

ABOUT THE DIACONATE

WHAT IS A DEACON?

A deacon is one of three distinct orders of ordained ministers (bishops, priests, deacons) in the Episcopal Church. Within the Anglican Communion, an individual becomes a deacon by being ordained by a bishop after having completed a course of study and formation. This is in contrast to other traditions that use the title for lay persons elected to responsible governing positions in their churches.

THE CHARGE TO A DEACON AT ORDINATION

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 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. *From The Book of Common Prayer, page 543*

WHAT IS THE MINISTRY OF A DEACON?

The word deacon derives from the Greek word *Diakonos* meaning servant or minister and the biblical concept of *Diakonia* is commonly defined as service, particularly to the poor, sick, and oppressed. The deacon's service is a sign or sacrament of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve. Jesus is the model for the servant leadership a deacon is called to exercise in a variety of ways, including encouraging and enabling others to serve. A deacon has "one foot in the world and one foot in the church." Although deacons also serve in specific roles in the liturgy, their liturgical roles are merely symbolic of their real ministry in the world.

HOW DO DEACONS IN THE DIOCESE OF ATLANTA SERVE?

Deacons in our diocese serve in a variety of ministries. Some of these include working with feeding programs, homeless shelters, transitional housing, hospital chaplaincies, hospice care, indigent health care, prison ministry, domestic violence programs, mental health programs, HIV/AIDS ministry, assistance to international student families, and missions in third-world countries.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRANSITIONAL AND A VOCATIONAL DEACON?

In accordance with the canons of the Episcopal Church, a person called, prepared and educated for the priesthood is first ordained a deacon and usually after a minimum of six months is ordained to the priesthood. These persons are referred to as transitional deacons. Those called, prepared and educated for the serving ministry of the vocational diaconate receive training that focuses on the servant nature of the diaconate. They are referred to and addressed as Deacon.