

Episcopal Diocese of San Diego  
Vision for the Diaconate

Introduction



God calls deacons to a special ministry of servanthood directly under their bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, deacons serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely. Deacons are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model their lives upon them. They are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by word and example, to those among whom they live, and work, and worship. Deacons interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. They assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and carry out other duties assigned from time to time. A deacon's life and teaching should show Christ's people that in serving those who suffer, they are serving Christ himself. (*Paraphrased from BCP p. 543*)

**Ministry of Diakonia:**

The primary ministry of a deacon is to serve those in need in the name of Christ, particularly those in the wider community, but also members of the congregation who are sick, suffering, and dying. Each deacon will likely have a particular ministry of service that represents their primary calling. It is appropriate for deacons to coordinate ministries of visitation to the sick and homebound, including Eucharistic visitors. All active deacons should have an important ministry of service outside of liturgical functions, usually a calling that they can identify from the beginning of their discernment. In serving those who suffer, deacons show

Christ's people that they are serving Christ himself. Deacons may be leaders in advocacy for justice and for improvement in conditions in the world and the lives of all people. They should have a passionate heart for helping all people live a just and abundant life.

### **Faith and Spirituality:**

A deacon's primary ministry of service should be grounded in a deep faith in Jesus and a willingness and desire to proclaim that their faith in Jesus is what leads them to serve others. The deacon's proclamation of the gospel symbolizes that faith and calling. A deacon should be a leader in prayer within the congregation, teaching and leading prayer practices, and calling people's attention in particular to prayer for those who are suffering. A deacon should regularly read and study the Holy Scriptures, seek nourishment from them, and model their life upon them. In their ministry of proclamation, deacons serve as leaders in evangelism for the congregation.

### **Connection to the Wider Community:**

Deacons represent the church to the world and the world to the church. Deacons interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world, and therefore a deacon should be involved in and aware of needs in the wider community, particularly the community immediately surrounding their church. A deacon should be able to respond creatively and innovatively to needs and opportunities that arise in the community, especially by leading the church in service to others. It is appropriate for a deacon to lead a congregation in ministries that increase the congregation's involvement in the wider community.

### **Liturgical Ministry:**

While deacons' primary ministry is that of service to the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely (BCP p. 543), they also have important liturgical functions, which are symbolic of their primary ministry of service. In their liturgical roles, they:

- Officiate at non-Eucharistic services such as Morning or Evening Prayer, as assigned by the priest;
- Proclaim the gospel, as a sign of Jesus' commitment to coming into the world to share the good news of God's love for all who suffer;
- Set the table to prepare for Communion, as a sign of a deacon's ministry of service;
- Share in the distribution of Holy Communion;
- Proclaim the dismissal, to send people out into the world to serve God and the world, calling all people to a ministry of service.

In addition, if the priest so assigns the deacon, the deacon may:

- Bid the Prayers of the People (the deacon may also help write the Prayers of the People as a sign of their connection to all who suffer and are in need of God's healing and comfort);
- Bid the Confession;
- Assist at Holy Baptism by pouring the water or performing other tasks as assigned;
- Preach from time to time;
- Assist the Bishop as chaplain at visitations;
- Other liturgical duties as assigned by the priest.

Under ordinary circumstances, the deacon would not be expected to officiate at liturgies such as Holy Baptism, Marriage, or Burial services. However, they may do so on occasion with permission of the Bishop. From time to time, the Bishop may authorize a deacon to lead a public service that includes distribution of

communion from the reserved sacrament, but this should be an occasional event rather than a regular or ongoing part of the deacon's ministry, and should happen with Bishop permission.

**Leadership:**

Deacons are leaders within a congregation, meaning that they not only perform the ministry of service themselves, but also lead, train equip, and organize lay people to take part in those ministries and awaken their own calls to service. Deacons should support the congregation and the priest(s) and other clergy in their ministries, and should never be disruptive to congregational life or to the ministry of the priest or vestry. They should have healthy emotional boundaries and have a good understanding of church governance and processes, and always work to build up the church community.

**Serving Directly Under the Bishop:**

The bishop and deacons of the diocese form a special community of care and support for each other, the Church, and the world. Deacons take a vow to be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church (BCP p. 538). They are required to follow the canons, rubrics, and other expectations of the Episcopal Church. Deacons serve directly under their bishop (BCP p. 543), and take a vow to "obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work" (BCP p. 538). Because they serve directly under the bishop, deacons are therefore servants of the whole Church and not simply one congregation. However, normally the bishop will assign a deacon to a particular ministry and/or congregation, after consulting with both the deacon and the leader of the ministry or congregation. When serving in a congregation, deacons are expected to follow the direction of the priest-in-charge and to keep the priest-in-charge informed of their ministries. They form part of the leadership team of the congregation, and are expected to serve in a way that builds up the congregational community. The archdeacon of the diocese serves as a coordinator, leader, and pastor to the deacons, and deacons should keep the archdeacon informed about their ministries and pastoral concerns. When matters of concern or question arise related to the deacon's ministry or placement, the deacon should meet with the archdeacon and/or the bishop to discuss those issues.