

MAY 2, 2023

DEACON HANDBOOK

FOR DEACONS SERVING IN THE DIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE
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THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF
MILWAUKEE

Preamble

This handbook provides the vision of the ministry of deacons in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee with the concept of how that vision will be implemented and supported.

Vision

I. Vision of the Diaconal Ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

Deacons are raised up from the congregations of the diocese to a servant ministry modeled by Jesus and to which all baptized are called. The church has called from its midst certain of its members to perform this servant ministry on behalf of the greater community since the earliest days of Christianity. This ministry is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

Today in the church, some of those called to be servants are raised up by the church and ordained to the order of deacons. Their role is to bring the people and needs of the world to God and God to the people and needs of the world.

To fulfill that role, those called to ordination to the diaconate are to be models of the servanthood of all and to be catalysts for servant ministry. The diaconate in the Diocese of Milwaukee is an order of ordained ministry that is envisioned to be:

Iconic – a representative symbol or image of someone or something that is sacred or sanctified, and not something that in and of itself is worshipped, representing Christ as a the servant to all people, both within and outside the church.

Catalytic – acting as the stimulus in bringing about or hastening a result by encouraging, leading, and supporting others in undertaking the service to which God has called them, making ministry happen.

Servants – working under the guidance of the bishop and serving God's people in a manner that best utilizes the gifts God has given them individually to support the collective mission of the diocese in a variety of roles and places, where needs exist in the greater community the diocese serves, or where needs exist in the church. Deacons, as icons of Jesus' servanthood, model servanthood of all and are catalysts for servant ministry.

II. Implementing the Vision

a. Basic guidance regarding deacons and their ministries.

Deacons are ordained for the church. Deacons are sent to impact their environment. Deacons have a direct relationship to their bishop. As icons of Christ's servanthood deacons will be assigned, by the bishop, through a process of discernment which matches their talent and vocation to the mission and needs of the church. They may be assigned to parochial and/or non-parochial ministries.

b. Role of the deacon in a parish or organization

In keeping with the vision of the deacon's role in a parish or organization to bring the people and needs of the world to God and God to the people and needs of the world, it is anticipated that deacons will be involved in the following ministries:

Community outreach, social justice, and opportunities for the church to be visible in the greater community.

Leading, developing, and participating in pastoral care and development of lay ministries

Liturgical roles during the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgies as indicated by the rubrics. Officiating at and leading worship as required.

Developing lay ministers to be able to lead daily office services and prayer services.

c. How and why deacons are assigned.

Deacons are sent to impact their environment. As icons of Christ's servanthood, deacons will be assigned, by the bishop, through a process of discernment that matches their talent and vocation to the mission and needs of the church. They may be assigned to parochial and/or non-parochial ministries.

Deacons may be assigned to their parish of origin or to a parish other than the parish of origin at the discretion of the bishop. Deacons may also be assigned to nonparochial or special ministries. These include instances in which deacons are

assigned to chaplaincies or non-parochial ministry with a specific focus, rather than a parochial assignment.

The length of service in a given ministry will be discerned by mutual review by the Office of the Bishop, the needs of the ministry itself, parish priest(s) if applicable, and the deacon.

It is understood that a deacon will need to honor their responsibilities to their family, employment, and other obligations along with the ministry to which they have been assigned.

A letter of assignment from the Office of the Bishop to the deacon concerning a deacon's assignment will include the ministry to which the deacon is being assigned, specific areas of responsibility, the start date of that assignment, and, if known, an end date in consideration of the deacon's gifts and call to ministry. Prior to a letter of assignment being issued, the Office of the Bishop, parish priest, the deacon, and the elected leaders of the congregation(s), or non-parochial ministry(s) will negotiate a letter of agreement outlining the focus of the deacon's ministry and the support that will be provided to the deacon.

Deacon assignments will be reviewed upon receipt of the deacon's annual letter to the bishop and by the archdeacon if one is appointed.

d. How deacons are supervised and mentored in their assignments.

Deacons are assigned by the Office of the Bishop and receive supervision by the priest of the parish, supervising minister of the faith community, or director of the special ministry to which they are assigned.

Per canons, a deacon shall not be placed in charge of a congregation or community of faith. If a parish is without a priest, the senior warden supervises the deacon with assistance from diocesan staff as needed.

As members of the clergy, deacons are not members of the parish. They may participate in parish and vestry meetings but have no vote.

For two years following ordination, new deacons shall continue a process of formation authorized by the Office of the Bishop. The bishop shall assign each newly ordained deacon a deacon to act as a mentor provided a suitable mentor deacon is available. The mentor and deacon shall meet regularly for at least two years to provide guidance, information, and a sustained dialogue about diaconal ministry.

- e. Status of deacons as they live out their ministries.

Deacons will be considered in one of these statuses following ordination:

1. Active deacon—in ministry assigned by the Bishop.
2. Unassigned deacon—is on sabbatical or between assignments.
3. Retired Deacon—is not active in ministry and is no longer open or able to be assigned.

- f. Deacons' relationship with their bishop.

Deacons serve directly under the authority of and are accountable to the bishop, or in the absence of the bishop, the ecclesiastical authority of the diocese.

All deacons are expected to report annually to the bishop regarding their ministry. Generally reports are made during Lent; the report may be in writing or by meeting with the bishop in person.

A mutual ministry review may be initiated by the bishop, requested by the deacon, or the priest of the parish(s) in which the deacon serves.

A deacon will have an active role in preparation for and the visitation of the bishop to the parish they are assigned or a parish(s) where they are requested to accompany the bishop. The deacon will coordinate prior to the visit with the bishop concerning any special requests, preferences for serving with the bishop, and details of the order of worship provided by the parish priest.

III. Supporting the Vision

- a. Deacon support and agreements.

Prior to a letter of assignment being issued, the bishop, deacon, and place they will be assigned will negotiate and outline the focus of the deacon's ministry, specific requirements, and the support that will be provided to the deacon by the diocese, congregation, faith community, or parochial ministry. Since deacons are assigned to congregations or other ministries to fill an identified need by the Office of the Bishop, the support provided to the deacon will take into consideration the resources of the congregation or other ministry, the diocese, and the deacon to determine the support available and needed to sustain the deacon's ministry.

The following should be considered and addressed in the development of the agreement:

- Stipend and CPG contribution
- Reimbursement for ministry expenses (extraordinary mileage expenses, supplies, special vestments, e.g.)
- Continuing education and Association for Episcopal Deacons (AED) membership support
- Sabbatical support
- Reimbursement for diocesan conventions and functions
- Vacation time
- Other support required by the deacon to fulfill their ministry

b. Deacon compensation.

Deacons shall receive the minimum stipend to allow them to be members of the Clergy Pension Group, if the deacon elects to receive it. Compensation of a deacon above the minimum stipend will be addressed in the agreement and letter of assignment of the deacon. If a deacon is the sole leader of Sunday morning worship at a parish, it is expected they will be compensated at the diocesan prescribed rate unless they decline it. The diaconate has traditionally been a volunteer ministry of the church. A deacon, therefore, has the right to decline compensation to maintain their role as a volunteer servant of the church in coordination with their bishop.

c. Continuing education and development of deacons.

Deacons are encouraged to seek and participate in continuing education and development throughout their ministry. At a minimum, they are expected to attend diocesan deacon meetings and training sessions and to be current with Safe Church, Safe Communities, and anti-racism training.

Deacons are also highly encouraged to join AED and maintain their membership as well as participate in continuing education opportunities from AED. The diocese will make the funds available to a deacon to maintain their membership upon request of the deacon or the parish.

Deacons are also encouraged to seek out other development opportunities that support their ministries. These can include but are not limited to second language development, mental health training, Clinical Pastoral Education, and other developmental and educational opportunities.

d. Deacon retirement.

On reaching the age of seventy-two years, a deacon shall resign from active service and the resignation shall be accepted. The bishop may, in coordination with the deacon and the ministry they serve, assign a deacon to a ministry for a term not to exceed twelve months. These assignments will be reviewed annually and may be renewed.

e. Archdeacon and Deacons' Council.

Per the diocesan canons, the bishop may appoint an archdeacon(s) to assist in the formation, deployment, supervision, and support of deacons within the diocese.

The bishop may also appoint a deacon's council to assist in the administration and support of deacons within the diocese. The deacons' council members shall be from diverse ministries and geographic areas of the diocese and shall have a minimum of three members if formed.

Appendices

Bishop's Visit/Celebrant Checklist for a Deacon

References

Holy Scripture, The Acts of the Apostles 6:2-7

Episcopal Church — Canons of the General Convention – Title III, Canon 6 – Of the Ordination of Deacons

Episcopal Church — Canons of the General Convention – Title III, Canon 7 – Of the Life and Work of Deacons

Episcopal Church — Book of Common Prayer

Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee — The Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee - Canon 13. Of the Archdeacon and Other Assistants.