



## THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NEW YORK

### The Special Ministry of Deacons in the Episcopal Diocese of New York

During the service of ordination of a deacon, the Bishop addresses the ordinand or ordinands regarding the special ministry of deacons. The Bishop says:

*"My brother/sister, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. 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."*

*(The Book of Common Prayer, page 543.)*

A deacon is called to a ***special ministry of servanthood*** directly under his or her bishop. But what does that mean? And what does a deacon do?

All Christians are called to ministry, and often those ministries involve serving others. The Catechism echoes the Bishop's words at ordination and affirms that a deacon's *special ministry of servanthood* is "to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need..."

*(BCP, page 856.)*

In representing Christ and his Church in and to the world, a deacon is called to servant ministry in a particular way. Given the Bishop's words at ordination, it almost goes without saying that the deacon serves directly in one or more ministries with the hungry, the homeless, the sick, prisoners, the oppressed and victims of all kinds. Indeed, a deacon models such service to other Christians.

But the special ministry of deacons goes beyond the work of service in these essential ministries to the work of leadership to which the deacon also is called. The deacon is “to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.” In other words, in the name of the Church, and under the authority of the Bishop, the deacon is charged with the responsibility of leading others in the Church and in the world to a deeper understanding which

leads to action. The deacon interprets the needs that keep God’s world from being all God created it to be and God’s people from being fully the people we are meant to be. The deacon reminds us of the power of the hope that is in us. The deacon is called to help and lead others to discern and practice their own ministries of service responding to those needs in the Church and in the world.

Thus, diaconal ministry is primarily one of outreach. The ministry of deacons may involve important aspects of pastoral care, teaching or other ministries, but it does so as the deacon fulfills the primary ministry of serving the community and leading the community in service.

Another aspect of the deacon’s ministry is to interpret to the Church “the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world” through his or her role in the liturgy. The same deacon whose active ministry of service proclaims good news - through an after school program for homeless children, by advocating against the death penalty or offering nourishment through the work of a community food pantry - also literally proclaims the Good News as she or he reads the Gospel during the Eucharist. The deacon calls on all the people to remember and pray for the needs of their neighbors at home and around the world. He or she then prepares for and participates in the ministration of the sacrament. At the conclusion of worship, the deacon sends people assembled into the world to love and serve their brothers and sisters in Christ’s name.

Because of the deacon’s service in the world and leadership in service, the people come to recognize the connection between the deacon’s roles in the world and in the liturgy of the Church. The community sees the deacon’s servant ministry as joining the world to the Church and the Church to the world. From the relation between the deacon’s active outreach into the community and her or his symbolic actions in the liturgy, the people observe “that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.” (BCP, page 543.)

The deacon’s ministry reaches out into the world and reaches back again into the community of the Church to draw out other Christians to become involved in servant ministry. Those members of the laity who become the new leaders will make it possible for existing ministries to continue. The deacon then will be able to identify and develop new opportunities for involving others in service.

Thus, there are three aspects to the ministry of the deacon: service to the wider community, leadership of the laity in service and leadership in liturgy – all to the one end of making known the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who most need to be touched by the savior’s redeeming love.