



THE DIOCESE OF
CALIFORNIA

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE BAY AREA

Deacon's Handbook

September 2022

“The Deacon is at the intersection of world and church if you will. Which is why the Deacon reads the Gospel. I mean it's not because it's an honorific position. The Deacon is reading the Gospel because it is the teachings and the life and the spirit of Jesus, who was God incarnate, who bridged Heaven and Earth. You see what I mean? Who is our bridge to church, our faith in the world. And so, the Deacon is that person, at the intersection. That's a unique charism and calling for the Deacon. It's not the same for priests. It's different for a priest. It's not the same for a bishop. Though, the irony is bishops and Deacons have the most in common.”

~ Interview with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry for the Episcopal Cafe

*The Rt. Rev. Marc Hadley Andrus, Bishop
The Ven. Cn. Nina Pickerrell, Archdeacon
The Ven. Hailey McKeefry Delmas, Archdeacon*

What is the ministry of the Deacon?

In the Episcopal tradition, Deacons are part of a four-fold ministry (both ordained and lay) that includes lay people, bishops, priests and Deacons. Deacons are called by God and the church to serve in both the church and the world in service to all people, but especially to those on the margins, who are forgotten, ignored, or particularly in need. Deacons act as a reminder to the church of its charism of servant ministry and continually encourages the Church in its ministry to the world by interpreting the needs of the world for the larger Church community.

Deacons in both tradition and practice have a historical and canonical link to the Bishop of the Diocese as an extension of the Bishop's outreach to serve all people. Deacons serve directly under the authority of the Bishop and are accountable to the Bishop. Their office in congregations reflects and extends their role as agents of the Church, commissioned by the Bishop to make the word of God and the mystery of Christ, known in many different ways and venues.

The role of the Deacon is ancient and found in scripture ([Acts 6-8](#)). (In their ordination vows (BCP p. 543), Deacons promise to:

- Serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.
- Make Christ and his redemptive love by word and example to those among whose they live, work, and worship.
- Interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.
- Assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments.

For more detail on the role of Deacon, consult the [Canons of The Episcopal Church](#), in the liturgy for the Ordination of a Deacon in the Book of Common Prayer and in the Episcopal [Outline of Faith](#).

What do Deacons do?

The ministry of Deacons in the world is singular as the people that are called to this ministry and as diverse of the gifts and talents that they have. The call of a Deacon is exercised in the world outside the church community, reflecting the church's prophetic concern for economic and social justice, and exemplifying the servant ministry of Christ.

A few examples of outreach ministry done by Deacons in the Diocese of California include:

- Caring for the unhoused;
- Caring for those in prison;
- Caring for the hungry;
- Caring for victims of abuse and violence of all kinds;
- Advocating for and ministry to people on the margins of society;
- Doing political advocacy to encourage change in the world;

- Pursuing racial justice.
- Specialized ministries with the aging and elderly; the mentally ill, with gay, lesbian and transgender persons; children and families; hospital chaplaincy; and hospice and bereavement support.

The Deacon then brings his/her/their work in the world to the church community, to encourage and enable the servant ministry for all of the .baptized Within the context of community, the Deacon acts to encourage and support outreach and pastoral ministry and to help the community discern how to use its resources and talents in service to the greater community.

In a parish setting, the Deacon's pastoral, teaching, preaching and liturgical activities are understood as an outgrowth of the call to service. Pastorally, Deacons may be involved in visitation of the sick and shut-ins, or with parish nurse and wellness programs. In worship, the Deacon proclaims the Gospel always in the midst of the congregation as symbol of community engagement, leads and oversees the Prayers of the People, sets and clears the table as symbol of servant ministry, proclaims the Dismissal, symbolizing the role of calling all believers to ministry in the wider world, and serves in other ways as described in the rubrics of the [Book of Common Prayer](#). The Deacon may also be involved with the vestry and various parish committees, especially those concerned with outreach.

Additional ministry activities in the parish setting may include:
(This list is neither exhaustive nor restrictive)

- Inspire others to fulfill their Baptismal Covenant and to do God's work.
- Empower others to access resources necessary for God's work.
- Raise up and support lay outreach ministers.
- Assist in gathering data on outreach alternatives.
- Lead/facilitate participation and collaboration in community programs and community organizing.
- Train and supervise Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors and/or acolytes.
- Facilitate Christian Education.
- Write a column for the congregation's newsletter/website.
- Administer Healing prayer in accordance with BCP Pg. 456.
- Visit those who are sick and shut in.

Diaconal ministry is understood as one which takes on characteristics of both servanthood and leadership. While the Deacon is bound by vow directly to the Bishop, the Deacon also carries out ministries in close collaboration with the rector/vicar and congregation, as well as outside the formal boundaries of the Church.

What is the relationship of Deacons to the Bishop?

In fulfillment of their ordination vows, each Deacon has a direct reporting relationship to and is under the leadership and direct pastoral care of the bishop and his appointed

Archdeacons. In this relationship, Deacons are expected and encouraged to seek counsel from the bishop and/or the Archdeacons in any life-changing or stressful situation. We want to support Deacons during any challenging time including:

- Pre-marital planning
- Marital crisis
- Hospitalization and severe illness of themselves or family members
- Personal faith crisis
- Other serious concerns of ministry.

It is the prerogative of the bishop to perform the marriage service of a Deacon. At the funeral service of a Deacon or his/her spouse, the bishop will normally be the designated presider, if available, and others may assist.

What do Archdeacons do?

The Bishop appoints Archdeacons (currently, two at a time) to assist in coordinating Deacons for the leadership of mission ministry within and beyond of the body of the church. These responsibilities include:

1. Acting as liaison between the bishop and Deacons
 - Meeting with the bishop as requested to discuss Deacons and/or the diaconate.
 - Facilitating ongoing communication between the diaconal community and the diocese.
 - Representing the bishop at the Service of Institution of Deacons in congregations when necessary.
2. Assisting the bishop in the formation and deployment of Deacons by:
 - Assessing the needs of the program, the diaconate, and the Deacons.
 - Assisting diaconal candidates in formation and preparation for ordination.
 - Overseeing continuing education for Deacons.
 - Sharing with the bishop in the deployment of Deacons.
 - Visiting Deacons in assignments planning for the diaconate (visionary).
3. Interacting with others on behalf of Deacons including with:
 - Other dioceses concerning the diaconate.
 - Congregations within the diocese and other potential ministries for diaconal assignment.
4. Conducting long-term pastoral care of the community of Deacons including:
 - Coordinating periodic gatherings of Deacons.
 - Visiting/checking in with Deacons periodically and making themselves available for consultation.
 - Conducting conflict interventions as needed.
 - Providing resources and funding for Deacons in need.
 - All pastoral interactions will be kept strictly in confidence.

Deacons in the Diocese of California serve under the direction of the Archdeacons, who act on behalf of, and in consultation with, the bishop. The term of the Archdeacon is decided upon by the Bishop.

What liturgical practices should Deacons follow in the Diocese of California?

The Deacon performs the full and proper liturgical functions of a Deacon at Sunday, Holy Day Liturgies, and at other liturgies such as baptisms, weddings, committals, and funerals at the appointment of the bishop, and by mutual agreement with the rector/ vicar.

The functions include proclaiming the Gospel, proclaiming/chanting the Exsultet at the Great Vigil of Easter, preparing the Table for Eucharist, assisting the priest during the Eucharistic prayer, coordinating the clearing of the Table after communion, and saying the Dismissal. Other duties may include bidding the Creed, the Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer, sending forth the Eucharistic Visitors, and other agreed upon functions appropriate to the Deacon. It is appropriate for a Deacon to lead in the writing of the Prayers of the People. Other guidelines:

- Preaching on a regular basis is encouraged.
- So-called "Deacons' masses" (also known as communion of the pre-consecrated) are expressly prohibited, unless the prior permission of the Bishop has been obtained (BCP p. 408).
- When serving with the bishop, Deacons often serve as the Bishop's Chaplain. It is the prerogative of the Bishop whether or not he/she/they wishes to carry the crosier or ask the Deacon to carry it.
- It is appropriate for a Deacon to approach the bishop for blessing before proclaiming the Gospel.
- Deacons should not undertake liturgical roles normally assigned to lay people (i.e. readers, intercessors, and eucharistic ministers) unless necessary.

Can Deacons officiate at a marriage?

A Deacon may, with the permission of the Bishop through the Archdeacons, officiate at a marriage, a same-sex blessing or a blessing of a civil marriage. Although not normative, it may be appropriate for pastoral reasons. Deacons should contact the Archdeacon to obtain permission (on behalf of the Bishop). If the marriage occurs in a different diocese, the Deacon should also obtain permission from the Bishop of that diocese. Further, Deacons should:

- Confirm documentation of any previous marriages and divorces. If the person has been divorced more than twice, all clergy must get special dispensation from the Bishop.
- Perform or confirm the performance at least three pre-marital preparation sessions.

- After the service enter the service in the official record of their home parish or the parish where the marriage occurred.

Can Deacons officiate at funerals?

A Deacon may preside at the Burial of the Dead when the services of a priest cannot be obtained or if there is a pastoral reason for it. The Eucharist should be omitted as well as the blessing of the people. Deacons do not bless or consecrate graves, but may say the prayers of committal.

How are Deacons assigned to a parish?

In a perfect world, two Deacons would be assigned to each parish in the diocese with placement in mission congregations getting particular support from Deacons.

In practice, the community of Deacons in the Diocese of California is limited. It is part of the work of congregations to identify and lift up Deacons for ordination out of the community. Deacons are assigned to congregations by the Archdeacons on behalf of, and in consultation with, the bishop. Consideration is given to geography, personal needs, community needs, and more. Assignments typically last three to five years but may be more extended as required and desired by all. Deacons are encouraged to change congregations periodically, not necessarily remaining at one congregation for their entire careers. It is also preferable for a Deacon's first assignment to be at a parish other than the one from which the Deacon was raised.

What is a Deacon's Contract in the Diocese of California?

A Deacon Contract (see appendix A) is executed at the time of assignment and outlines expectations for the Deacon in terms of scope and hours. The contract is negotiated by the rector/vicar, Sr. Warden, and the Deacon, and sent to the Bishop/Archdeacons for approval. A copy is retained in the Bishop's files and signed copies returned to the rector/vicar and Deacon. A Deacon should not assist a congregation without a current annual Covenant on file. Contracts should be reviewed annually and sent to the Bishop.

What does the diocese expect of Deacons in active service in the Diocese of California?

Each active Deacon is expected to submit, to the Bishop, via email or in a printed form, a report of all of their ministry and continuing education activities annually, by the anniversary date of their ordination.

In the event that an active Deacon is not assigned to a Congregation/Mission, that Deacon shall provide a report of ministry to the Bishop. These reports should clearly indicate the Deacon's activity in liturgical assistance, pastoral care and social ministry

involvement outside of congregation life. It should also indicate where the Deacon is worshipping regularly.

Deacons are expected to fulfill all training requirements expected of all involved in ministry within a parish, including (but not limited to): anti-racism training and Whole and Healthy Church training.

How does the Diocese of California actively and pastorally support its Deacons?

Deacons are encouraged to stay in contact with the community of Deacons within the diocese. The Archdeacons will organize and offer opportunities for gathering, training, and retreat throughout the year, including an annual Deacons retreat, a Christmas celebration, and regular chances to talk to other Deacons. Deacons will also receive regular communications and updates in the form of diocesan Clergy Connect newsletter and regular communication from the Archdeacons. In addition, Deacons should have a spiritual director and spiritual/clergy friends with whom they meet regularly for support and care.

Deacons are expected to participate in the ongoing life of the diocese as their work and personal schedules permit. These events include:

- Attendance and participation in the Diocesan Convention.
- Attendance in the ordination and reception of new Deacons and priests in the diocese.
- Participation in the Renewal of Vows when offered.
- Service on diocesan committees and commissions as requested.
- Attendance of the annual Clergy Retreat.

Further, Deacons are encouraged to reach out directly to the Bishop or the Archdeacons by phone or email with any questions or concerns.

Can a Deacon be asked to be supply clergy in a parish?

From time to time, a parish that has been unable to secure a supply priest may request a Deacon to act as supply clergy at a Sunday service. A Deacon may preach and officiate a service of the Daily Office or Liturgy of the Word without needing permission from the bishop. If a parish wishes to have a Deacon officiate a service of the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion from Reserved Sacrament, **this request must be made to the Archdeacons (on behalf of the Bishop)**. If Deacons supply outside of their regularly assigned parish, then the Deacon should be compensated according to the diocesan rate for supply clergy.

Are Deacons paid in the Diocese of California?

Deacons may be paid a stipend by the congregation, and should receive financial support in the form of funding for continuing education, reimbursement of reasonable expenses, and financial support to attend diocesan and parish events and retreats expected by virtue of their ministry. Further, the parish should support the Deacon by paying a small amount (\$25 per month) to the [Church Pension Group](#) so that the Deacon may be enrolled and take advantages of the benefits offered by that organization.

Congregations are encouraged to furnish other support as they are able in the form of:

- Funds for continuing education and spiritual retreats.
- A Deacons discretionary fund to be used for charitable expenses in the Deacons ministry on behalf of the church.
- Support for health insurance costs.
- Support for books, materials, and vestments.

CPG Resources* to Support Deacons



What title do Deacons use?

Forms of address vary according to preferences but some guidelines exist. Use of the term 'the Reverend' applies to all clergy (with variations for Deans, Canons, Bishops, Chaplains and Archdeacons) for use in written communications or in introductions. The correct title for Deacons is "The Rev.NN." or "The Rev. Deacon NN." Both are acceptable. Instead of 'the Reverend' the title 'the Venerable' is used for Archdeacons.

In speaking, Deacons may be addressed as Deacon [First Name] or Deacon [Last name].

When referencing the Order of Deacons, the Deacon is to be referred to as "Deacon" rather than "vocational" or "permanent Deacon." A Deacon in the process to ordination to the priesthood should be referred to as a "transitional Deacon." This should be the normal usage in all diocesan and parish documents.

What is the age of retirement for Deacons?

As with all ordained clergy, the nominal retirement age is 72. The year before retirement is reached, the Archdeacons and the Deacon should meet together to create a plan for retirement (with appropriate recognition and celebration of the Deacon's service) or for further service.

Upon reaching age 72, a Deacon shall write the Archdeacons (on behalf of the Bishop) offering resignation from all positions of active service in the church. At the bishop's discretion, the resignation may be accepted or service may continue. Such letters shall be tendered annually after age 72 (TEC Canon III.7.7). Deacons who continue to serve past the age of 72 agree to do so under the direction of the Archdeacons, who act on behalf of the bishop.

What does a Deacon do when the rector or priest in charge leaves the parish?

When a change of leadership in the parish occurs, the Deacon should consult with the Archdeacons. If appropriate and desired, the Deacon shall remain in service to the parish to act as a non-anxious presence to the parish or mission community during times of transitions. The Deacon does not participate in any decision directly related to the selection of candidates for rector/priest in-charge. A Deacon may advise in the development of parish profiles, especially as related to mission and outreach aspects of congregational life.

In terms of oversight, the Deacon will work with interim leadership directly (the Senior Warden or interim rector) in the absence of a rector or priest in charge. The Deacon shall serve as described in the letter of agreement established before the priest in charge's resignation or leaving. The Deacon and the interim priest in charge may

review and revise the Deacon's contract as necessary and subject to the provisions of this handbook.

Do Deacons pledge to the congregations they serve?

As for any Christian, the decision of how and where to pledge financially is a private and personal decision. There are a variety of criteria that Deacons may use in deciding where to give tithes and offerings. Some may choose to contribute to a particular congregation, the bishops fund or some other diocesan fund. They may also choose other charitable organizations that help the word—or some combination of all of these. It is entirely the choice of the individual.

Do Deacons have to do continuing education?

Formation for ministry is a lifelong process. Each Deacon should engage in an intentional program of continuing formation. This may take the form of attendance at a conference, a class, or other coursework offered by a school/seminary/extension program. The particular focus of ministry or area of personal growth may be the focus. Any Deacon who would like help in identifying resources or needs help with funding should contact the Archdeacons.

Appendix A: Deacons Contract

Covenant for Deacons

between

Marc Handley Andrus, Bishop of California,
NN, a deacon of the Diocese of California,
and *(Name of Parish/Mission)*

The Bishop has assigned NN as Deacon at NN Episcopal Church, a congregation of the Diocese of California, beginning on XX YY, 20ZZ, for a period to be set by the Bishop in consultation with the deacon and parish and reviewed semi-annually. Period of service will be determined with consideration to the practical needs of the parish, the pastoral consideration of the deacon, and the logistical concerns and broader well-being of the Diocese.

Preface: The ministry of the deacon has its origins in the life and ministry of Christ and in the history of the early Church. The deacon's ministry is given shape, meaning and purpose in the words of the Baptismal Covenant, especially the agreements to *seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself, strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being*. Diaconal ministry is made concrete and specific by the words of the ordination service for deacons:

God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely. As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known by your word and example, to those among whom you live and work and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.
(BCP p. 543)

Diaconal ministry is understood as one which takes on characteristics of both servanthood and leadership. While the deacon is bound by vow directly to the Bishop, the Deacon also carries out ministries in close collaboration with the Rector/Vicar and congregation, as well as outside the formal boundaries of the Church.

1. Authority

Deacons serve directly under the authority of the Bishop and are accountable to the Bishop. Their presence and ministry within congregations reflects and extends their role as agents of the Church, commissioned by the Bishop to make the word of God, the mystery and servanthood of Christ, known in many different ways and venues.

The Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons specifies the sources and functioning of authority for diaconal ministry:

“The Bishop, after consultation with the Deacon and the member of the clergy or other leader exercising oversight, may assign a Deacon to one or more congregations, a Deacon team, other communities of faith, or non-parochial ministries. Deacons assigned to a congregation or other community of faith act under the authority of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight in all matters concerning the congregation.” (National Canons Title III, Canon 7, Sec.4)

2. Ministries

The Deacon shall work with the Rector/Vicar and the members in the work of encouraging the ongoing renewal of the congregation, through worship, outreach, formation, pastoral care, and other programs.

The Deacon shall work with the people of the congregation in discerning gifts and developing ministries to those in need.

The Deacon shall cultivate in the congregation a sensitivity to the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

The Deacon’s proposed ministry *in this parish or mission* will be as follows (please be specific):

The Deacon’s proposed ministry in the world and supported by the congregation will be as follows (please be specific):

3. Separate and Equal Orders

The Rector/Vicar shall model that their orders are separate and equal to the congregation in the following ways (please be specific):

4. Liturgy

The deacon shall perform the full and proper liturgical functions of a deacon at Sunday, Holy Day Liturgies, and at other liturgies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals by mutual agreement with the Rector/Vicar. The functions shall include: Proclaiming the Gospel; Proclaiming the *Exultet* at the Great Vigil of Easter; Bidding the Creed, the Prayers of the People, and the Confession; Assisting at and preparing the Table at the Eucharist,; Sending Forth the Eucharistic Visitors; and Dismissing the People. It may include bidding the Lord's Prayer, and other agreed upon functions appropriate to the deacon. Preaching on a regular basis and providing for the Prayers of the People are both strongly encouraged. *Pursuant to the rubrics in the BCP, So-called "Mass of the Pre-concecrated" are expressly prohibited, unless the prior permission of the bishop has been obtained (BCP p. 408).*

5. Congregational Support

The congregation will support the Deacon in the following ways (please be specific):

6. Participation in Diocesan & Congregational Life

From time to time the Deacon may assist at liturgies elsewhere.

The Deacon is to participate, to the fullest extent possible, in diocesan convention, clergy retreat (as possible for the deacon's schedule), and other required meetings, in-gatherings for deacons, and in continuing education. Any costs for required meetings shall be borne by the congregation.

By agreement with the Rector/Vicar, the Deacon may serve on appropriate committees of the congregation.

All newly-ordained deacons are expected to participate in the Diocesan "Fresher Start" program.

7. Work & Leave

N is expected to be present *X* Sundays per month and *Y* hours per week.

The deacon will/will not receive a stipend or other remuneration.

The congregation shall reimburse travel expenses incurred in the Deacon's activities on behalf of the congregation, including automobile at the current IRS rate for business use (except for travel from home to church) and out-of-pocket costs for parking fees and tolls. The Deacon shall be responsible for maintaining a log of these miles/expenses and submitting them quarterly for reimbursement.

The congregation shall establish a discretionary fund for the Deacon, funded out of offerings for the poor, other special offerings, and direct donations, to be used for charitable purposes outside the congregation. This fund should be set up as a line-item in the congregation's existing budget. The Deacon shall make a regular report to the Vestry on the use of the fund, without disclosing the names of beneficiaries.

The congregation shall furnish other support for the Deacon at the discretion of the parish finance committee such as:

- 1) continuing education for clergy conference and other classes;
- 2) spiritual direction expenses;
- 3) support for spiritual retreats;
- 4) support for health insurance costs;
- 5) support for books, materials, and vestments.

The Deacon is eligible at minimum for the following periods of leave, if possible taken concurrently with leave from secular work (if any) or as necessitated by family circumstances:

- Four weeks vacation each year.
- Two weeks each year for continuing formation.
- Sick leave, as required.
- Sabbatical leave from all church duties, normally after each seven years of service, after application to the Archdeacon and with the consent of the Bishop. The typical length of such leave is six months. At the discretion of the parish finance committee, support may be provided for sabbatical educational or travel activities.
- Such other leave as is required to develop and maintain self-support outside the church.

8. Review

The Rector/Vicar in Charge and Deacon will meet together on a semi-annual basis to discuss ministry goals, achievements and problems. If it is deemed necessary or desired, the Archdeacon may be invited to this meeting.

Bishop: _____ Date: _____

Deacon: _____ Date: _____

Rector/Vicar: _____ Date: _____

Senior Warden: _____ Date: _____

*This Letter of Agreement format was
approved by Bishop Marc Handley Andrus
January 2021*