

Guidelines for the Use of Deacons Diocese of Northwest Texas

1. Deacons will function under the principles of ministry as written in the diocesan statement, "the Meaning and Function of the Diaconate."

Deacons exist to call the whole community into its servant ministry. They are prophetic leaders who are called to challenge the Church to always look beyond herself.

Applicants to the Diaconate need to have the character of a servant, and this character should be visible in the applicant's life and ministry. Ordination to the Diaconate is not a way to recognize or validate existing ministries, but a means of forming living icons who illuminate Christ as the model of servanthood to all the baptized. Deacons are not ordained to do the outreach ministry for the Church, but to lead others into servant ministry in the world.

Deacons are under the authority of the bishop and of the supervising Priest under whom they work. The liturgical functions of a Deacon are not their primary ministry, but are symbolic and expressive of their central ministry:

- Serving all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely
- Interpreting to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

Deacons will be leaders who have a visible ministry to the dispossessed, are willing to undertake the role of prophet, and will strengthen the servant ministry of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Northwest Texas.

This statement provides the theological and practical context for the exercise of Diaconal ministry in the Diocese of Northwest Texas.

2. References and Forms of Address for Deacons.

These guidelines pertain to "deacons," not "transitional deacons". Deacons are to be referred to simply as "deacons," not "vocational" or "permanent" deacons. Persons who are in the process toward ordination to the priesthood should be referred to as "transitional" deacons after they are ordained as such. The appropriate form of written address for a deacon is "Deacon" before or after the person's name. The only appropriate form of address is the word "Deacon" before the name.

3. Relationship of Deacon to the Bishop

Traditionally, deacons serve immediately under the authority of the Bishop. In this diocese, most deacons will be assigned by the Bishop to a parish or mission and will serve under a supervising priest, normally the rector or the vicar. Deacons may, however, be reassigned by the Bishop and continue to function as deacons. Deacons are expected to negotiate a written covenant between themselves and the parish or mission in which they are serving, to be approved by the Bishop. Adjustments may need to be made when there is a change of supervising priest.

4. Relationship of Deacon to Congregation and Priest

As required by canon law, a deacon assigned to a particular parish is considered an "Assistant Minister" and, as such, must resign should the rector resign his or her cure. The deacon may be re-appointed by the bishop to serve during the interim under the direction of the Bishop and of the senior warden. Upon the election of a new rector, the deacon's covenant may be re-negotiated or the Bishop may appoint the deacon to another parish or mission.

5. Ordination of Deacons

If at all possible, there should be but one ordination of candidates to the Diaconate per year at a central location. Preferably this will take place at a Eucharist during the annual diocesan convention to highlight the fact that deacons serve directly under the authority of the Bishop. It would then be expected that an adaptation of the rite of "Celebration of a New Ministry" be celebrated in the local congregations where the newly ordained deacons are assigned. (Adaptations are available through the North American Association for the Diaconate and the Diocese.)

6. Conferences and Continuing Education

Deacons will be invited to the annual diocesan Clergy Conference and to other clergy educational and social gatherings. In addition to these, the Bishop and Archdeacon will regularly design and offer conferences and continuing education events especially for deacons. These will be held at times that are convenient for the deacons to attend. Deacons are expected to place a high priority on continuing education and formation.

7. Mailings

There should be a separate mailing list for deacons to receive mailings particularly appropriate to them. Otherwise, deacons should be included in all diocesan mailings.

8. Covenants

Deacons and their supervising clergy shall together design and approve a Covenant, or position description, outlining the specifics of the deacon's ministry in that place. The Bishop or the bishop's designee shall approve such covenants.

9. Clerical Dress

Clerical clothing is not the norm for deacons. However, such apparel may be worn under the following circumstances:

- a. When administering communion from the reserve sacrament to the sick and shut-in.
- b. For admission and recognition in hospitals, jails, other institutions, and in other specialized ministry situations when appropriate.
- c. Under vestments during liturgical celebrations, and at events where such celebrations take place.

(Please note that deacons are not required to wear clerical attire, even should its wearing be authorized in the above circumstances. Ordinary street dress is the norm for deacons.)

10. Deacons at Diocesan Convention

Deacons are considered clergy in canon law and are therefore eligible as clerical members of commissions and committees, clerical deputies to Provincial Synod and General Convention. They vote as clerical deputies when there is voting "by orders."

The deacons of the diocese are encouraged to sit together in a prominent place during the Bishop's Address to Convention.

11. Liturgical Function of Deacons

a. The deacon takes his or her appropriate place along with the bishop (when present), the priest, other liturgical ministers, and the gathered laity. The deacon should:

i. Read the Gospel (This includes carrying the Gospel book in procession and censing such book where this is the custom.)

ii. Lead the Prayers of the People (or be significantly and visibly the Minister of Intercessions) and issue the invitation to the Confession of Sins.

iii. Prepare the Table and receive the gifts (cense altar party and people where this is the custom).

iv. Stand to the presider's right during the Great Thanksgiving (the deacon or a lay person may point the missal, depending which side it is on); raise the chalice at the designation and the phrase, "the gifts of God for the people of God."

v. Administer the chalice, assisted by additional chalice bearers when necessary. (These persons also assist the deacon in preparation and cleansing of these additional chalices.)

vi. When appropriate, the deacon may assist the priest in administering the bread, instead of administering the chalice, e.g., when there are sufficient chalice bearers and the large number of communicants warrants having two persons administer the bread.

vii. Do the ablutions, assisted by other chalice bearers when necessary, either after communion or after the service altogether.

viii. Give the dismissal.

ix. Carry the Paschal Candle in processions.

x. Lead the prayers of the candidates for baptism, confirmation, and reception at services of Christian Initiation.

xi. Sing (or say) the "Lumen Christi" and the "Exultet" at the Great Vigil of Easter.

b. Preaching is part of the ministry of the deacon; and deacons are expected to preach regularly, although not necessarily frequently. The Diocese will provide opportunities for continuing education in this area.

- c. "Deacon's Masses" or more properly "Administration of Communion from the Reserved Sacrament" as a public service of worship is never the norm. They may only be performed by the specific authorization of the Bishop in extraordinary circumstances at the request of the deacons' supervising priest. Should such a liturgy be authorized, the deacon is to follow the instructions on page 408 of the BCP for the distribution of communion from the reserved sacrament.
- d. The deacon may administer the reserved sacrament to the sick, shut-in, and others unable to attend the parish Eucharist when authorized by his or her supervising priest.
- e. Deacons are to be significantly involved in the recruitment, training, and liturgical use of Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Lay Eucharistic Visitors.
- f. Deacons should participate in the preparation of candidates for Holy Baptism and Confirmation, especially in regard to such candidates' intention to promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to strive for justice and peace among all people. The deacon may perform the water rite in the baptismal liturgy when there are many candidates to be baptized or when the deacon has been particularly involved in the preparation of a candidate for baptism.
- g. At all diocesan liturgies deacons are to be given preference over transitional deacons, lay persons, priests, or bishops for those liturgical actions specifically assigned to deacons – reading the Gospel, leading the Prayers of the People, setting the Table, administering the chalice, and giving the dismissal.