

A Letter of Agreement (LOA) will be executed when a Deacon is assigned to a congregation. The LOA shall be negotiated by the Rector/Vicar, Sr. Warden, and the Deacon, and sent to the Bishop for approval. A copy will be retained in the Bishop's files and signed copies returned to the Rector/Vicar and Deacon. A Deacon should not assist a congregation without a current annual LOA on file. (The template for an LOA is found at [www.norcalepiscopal.org](http://www.norcalepiscopal.org).) There shall be an annual review of ministry by the Rector/Vicar and Deacon to reflect on the past year and plan the coming year, which will be formalized by a new contract.

Each active Deacon is expected to submit, to the Bishop, a report of all of their ministry and continuing education activities annually, by the anniversary date of their ordination.

In the event that an active Deacon is not assigned to a Congregation/Mission for some period of time, that Deacon shall provide a report of ministry to the Bishop. These reports should clearly indicate the Deacon's activity in liturgical assistance, pastoral care and social ministry involvement outside of Congregation life. It should also indicate where the Deacon is worshiping regularly.

The Community of Deacons of the diocese of Northern California usually meets twice a year including at least one meeting with their Bishop. These meetings will provide an opportunity for the Bishop and Deacons to share their journeys, support each other and reinforce their mutual commitment.

### **Relationship with the Bishop**

In fulfillment of their ordination vows, each Deacon has a direct reporting relationship to and is under the leadership and direct pastoral care of the Bishop. In this relationship Deacons are expected to seek counsel from the Bishop, or the Bishop's designated representative, for issues related to pre-marital planning, marital crisis, hospitalization and severe illness of themselves or family members, personal faith crisis or other serious concerns of ministry. It is the prerogative of the Bishop to perform the marriage service of a Deacon. At the funeral service of a Deacon or his/her spouse, the Bishop will normally be the designated celebrant, if available, and others may assist.

### **The Deacon's Responsibility**

Deacons are required to attend the semi-annual Gatherings of the Deacon Community and Diocesan Convention. Absence requires permission from the Bishop or his designated representative and notification of the event coordinator of such permission before the event. Deacons are also encouraged to attend the annual clergy conference when possible.

Deacons are expected to participate in the ordination and/or reception of new deacons into the community. Deacons are expected to participate in the Renewal of Vows when offered.

Deacons are expected to serve on Diocesan Committees and Commissions and attend the Bishop's Conference, Convocations and Leadership Conferences when available and as their work schedules permit.

Deacons should be in spiritual direction and have spiritual friends that they meet with regularly or irregularly.

## **Continuing Formation**

Diaconal formation must be a life long process. It is expected that each Deacon will be engaged in an intentional program of continuing formation. This may be in the form of conferences (one day or longer) and continuing education in their particular focus of ministry or other area of interest or personal growth. It may be course work offered by a local school or seminary, or an extension program.

Continuing Education shall be documented each year in the Deacon's Anniversary Letter.

## **Titles**

Use of the term 'the Reverend...' applies to all clergy (with variations for Deans, Canons, Bishops, Chaplains and Archdeacons) for use in written communications or in introductions. Instead of 'the Reverend...' the title 'the Venerable...' is used for Archdeacons. However, in many situations the terms 'Deacon' or 'Archdeacon' are equally or even more suitable, and preferred by many Deacons. Within the Diocese of Northern California, there is no hard and fast rule for Deacons, (except that we do not use "the Rev. Deacon...") just as there is no hard and fast rule for Priests or Bishops. It is optional for Deacons to use a small cross sign following their names as a sign of their ordination to Holy Orders.

There are many clergy today who prefer to be addressed by the name which identifies them as members of the People of God -- that is, by their Christian name with no title. In these cases, it is appropriate to refer to them only by the Christian name by which they wish to be known.

## **Archdeacon**

The Archdeacons are appointed by the Bishop to assist him in coordinating Deacons for the leadership of mission ministry within and beyond of the body of the church. These responsibilities include:

- Interacting with other dioceses concerning the Diaconate
- Interacting with Congregations within the Diocese
- Assessing the needs of the Program, the Diaconate, and the Deacons
- Assisting the Bishop in the formation of Deacons

- Conducting long term planning for the Diaconate (visionary)
- Overseeing continuing education for Deacons
- Coordinating the periodic gatherings of the Deacon Community
- Visiting Deacons in assignments
- Conducting conflict interventions as needed
- Acting as liaison between the Bishop and Deacons
- Meeting with the Bishop as requested to discuss Deacons and/or the Diaconate
- Sharing with the Bishop in the deployment of Deacons
- Exploring Congregations and other potential ministries for diaconal assignments
- Representing the Bishop at the Service of Institution of Deacons in Congregations when necessary
- Assisting in Deacon ordination preparation

### **Assignment of Deacons**

Deacons are assigned to Congregations by the Bishop. Deacons will be part of the worshiping community where assigned.

As clergy, canonically resident Deacons are members of the Convention of the Diocese. They transfer by Letters Dimissory from one Bishop and Convention to another Bishop and Convention. Since they are members of Convention, and not delegates to Convention, Deacons are given seats, voice and vote at every Convention. Deacons being considered for election do so as clergy.

### **Post Ordination Formation**

Newly ordained Deacons will spend 2 years in formation either with a mentor or a spiritual formation group as assigned by the archdeacon.

### **Pledging - Contributions**

There are a variety of criteria which Deacons may use in deciding where to give their tithes and offerings. For some Deacons, a pledge to the Bishop's fund or to a diocesan fund is the most reasonable. For many, a pledge to the congregation they are serving is most appropriate. For others, it is important to distribute their offerings among a variety of places. The choice is the Deacon's.

## **Compensation of Deacons**

Deacons will not normally receive compensation from the congregation they serve, but they should be reimbursed for:

- mileage and other expenses incidental to the performance of their ministry, (deacons should not be reimbursed for their mileage to and from their assigned Church or office),and
- Diocesan required conferences, including convention, clergy days and conferences and quarterly Deacon Community gatherings.

Deacons who receive compensation from the Church or a church related entity must be covered by the Church Pension Fund.

Diocesan reimbursement for travel with the Bishop is requested on a Travel Voucher. The voucher is forwarded to the Archdeacon for signature. Payment is at the current IRS business mileage rate plus lodging.

## **Discretionary Funds**

If the congregation or the Diocese does not establish a Discretionary Fund account for the Deacon, and include it in the annual audit, all money given to the Deacon for discretionary use must be reported by the deacon as personal income, no matter how it is used. Discretionary funds given to the Deacon should be deposited in an account established by their assigned congregation. Discretionary funds should be used only for pious and charitable expenses as shall be thought fit in the conduct of the Deacon's ministry on behalf of the Church.

## **Retirement of Deacons**

Upon reaching age 72, a Deacon shall write the Bishop offering resignation from all positions of active service in the church. At the Bishop's discretion, the resignation may be accepted. Such letters shall be tendered annually after age 72. (TEC Canon III.7.7)



## **Licenses for Non-canonical resident Deacons**

Non-canonical resident Deacons must be licensed to serve. Proof of Safe Church and Diversity training and a background check must be included with the Vestry/Mission Committee's request for a license.

### **Transitional Deacon Experience**

All aspects of service in this diocese as a deacon apply to the transitional deacon as well as the vocational deacon, with the exception of post-ordination training requirements.

The Transitional Deacon Experience approved by the Commission on Ministry is found at [www.norcalepiscopal.org](http://www.norcalepiscopal.org).

Acknowledgement: The Diaconate in the Diocese of Maryland, the Rt. Rev. John L Rabb.

EXHIBIT A  
VISITATIONS

Deacon with the Bishop at a visitation

Reminder: you are a guest and as such should honor the procedures of the congregation. **Call ahead to introduce at least 10 ahead to yourself and discuss your role.**

Arrive about 30 minutes before the earliest service. This is a good time to meet and talk to parishioners with the participants.

Put together the Bishop's crosier.

Expect to bid the confession, when appropriate. Check with the Bishop about when to fill extra patens and/or chalices, if necessary.

Things to check:

- ✓ The altar book! Mark the prefaces, Eucharistic Prayer, and post communion prayers in accordance with the service bulletin for that occasion. Also note if acclamation is sung or said and the version of the Lord's Prayer to be used.
- ✓ Where you are supposed to sit in the sanctuary. If you are the chaplain, you will sit near the Bishop. Make sure there is a bulletin and Prayer Book there.
- ✓ The local custom on gospel procession or if there be one.
- ✓ The local custom on setting the Table. Find out how you will know the count and, if necessary, how many wafers are in the ciborium.
- ✓ How you will know how many wafers you will need.
- ✓ The local custom on consuming the remaining bread and wine.

GOSPEL: Make sure the crosier is close. The Bishop will hold it while you proclaim the Gospel. Stand before the Bishop and ask

for a blessing. After receiving the blessing respond “Amen”.  
Then proceed as above.

NICENE CREED: The Bishop will bid it.

During the Great Thanksgiving the Bishop appreciates having you turn the pages of the Service Book and point.

You may or may not be asked to administer the chalice or paten. Remember we are not there to replace the lay people.

Baptism or Confirmation: Be ready to hold the Bishop’s bulletin where he can easily read from it. At all times be alert to the bishop’s needs. Request an acolyte or other member of altar party stand next to you and hold the crosier while you are holding the bulletin or BCP for the Bishop.

Dismantle and put the Bishop’s crosier back into the carrier.

**BE PREPARED!** During the service the Bishop may ask you to speak briefly on what it means to be a deacon!

*Hint:* Whenever the Bishop reaches for his mitre, he will need his crosier.

**Don’t assume.**



**Making Disciples Raising up Saints**  
**Transforming communities for Christ**

[www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon](http://www.norcalepiscopal.org/deacon)