



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada

# **Information on the Diaconate in the Diocese of Toronto**

March 2023

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## Concerning the Order of Deacons

Since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been known: the order of **Bishops** who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church, the presbyters, or **Priests**. Together with the Bishops, priests take part in the governance of the Church, in the carrying out its missionary and pastoral work, and in preaching the Word of God and administering the Holy Sacraments.

The order of **Deacons**, in assisting bishops and priests in all of this work, have a special responsibility to minister, in Christ's name, to the poor, the sick, the suffering and the helpless., and to encourage others in that ministry (BAS p. 655).

All three orders are “consecrated,” “ordained” and “made” according to the ordination liturgies.

The Diaconate is a separate, distinct, and equal order of ordained ministry dedicated to:

- serving, and enabling others to serve, the needy, the weak, the sick, and the lonely, and
- holding before the Church the needs of the world.

The Deacon encourages and supports all to live out the Baptismal promises.

Deacons are

- Icons, or examples, of servant hood;
- agents of the bishop (taking the bishop's vision into the world);
- leaders (encouraging baptismal ministry within their parish); and
- prophets (alerting the church to the needs of the world and encouraging the community to act in response).

## Terms

People ordained to a continuing life as a deacon have been called ‘vocational deacons,’ ‘permanent,’ ‘perpetual’ and other similar titles. The present practice is to call those called to a life of a deacon, simply, “deacon”.

Those ordained a deacon as an apprenticeship to the call of a priest are known as “transitional deacons.” Within this document, the word “deacon” applies to those who have been chosen to that order for life.

## The Call to Diaconal Ministry

A call to Diaconal Ministry often starts with the individual, and comes through a prayerful communication with God. It may arise when the Incumbent believes that a particular individual is a possible candidate; or in the process of a parish exploring the possibility of “raising up” a deacon, a number of individuals may be identified and encouraged to explore

their callings. The Church as a whole (individual, parish and diocese) must all recognize this call.

Some signs of a call are an individual's demonstrated activity in:

- serving and to enabling others to serve;
- holding before the community and the wider Church the needs of the world; interpreting those needs, and enabling the community to act;
- being a symbol of, and model for, the ministry of all the baptized; and
- demonstrating a strong empathy with the powerless, poor, sick, weak and lonely.

The gathered community of the parish should look for individuals who have both an active ministry outside of the parish and an ability to lead within the parish.

## **The Process** (see the Flow Chart)

With the Bishop's permission, the parish (or group of parishes) appoints a Discernment Committee. With the support and guidance of a Mentor appointed by the Coordinator of Deacons, the Discernment Committee learns about deacons so they can decide if the parish community is called to support a diaconal ministry. The parish must be educated about the diaconate to make an informed decision and to then support ongoing ministry. If the parish decides they are to call up a deacon, the Discernment Committee then considers possible candidates who have both an active ministry and demonstrated leadership abilities. When there is a consensus on the individual or individuals, the Parish Vestry votes first on supporting a deacon, and then nominates this individual (s).

The Mentor provides tools and information to the Parish Discernment Committee to enable a full exploration of the meaning of servant hood ministry, how this has been experienced in the life of the parish in the past, and how that might be enhanced in the future. Potential nominees can not be members of the Discernment Committee. Potential nominees are well served by having a support group (separate from the Discernment Committee), a Spiritual Director and encouragement by their priest or Incumbent and by a mentoring deacon.

Following the Vestry votes, with the Bishop's approval, the nominee completes an "Application for the Diaconate" which forms the basis for an interview with the Bishop's Diaconal Review Committee. The Review Committee makes recommendations to the College of Bishops which decides if the nominee should proceed with "Diocesan Discernment and Screening," should be declined, or should be required to achieve certain prerequisites pending further assessment.

If a nominee is declined, the candidate will be informed in such a way as to ensure that appropriate pastoral care is immediately available. At all times the nominees must be supported to enable them to carry out the ministries to which they have been truly called and preserve their dignity and self-esteem.

## The Deacon Formation Process

Those individuals who have been nominated by their Vestry, been approved by their bishop to continue, and are undertaking the Diocesan Screening process begin “Formation.” Candidates learn what it means to be a deacon, and refine and build necessary skills. This takes some months and ideally occurs as part of a group. When Formation is completed, and all the requirements of Diocesan Screening are completed, the Coordinator refers successful candidates to their bishop for consideration for ordination.

### **Diaconal Covenant**

Each deacon has a written “Covenant” with their Bishop and parish specifying responsibilities of all parties. This is developed during Formation. All parties to the Covenant benefit if the “Covenant” is reviewed annually.

## Education

Learning is on-going, but, for diaconal ordination, the Diocese requires preparation and training equivalent to 10 university credits: 6 credits in scripture, theology, and history; and 4 optional credits based on diaconal ministry. Suitable programmes are offered through The Toronto School of Theology, Thornloe University, Centre for Christian Studies and other institutions.

About half of the deacons in Toronto have a MTS or MDiv degree, and others have a Diploma of Ministry. Education for Ministry (EFM) is an option. All of these are accepted for ordination.

## The Ministry of Deacons

The ministry of Deacons in the Diocese of Toronto has two parts:

- Parochial Ministry within the parish. The deacon serves as an example to others through teaching and symbolically through the Deacons’ Liturgical Functions of serving at the Table, Proclaiming the Gospel and Dismissal.
- Diaconal Ministry in the world beyond the parish. The deacon serves as an example to others. Diverse and varied examples include:
  - Social Ministry (with people in hospitals, homes for the elderly, prisons, in shelters or with young people as doctors, teachers, nurses counsellors, companions or assistants).
  - Direct services with the Community: organizing and promoting the engagement of volunteers in Food Banks, Tax Clinics, Social Services Networks, Community Development....
  - Pastoral Care including Chaplaincies, and serving on the Bishop’s Committee on Healing;

- Advocating and Social Justice (assisting the Diocese and the Bishop on behalf of disadvantaged) including serving on the Diocesan Social Justice and Advocacy Committee, and organizations dedicated to improving the world.

## **Compensation of Deacons**

Deacons are ordinarily non-stipendiary, having other source(s) of income. However, deacons should receive compensation from the parish they serve for mileage and other expenses incidental to the performance of their parish ministry, and for (but not limited to) diocesan clergy days, conferences, and continuing formation.

This could include an honorarium of a nominal amount, subject to taxes and deductions.

## **Preaching as a Deacon**

To enable others to live out their Baptismal Covenants, Deacons have a special responsibility to promote Jesus' message of servant ministry. Priests may focus on theological concepts in their preaching, but Deacons, if they are licensed by the bishop to preach, emphasize the diaconal aspects of Christ's teaching and motivate the congregation to serve the poor, the sick, the suffering, the helpless, and the lonely in their parish and communities. In addition to preaching, the deacon will also find other ways to encourage the congregation in each of their baptismal ministries.

## **Accountability**

Deacons are directly accountable to their Bishop. In the name of the Bishop, the Incumbent, or Priest-in-Charge of the parish where a Deacon is licensed will have supervisory administrative authority over the parish activity of the Deacon. The "Covenant" specifies the deacon's particular responsibilities. All parties to the Covenant benefit if the "Covenant" is reviewed annually.

## **Duties in Exceptional Circumstances**

Deacons may conduct funerals with consultation and the approval of the Incumbent. In the absence of the parish priest and with his/her permission, a deacon may perform a baptism. Of course, to the same extent as laity, deacons may baptize in an emergency. Deacons in this diocese may not perform marriages. As an extension of the community's worship together, a Deacon may (along with others so licensed) take the Sacrament to members of the parish who are unable to attend in person, but in the Diocese of Toronto, a Deacon may not serve the consecrated sacrament to the gathered community in what is sometimes called a "Deacon's Mass."

## Membership in the Councils of the Church

Deacons in the Diocese of Toronto are members of the Synod of the Diocese and can serve as clergy on other councils of the church.

## Liturgical Functions of a deacon.

Liturgical functions symbolize the deacon's call to proclaim the Gospel, to serve and to enable others to serve. Guided by the Bishop and local custom, it is usual for the Deacon to:

- Read the Gospel
- Set the table for the Eucharist
- Clear the table
- Dismiss the people

Deacons often have a role in coordinating the “Prayers of the People” and as “Chief Wine Steward” may raise the Chalice at the Elevations.

## The Community of Deacons

Within the Diocese of Toronto, deacons regularly meet together and with their Bishops for fellowship, learning, and mutual support.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. *What are the differences between a committed lay person and an ordained deacon?*

By their Baptismal Covenant everyone is called to “Seek and serve Christ,” and so there are many calls and many ministries. Deacons are called to fulfill “...a **special ministry** of servant hood.” (BAS 655). The committed lay person is a volunteer, a free agent who, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, chooses where, how and how long they serve in any given capacity. They give selflessly in many ways, both within the parish and beyond.

Ordained clergy are accountable to their Incumbent and Bishop, who have rights and responsibilities of supervision and direction. Volunteers, whether they offer their services or are invited to take on a particular role, can discontinue that ministry at any time.

Deacons have undergone a process of discernment, education, screening for suitability and preparation. They then make public vows for life before God, and in the presence of the gathered Church, to serve God and Church all their days. These persons become accountable to their bishop, under the supervision of their Incumbent, and answerable to both their bishop and the corporation of their parish. They are licensed by their bishop to practice as deacons in specific and explicit ways.

*2. How does a close-knit parish say yes to one potential deacon and no to another without hurting the individuals who offered themselves or who are nominated?*

The first and fundamental choice a parish makes is whether or not to have a deacon. Having agreed that they wish to have a deacon, the opportunity is offered to the membership of the parish to nominate one or more candidates and at the same time persons who believe they may have a call to the diaconate are asked to identify themselves. It is best if these nominations are a confidential process. All potential candidates must receive on-going pastoral support from their parish.

*3. What happens during the process to those who have already self-identified as potential candidates?*

While the parish works through its own commitment to support a deacon or deacons, a candidate support group, distinct from the Parish Discernment Committee, of two to four parishioners cares for the self-identified candidate helping them look at all aspects of their call. They must be encouraged and supported to continue to do the work to which they have been called.

*4. How does the process become adapted or modified in parishes that already have a Lay Reader?*

The Parish Discernment Committee must articulate a clear distinction between a lay reader and a deacon. A lay reader is a parochial position where the individual helps the priest with pastoral duties and taking Services. The deacon is largely in extra-parochial ministry outside the parish and talking the Church there. The Deacon may still take Services and do visitations, but the deacon does not take over the role of lay readers. Deacons arising in this situation are often already lay readers and they must be seen as different after ordination.

*5. How long should a church expect the process to take place from inquiry to ordination?*

The process must provide time for the parish to become educated and soberly reflect on diaconal ministry in a parish and potential candidates. An absolute minimum would be two years, but usually it will take longer. Finally, time for candidate's education must be considered as well, if not done before.