



CHRISTIAN FORMATION
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF TEXAS

THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

2007

What is a deacon?

The Book of Common prayer describes the ministers of the church as lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.

In recent years, the Episcopal Church has begun to revive the ancient order of deacons. Bishop Wimberly wishes to ordain deacons to further the diocesan vision of raising up leaders for ministry within the local congregation.

Our diocesan mission is to place resources in the hands of local leaders and to empower the local ministry of every congregation. The role of a deacon completes this ministry.

The deacon shares ministry with lay people, priests and bishops. They do not replace any of these ministers, but instead sustain and further the work of the whole church especially in those areas of service to which deacons are called. Together with priests, they hold specified functions in the liturgy, but theirs is not the sacramental ministry.

The sacred order of deacons is a clerical order that leads the church's servant ministry to the poor, outcast and those in need. The deacon's role is to bring the needs of the world into the congregation's consciousness and lead the baptized into ministries that bring the church's resources to a hurting world. The order serves as a bridge that links the church to the world through means of both word and deed. The deacon is a servant leader.

Deacons are missionaries; they may serve a single congregation, several congregations or a region.

At the deacon's ordination, the bishop says to the deacon: "You are to interpret to the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world." In the liturgy the deacon calls the congregation to pray for the church, for the world, for any in need and then calls the church to corporate confession for those things done and left undone.

At the deacon's ordination the bishop says to the deacon, "You are to assist the bishop and priest in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments." In the liturgy the deacon helps to set the table and prepares the community for communion and then helps to administer the elements.

At the deacon's ordination, the bishop says to the deacon "At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself." The service of Communion concludes with the deacon's call to enter the world to "love and serve the Lord." The deacon is the leader into the world. The deacon calls forth ministry from the baptized. The deacon brings the voice of the voiceless ones into the community and leads the empowered out to do ministry. The deacon reminds the community of the faithful that we are both Christ to the world and that in the faces of the helpless and hopeless we find Christ as his disciples.

The main ministry of a deacon is to bridge the living body of Christ with the needs of the world.

What does a deacon do?



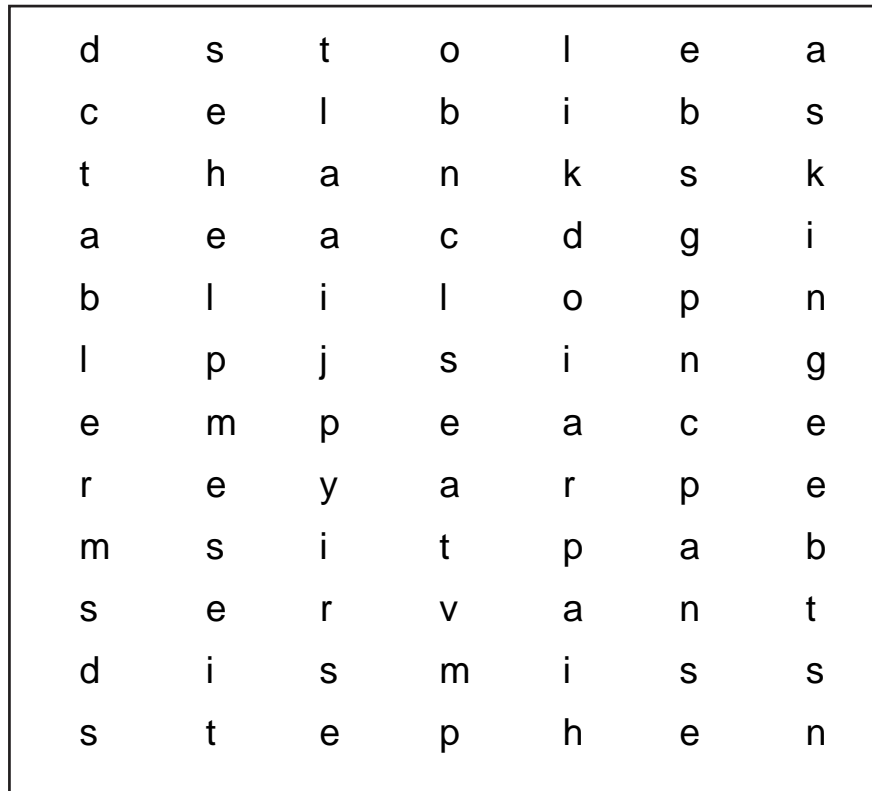
Use these words to fill in the blanks

Prepares the Table
Visits the sick

Calls us to prayer
Teaches

Servant
Voice to voiceless

A Word Search



Deacon
Chalice
Servant
Peace
Prayer
Sing
Dismiss

Help
Table
Stole
Baptism
Thanks
Asking
Stephen

The words may be found horizontally, vertically or diagonally. How many can you find?

Deacons in the Diocese of Texas

Our diocese was a missionary diocese begun when Texas was a republic.

One of the first deacons in the diocese was a man named Adam Cloud who lived in Brazoria County. In 1835 he settled with his son in the Austin colony.

Deacon Chester Newell also lived in Brazoria Country and taught school at Velasco. He also served as a chaplain to the Texas navy.

Finally, R. S. Chapman was the deacon who led the first services in Houston, at that time the capitol of the Republic. He preached and led services in Galveston, Velasco and Quintana.

These deacons were faithful in their preaching of the Word, in gathering the faithful on Sunday mornings and in bringing more people into the Episcopal Church during a time when there were few ordained clergy present.

The Deacon's Role in Liturgy

- " The deacon carries the Gospel book in procession.
- " The deacon reads the Gospel.
- " The deacon dismisses the congregation at the end of the service to go out into the world.
- " The deacon prepares the Table for Holy Communion and assists in the administration of the bread and wine.
- " The deacon wears the stole tied to one side, symbolizing being ready to serve at a moment's notice.
- " The deacon chants the Exultet at the Easter Vigil service.
- " The deacon may offer the prayers for the candidates at baptism.
- " The deacon may light the baptismal candle for the candidate.
- " The deacon may lead the prayers of the people.



Clockwise: Wanda Cuniff works with a Sunday School class at Trinity, Jacksonville, during her fieldwork in preparation for the diaconate. Betty Divine (center) supports a woman at Family Intervention Court. Judge Leta Parks, a member of Christ Church Cathedral, Houston, is pictured right. Linda Shelton is pictured working with clients for access to Harris County Hospital services and Russ Oechesel, Jr., at the altar of St. Aidan's, where he will serve as a deacon.

Deacons in the Bible

Acts 6:1-6

In this reading we feel the tension between the Greeks and the Hebrews over the daily distribution of food to the widows. The apostles feel that they do not have time to adequately perform this task and so they appoint seven people to do this ministry for them. Stephen was chosen as the leader of the group.

Some questions would come to our mind. Were only Greek widows being neglected? Were the seven chosen by the apostles Greek? (They do have Greek names.) Of the seven, only stories of Stephen and Philip found their way into scripture.

The work of the seven, though, helped grow the new church.

Acts 8:26-40

In this story of Philip and the eunuch, we find that Philip was preaching in Samaria, an area in which most of the people had not been receptive to Jesus and his preaching.

The eunuch approached Philip and asked for help in discerning the scripture he was reading. Philip spent time with him, explaining the scriptures and then the eunuch asked Philip to baptize him and Philip did so.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Timothy himself is called a deacon in this passage, based on his ministry. We also learn that there were women deacons, Lydia and Phoebe, to name two at this time.

Their ministry was that of spreading the Gospel message. We also learn here that there was a probationary time for these deacons as well.

A Method of Bible Study

1. Read the chosen text.
2. As a group, decide upon a modern situation that is similar to the biblical one.
3. Individually write how you imagine the modern situation unfolding, if it were a scene you were observing.
4. Discuss your different scenes. What do the scenes say about what is important for you in the passage? What do the scenes say about how the biblical passage can be applied to life today?
5. Individually identify a scene from your own life (personal, school, work, social or political) related to the scene you constructed.
6. Say how you will use what you have learned from the Bible passage.
(Taken from *In Dialogue with Scripture*, Linda Grenz)

The Diaconate

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word *diakonos* (servant).

The ministry of a deacon is modeled after that of Jesus. This ministry is characterized by an attitude of selfless, loving service - servant ministry. The apostles’ decision to bring seven others into their growing ministry to help in a particular way, was a response to the ministry to the poor, the widows and orphans that was being neglected due to other duties. They realized the importance of this ministry and wanted to bring in people who had the gifts of ministry and the heart of a servant.

In the early church deacons were called “the servants of God.” The deacons were charged with proclaiming the Gospel, a ministry that often resulted in their deaths, like Stephen or Philip. The deacons served as the “eyes and ears of the bishop.” They assisted with Communion and Baptism, and the prayers of the people. They also collected and distributed alms for the poor.

During the Industrial Revolution, the ministry of the deacons came to importance after having been subdued for some time. The role of the deacons was to provide pastoral care to neglected children, the poor, the sick and those in prison.

Missionary bishops and deacons travelled to the frontier and our diocese had three deacons in its very beginning.

Deaconesses organized themselves in England in 1861 and American deaconesses were ordained in 1885 for social work and service to women and children.

After World War II, a shortage of clergy was acutely felt in the United States and “perpetual or permanent,” bi-vocational male deacons who had no intention of seeking the priesthood were ordained beginning with the 1952 General Convention. These deacons usually served in their own church as assistants.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer recognized the deacon’s ministry. Deacons were recognized as a distinct order. This has allowed deacons to assume more duties and particularly to work in areas of social ministry.

In the liturgy, the deacon proclaims the Gospel, often leads the prayers of the people, prepares the table for the Eucharist, accepts the gifts of the people, helps serve at the Eucharist, calls us into our baptismal promises to go forth and serve, and then leads us out to do this work.



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