



## Diocese of Western Anglican What is the Diaconate? August 2020

The Vocational Diaconate is recognized by the Anglican Church in North America Canons as “an essential and historic ministry of the Church and a vital component of the threefold pastoral ministry of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon.”<sup>1</sup> The leadership of the Diocese of Western Anglicans has a strong interest in developing the potential of the vocational diaconate throughout the DWA. In April 2015, Bishop Keith Andrews appointed and met with a Deacon Formation Team with broad-based representation of laity, practicing vocational deacons, presbyters, and a dean. (All deaneries are represented on this team.) The Bishop described the three-step process design to be followed: development of a white paper on the vocational diaconate; development of the components for deacon formation: coursework, deacon school, internship, and mentoring; and, development of a review process.

The purpose of this study is to develop a shared understanding of the vocational diaconate, past, present, and future, and to consider how an intentional increase in a network of vocational deacons might impact our mission to transform North America (and beyond), with the love of Jesus Christ through mission-focused ministry and effective church planting.

The following questions will be used as a guide:

- **Question 1:** Historical Perspective: What was the original intent of the diaconate? How did deacons in history live out their calling?
- **Question 2:** Theological Perspective: What is the theological context of the vocational diaconate?
- **Questions 3:** How is the vocational diaconate missionally driven?
- **Questions 4:** How is the vocational diaconate aligned with the stated mission of the Diocese of Western Anglicans and the Bishop’s priorities?
- **Question 5:** How is the vocational diaconate aligned with the stated mission of the Anglican Church in North America?
- **Question 6:** What are the implications for the vocational diaconate for the future?

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<sup>1</sup> *ACNA Constitution and Canons, 2019*: Title III, Canon 3 Section 3.1.





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#### **Question 1: Historical Perspective: What was the Original Intent of the Diaconate? How did Deacons in History Live Out their Calling?**

##### **Apostolic Age**

The Preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer (2019) traces the threefold ministry of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon to New Testament times when the first Apostles led the Body of Christ. One of the lessons read during the ordination of a deacon is either 1 Timothy 3:8-13 or Acts 6:1-7.<sup>2</sup> These Scriptures emphasize the noble character and qualifications required of deacons and the fact that they are to be affirmed by the community they serve. They are to be proven servants of good repute, full of faith and of the Spirit and wisdom. Acts 6 describes how the first seven deacons were carefully selected to help the Apostles meet the needs of all the people in their growing community of faith. The Apostles prayed over and laid their hands on them. The first assignment of the deacons was the equitable distribution of food so the Apostles might be able to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word. Acts 6:7 reports that the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly.

Stephen and Philip are named as two of the first seven deacons chosen by their overseers. Acts 6:8 through 8:40 describe the vital roles both early deacons played in expanding God's Kingdom. Stephen prophetically preached the longest sermon in Acts, demonstrating his bold witness of God's Word and truth. He served faithfully according to God's will to his death, following His Lord's footsteps. Philip was led by the Spirit to evangelize and heal those in foreign lands. The Apostles Peter and John ministered alongside Philip in his outreach ministry in Samaria.<sup>3</sup> Philip preached the good news of God's salvation. He even baptized an Ethiopian official.<sup>4</sup> Both deacons, Stephen and Philip, clearly emulate the character and bold witness of the Gospel that today's ACNA deacons are committing to sustain in their ordination vows.<sup>5</sup>

In Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses the community of saints in Philippi and specifically calls out the twofold leadership as overseers and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3:1-14, Paul addresses the spiritual leadership of the faith community in Ephesus: overseers, deacons, and women helpers. He appeals to men and women leaders to demonstrate the kind of visible, mature, and righteous living in their character that would commend the transforming power of Christianity to its observers both Christian and yet to be Christian. He encourages spiritual leaders to demonstrate a maturity that has been proven by obedience (to God's will and truth) and

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<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 475.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 8:14-25 ESV.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 8: 26-38 ESV.

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 477-479.





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endurance under trials and testing. Deacons are particularly singled out in verse 9 to exhibit a proper doctrinal and moral response to Christ's message. They are to live out the deep truths of the faith (the content of Scripture) with integrity.<sup>6</sup> In verse 13, Paul offers two relationship outcomes for deacons serving well: respect from the community they serve, and a growing confidence and trust in God.

In Romans 16:2, Paul commends Phoebe as a deacon to the saints in Rome and exhorts them to welcome her and regard her as his agent carrying his epistle to them. Here we see the example of an esteemed woman deacon representing the overseer. This might be an example of the emerging complementary "agency" relationship between bishop and deacon described in the patristic era.

### Patristic or Golden Age of Deacons

As Christianity spread in the first few centuries of the Church, the diaconate grew and developed roots, with distinct functions within the Christian community. Bishops directly ordained deacons and assigned diverse roles to them. (The threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon is recorded as early as 110 A.D. in Syria and Asia Minor.<sup>7</sup> During this time period, as the diaconate flourished, the presbyter's role, in contrast, seemed much more nebulous and undefined.)<sup>8</sup>

In this early time period of the Church, deacon roles included the following: participation in the ruling council in some churches (*Didache*, also Ignatius and Polycarp); servant ministry such as collecting and distributing money to the poor (*Shepherd of Hermas*); liturgical functions at the Eucharist (Ignatius, *Didache*); administering Bread and Wine to those present and to those absent from the assembly (Justin Martyr); baptizing alongside presbyters (Tertullian); and, leading prayers of the people at the Eucharist (*Apostolic Constitutions*).<sup>9</sup> In the absence of the bishop or presbyter, the deacon would, on rare occasion, preside at the Eucharist. However, this practice was eventually eliminated at Arles by 314 A.D.<sup>10</sup> Augustine of Hippo's writings includes instructions to deacons in their role as catechists. Tertullian described deacons teaching and

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<sup>6</sup> T.D. Lea., & H.P. Griffith, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 34:121.

<sup>7</sup> *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church: A report to the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1988), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Tara Jernigan, "Deacon in the Pulpit: Towards a Theology of Diaconal Preaching," (Pittsburgh: Unpublished Manuscript, 2010), 19.

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 124-125.

<sup>10</sup> Barnett, 125.





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preparing catechumens (people seeking baptism) over a three-year period and assisting the bishop in the baptismal rite. According to the Didache, deacons who had proven themselves were appointed to preach and teach alongside the bishop.<sup>11</sup>

During the Patristic era, deacons worked in close relationship with the local bishop, clearly under his authority.<sup>12</sup> The deacons were **agents** of the bishop. This was the fundamental role of the early church deacons.<sup>13</sup> The third century writing on the teaching of the Apostles, the Didascalia says: "Be of one mind, bishops and deacons...in your agreement (bishop and deacons), the Church will find its peace." The deacons were also to report everything to the bishop as messengers...<sup>14</sup> The North African Bishop Cyprian wrote extensively on the role of the diaconate during the third century. He was known to confidently send deacons to represent him as his emissaries to other bishops.<sup>15</sup>

During these first few centuries of the Church, deacons served as the vital link between the bishop and laity.<sup>16</sup> Everyday needs of the community were addressed by the deacons (as in Acts). Deacons communicated the needs of the people to the bishop. They were given delegated authority by the bishop to serve the community. In Rome, for example, seven administrative deacons were assigned to serve specific jurisdictions. They also communicated the instructions of the bishop to the church as a whole. This required the deacons to understand and faithfully share the bishop's communications and priorities.<sup>17</sup>

During the first few centuries of the Church, vocational deacons were vitally important ministers of the Church.<sup>18</sup> The progression from deacon to presbyter was not yet normative. During the fourth century, as the role of the presbyter became more prominent, the role of vocational deacon declined.<sup>19</sup> Noteworthy examples of deacons during this time period were Lawrence in the Church of Rome, Ephrem in Syria, and Athanasius in Alexandria.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Echlin, *The Deacon in the Church Past and Future*, (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1971), 17, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Jernigan, 16-18.

<sup>13</sup> Jernigan, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Lukas Vischer, "The Problem of the Diaconate," *Ministry of Deacons* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1965), 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church: A Report to the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1988), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Jernigan, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Vischer, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Echlin, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Echlin, 58.





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After his Bishop, Sixtus II, was martyred, Lawrence, as the Bishop's assistant, who looked after the poor and administered the church's goods, was told by the Romans to turn over the Church treasury. He immediately gave the Church's wealth to the poor. Instead of money, he brought the poor before the Romans as the wealth of the Church. He was Christ's witness in caring for the poorest of the poor and the marginalized. He was martyred in 258 A.D.<sup>20</sup>

Ephrem of Edessa was a Syrian, known as an ascetic and a learned scholar.<sup>21</sup> He was well known for his catechetical work and his religious poetry. Pope Benedict proclaimed him as "Doctor of the Church" in 1920, because his scholarship and way of life had a significant impact on the Church.

Athanasius of Alexandria was a newly ordained deacon and assistant to the Bishop of Alexandria when he became the defender of Nicene orthodoxy in 313 A.D. (He fulfilled his prophetic role and witness for the Gospel.)<sup>22</sup> He was elected bishop when his Bishop passed away.

### **The Shift to a Transitional Diaconate**

In the fourth century, the Church grew rapidly with the end of persecution and Constantine's conversion in 313 A.D. The presbyterate grew, taking on sacramental authority and pastoral oversight. During this period, the Church adapted the hierarchical structure of Roman society. A graded progression of orders of clerics in training developed: doorkeeper, exorcist, lector, subdeacon leading to deacon then presbyter. The order of deacon became less important. Deacons were restricted from serving the Eucharist. The progression of orders below the level of deacon disappeared. The diaconate gradually became a transitional order to the priesthood. The threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon gradually became more like a twofold ministry.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Decline of the Diaconate in the Middle Ages**

During the Middle Ages, the vocational diaconate lost ground, and the sense of *diakonia* (service) was gradually replaced by a greater sense of clericalism.<sup>24</sup> The threefold ministry was still compared to Christ; In eighth century Ireland and on the continent, the deacon was

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<sup>20</sup> William T. Ditewig, *101 Questions on Deacons* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 16-18.

<sup>21</sup> Ditewig, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Barnett, 88.

<sup>23</sup> E.J. Enright, "The History of the Diaconate", in *The Deacon Reader*, ed. J.D. Keating (New York: Pauline Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>24</sup> Barnett, 112.





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compared to Christ washing his disciples' feet, the priest to Christ consecrating the bread and wine at the Last Supper, and the bishop to Christ solemnly blessing the apostles. Deacons began to serve presbyters as well as bishops.<sup>25</sup> In the twelfth century, Lombard repeated traditional teaching: deacons were Levites of the new dispensation, helpers to Christian "priests"; their role was primarily liturgical, with other roles in the ministry of the word and charity.<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas saw the deacon's role as almost exclusively liturgical: to assist bishops and presbyters in the liturgy. Deacons read the Gospel and preached the word in catechesis.<sup>27</sup>

After the Church was separated (East-West Schism in 1054), vocational deacons, both male and female, continued to serve in the East in mainly liturgical roles.<sup>28</sup> The vocational diaconate declined but did not completely disappear in the West. St. Francis of Assisi is an example. With urbanization in the late Middle Ages, the urban class of merchants and burghers took over works of charity performed by deacons.<sup>29</sup>

Saint Francis of Assisi was one of the few known deacons in the thirteenth century. He was well known for his homilies and for his outreach to the poor and lepers. He served as a powerful witness of discipleship and diaconal service.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Deacon in the English Reformation**

During the English Reformation of the sixteenth century, the threefold ministry continued, but the diaconate remained as a transition to the priesthood, subordinate and ceremonial.<sup>31</sup>

Nicholas Ferrar was the one well-known example of a lifelong deacon during this era. He founded the community at Little Gidding in the United Kingdom in 1626, with his family and a few friends. This little community was known as a counter-cultural model of living the Christian faith through a life of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Daily Office and complete psalter were part of daily life in the community. Ferrar wrote books and stories about Christian faith and practice. The community embraced voluntary poverty to provide further resources for the poor. Little Gidding was known for the intentional spiritual formation of the children. The community looked after the health and well-being of the people in the surrounding district.

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<sup>25</sup> Echlin, 81, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Echlin, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Echlin, 85

<sup>28</sup> Echlin, 92.

<sup>29</sup> Echlin, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Echlin, 92.

<sup>31</sup> Echlin, 93.







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Little Gidding was disbanded by the Puritans through Cromwell's authority in 1646. Ferrar's community had a lasting impact as an exemplar for Christian communal living.<sup>32</sup>

### The Deacon in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Lutheran churches on the continent established orders of deaconesses and deacons for servant ministry in the nineteenth century, to address the social upheaval and economic disparities of the industrial revolution. Three distinct forms of diaconal ministry could be found in the West up to the 1950's: 1) deaconesses who were performing diaconal ministries without ordination, 2) deacons who performed liturgical tasks when presbyters were in short supply, and, 3) deacons who served as spiritual leaders in Native American and other ethnic communities. David Pendleton Oakerhater, a former Cheyenne warrior who led battles against the United State government is a good example of this third form of deacon. After his conversion in prison, God transformed his leadership in war into a lifelong ministry of peace in community with others. Deacon Oakerhater was instrumental in founding schools and missions and providing consistent pastoral care for his Native American community. He is included in the Episcopal *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the mid-1960's the Second Vatican Council restored the vocational diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. Vatican leadership restored vocational deacons to fulfill vital roles in the ministry of charity, as well as the teaching and preaching of the word to catechumens. During this period, the restored vocational deacons also assisted bishops and priests in sacramental communion.<sup>34</sup>

### The Deacon in Today's World

Essentially three categories of vocational deacons have emerged throughout the Anglican Communion in the present century: **parish deacons**, who serve within the local community; **institutional deacons**, who serve in institutions such as prisons, law enforcement and firefighter agencies, hospitals, hospices, or schools; and, **diocesan deacons**, assigned directly to the Bishop in administrative staff and leadership roles.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> F.L. Cross and A.L. Livingston, ed. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 610.

<sup>33</sup> *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 365.

<sup>34</sup> Echlin, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Ferguson, *Lifting Up the Servants of God: The Deacon, Servant Ministry and the Future of the Church* (Westborough: Association of Episcopal Deacons, 2001), North American Association for the Diaconate Monograph Series #12, 9.





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In the ACNA, the dioceses considered most active in deacon formation, have approximately 18% of the ordained clergy serving as vocational deacons with one to three deacons per year completing diaconal studies certification and ordination.<sup>36</sup> In the DWA, there are 14 vocational deacons, representing approximately 18% of the total 79 ordained clergy in 38 congregations, church plants and emergent works. The vocational deacons collectively serve in diverse parish, institutional, and diocesan-wide roles including: Bible study and/or daily office in the church setting and assisted living facilities; pastoral care in hospitals and to the homebound; traditional roles in liturgical worship; preaching and teaching among the laity; outreach ministries to the homeless; prison outreach ministries; Christ-centered recovery small group ministries; ecumenical-school partnership ministries to address issues of poverty and self-sufficiency for families in local communities; cross-cultural spiritual formation summer camps (also known as Vacation Bible Schools) in the local neighborhood; training of lay Eucharistic and prayer ministers; healing and corporate prayer ministries; reading tutoring programs in the schools; parish administration; small group facilitation; intergenerational children and families ministries; catechesis and spiritual formation for all ages; gift-based ministry; lay leadership mentoring/coaching and empowerment; healthy church growth and development; church planting development and support.

### Summary

The early deacons took care of the needs of the community and served as bold and proven witnesses of Christ's character and teaching. They were chosen by their community, and, prayed over and anointed by their apostolic leadership. They reached out to the world beyond their local community, evangelizing, teaching, catechizing, baptizing, and providing pastoral care for healing and wholeness as a sign of God's Kingdom power. Both men and women served as deacons (especially in the East) and were trusted agents for their overseers who were formally called bishops in the first century. As the Church grew and became more formalized, the deacons took on administrative leadership roles along with their liturgical roles in the Eucharist assisting the presbyters and bishops. They continued to be the vital link between the bishop and the laity.

This historical review gives an indication of the diverse roles assigned to deacons, to equip and empower the Body of Christ, to live out the Great Commission and Great Commandment. These roles are aligned with Christ's diaconal framework. The notable deacons in history and the present practicing vocational deacons, give evidence of the potential for the intentional development of the vocational diaconate within the Body of Christ and as a vital component of an effectively functioning threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon with clarified roles.

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<sup>36</sup> Tara Jernigan, Diocese of Pittsburgh demographics, 2015.







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### Question 2: What is the Theological Context for the Vocational Diaconate?

The Church itself is the fundamental sign of the ministry of Christ in the world.<sup>37</sup> The Body of Christ is meant to manifest God's mission to the world in Jesus Christ and, in unity with the Holy Spirit, serve as an effective instrument of his redemption.<sup>38</sup> During the first century of the Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch exhorted the Christians of Magnesia to do everything in unity (godly agreement). He followed with a description of what that would look like for ordained ministry: "Let the bishop preside in God's place, and the presbyters take the place of apostolic council, and let the deacons be entrusted with the diaconal ministry of Christ."<sup>39</sup> The deacons are to imitate Christ in their ministry of service.

Sacramental churches see the primary significance of the threefold ordained ministry as a sign of the apostolic character of the Church and of Christ's continuing headship in the Christian community. Some align the episcopate with Christ's roles of prophet, priest and king.<sup>40</sup> Some see the bishop primarily as the biblical, pastoral king, the presbyter as the priest, and the deacon as the prophetic witness of God's love and truth.<sup>41</sup>

Testimonies of those in the ordained ministry describe that something ontological occurs through the Bishop's prayers and laying on of hands during ordination. They describe an internal change in identity as ordained ministers. As the sacrament of baptism brings about an ontological, internal change in the one baptized in the Name of the Triune God, the sacramental rite of ordination effects a continuing change in the life and character of the person ordained. Ordination is more than a commissioning for the performance of certain tasks. It establishes the ordained deacons in a new relationship with God and His Church, internally empowered to carry out their assigned ministry.<sup>42</sup> During the ordination of ACNA deacons, the Bishop offers this prayer:

Almighty God, by your divine providence you appointed various Orders of Ministers in your Church, and you inspired your Apostles to appoint to the Order of Deacons the first

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Hannaford, "Towards a Theology of the Diaconate" in *The Deacon's Ministry*, ed. C. Hall (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), 19.

<sup>38</sup> Hannaford, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *St. Ignatius' Epistle to the Magnesians*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers> (Accessed August 18, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> R. Hannaford, 25.

<sup>41</sup> The Rt. Rev. R. Sutton, *Captains and Courts: A Biblical Defense of Episcopal Government* (e-books download, 2011), 51-56.

<sup>42</sup> Hannaford, 26.





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martyr Stephen, with others; mercifully behold *these servants* now called to the same office and administration; so fill *them* with the truth of your doctrine and adorn *them* with holiness of life, that by word and good example, *they* may faithfully serve you in this office, to the glory of your Name and the edification of your Church; through the merits of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**<sup>43</sup>

In ordination, a baptized person is set apart to be a focus of Christ's presence in the ministry of the Church. Each baptized member does share in the ministry and character of the Body of Christ. The ordained deacon serves even more specifically as a representative sign of the ministry of Christ as servant to God and the world. The primary purpose of Jesus breaking into the world is to proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom.<sup>44</sup> The Kingdom proclaimed centers in the example of Jesus himself who came to serve (*diakonesai*) and to give his life as a ransom for many.<sup>45</sup> He has promised that the servants who are able to yield to His leading will inherit His Kingdom.<sup>46</sup>

This reverses the normative pattern of human relationships and provides the dawning of the new age of the Kingdom of God. Believing and receiving this truth into one's heart does not involve a change in behavior alone; It involves a transition from this age to the age to come. It involves a growing self-abandonment to God and a projection into the new reality of the Kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

The *diakonia*, the life of service involved with those called to the sacred ministry of the vocational deacon, is more than simply loving service to others. It is a compelling call to offer one's whole life for others, completely as Jesus did. (The early deacons like Stephen, Lawrence, Athanasius, St. Frances and others, seemed to have had this compelling call.)<sup>48</sup> As Jesus said to his disciples, the first Apostles, "if anyone serves me, he must follow me and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."<sup>49</sup>

Jesus calls his disciples toward a radical change of life extending into one's identity as a person. Those who would enter God's Kingdom are transformed in their inner life as well as in their

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<sup>43</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 475.

<sup>44</sup> Mark 1:15 ESV.

<sup>45</sup> Mark 10:45 ESV.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 5:3,5 ESV.

<sup>47</sup> Hannaford, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Hannaford, 34.

<sup>49</sup> John 12:25-26.





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behavior, and the image of the servant stands as a striking reinforcement of this. Good works proceed from a heart transformed and purified of all selfish desires and motives.<sup>50</sup>

The vocational deacon takes vows in ordination to represent the eschatological character of Christian *diakonia* as a servant of the Kingdom especially in working alongside the laity in searching for the sick, the poor, and the helpless, that they may be relieved and in instructing young and old in the Catechism (what it truly means to be a disciple and servant in God's Kingdom.)<sup>51</sup> (A practicing deacon sees this as a vocation of "ministry and message".)<sup>52</sup> The ordained deacon as well as the Church or Body of Christ are, in reality, works in progress in being transformed into Christ's Image and living into His Kingdom Life. (In reality, the current Church still has aspects of imperfect human institutions and is not equal to God's Kingdom on earth until Christ's return for his final reign in the last days.)

As a prophetic minister of the Gospel, the ordained vocational deacon serves to remind God's community of the radical demand from Christ to be transformed in newness of life to live life in His Kingdom on earth now. This diaconal minister can serve as a double sign: first, of the new age of the Kingdom already breaking out in the ministry of the Church, and, also of the call for the Church to be ever more closely conformed to the image of the servant Messiah.<sup>53</sup> The deacon serves at the nexus between the contemporary Body of Christ and the eschatological vision of God's Kingdom. The ordination call to strategically mobilize and catechize the laity to serve all of God's people is a powerful means to advance God's Kingdom on earth.

The deacon's identity in Christ's ministry of charity is well known and documented.<sup>54</sup> This ministry of charity comes from the commandment of love for neighbor and has an eschatological dimension. Authentic caring for one's neighbor is a practical manifestation of the Kingdom.<sup>55</sup> As shared in Matthew 11:2-6, the true works of charity are signs of God's Kingdom at work in the ministry of Jesus (e.g., The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them). The diaconal ministry of mobilizing the laity to works of charity is a sacramental sign of God breaking into the present.

Mobilizing others to care for those in need including the poor, the outcast, and the sinner is more than just a benevolent diaconal ministry. It also reflects an action of social justice to

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<sup>50</sup> Hannaford, 35.

<sup>51</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 478.

<sup>52</sup> Joy Edwards, vocational deacon interview, May, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Hannaford, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Hannaford, 39; Mark 12:30-31 ESV.

<sup>55</sup> Hannaford, 39.





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address our neglect of these human needs by identifying with them and being their voice. Saint Francis, as a lifelong deacon, embraced the poor with whole-hearted abandon and joy. He placed his trust in God and sought to bring God's Kingdom to those in poverty above all things. As a sign of God's Kingdom, the diaconal ministry is an expression of both the priority of the poor and of the gospel's demand that we should be free from the entrapments and brokenness of this world.<sup>56</sup>

The ordained ministry of the vocational diaconate can serve as a significant sign of the *diakonos* of Christ in the world, addressing the needs of the people in poverty and beyond that keep them from the healing and wholeness that God offers to all who would come to him.

### Summary

Acknowledging that the Church itself is the fundamental sign of the ministry of Christ in the world, the threefold ordained ministry is seen as a sign of the apostolic character of the Church and of Christ's continuing headship in the Christian community. The bishop is seen as the biblical, pastoral king, the presbyter as the priest, and the deacon as the prophetic voice and witness of God's love and truth.

Vocational deacons who have experienced ordained ministry for years acknowledge that as the sacrament of baptism brings about an ontological, internal change in the one baptized, the sacramental rite of ordination effects a continuing change in the life and character of the one ordained. The ordained deacon engages in a new relationship with God and His Church as the servant ministry is carried out. It requires an increasing self-abandonment to God and a projection into the new reality of His Kingdom. It is a compelling call to offer one's whole life for others, completely as Jesus did.

This gradual transformation by God in the life of the ordained, empowers deacons to mobilize others for the diaconal ministries of charity and social justice coming from a heart commitment to loving and serving those in need in community. Responding to their compelling call by God, vocational deacons can be catalysts, focusing the Body of Christ to engage in a ministry of reconciliation for all people to enter into life in God's Kingdom now and forever.

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<sup>56</sup> Hannaford, 42.





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### Question 3: How is the Vocational Diaconate Missionally Driven?

Being missional means to be on the mission of God.<sup>57</sup> The term comes from the Latin *Missio Dei*. In His Great Commission, Jesus, with full authority, commanded His Apostles (his leadership team) to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He told them to teach these new disciples to obey all the commands that He had given them. He promised to be with them always, till then end of the age.<sup>58</sup> This commission was meant for the whole Church, the Body of Christ to make disciples everywhere and anywhere, across cultural boundaries. The corporate ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon are an inherent part of the Church. The command holds for all: ordained and laity, for all time and beyond. The guiding principles for accomplishing this Great Commission can be found in the teaching of Christ and the Holy Spirit in Scripture and the apostolic plan of the early church.<sup>59</sup> Missional then means sharing the gospel in such a contextual way that the hearers are engaged and transformed by God's love and truth. They become disciples of Christ, transforming the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

As described in the previous sections, the vocational diaconate is missional from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective. As mission is one of going forth, a deacon follows in the footsteps of Jesus, walking as led by the Father, with Holy Spirit guidance. Seeking those in need for wholeness and reconciliation to God is a **way of life**, entwined in personal relationship with our Lord, infused with His servant heart. Missional work then, for a deacon, is as broad as His arms are wide, enfolding all who are weary, hopeless, lost or broken. The world is ready and ripe for the harvest! A deacon recognizes this and while responding, mobilizes members of the Body in works of mercy and love in Christ's name and teaching.<sup>61</sup>

The deacon has the ability and heart to go into the "highways and hedges" of the world, for the sake of Jesus' Kingdom, recognizing that the whole earth is the mission field, including one's own neighborhood. The deacon also demonstrates the model of going out two-by-two, with ordained and laity working side by side, knowing that mission is not a solo act.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> R.J. Grunewald, "What Does Missional Mean?" [www.fivetwo.com](http://www.fivetwo.com)

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 28:19-20, ESV.

<sup>59</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: Saint Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 148.

<sup>60</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 25.

<sup>61</sup> Nan Joyce, vocational deacon interview, May 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Rosalind Marver, vocational deacon interview, May 2015.







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Most important to remember: the deacon's missional work (following Paul's example) is bringing God's message of reconciliation to all people through the love of Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

### **Question 4: How is the Vocational Diaconate Aligned with the Stated Mission of the Diocese of Western Anglicans and the Bishop of DWA's Stated Priorities?**

Based on the historical and theological perspectives presented, the vocational diaconate is clearly aligned with the mission of DWA and the Bishop's priorities for growing forward as part of the Body of Christ. The mission of the Diocese of Western Anglicans is to empower and sustain support for the laity and clergy in local congregations, working in unity to extend the Kingdom of God by so presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that people will come to put their trust in God through Him. The DWA confesses the historical episcopate as an inherent part of the apostolic faith and practice and integral to the fullness and unity of the Body of Christ. According to the diocesan governing principles, the Bishop provides leadership to the DWA in four ways: 1) by upholding the authority of the Holy Scriptures, 2) by ministering to the clergy, 3) by doing the work of an evangelist, and, 4) by supporting and overseeing the planting of churches reaching all people with the Gospel of Christ.

In February 2015, the new Bishop of DWA gathered all clergy (presbyters, deacons, and ordinands) for a three-day retreat. He shared a vision for growing forward as a Diocese to fulfill the Great Commission and Great Commandment. He described three areas of focus for life and ministry for all, clergy and laity in unity as the Body of Christ: 1) moving from maintenance to mission to reproduction, 2) establishing a framework for discipleship (intentional, long term catechesis) in community, and 3) building a comprehensive framework for leadership development at all levels. Here are quotes from his teachings:<sup>64</sup>

We need to take courage and move toward God's purpose, assessing where we are and then taking steps in mission and then greater mission and then reproducing mission;

Our understanding of catechesis must be holistic, combining individuals and groups in active learning experiences. Let's gather some evangelists, educators, community builders and mission-driven people together and give them the tools they will need in order to put together an approach in our diocese that is reproducible at the local church

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<sup>63</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 19 ESV; Joy Edwards, vocational deacon interview, May 2015.

<sup>64</sup> The Rt. Rev. Dr. Keith Andrews, "A Shared Approach to Moving Forward," Clergy Retreat, February 12-13, 2015.







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level. Let them address the challenge of helping all of us identify useful approaches to discipling the nations;

The ministry of the Body of Christ rises and falls on the effectiveness of its leaders...Jesus is our model and he is the consummate servant leader described in Luke 22: 25-26. Let us begin to utilize {all resources and gatherings} to address the influence we can and must rightly exert as servant leaders and the equippers of more servant leaders. As clergy leaders, training leaders is a key responsibility for us.

In April 2015, the Bishop called together a Deacon Formation Team. He shared his vision of a fully functioning vocational diaconate as part of the threefold ordained ministry. He directed the team of lay leaders, practicing deacons, and presbyters to develop a statement of purpose, plan, and implementation process for the intentional development of future vocational deacons with a discerned calling to this ordained ministry. The Bishop communicated his priority for a restored vocational diaconate through his introductory letter and guiding principles for a future Deacon Manual for Ministry Development. (See attachments). A network of well-prepared vocational deacons could provide strategic support to the Bishop, congregations, and church plants in missional ministry, catechesis for all ages, and lay leadership development and empowerment in gift-based ministry. Their diaconal course of study would include active learning experiences in these areas with experienced mentors, coaches, and spiritual directors.

### **Question 5: How is the Vocational Diaconate Aligned with the Stated Mission of the Anglican Church in North America?**

In the Constitution of the ACNA, Article III presents the Mission of the Province:

1. The mission of the Province is to extend the Kingdom of God, by so presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that people everywhere will come to put their trust in God through Him, know Him as Savior and serve Him as Lord, in the fellowship of the Church. The chief agents of this mission to extend the Kingdom of God are the people of God.
2. The work of the Province is to equip each member of the Province so that they may reconcile the world to Christ, plant new congregations, and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything commanded by Jesus Christ.<sup>65</sup>

The ACNA has recently released a new catechism and the foundation of a new prayer book.

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<sup>65</sup> *ACNA Constitution*, 2019, 3.





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These resources will strategically enhance the vocational deacon's ability to disciple others in the catechism and to assist and equip laity to deepen their experience in embracing and serving in liturgical worship. The ACNA believes that church planting is uniquely suited to make and disciple new Christians. Vocational deacons can work strategically alongside church planters building dynamic communities in Christ yearning for spiritual formation and a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. The ACNA brings congregations together to provide relief to the suffering around the world. Vocational deacons are called to be part of any relief effort in the local community and beyond.

As presented earlier, the vocational diaconate is mentioned in the ACNA Canons as an essential historic ministry of the church. The *Book of Common Prayer (2019)* identifies the following roles for the deacon: to assist the presbyter in public worship, especially in the administration of Holy Communion; to lead in public prayer; to read the Gospel; to instruct the young and old in the Catechism; at the direction of the presbyter, to baptize, to preach, and, to work with the laity in searching for the sick, the poor, and the helpless, that they may be relieved. Each of these roles is consistent with the original intent of the diaconate from biblical, theological and historical perspectives. The rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer 2019 assign the following tasks to the deacon in the liturgy: proclaim the Gospel, lead the prayers, set the Table, perform the ablutions and dismiss the congregation. Each of these liturgical roles has been historically emblematic of the diaconate:

1. **Proclaim the Gospel:** Take the Gospel out to the people and witness, preach and lead all to the knowledge of Christ and His Salvation work on the cross.
2. **Lead the Prayers:** They can be written by the deacon or used from the forms in the BCP. This is iconic of the deacon's office of bringing the needs of the people to the church and taking the church to the people for their comfort, healing and support. The Deacon is also leading the people in confessing their sins and renewing their relationship with God.
3. **Set the table:** This is representative of the first work of the servant, that of feeding and clothing the needy of the church through the ages. It is the original or first call met by the original seven chosen to serve.
4. **Perform the Ablutions:** This is part of feeding the needy. Deacons serve the food and help clear away and restore order to things after a feeding.
5. **Dismiss the congregation:** Here is the very heart of the call: empowering and raising up the church to go out to do the work assigned to the Body of Christ. The deacons help to rally others to identify and live out God's calling on their lives.





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The action of the deacon in the Holy Eucharist is representative of the original diaconal role in Acts and is fulfilling the diverse call of the deacon in the World.<sup>66</sup>

### **Question 6: What are the Implications for the Development of the Vocational Diaconate for the Future?**

This study provides a foundation for an intentional ministry development plan and process for the vocational diaconate as a vital component of the threefold ordained ministry. The current practicing vocational deacons are collectively addressing who deacons are and how they are serving in missional ministry. Their diverse ministries and the results they are experiencing have historical and theological roots and are aligned with the Bishop's priorities: moving away from maintenance to continuous missional outreach, successfully multiplying ministries and communities, developing long term systems of transformational discipleship(catechesis) for all ages, and increasing engagement and empowerment of lay leadership in gift-based missional ministry.

At present, 23% of the ordained clergy are vocational deacons in the Diocese of Western Anglicans. An intentional deacon formation process/system could lead to a significant increase in the number of vocational deacons serving the Body of Christ as an integrated part of ordained ministry. This could have a powerful impact on the DWA's mission to transform North America (and beyond), with the love of Jesus Christ through mission-focused ministry. Consider the untapped servant leadership potential of a well-prepared vocational deacon network mobilizing and empowering the Body of Christ for gift-based outreach ministry and church planting initiatives in the future.

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<sup>66</sup> Dee Renner, vocational deacon interview, May 2015.





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#### Appendix 1

#### The Bishop's Reflection on Hearing God's Call to Service for His Kingdom

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In every way, the ministry is for the whole body of Christ who exists to serve God's purposes in the world He loves so much. As people come to faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord of the universe, they commit and consecrate themselves to service. The ministry is, however, always the Lord's because works of service flow from hearts given over to intimate fellowship with the Lord. Those who come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord are baptized and in that worship service they commit themselves to His way of life as a servant of the living and Most High God. Those who mature in living for God begin to influence others through words and actions of demonstrated leadership. Those who are raised to leadership both by God and His church, are often in the early stages of training for Holy Orders, because leaders produce leadership in others. In our diocese, we are observing people to see how the Lord is raising them to serve Him as members of His body and as citizens of His Kingdom. Local churches are environments rich in opportunity and training experiences where emergent leaders may mature and be formed into godly mentors and guides for others. The church is God's idea and we still hear His voice as He commands us:

*And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-39*

And commissions us:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20a*

Our diocese is on a wonderful journey together and we are growing from maintenance to mission to reproduction. Everyone is invited to service in Jesus' Name so that we may engage in mission together and thereby participate in the work of God's Kingdom every day. I invite you to consider how the Lord may be calling you into service today and whether you are willing to go into the Harvest field to reach for those who do not yet know Him and love them into relationship with Him. Do not consider yourself too young or too old or too busy or too uninformed. Listen for His voice and follow Him as He leads. If you are young, yet have a passion to serve others, let me encourage you now to listen and seek out godly counsel from your pastor. The Bible is filled with examples of the Lord calling young people to do something He has planned for them to do.





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Among the members of Christ's body, some are called by God to become Deacons. Deacons serve primarily in the world and orient their life toward those in greatest need, reaching for and alleviating suffering among those who are sick, hungry, homeless, in prison or in some other way live on the margins of society. Their service models for the church body the means of bringing hope to the hopeless, extending the mercy and justice of God. Deacons often live their lives with both feet planted in the Kingdom, but with hands outstretched in opposite directions, so as to hold the world in view for the church and to hold the church in view for the world. I hope you will consider this vocation—a calling to service that elevates the Way of Jesus as the disciples experienced him on the Last Supper:

*When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:12-15)*

If you sense that the Lord may be calling you to serve Him as a Deacon in Christ's one, holy catholic and apostolic church, reach out to your Rector and begin a discussion with him. Should he sense that this is what the Lord is doing, he will help you gather a Discernment Team from the members of your congregation and you will enter into a formal season of Discernment. At the completion of this process, together you will come to common mind and heart that your vocation is in the lay ministry or you will be advanced so that you may take a step toward ordination. Early in this process, I will join with you in prayer and discernment and if I sense the same calling that you and the members of your congregation sense, then I will advance you in the process toward ordination by making you a postulant. This multi-step process is necessary because ordination happens to the individual, but it is by and for the church.

So, please pray and listen carefully to the voice of the Lord and consider me a friend and advocate for you as I join with you, your Rector and your discernment committee. We are on a joyous journey of faithfulness because Jesus promises that we will produce much fruit when we abide in Him: *I am the vine you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5 Let us trust Him together to say with clarity how you may order your life, for when we do as He directs, there is much rejoicing in the Heavens and much peace in the hearts of those who serve Him.

I am your friend and brother,

+ Keith Atkins





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## **Appendix 2**

### **The Bishop's Principles as Guidance for the Vocational Deacon Formation Process**

Ordination is chiefly about raising, forming, equipping and sending leaders who live out and reproduce in others the Great Commandment and Great Commission of Jesus. The Diocese of Western Anglicans exists to make disciples of all nations in the Anglican way. Therefore, we seek:

1. Missional leaders who develop mission and leadership in others.
2. Leaders who are fully submitted to spiritual formation and are committed to do all that is required to be prepared educationally, spiritually and ministerially.
3. Devoted followers of Jesus who practice spiritual disciplines in worship, discipleship and evangelism that show them to be balanced and mature.
4. Leaders with vision and capacity to give birth to new ministries and missional communities as they lead and serve.

The chief unit of mission is the local congregation, so the local congregation will be the focus of our involvement as we:

1. Plant new congregations in communities where we do not have a presence
2. Develop congregations as we move from maintenance to mission
3. Multiply congregations as we move from mission to reproduction
4. Concentrate on penetrating ethnic communities with new and ongoing mission and ministry activities
5. Strengthen our effectiveness with university and seminary students through campus mission.

Our deacons and presbyters must focus on and prepare themselves for mission and ministry in these contexts.

The Ordination Process will:

1. Serve people so our attitude will be to assist, encourage and guide
2. Serve the Holy Spirit's purpose to raise people without prejudice from every congregation and ministry unit of the Diocese of Western Anglicans
3. Focus its activity on the arenas where the Diocese of Western Anglicans has primacy and opportunity to advance the Kingdom of God
4. Examine its candidates so as to strengthen their effectiveness theologically, missionally and pastorally
5. Mentor leaders during their season of preparation and while they are in active service in the body of Christ.

