

## INTRODUCTION

The ordination vows of the Sacred Order of Deacons include "...assist the Bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments...." (BCP, page 543). Deacons engage in a wide range of ministries based on their individual diaconal call, specific gifts, and parish need, including outreach, pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and advancing the ministries of the laity. This document solely addresses the deacons' liturgical role.

Diaconal ministry is one of *preparation* and *proclamation*. Deacons are responsible for setting the altar, serving as ministers of the chalice, attending to ablutions after Holy Communion, proclaiming the Gospel, and dismissing the congregation. The Deacon always stands at the right of the celebrant.

Deacons are also responsible for coordinating the ministry of Lay Eucharistic Ministers (Canon III.3.5.c). Deacons assist all other orders of ministry (laity, bishops, and priests) in carrying out their own responsibilities. Therefore, the liturgical ministry of a deacon is a ministry of service, as are all the other aspects of diaconal ministry. When all orders are functioning in accordance with their proper order, the fullness and the cooperation of the ministry is realized by the Church.

The rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer are the definitive source for liturgical guidelines and this document, derived from those rubrics, is intended as a summary source. **Additionally, there may be directives which are specific to the Episcopal Diocese of New York (blue/bold font).**

While a deacon does not typically preside, or officiate at any liturgy because the ministry of presidency is the ministry of bishops and priests, there are occasions when a deacon may be called upon to do so. Those occasions are noted in each section of this document. **These rubrics should be understood as allowing deacons to lead services when, due to a genuine emergency, it is not possible to obtain the ministration of a priest.**

## THE DAILY OFFICE

When Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer takes the place of the celebration the Eucharist, note that the reading from the gospels, required by the rubrics, need not necessarily be read by a deacon. In this context, it may be read by a lay person, and all readers including clergy should remember that it is announced and concluded as a reading at Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer not as "The Holy Gospel", as proclaimed at the Eucharist.

If a priest is not present at the recitation of the Daily Office, a deacon (or lay person) replaces the absolution following the confession of sin with a prayer for corporate pardon by substituting "us" for "you" and "our" for "your".

In the Order of Worship for the Evening, the deacon, in the absence of a priest, is to read the Prayer for Light. The deacon will also dismiss the congregation.

## THE GREAT LITANY (BCP page 148-155)

A deacon may lead the litany and may chant it on solemn occasions.

## THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The deacon is always to read or chant the gospel and should, therefore, carry the gospel book (as able) in the procession before the liturgy and in the procession to the place from which the gospel is to be read.

Deacons may preach in any congregation in the diocese, when invited to do so by the priest of that congregation.

The deacon should always have a principal role in the Prayers of the People. Forms I, IV and V of the Prayers of the People in the Book of Common Prayer are preceded by rubrics which give the deacon priority over other leaders in offering these prayers. In the case of other forms of the Prayers of the People, the deacon may be asked to provide to the intercessor those names and concerns for which prayers are asked. The deacon may also compose and lead intercessions for the Eucharist.

The deacon should bid the Confession of Sin.

Deacons serve at the Lord's table, preparing and placing on it the offerings of bread and wine. In some parishes, it is customary to elevate the consecrated sacrament at the doxology to the Eucharistic prayer (By him, and with him, and in him...) and at the Invitation ("The Gifts of God for the People of God..."). Where this is the custom, the deacon, as minister of the chalice, elevates the chalice and the celebrant elevates the consecrated bread.

The deacon assists in administering Holy Communion. The minister of the consecrated bread is a bishop or a priest. If there are insufficient bishops or priests present, then deacons administer the consecrated bread. If there are insufficient deacons, then priests or licensed lay persons administer the chalice.

If Lay Eucharistic Ministers are taking Holy Communion to the sick, before the post-communion prayer, the deacon, using the form on Page 285 of the Book of Occasional Services, gives Lay Eucharistic Ministers the sacrament to take to the sick and the shut-in.

The deacon should assist with or coordinate the ablutions according to the custom of the parish.

The diaconal dismissal is an ancient tradition. The dismissal is always to be said or sung by the deacon. Alleluias are always added to the dismissal during Eastertide.

### **THE HOLY EUCHARIST - SPECIFIC TO RITE I**

The deacon may say the exhortation (BCP page 316). The deacon may say the Decalogue in the Penitential Order and should bid the Confession of Sin in the Penitential Order. The deacon may say the Summary of the Law and should offer the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church. The deacon should invite the Confession of Sin. The deacon may read one or more of the "comfortable words" (BCP Page 332). The deacon may lead the "Prayer of Humble Access" (BCP page 337).

### **BLESSINGS AND DISMISSALS (BCP Page 366)**

The deacon should be aware of the different options and requirements for concluding the liturgy in Rite I and in Rite II. In Rite I, the dismissal is optional, but the blessing is mandatory. In Rite II, the blessing is optional and the dismissal mandatory. Where deacons are present, the use of the dismissal is encouraged even when it is not absolutely required.

### **COMMUNION UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (BCP Page 396-399)**

This form is intended for use with those who for reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the Eucharist." The entire rite may be done by a deacon.

### **HOLY COMMUNION FROM RESERVED SACRAMENT IN THE ABSENCE OF A PRIEST (BCP page 408-409)**

In an emergency, to meet the liturgical needs of a congregation, a deacon may administer Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament following the rubrics.

**On such occasions, a deacon is to notify the bishop diocesan, or, failing that, any of the bishops in this diocese. In the event such notification is impossible, the deacon is to proceed using prudent judgment and notify a bishop following the liturgy.**

**The elements should be prepared for distribution at a Credence Table rather than upon the Altar.**

### **HOLY BAPTISM (BCP Pages 299-308)**

The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above. The deacon may lead the Prayers for the Candidates and carry the paschal candle to and from the font. A deacon may fill the font, pour the water over the candidate in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and present to the newly baptized a candle lighted from the paschal candle. A bishop or priest anoints the newly baptized with Chrism.

In an emergency, a deacon, or a lay person, may baptize using the form for emergency baptism (BCP pages 313-314). If the ministry of a bishop or a priest cannot be obtained, the bishop may authorize a deacon to preside at Holy Baptism in the case of a pastoral emergency. In such a case, the deacon omits the prayer for the candidates and the chrismation.

## PROPER LITURGIES FOR SPECIAL DAYS

### ASH WEDNESDAY (BCP 264-269)

The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above. A deacon may assist with the imposition of ashes and the recitation of Psalm 51 which is meant to accompany the imposition of ashes.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the whole Ash Wednesday liturgy (BCP pages 264-269) may be led by a deacon. In such a case, the deacon remains kneeling, as able, after the Litany of Penitence and says the prayer for pardon from Morning Prayer.

### PALM SUNDAY (BCP page 270-273)

The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above. At the beginning of the Palm Sunday liturgy, the deacon reads the triumphal entry gospel and bids the procession. The gospel for the day is the Passion of the Lord. Rubrics allow it to be read or sung by persons other than the deacon; however, the deacon might organize such a dramatic reading or chanting of the gospel, and may participate in it. It is particularly suitable for the deacon to be the narrator.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the Palm Sunday liturgy, (BCP pages 270- 272), may be led by a deacon.

### MAUNDY THURSDAY (BCP pages 274-275)

The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above. The deacon should assist with the foot-washing. It is recommended that the deacon deliver the homily on Maundy Thursday, addressing servant ministry.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the Maundy Thursday liturgy may not be celebrated. A deacon should lead, or cause to be led, a liturgy of the Daily Office.

### GOOD FRIDAY (BCP Pages 276-282)

The deacon may assist in the proclamation of the Passion as outlined above regarding Palm Sunday.

At the Solemn Collects, the deacon and the celebrant have a cooperative role. The deacon reads or sings the biddings which precede the prayers. The deacon also reads or sings the biddings which introduce each of the five categories of prayers asked of the congregation: The Church, the nations of the earth, the sick and suffering, the mission of the Church, and the dead. Following each bidding, the deacon should bid the congregation to kneel in silent prayer and then arise.

Following the concluding prayer(s) after these biddings, it is customary to bring a cross into the church to be placed in the sight of the congregation. The deacon may carry this cross.

The deacon prepares the altar for Communion from the Reserved Sacrament, bids the General Confession, and assists in administering Holy Communion.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the specific Good Friday liturgy may be led by a deacon.

### HOLY SATURDAY (BCP Page 283)

The deacon may read the conclusion of the Passion Gospel, and might lead the anthem "In the Midst of Life."

In the absence of a bishop or a priest, the Holy Saturday liturgy, as outlined on page 283, may be led by a deacon.

### THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER (BCP Pages 285-295)

The deacon always carries the Paschal Candle in the opening procession and says or sings the lumen christi. The deacon sings the Exsultet; if the deacon prefers not to sing, he or she could say it or could cense and circumambulate the Paschal Candle as another minister sings the Exsultet.

If Baptism is to be celebrated, the deacon takes the role outlined in the section on Baptism.

At the Easter Vigil Eucharist, the deacon should perform all those ministries outlined above in the section on the Holy Eucharist.

The deacon should note that the dismissal at Eastertide is followed by alleluias, not preceded by them. As these alleluias are an essential seasonal variation for Easter, the deacon should ensure that they are used throughout the Great Fifty Days of Easter.

In the absence of a bishop or priest, a deacon may lead the first two parts of the service, the Lighting of the Paschal Candle and the Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, and the Ministry of the Word of God from the Easter Eucharist, concluding with the Prayers of the People, the Lord's Prayer, and the Dismissal with Alleluias.

## **PASTORAL OFFICES**

### **CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION, REAFFIRMATION, COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN SERVICE (BCP Page 413-421)**

The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above. A deacon may be a presenter of candidates.

### **CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE (BCP pages 423-432)**

The deacon has a full and rich role in the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage. A deacon may deliver the charge and ask for the declaration of consent. A deacon may deliver the homily, remembering that servant ministry is always to be a deacon's homiletic theme. It is very appropriate for a deacon to lead the prayers for the couple. If a nuptial Eucharist is to be celebrated, the deacon should exercise the full diaconal ministry in that part of the liturgy, as outlined above.

While the rubrics state that "Where permitted by civil law, and when no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may function as celebrant, but does not pronounce a nuptial blessing", [in the Diocese of New York, a deacon must first receive permission from the Bishop prior to presiding at a marriage.](#)

### **THE BLESSING OF A CIVIL MARRIAGE (BCP pages 433-434)**

A deacon reads the gospel at the Ministry of the Word of God. It is appropriate for the deacon to lead the prayers for the couple. The deacon performs the normal diaconal functions outlined above if a Eucharist is to follow.

### **THANKSGIVING FOR A CHILD (BCP pages 439-445)**

A deacon may lead the psalm or canticle.

### **THE RECONCILIATION OF A PENITENT (BCP pages 447-452)**

The ministry of absolution is the ministry of the episcopate and the priesthood. In an extreme emergency, a deacon might hear a confession and offer a prayer for pardon such as the one which appears at the bottom of page 448 of the Book of Common Prayer.

### **MINISTRATION TO THE SICK (BCP pages 453-461)**

The deacon may lead the entire service, substituting the words "us" for "you" and "our" for "your".

A deacon may anoint the sick only in circumstances where a priest or bishop is not available. Only a priest or bishop may bless the oil. The deacon may administer Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament, using the form for Ministration to the Sick. A deacon concludes this rite not with a blessing, but with one of the dismissals.

### **MINISTRATION AT THE TIME OF DEATH (BCP pages 462-507)**

A deacon may lead this entire liturgy, which provides to the dying the "last rites" of the Church.

### *Vigil of the dead*

A deacon may lead this entire liturgy.

### *Reception of the body*

A deacon may lead this entire liturgy. If a deacon is assisting a priest, it would be suitable for the deacon to carry the paschal candle before the coffin as it is carried into the Church.

### *The Burial of the Dead*

The deacon may sing or say the opening anthems and may carry the paschal candle in the opening procession. If a Eucharist is to follow, a deacon should do the normal deacon's functions in that liturgy. A deacon may lead the psalm when it cannot be sung, and may preach the homily. Our diocesan document, Concerning Funerals, states "the homily is designed to comfort and instruct those present and to recall for them the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the faithful departed by virtue of their baptism. Eulogies are not appropriate, however, salient facts that witness to the power of God in the person's life may appropriately be mentioned in the course of the homily". If the Paschal Candle is carried out of the church ahead of the coffin, the deacon usually performs that ministry.

When the ministry of a priest or a bishop cannot be obtained, a deacon can preside at the entire liturgy, which is then adapted as follows: After the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer is said, other prayers are added, the Commendation follows (only if the corpse is present) and the Dismissal is added.

### *An Order for Burial*

Should celebration of the Eucharist accompany the burial, the deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above.