

Customary for Deacons

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Diocese of
Western Michigan
Robert R. Gepert
Bishop

VISION STATEMENT

A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ's servant ministry for all people. As agents of God's compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world's needs, hopes and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to these needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ's presence as they embody Christ's servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.

North American Association for the Diaconate

The Discernment of a Call to Diaconal Ministry

Through their ordination vows, deacons place themselves under orders to follow Jesus and to be obedient to the bishop, who gives them the mandate to encourage, support, and develop servant ministry in this diocese.

Three aspects of Call

This is a person who has the ability to articulate the proclamation of servant ministry that is present in the Gospel and who shows leadership skills and a willingness to lead others into servant ministry.

A deacon is also one who has the courage to be a prophetic voice to the Church concerning the needs of the powerless and voiceless in the community. She or he is a person who has the mental ability and competence for ordained ministry, and who understands that the diaconate is a *life long* discernment of the direction of his or her ministry. This process involves continuous prayer, openness to change, willingness to study, and the active quest for personal growth.

The diaconate is a distinct order and is not a stepping stone to the priesthood. Likewise, the diaconate is not to be seen as a reward for faithful service as a lay reader, chalice bearer, warden or member of the vestry. Nor is it to be seen as a reward for a pre-existing servant ministry. The individual aspiring to the Sacred Order of Deacons must clearly articulate and demonstrate that he or she is called to the order of ministry which is personified by servant ministry, diakonia.

Signs of Call

FIRST, a person identified with having a vocation to the diaconate would be recognized by him/herself and by the Church as meeting three fundamental requirements:

- 1) The exercise of a servant ministry in the world.
- 2) The desire and capacity to call the church to a life of service in the name of Christ and to

call the body of Christ to live out the servant ministry given at baptism.

- 3) The desire and capacity to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.

SECOND, a person with a discernable vocation evidences many, if not all, of the following qualities:

- 1) a strong commitment to and deep love for Jesus Christ and the Church;
- 2) an ability to articulate his or her faith;
- 3) a confirmed adult member in good standing with the understanding of his or her ministry as a baptized person;
- 4) a spiritual life marked by the holy habits of worship, prayer, the study of scripture, and tithing;
- 5) a vocation to serve and enable others to serve;
- 6) empathy for the powerless;
- 7) a history of satisfactory employment (if applicable) and interpersonal relationships;
- 8) a willingness to undertake extensive preparation, including theological education, spiritual formation and practice of ministry;
- 9) a clear understanding of the ministry of a deacon;
- 10) a willingness to serve God through the leadership of the diocesan Bishop.

THIRD, a person with a discernible vocation to the diaconate would be recognized both by her/himself and by the Church as being called to live the vision statement for diaconal ministry, noted at the beginning of this booklet. Deacons are often at work in risky places and at the margins, responding to the needs of the poor, the weak, the addicted, the sick, and the lonely, thus enabling them to discover the presence of God in their world. Deacons are called to engage the issues of justice, mercy, poverty, family and the environment. Increasingly, the role is one of opening doors of opportunity, encouraging others to take risks, and serving as agents of change.

The Life and Ministry of a Deacon

DEPLOYMENT

The Bishop, after consultation with the Deacon and the Member of the Clergy (hereafter known as presbyter) or other leader exercising oversight, may assign a Deacon to one or more congregations, other communities of faith or non-parochial ministries. (Title III, Canon 8.4- See Appendix B)
The bishop may re-assign a deacon, or the deacon may request re-assignment, at any time after the second year with a congregation. Normally a deacon would not serve more than seven successive years in a congregation. The gifts, talent and experience of a deacon will be considered in deployment decisions, as well as the ministry needs of the diocese.

The deacon shall have a written covenant agreement with the congregation signed by the deacon, presbyter, vestry and bishop. This agreement is renewed every two years, or with each new assignment. The contents of the agreement will follow the outline provided by the bishop's office. (See Appendix A)

CLOTHING

Clerical garb should be reserved for liturgical or pastoral occasions. If a deacon is in clerical collar, she/he will wear an insignia of the Order of Deacons (pin or pendant) to distinguish him/her from priests.

Vestments: Alb and stole should be worn only when the deacon is functioning as a deacon in the worship service. A dalmatic, if any, should be in keeping with the vestments worn by others. Cassock and surplice, or alb without stole, is appropriate for non-Eucharistic worship services. If a master of ceremonies is in charge of the service, his/her direction shall be followed.

rites of passage

A "Celebration of New Ministry" or other institution with the congregation is appropriate, during a regular worship service, upon a new assignment. Likewise, a leave-taking liturgy is appropriate when a deacon leaves the congregation for reassignment, retirement, or other reasons.

TERM OF STAY IN A CONGREGATION

When the presbyter resigns or otherwise leaves the cure, the deacon must contact the bishop immediately and offer his/her resignation. A three months sabbatical will be taken upon the departure of the presbyter. Options for continuing service will be discussed with the bishop, deacon, warden, and interim presbyter if there is one. When a new Presbyter is called, the deacon may or may not be reassigned to the congregation by the bishop.

ROLE IN THE PARISH

Leadership In accordance with National Canon 3, Section 3, Subsection c, in those congregations where there are Eucharistic Ministry (chalice bearers and Eucharistic Visitors) programs, these ministries would normally be under the direction of the Deacon of the congregation.

In the Diocese of Western Michigan, the sacramental rites of the church are appropriately administered by a priest. Therefore, Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, Confession and Unction are to be administered by the priest with the deacon assisting. Exceptions may be made in certain circumstances only with the permission of the Bishop. [For example: if a deacon is asked to officiate at a wedding or baptism, she/he must first notify the Bishop of this request *before* agreeing to the request.]

Liturgy

It is assumed that all clergy will be knowledgeable in and observant of the Canons of the Church. It is expected that the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer and the Canons will guide the liturgical functioning of the deacon. The presbyter will neither ask the deacon to function in ways prohibited by the BCP rubrics and Canons, nor deprive the deacon of those roles which are preferred to the order. In particular, when a supply priest is called to provide a service such as a Eucharist at a funeral, and a deacon has been pastor to the deceased and/or the family, it is especially appropriate for the deacon to participate in the service. (For more detail on the liturgical functioning of deacons and lay persons, see the rubrics of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church.)

When properly invited, the Deacon may preach, but with the understanding that the rector/vicar is the ordinary preacher of the parish. It is appropriate for the deacon to preach on Maundy Thursday and other feast days or occasions related to servant ministry.

Service

Deacons appropriately work with the outreach committee, and/or social justice ministries within the parish. The work of the deacon does not generally include other committees or commissions within a congregation.

DIOCESAN FUNCTIONS

It is expected that all persons planning diocesan functions and liturgical events will include deacons, and will provide for appropriate participation according to the order.

In particular, deacons will be informed about, and are expected to attend, the annual diocesan convention, and are encouraged to attend diocesan clergy conferences and deanery meetings. If a deacon is not employed full time, it is expected that he/she will attend the monthly Bible Study with the bishop. Deacons will have voice and vote in these meetings according to canon.

All deacons canonically resident or licensed in the diocese shall be included in all general diocesan mailings to the clergy.

THE COMMUNITY OF DEACONS & DEACON'S COUNCIL

All deacons canonically resident in the diocese (except those retired or living out of state) constitute a Community of Deacons, which will meet from time to time.[see: Title III, Canon 7.2 & 7.3] All are eligible for participation in the Council. The Deacon's Council should be comprised of 10% of the active deacons in the diocese and the Archdeacon(s). Representatives shall be chosen by the Community of Deacons from among them. The Council should speak for the deacons of the diocese. The Council will arrange for and hold an annual conference for deacons, and all active deacons are expected to attend that conference.

FINANCES

The deacon shall normally serve the congregation or ministry to which he/she is assigned for *a maximum* of eight to ten hours per week without stipend, or other compensation. It is expected that the deacon will be reimbursed by the parish or ministry for expenses related to his/her service, including reimbursement for mileage, expenses of attending diocesan convention and the annual deacons' conference; this matter should be specifically addressed in the deacon's agreement.

The congregation is encouraged to provide some funding for continuing education for the deacon (books, video rental, courses, etc.).

When a deacon undertakes a non-parochial assignment, reimbursement of expenses related to the deacon's service shall be discussed with the bishop and the supervisor and resolved before the assignment is effective.

RULE OF LIFE

It is expected that the deacon will maintain a disciplined prayer life, have and consult a trained spiritual director approved by the Bishop, and follow a regular program of study. A plan of continuing education should be prepared by the deacon annually, and implementation should be reported in the deacon's annual report. (See Appendix A)

- *Trained* spiritual directors are those individuals who have undergone a course of study to be a spiritual director, and they themselves are 'in direction.'

CONTINUING EDUCATION

All active deacons shall complete 8 (eight) hours of continuing education per year in addition to the Deacon's Conference. It is possible to combine these hours to 16 (sixteen) hours every two years. Topics chosen should either improve skills and vision for the deacon's current ministry or prepare the deacon for a new ministry of justice (ex. areas of racism, affordable housing, prison, etc.). It is important at the beginning of each year to know the general areas of study anticipated, but not the particulars of time or place. The details can be acknowledged in the final report.

Continuing education is to be completed in community, not in isolation. Suggested are weekend or one or two day classes or seminars sponsored by hospitals, civic organizations, and educational institutions (Oakerhater School), as well as religious organizations (houses of faith, denominational entities) at the state, national or international level.

RETIREMENT [Persuant to Title III Canon 7.7-See Appendix B]

A Deacon may retire from active service for reasons of age or infirmity with the consent of the Bishop at any time and shall retire for reasons of age or infirmity at the request of the Bishop. The Bishop

may, with the consent of the Deacon, assign a retired Deacon to any congregation, other community of faith or non-parochial ministry, for a period not to exceed twelve months, and this period may be renewed.

AGREEMENTS

Leave: The deacon should take the following periods of leave:

- One calendar month vacation each year, or 4 weeks.
- Three month sabbatical of rest for refreshment outside the present diaconal assignment every 5 to 7 years with the bishop's approval.

Leave of Absence: A leave of absence from ministry may be taken after a conversation with the Bishop and rector of the congregation. At that time the length of the leave will be determined, with appropriate check-in points.

Reports: The deacon shall provide a written annual report to the bishop. Deacons functioning in a congregation shall give a copy of the report to the presbyter of the parish. In addition to the required written report, the deacon and bishop should have periodic discussions. Those deacons on leave or otherwise not actively deployed shall write the bishop an annual letter describing their activities, spiritual life, connection with church, etc. Retired

deacons are not required to provide annual reports/letters.

If problems arise which affect the life of the congregation, and/or the ministry of presbyter or deacon, the deacon shall discuss them first with the presbyter who is his/her supervisor and follow his/her counsel and advice. In case of disagreement, the deacon, with the knowledge of the presbyter, shall inform the bishop in writing, with copy to the presbyter and the Archdeacon. The bishop shall accept the responsibility for resolution. The quality of supervision and the adequacy of inter-personal communication shall be considered in working towards resolution.

To the Presbyter: It is expected that the deacon, serving with your agreement, will be given responsibilities, liturgical and otherwise, appropriate to the order. The presbyter (or other supervisor) and appropriate members of the congregation will prepare an annual evaluation of the work of the deacon, and after reviewing and discussing it with him/her, send a copy to the bishop. The contents of the evaluation shall be considered when continuing education decisions are made.

Electronic copies of the Letter of Agreement are available from the Bishop's Office.

Appendix A

Letter of Agreement

Sample

for

Deacon _____

Date _____

The Rt. Rev. Robert R. Gepert, Bishop of the Diocese of Western Michigan, agree that the exercise of the diaconate by _____ shall be subject to the terms set forth in the Customary for the Diaconate in Western Michigan as reviewed by the Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee, and as amplified by the additional provisions of this Letter of Agreement.

I. Deployment

- a. The Bishop assigns the Reverend _____, Deacon, to serve in _____ Church, _____, Michigan, where he/she shall function as a part-time, non-stipendiary deacon. This assignment is to be reviewed annually by the Rector and Bishop, and a new agreement signed every two years.
- b. Deacon _____ shall serve with the Rev. _____, Rector of _____, (hereafter referred to as presbyter) who will act as immediate supervisor.

II. Ministry Guidelines

- a. All parties to this agreement understand that the Deacon's secular employment takes precedence

over community involvement and church activities.

- b. The deacon generally expects to serve the church a maximum of 10 hours per week, with an overall goal of a maximum of 30 hours per month.
- c. The deacon should receive financial assistance for the cost of Continuing Education, the Annual Deacon's Conference, the annual Diocesan Convention, and travel required for fulfillment of diaconal responsibilities.
- d. The deacon should have access to a Discretionary Fund, established by the Parish for such purposes.

III. The Deacon shall serve in the world as follows:

- a. Encourage the Church's participation in all opportunities for ministry in the world, especially in this country.
- b. Make Christ and his redemptive love known, by word and example to the people of the world through:

IV. The Deacon shall serve the congregation through pastoral ministry, particularly to:

V. The Deacon shall serve liturgically as follows:

- a. Perform the full and proper liturgical role of a deacon at Eucharist on Sunday, and at the liturgies of Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and other

congregational worship services as requested by the Rector.

- b. Assist at other liturgies, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and in the inter-parochial or diocesan liturgies when called upon to do so by the Rector or the Bishop.
- c. Compose and preach liturgical homilies [___ times per year], with the understanding that the presbyter is the ordinary preacher of the parish. In services of Morning or Evening Prayer and Compline conducted by the deacon, the deacon is the ordinary preacher. It is particularly appropriate for the deacon to preach on Maundy Thursday and other occasions where the gospel readings focus on the ministry of service.

VI. The Deacon shall take the following periods of leave:

- a. One calendar month vacation each year, or 4 weeks.
- b. _____ days/weeks for development of diaconal ministry.
- c. Sick leave and personal days as required.
- d. Such other leave as is required to develop and maintain self-support outside the Church, with adequate advance notice.
- e. Three month sabbatical of rest and refreshment, outside the present diaconal assignment, every 5 to 7 years with the Bishop's approval.

VII. Conflict resolution

- a. If problems arise which affect the welfare and unity of the parish, the deacon shall

consult with the presbyter and shall follow his/her counsel and advice. In case of a disagreement, the deacon, with the knowledge of the presbyter, shall inform the bishop in writing, with copy to the presbyter and the Archdeacon. The bishop shall accept the responsibility for resolution. The quality of the priest's supervision and the adequacy of interpersonal communication shall be considered in working towards resolution.

- b. If problems arise concerning the Deacon's role or work, the Presbyter will consult with the Deacon and work together for resolution. In case of disagreement, the Presbyter with the knowledge of the Deacon, shall inform the Bishop in writing, with a copy to the Deacon. The Bishop shall accept responsibility for the resolution.

VIII. Annual Report

The Deacon shall submit to the Bishop an annual report of all ministry and continuing education performed in the previous year with a copy to the supervising priest, who shall provide an evaluation of the Deacon's contributions to the life of the congregation. The major emphasis of this report shall not be liturgical, but shall be the development of lay ministries in the world under the leadership of the Deacon.

IX. This agreement terminates:

- a. at the discretion of the Bishop and/or

presbyter.

- b. If and when the Deacon moves to another community, which would require over 45 mile drive in one direction on a regular basis to perform assigned duties.
 - c. When the supervising presbyter resigns from the parish.
 - d. After _____ years; after evaluation, then may be renewed after any necessary changes.
 - e. If Deacon is reassigned to a new parish. A new agreement should be in place after ninety (90) days.
 - f. At age 72, following the guidelines of the Customary for Deacons.
- X. In order for the Deacon to function at this parish, the written consent of the Presbyter is required to this Agreement.

Date: _____ Deacon: _____
Archdeacon: _____
Bishop: _____

On behalf of _____ Church
_____, Michigan

Senior Warden

I consent to the above agreement.

Presbyter

Appendix B

Title III-National Canons

CANON 6: Of the Ordination of Deacons

Sec. 1. Selection

The Bishop, in consultation with the Commission, shall establish procedures to identify and select persons with evident gifts and fitness for ordination to the Diaconate.

(a) Nomination. A confirmed adult communicant in good standing, may be nominated for ordination to the diaconate by the person's congregation or other community of faith. The Nomination shall be in writing, and shall include:

- (1) Full name and date of birth.
- (2) The length of time resident in the Diocese.
- (3) Evidence of Baptism and Confirmation.
- (4) Whether an application has been made previously for Postulancy or the person has been nominated in any diocese.
- (5) A description of the process of discernment by which the applicant has been identified for ordination to the Diaconate.
- (6) The level of education attained and, if any, the degrees earned and areas of specialization.
- (7) A letter of support by the applicant's discernment community, including a statement committing the discernment community to involve itself in the applicant's preparation for ordination to the Diaconate. If it be a congregation, the letter shall be signed by a two-thirds majority of the Vestry or comparable body, and the Member of the Clergy or leader exercising oversight.
- (8) An acceptance in writing by the nominated person.

The nomination shall be submitted to the Bishop, who may admit the person as a Postulant for ordination to the Diaconate.

(b) Admission to Postulancy. Admission is the time between nomination and candidacy and includes a process of exploration of and decision on the Postulant's call to the Diaconate.

- (1) There shall be a thorough investigation of the Postulant which shall include:
 - (i) a background check, and

(ii) medical and complete psychological evaluation by professionals approved by the Bishop, using forms prepared for the purpose by The Church Pension Fund, and if desired or necessary, psychiatric referral.

(iii) Reports of all investigations and examinations shall be kept on file by the Bishop.

(2) The Bishop, or the Bishop's designee, may interview the Postulant. The Commission or a designated committee shall interview the Postulant, and the Commission or designated committee shall submit a recommendation to the Bishop.

(3) The Bishop may then admit the Postulant as a Candidate, informing the Candidate and the Member of the Clergy or other leader of the Candidate's discernment community in writing.

Sec. 2. Candidacy

(a) Candidacy is a time, no less than one year in length, of formation in preparation for ordination to the Diaconate, established by a formal commitment by the Candidate, the Bishop, the Commission, and the congregation or other community of faith.

(b) The Bishop may assign the Candidate to any congregation of the diocese or other community of faith after consultation with the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight.

(c) At the Bishop's sole discretion, any Candidate may be removed from the list of Candidates, with written notice of the removal being given to the Candidate and the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the nominating congregation or other community of faith and the Commission.

Sec. 3. Preparation for Ordination

(a) The Bishop, in consultation with the Commission, shall determine the length of time and extent of formation needed to prepare each Candidate for ordination.

(b) Before ordination each Candidate shall be prepared in and demonstrate basic competence in five general areas:

- (1) Academic studies including, The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church.
- (2) Diakonia and the diaconate.
- (3) Human awareness and understanding.
- (4) Spiritual development and discipline.
- (5) Practical training and experience.

(c) The formation process shall include sexual misconduct prevention training, training regarding Title IV of these Canons, and anti-racism training.

(d) Formation shall reflect the local culture and each Candidate's background, age, occupation, and ministry. Prior education and learning from life experience may be considered as part of the formation required for ordination.

(e) Wherever possible, formation shall take place in community, including persons in preparation for the diaconate, or others preparing for ministry.

(f) Each Candidate shall communicate with the Bishop in person or by letter, four times a year, in the Ember Weeks, reflecting on the Candidate's academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development.

(g) During Candidacy each Candidate's progress shall be evaluated from time to time, and there shall be a written report of the evaluation by those authorized by the Commission to be in charge of the evaluation program. Upon certification by those in charge of the Candidate's program of preparation that the Candidate has successfully completed preparation and is ready for ordination, a final written assessment of readiness for ordination to the Diaconate shall be prepared as determined by the Bishop in consultation with the Commission. This report shall include a recommendation from the Commission regarding the readiness of the Candidate for ordination. Records shall be kept of all evaluations, assessments, and the recommendation, and shall be made available to the Standing Committee.

(h) If the medical examination, psychological examination, or background check have taken place more than 36 months prior to ordination, they must be updated.

(i) Before ordination each Candidate must have reached the age of twenty-four, and made application for ordination.

(j) Upon certification in writing by the Standing Committee that all canonical requirements have been met and that there is no sufficient

objection on medical, psychological, moral, doctrinal, or spiritual grounds and that they recommend ordination, the Bishop may ordain the Candidate a Deacon.

CANON 7: Of the Life and Work of Deacons

Sec. 1. Deacons serve directly under the authority of and are accountable to the Bishop.

Sec. 2. Deacons canonically resident in each Diocese constitute a Community of Deacons, which shall meet from time to time. The Bishop may appoint one or more of such Deacons as Archdeacon(s) to assist the Bishop in the formation, deployment, supervision, and support of the Deacons or those in preparation to be Deacons, and in the implementation of this canon.

Sec. 3. The Bishop may establish a Council on Deacons ("Council") to oversee, study, and promote the Diaconate.

Sec. 4. 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, 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.

(a) Deacons may have a letter of agreement, subject to the Bishop's approval, setting forth mutual responsibilities in the assignment.

(b) Deacons shall report annually to the Bishop or the Bishop's designee on their life and work.

(c) Deacons may serve as administrators of congregations or other communities of faith, but no Deacon shall be in charge of a congregation or other community of faith.

(d) Deacons may accept chaplaincies in any hospital, prison, or other institution.

Sec. 5 . The Bishop and Commission shall require and provide for the continuing education of Deacons and keep a record of such education.

Sec. 6. (a) A Deacon may not serve as Deacon for more than two months in any Diocese other than the Diocese in which the Deacon is canonically resident unless the Bishop of the other Diocese shall have granted a license to the Deacon to serve in that Diocese.

(b)

(1) A Deacon desiring to become canonically resident within a Diocese shall request a testimonial from the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese in which the Deacon is canonically resident to present to the receiving Diocese, which testimonial, if granted, shall be given by the Ecclesiastical Authority to the applicant, and a duplicate thereof may be sent to the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese to which transfer is proposed. The testimonial shall be in the following words:

I hereby certify that A.B., who has signified to me the desire to be transferred to the Ecclesiastical Authority of _____, is a Deacon of _____ in good standing, and has not, so far as I know or believe, been justly liable to evil report for error in religion or for viciousness of life, for the last three years.

(Date) _____ **(Signed)** _____

(2) Such testimonial shall be called Letters Dimissory. If the Ecclesiastical Authority accepts the Letters Dimissory, the canonical residence of the Deacon so transferred shall date from the acceptance of the Letters Dimissory, of which prompt notice shall be given both to the applicant and to the Ecclesiastical Authority from which it came.

(3) Letters Dimissory not presented within six months from the date of transmission to the applicant shall become void.

(4) A statement of the record of payments to The Church Pension Fund by or on behalf of the Deacon concerned shall accompany Letters Dimissory.

Sec. 7. A Deacon may retire from active service for reasons of age or infirmity with the consent of the Bishop at any time and shall retire for reasons of age or infirmity at the request of the Bishop. The Bishop may, with the consent of the Deacon, assign a retired Deacon to any congregation, other community of faith or non-parochial ministry, for a period not to exceed twelve months, and this period may be renewed.