

# Customary for Deacons

1st edition

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Diocese of  
Central Pennsylvania

The Right Rev. Robert R. Gepert  
Bishop

## **VISION STATEMENT**

A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ's servant ministry for all people. As agents of God's compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world's needs, hopes and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to these needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ's presence as they embody Christ's servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.

*North American Association for the Diaconate*

### **The Discernment of a Call to Diaconal Ministry**

Through their ordination vows, deacons place themselves under orders to follow Jesus and to be obedient to the Bishop, who gives them the mandate to encourage, support, and develop servant ministry in this diocese.

#### *Three aspects of Call*

This is a person who has the ability to articulate the proclamation of servant ministry that is present in the Gospel and who shows leadership skills and a willingness to lead others into servant ministry.

A deacon is also one who has the courage to be a prophetic voice to the Church concerning the needs of the powerless and voiceless in the community. She or he is a person who has the mental ability and competence for ordained ministry, and who understands that the diaconate is a *life long* discernment of the direction of his or her ministry. This process involves continuous prayer, openness to change, willingness to study, and the active quest for personal growth.

The diaconate is a distinct order and is not a stepping-stone to the priesthood. Likewise, the diaconate is not to be seen as a reward for faithful service as a lay reader, chalice bearer, warden or member of the vestry. Nor is it to be seen as a reward for a preexisting servant ministry. The individual aspiring to the Sacred Order of Deacons must clearly articulate and demonstrate that he or she is called to the order of ministry which is personified by servant ministry, diakonia.

### *Signs of Call*

FIRST, a person identified with having a vocation to the diaconate would be recognized by him/herself and by the Church as meeting three fundamental requirements:

- 1) The exercise of a servant ministry in the world.
- 2) The desire and capacity to call the church to a life of service in the name of Christ and to call the body of Christ to live out the servant ministry given at baptism.

- 3) The desire and capacity to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.

SECOND, a person with a discernable vocation evidences many, if not all, of the following qualities:

- 1) A strong commitment to and deep love for Jesus Christ and the Church;
- 2) An ability to articulate his or her faith;
- 3) Is a confirmed adult member in good standing with the understanding of his or her ministry as a baptized person
- 4) Has a spiritual life marked by the holy habits of worship, prayer, the study of scripture, and tithing;
- 5) A vocation to serve and enable others to serve;
- 6) Empathy for the powerless;
- 7) A history of satisfactory employment (if applicable) and interpersonal relationships;
- 8) A willingness to undertake extensive preparation, including theological education, spiritual formation and practice of ministry;
- 9) A clear understanding of the ministry of a deacon;
- 10) A willingness to serve God through the leadership of the diocesan Bishop;
- 11) A spouse/partner who supports the call to ministry—if one has a spouse/partner

THIRD, a person with a discernible vocation to the diaconate would be recognized both by her/himself and by the Church as being called to live the vision statement for diaconal ministry, noted at the beginning of this booklet. Deacons are often at work in risky places and at the margins, responding to the needs of the poor, the weak, the addicted, the sick, and the lonely, thus enabling them to discover the presence of God in their world. Deacons are called to engage the issues of justice, mercy, poverty, family and the environment. Increasingly, the role is one of opening doors of opportunity, encouraging others to take risks, and serving as agents of change.

## **THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF A DEACON**

### *Deployment*

The Bishop, after consultation with the Deacon and the Member of the Clergy (hereafter known as presbyter) or other leader exercising oversight, may assign a Deacon to one or more congregations, other communities of faith or non-parochial ministries. (Title III, Canon 8.4- See Appendix B) The Bishop may re-assign a deacon, or the deacon may request re-assignment, at any time after the second year with a congregation. Normally a deacon would not serve more than seven successive years in a congregation. The gifts, talent and experience of a deacon will be considered in deployment decisions, as well as the ministry needs of the diocese.

The deacon shall have a written covenant agreement with the congregation signed by the deacon, presbyter, vestry and Bishop. This agreement is renewed every two years, or with each new assignment. The contents of the agreement will follow the outline provided by the Bishop's office. (See Appendix A)

### *Clothing*

Clerical garb should be reserved for liturgical or pastoral occasions. If a deacon is not serving in a liturgical or pastoral function (is out "in the world") then normal attire is appropriate. If a deacon is in clerical collar, she/he will wear a deacon's cross to show the order of deacons.

Vestments: Alb and stole should be worn only when the deacon is functioning as a deacon in the worship service. A dalmatic, if any, should be in keeping with the vestments worn by others. Cassock and surplice or alb without stole, is appropriate for non-Eucharistic worship services. If a master of ceremonies is in charge of the service, his/her direction shall be followed.

### *Rites of Passage*

Upon a new assignment, when a "Celebration of New Ministry" or other institution with the congregation is appropriate, a service led by the Archdeacon may be held during a regular worship service. Likewise, a leave-taking liturgy is appropriate when a deacon leaves the congregation for reassignment, retirement, or other reasons.

### *Term of Stay in a Congregation*

When the presbyter resigns or otherwise leaves the cure, the deacon must contact the Bishop immediately and offer his/her resignation. A three month sabbatical will be taken upon the departure of the presbyter. Options for continuing service will be discussed with the Bishop, deacon, warden, and interim presbyter if there is one.

### *Role in the Parish*

Leadership: In accordance with National Canon 3, Section 3, Subsection c, in those congregations where there are Eucharistic Ministry (chalice bearers and Eucharistic Visitors) programs, these ministries would normally be under the direction of the Deacon of the congregation.

In the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, the sacramental rites of the church are appropriately administered by a priest. Therefore, Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, Confession and Unction are to be administered by the priest with the deacon assisting. Exceptions may be made in certain circumstances only with the permission of the Bishop. [For example if a deacon is asked to officiate at a wedding or baptism, she/he must first notify the Bishop of this request *before* agreeing to the request.]

Liturgy: It is assumed that all clergy will be knowledgeable in, and observant of, the Canons of the Church. It is expected that the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer and the Canons will guide the liturgical functioning of the deacon. Deacons do not bless. Deacons with a “gift for healing” may be invited to serve at a healing station. The presbyter will neither ask the deacon to function in ways prohibited by the BCP rubrics and Canons, nor deprive the deacon of those roles which are preferred to the order. In particular, when a supply priest is called to provide a service such as a Eucharist at a funeral, and a deacon has been pastor to the deceased and/or the family, it is especially appropriate for the deacon to participate in the service. (For more detail on the liturgical functioning of deacons and lay persons, see the rubrics of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church.)

When properly invited, the Deacon may preach, but with the understanding that the rector/vicar is the ordinary preacher of the parish. It is appropriate for the deacon to preach on Maundy Thursday and other feast days or occasions related to servant ministry.

Service: Deacons appropriately work with the outreach committee and/or social justice ministries within the parish but do not necessarily chair these committees. Deacons enable the laity by supporting the ministry of the laity. The work of



the deacon does not generally include other committees or commissions within a congregation.

### *Diocesan Functions*

It is expected that all persons planning diocesan functions and liturgical events will include deacons, and will provide for appropriate participation according to the order.

In particular, deacons will be informed about, and are expected to attend, the annual diocesan convention and diocesan clergy conferences. If a deacon is not employed full time, it is expected that he/she will attend monthly Clergy Council with the Bishop. Deacons will have voice and vote in these meetings according to canon.

All deacons canonically resident or licensed in the diocese shall be included in all general diocesan mailings to the clergy.

### *The Community of Deacons & Deacons' Council*

All deacons canonically resident in the diocese (except those retired or living out of state) constitute a Community of Deacons, which will meet from time to time.[see: Title III, Canon 7.2 & 7.3] All are eligible for participation in the Council. The Council will be called together and chaired by the Archdeacon and attended by all available deacons. The Council should speak for the deacons of the diocese The Bishop and archdeacon will arrange for and hold an annual conference for deacons, and all active deacons are expected to attend that conference.

## **FINANCES**

The deacon shall normally serve the congregation or ministry to which he/she is assigned for a *maximum* of ten hours per week without stipend. It is expected that the deacon will be reimbursed by the parish or ministry for expenses related to his/her service, including reimbursement for mileage, expenses of attending diocesan convention and the annual Deacons Conference; this matter should be specifically addressed in the deacon's Letter of Agreement.

The congregation is encouraged to provide some funding for continuing education for the deacon (books, video rental, courses, etc.).

When a deacon undertakes a non-parochial assignment, reimbursement of expenses related to the deacon's service shall be discussed with the Bishop and the supervisor and resolved before the assignment is effective.

## **RULE OF LIFE**

It is expected that the deacon will maintain a disciplined prayer life, have and consult a trained spiritual director approved by the Bishop, and follow a regular program of study. A plan of continuing education should be prepared by the deacon annually, and discussed with the Bishop. (See Appendix A)

- Trained spiritual directors are those individuals who have undergone a course of study to be a spiritual director, and they themselves are ‘in direction.’

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION**

All active deacons shall complete 8 (eight) hours of continuing education per year in addition to the Deacons Conference. It is possible to combine these hours to 16 (sixteen) hours every two years. Topics chosen should either improve skills and vision for the deacon’s current ministry or prepare the deacon for a new ministry of justice (e.g. areas of racism, affordable housing, prison, etc.). It is important at the beginning of each year to know the general areas of study anticipated, but not the particulars of time or place. Personal experiences may be used to fulfill this requirement in some cases.

Continuing education is to be completed in community, not in isolation. Suggested are weekend or one or two-day classes or seminars sponsored by hospitals, civic organizations, and educational institutions, as well as religious organizations (houses of faith, denominational entities) at the state, national or international level.

## **RETIREMENT** [Pursuant to Title III Canon 7.7-See Appendix B]

A deacon may retire from active service for reasons of age or infirmity with the consent of the Bishop at any time and shall retire for reasons of age or infirmity at the request of the Bishop. The Bishop

may, with the consent of the Deacon, assign a retired Deacon to any congregation, other community of faith or non-parochial ministry, for a period not to exceed twelve months, and this period may be renewed.

## **AGREEMENTS**

*Leave:* The deacon should take the following periods of leave:

- One calendar month vacation each year, or 4 weeks.
- Three-month sabbatical of rest for refreshment outside the present diaconal assignment every 5 to 7 years with the Bishop's approval.

*Leave of Absence:* A leave of absence from ministry may be taken after a conversation with the Bishop and rector of the congregation. At that time the length of the leave will be determined, with appropriate check-in points.

*Reports:* The deacon shall provide a written annual report to the Bishop if she/he has not met with the Bishop during the year. Deacons functioning in a congregation shall give a written report to the presbyter of the parish. The written report to the congregation may be used as the report to the Bishop. Those deacons on leave or otherwise not actively deployed shall write the Bishop an annual letter describing their activities, spiritual life, connection with church, etc. Retired deacons are not required to provide annual reports/letters.

If problems arise which affect the life of the congregation, and/or the ministry of presbyter or deacon, the deacon shall discuss them first with the presbyter who is his/her supervisor and follow his/her counsel and advice. In case of disagreement, the deacon, with the knowledge of the presbyter, shall inform the Bishop in writing, with a copy to the presbyter and the Archdeacon. The Bishop shall accept the responsibility for resolution. The quality of supervision and the adequacy of inter-personal communication shall be considered in working towards resolution.

**To the Presbyter:**

It is expected that the deacon, serving with your agreement, will be given responsibilities, liturgical and otherwise, appropriate to the order. The presbyter (or other supervisor) is expected to meet with congregational deacons every four to six weeks to share updates on ministry, mutual parish concerns and other matters affecting the life of the parish.

Electronic copies of the Letter of Agreement are available from the Bishop's Office.

## **Appendix A**

Letter of Agreement

*Sample*

for

Deacon \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The Rt. Rev. Robert R. Gepert, Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, agrees that the exercise of the diaconate by \_\_\_\_\_ shall be subject to the terms set forth in the Customary for Deacons in Central Pennsylvania as reviewed by the Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee, and as amplified by the additional provisions of this Letter of Agreement.

### I. Deployment

- a. The Bishop assigns the Reverend \_\_\_\_\_, Deacon, to serve in \_\_\_\_\_ Church, \_\_\_\_\_, Pennsylvania, where he/she shall function as a part-time, non-stipendiary deacon. This assignment is to be reviewed annually by the Rector and Bishop, and a new agreement signed every two years.
- b. Deacon \_\_\_\_\_ shall serve with the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, Rector of \_\_\_\_\_, (hereafter referred to as presbyter) who will act as immediate supervisor.

### II. Ministry Guidelines

- a. All parties to this agreement understand that the Deacon 's secular employment takes precedence over community involvement

and church activities.

- b. The deacon generally expects to serve the church a maximum of 10 hours per week, with an overall goal of a maximum of 30 hours per month.
- c. The deacon should receive financial assistance for the cost of Continuing Education, the Annual Deacons Conference, the annual Diocesan Convention, and travel required for fulfillment of diaconal responsibilities.
- d. The deacon should have access to a Discretionary Fund, established by the Parish for such purposes.

III. The Deacon shall serve in the world as follows:

- a. Encourage the Church's participation in all opportunities for ministry in the world, especially in this country.
- b. Make Christ and his redemptive love known, by word and example to the people of the world through:

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IV. The Deacon shall serve the congregation through pastoral ministry, particularly to:

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V. The Deacon shall serve liturgically as follows:

- a. Perform the full and proper liturgical role of a deacon at Eucharist on Sunday, and at the liturgies of Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter

Vigil, and other congregational worship services as requested by the Rector.

- b. Assist at other liturgies, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and in the inter-parochial or diocesan liturgies when called upon to do so by the Rector or the Bishop.
- c. Compose and preach liturgical homilies [\_\_\_\_times per year], with the understanding that the presbyter is the ordinary preacher of the parish. In services of Morning or Evening Prayer and Compline conducted by the deacon, the deacon is the ordinary preacher. It is particularly appropriate for the deacon to preach on Maundy Thursday and other occasions where the gospel readings focus on the ministry of service.

VI. The Deacon shall take the following periods of leave:

- a. One calendar month vacation each year, or 4 weeks.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_days/weeks for development of diaconal ministry.
- c. Sick leave and personal days as required.
- d. Such other leave as is required to develop and maintain self-support outside the Church, with adequate advance notice.
- e. Three month sabbatical of rest and refreshment, outside the present diaconal assignment, every 5 to 7 years with the Bishop's approval.

VII. Conflict resolution

- a. If problems arise which affect the welfare and unity of the parish, the deacon shall consult with the presbyter and shall follow



his/ her counsel and advice. In case of a disagreement, the deacon, with the knowledge of the presbyter, shall inform the Bishop in writing, with a copy to the presbyter and the Archdeacon. The Bishop shall accept the responsibility for resolution. The quality of the priest's supervision and the adequacy of interpersonal communication shall be considered in working toward resolution.

- b. If problems arise concerning the Deacon's role or work, the Presbyter will consult with the Deacon and work together for resolution. In cases of disagreement, the Presbyter with the knowledge of the Deacon, shall inform the Bishop in writing, with a copy to the Deacon. The Bishop shall accept responsibility for the resolution.

#### VIII. Annual Report

The Deacon shall submit to the parish an annual report of all ministry and continuing education performed in the previous year with a copy to the supervising priest. The major emphasis of this report shall not be liturgical, but shall be the development of lay ministries in the world under the leadership of the Deacon. The Deacon shall send the annual report to the Bishop if he or she has not met with the Bishop during the year.

- IX. This agreement terminates:
- a. at the discretion of the Bishop and/or presbyter.
  - b. If and when the Deacon moves to another community, which would require over a 45 mile drive in one direction on a regular basis to perform assigned duties.
  - c. When the supervising presbyter resigns from the parish.
  - d. After \_\_\_\_\_ years; after evaluation, then may be renewed after any necessary changes.
  - e. If Deacon is reassigned to a new parish. A new agreement should in place after ninety (90) days.
  - f. At age 72, following the guidelines of the Customary for Deacons.
- X. In order for the Deacon to function at this parish, the written consent of the Presbyter is required to this Agreement.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Deacon: \_\_\_\_\_

Archdeacon: \_\_\_\_\_

Bishop: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Church  
 \_\_\_\_\_, Pennsylvania

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Senior Warden

I consent to the above agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Presbyter