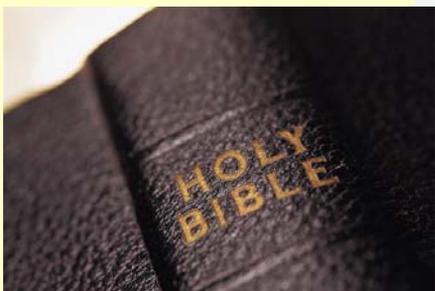


Study Guide on the Ministry of the Vocational Deacon



Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

The Rt. Rev. Jane Alexander, Bishop

10035 – 103 Street, Edmonton AB T5J 0X5

churched@edmonton.anglican.ca

780-439-7344

To the Parish Discernment Committee

Greetings from the Examining Chaplains.

We want to thank you for being willing to take on the important ministry of helping someone to discern their calling as a vocational deacon. This pamphlet is designed to help inquirers to articulate whether or not they have a calling to the vocational diaconate.

All baptized Christians are called to reach out to those in need, serving Christ in all persons, proclaiming by word and example the good news of God in Christ and striving for justice and peace among all people.

These are the promises we renew in the baptismal covenant.

Vocational Deacons are also deeply aware of their baptismal calling, but they have a special role of leadership. The deacon serves as a visible reminder of servant ministry of all the faithful. They connect the needs of the world to the church and the ministry of the church to the world.

They have a foot in the sacred and the secular.

This servant ministry is lived out in specific ways, which may be quite wide ranging. Some examples of diaconal ministries may be offering loving service to the world, advocating on behalf of disadvantaged people, dealing with environmental issues, being an agent of peace and reconciliation where there is hurt and anger, or proclaiming the good news to a specific sector of society. The Deacon does not do this work on behalf of the church, but seeks to bring the church alongside so that all Christians live in obedience to God's call for right relationships.

This study is broken into four different parts. It is designed so that the discernment committee and the inquirer work through this together. It is meant to be a springboard for the inquirer to talk of his or her understanding of call and of their particular ministry. Each part should take around 30-45 minutes and so the study could be done in two sessions. It may be adapted to your particular needs.

At the end of the study the parish discernment committee will want to add further questions to the inquirer. The committee will need to write a report based on this study **and** their knowledge of the person in the

parish and in the community. The question is “Do you discern the vocational diaconate in this person?” The report should describe the inquirer’s current ministry in the parish and the community and an assessment of their leadership abilities and suitability for this role. The discernment committee needs to be frank about any limitations that they see and recommendations for further discernment and/or education.

This is an important vocation, and we appreciate your help in discerning it in our midst.

God bless,

The Examining Chaplains

Part One: Calling and Servant Ministry in the Bible

To prepare for this section please read Jeremiah 1:4-9 and John 13:1-15. The questions in this section should help to start a discussion for everyone involved. This should not just be about the inquirer answering the questions, but the entire group reflecting together about the nature of call and servant ministry.

Jeremiah 1:4-9

1. In this passage it says that the “word of the Lord” came to Jeremiah. How have you experienced God’s word being revealed to you?
2. How is it significant that god knew, consecrated, and appointed Jeremiah before he was born? Do you believe this is true of yourself?
3. Jeremiah is concerned about his youthfulness and lack of experience. What apprehensions do you have concerning this possible calling?
4. In this passage, God assures Jeremiah to have no fear of people. What concerns do you have about the response of people to prophetic diaconal ministry?
5. As God assures Jeremiah, he puts out his hand and touches him. In the ordination of a deacon the bishop lays hands upon the person and asks God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you are ordained a Deacon, what role do you anticipate the Holy Spirit will have in your life?

John 13:1-15

1. In this passage, the son of God humbles himself by washing the feet of his friends: Jesus even humbles himself to Judas who will betray him. In our current culture, and in the work to which you feel called, what is the equivalent of foot washing.
2. When Jesus washes his disciples' feet he does more than wipe away physical dirt. How would the disciples be changed by this experience?
3. The vocational deacon vows to be faithful in prayer and in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures. It is from spending time with God and receiving his grace that our character is transformed. What would you say about your own time that you spend with God?

Part Two: Diaconate Ministry and Leadership

For this section read Acts 6:1-7:1 and Acts 7:51-60. During this section reflect on the diaconate as it was first instituted and its relationship with servant ministry. As well reflect on the nature of being set apart in leadership and the ability to speak the Gospel. Again this should be a discussion of the entire group, although it does have a focus on the inquirer's own thoughts and journey.

Acts 6:1-7:1, 7:51-60

1. The neglect of the Hellenist widows would today be termed as discrimination. In what ways has discrimination affected you and what has been God's response?
2. What do you think of the disciples' response to the report of unfair distribution?

3. The people called to be the first deacons were of good standing, full of the Spirit, and wise. What gifts do you bring to this ministry?
4. The deacons were called to do the work of apostles. This is a position of honour yet to “wait upon tables” is a position of humility. How has God called you to both honour and humility?
5. The disciples laid hand on seven deacons. How is Stephen distinguished as a leader in the church? How is the diaconal role one of leadership within the church?
6. Stephen showed a great deal of courage in speaking out. Do you have trouble speaking out? What are your fears?

Part Three: Diaconal Ministry in the Ordinal of the Book of Alternative Services.

Read the Book of Alternative Service pages 652-658 with special attention to the Examination and Prayer of Consecration on pages 655-657.

The deacon is one of four orders of ministry with the Anglican Church. The other three are the laity, the bishops and the priests. Historically, the deacons had a very close relationship to the bishops, often being the ones charged with the church’s ministry to the poor and sick. The ordinal is the liturgical form used to ordain the deacon, and it contains the church’s understanding of what a deacon is. The goal is to be able to articulate the role of the deacon and why the inquirer feels called to this particular role.

1. According to the ordinal, what are the main functions of a deacon?

2. Why do you think that service is such an important aspect of ministry?
3. If every Christian is called to this ministry, why is the deacon set apart “to a special ministry of servanthood?”
4. What do you think it means to say that the deacon is supposed to interpret to the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world? How would you do this?
5. What is the relationship between the ministry of the deacon and the ministry of Jesus Christ?
6. The call to the diaconate is a call to “make Christ and his redemptive love known.” Do you feel called to spread the good news of Christ? How have you done this in your life so far?
7. The deacon is called to interpret to the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. What concerns of the world need to be brought to the church’s attention today? What do you believe the church can do?
8. The deacon promises to be loyal to the structures of the church and obedient to the Bishop and other ministers. What challenges might this present for you?
9. Of all the promises the deacon makes, which will be the most challenging for you?

Part Four: Further Questions on Ministry

It is anticipated that deacons will have very specific outreach ministries, and that they will have the participation and support of the parish in these ministries. In some cases the ministry may be more diocesan wide. Here follows some questions on what ministry will look like. Feel free to supplement this section with further questions arising from your particular situation.

1. What is your ministry in the church and the wider community?
2. What difference will ordination make for this ministry?
3. What difference will ordination make to the parish?
4. What education or training will you need to do the ministry of a deacon?
5. How will this training continue?
6. How does your family feel about this call?