

## The Diaconate

With Stephen as its patron saint, the Diaconate was formed by the early church to give voice and succor to human need. In the book of Acts, deacons are called to care for widows and orphans (Acts 6:1-7) – to prioritize their needs, and to keep their beatitude status front and center in the minds and hearts of God’s people. Over the centuries, the ministry of the Diaconate has greatly expanded. The question isn’t so much, “What does a deacon do?” but rather, “What does a deacon not do?” Deacons (from the Greek word "diakonos," meaning servant) are a bridge from the church to the world and vice versa. They are often the vanguard of the church, first responders, ministers on the front lines of God’s redemptive work.

In Anglicanism today, deacons lead music, prepare meals, run charitable organizations, minister to the elderly, the sick, participate in church polity, organize church events, advise the priests they serve, advance the arts, help distribute the elements, and preach on Sundays. Some deacons are en route to the priesthood, others embrace their station as a fulfillment of God's calling. Deacons uniquely inhabit the landscape of their respective parish. No two ministries are alike. The genius of the office is how nimbly it can address the physical and spiritual needs of a given community.

Ordination is a serious endeavor, best approached in faith and humble reliance upon God's strength and provision. As Scripture affirms, God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Prospective deacons undergo a rigorous ordination process, and are vetted by the priests and bishops within their respective diocese. Candidates should expect a physical and psychological evaluation, home visits, an extensive questionnaire, and written theological exams. This process is beneficial in two ways. First, it helps the diocese discern if the calling is genuine. Second, it gives the candidates ample season to check their desires, discern motive, and prayerfully contemplate the gravity of their endeavor. Being a deacon is often costly, and inhabits Christ's call to " ... deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Deacons often comment that, rather than being an expression of self actualization, vocation, or will, the office chooses them.

The Diaconate is a powerful manifestation of God's presence with us, of His promise to never leave or forsake us, and is perhaps best summarized in Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with Peter (John 21:15-17). "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these," Jesus asked. "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you," Peter replied. "Feed my sheep," Jesus replied.

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