

A Customary for the Order of Deacons in The Episcopal Church in Minnesota

I. Purpose

This Customary is written to clarify the role of deacons as ordained ministers in service to the church and the world, and to communicate the ways in which deacons will function and be supported in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (hereafter ECMN). It is intended to serve as guidance for Deacons in ECMN and all who work with them, including lay leaders, priests, vestries, and total or shared ministry teams. This Customary is presented with the approval of Bishop Craig Loya, tenth Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, and is guided by Title III Canons 6 and 7 of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, the liturgy for the Ordination of Deacons in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the Canons of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, and the vision statement of the Association for Episcopal Deacons.

II. Deacons and the Rector/Priest-in-Charge

Deacons assigned to serve a faith community or other organization act under the supervision of the local canonical authority—the Bishop—and the Rector/Priest-in-Charge or other leader exercising authority of the faith community or organization (BCP p. 538). That relationship is of primary importance to the success of the deacon's assignment, and to every aspect of the deacon's ministry. Each works as a cooperative ministry partner with the other, and both understand the relevance of role distinction. Good communication cannot be emphasized enough. It is expected that the priest/deacon team will meet regularly for prayer, mutual review of the deacon's ministry, and planning. (Title III.7)

III. Archdeacons

Archdeacons are deacons appointed and commissioned by the Bishop to support the community of deacons in their life and work, helping to extend the reach of the Bishop in the nurture and care of deacons. They are to be a pastoral support for the deacons as events transpire in their daily lives and to assist deacons with discernment of their call to ministry at those times when the need for fresh perspective is perceived. In addition, the archdeacons are responsible for promoting the diaconate throughout the diocese, encouraging individuals who express a sense of call to diaconal ministry, supporting those in formation, and assisting the Bishop in developing and delivering programs to support and strengthen the community of deacons in ECMN. Archdeacons advise the bishop on all such matters and assist with deacon placement and transitions. On occasion, Archdeacons travel with the Bishop on his visits to faith communities when the faith community does not have a deacon assigned to it, for the purpose of representing and educating about the order of deacons. Archdeacons are to collaborate closely with the Commission for the Diaconate or Council of Deacons, when it is the prerogative of the Bishop form and support such a group.

IV. Deacons in the Liturgy

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) rubrics, the Canons (specifically Canon III.7), and the Bishop's

expectations guide the liturgical functions of deacons. Local customs, consistent with the rubrics, also act as a guide. If a deacon is participating in the worship service, none of the expressly stated liturgical responsibilities of a deacon in the Book of Common Prayer should be exercised by priests, members of the laity, or non-ordained interns. In the absence of a deacon, all diaconal liturgical responsibilities belong to the priest (BCP p. 322). Transitional deacons are expected to function fully as deacons in the liturgy. Deacon interns should be encouraged to perform many of the roles in the liturgy reserved for lay leaders in order to gain broad experience, but they may not perform any of the following.

Specific references to the Book of Common Prayer and other resources are listed below, in the addendums, and specific instructions for permission from the Bishop.

Liturgies with Holy Eucharist

Deacons:

- Proclaim the Gospel (BCP p. 354)
- Bid the Confession (BCP p. 360) or Exhortation (BCP p. 316)
- Serve at the Lord's table by preparing the table, receiving the gifts of bread and wine, preparing the gifts, and clearing the table (BCP pp. 322, 354, & 407)
- Dismiss the people into world (BCP p. 366)
- Bid the Prayers of the People (BCP pp. 322, 328, & 354)
 - Additional information found in Prayers of the People Addendum A

Deacons may also:

- Receive the gifts (bread and wine) and offerings from the laity (BCP p. 361)
- Administer the Bread and the Wine (BCP pp. 322, 354, & 408)
- Preach or give the homily (working with their priests/vicars/supervisors/teams, deacons shall develop a schedule for preaching on a regular basis during the liturgical year, ideally, a minimum of four times a year.)

Additionally, the Deacon may:

- Ensure that everything is set for the liturgies by working with the priest and altar guild. This may include setting the lectionary, gospel, and altar book, and ensuring sufficient bread and wine is available for consecration.
- Carry the Gospel book during processions
- Lead the Nicene Creed
- Elevate the cup at the Great Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer and Celebrant's invitation for all to participate in communion
 - Additional information found in Elevate the Cup Addendum B
- Ensure children or adults who do not partake of communion receive an indication of God's love with a sign of the cross and offer a blessing by asking for God's blessing (not themselves acting to bless directly, as a priest does)
- Administer the sacraments to those unable to come to the altar for communion
- Refill patens and chalices
- Prepare Eucharistic Visitors' communion kits and send forth Eucharistic Visitors from the altar

- Additional information found in Eucharist Visitors Addendum C

Special Circumstances

- When priests are unavailable, deacons may conduct a daily prayer service instead.
- Only with prior approval of the bishop may deacons officiate at the Liturgy of the Word and distribute the Holy Eucharist using reserved sacraments (BCP p. 408)
 - See Eucharist under Special Circumstances (BCP p. 396) Addendum E
 - See additional instructions in Bishop's Permission Addendum D

Daily Offices

Deacons may:

- Officiate at Morning Prayer, Noon Day, An Order of Worship for the Evening, Evening Prayer, and Compline
- Read the Prayer for Light when presiding the service for An Order of Worship for the Evening (BCP p. 108)
- Dismiss the congregation at the conclusion of An Order of Worship for the Evening (BCP p. 108)

Proper Liturgies for Special Days

Ash Wednesday (BCP p. 264)

Deacons may:

- Pray the Invitation (BCP p. 269)
- Assist in the imposition of ashes (BCP p. 269)

Palm Sunday (BCP p. 270)

Deacons:

- Read the Gospel in the Liturgy of the Palms (BCP p. 270)
- Bid the people to procession (BCP p. 271)

Maundy Thursday

- Deacons may participate in the washing of feet according to the local custom of the parish

Good Friday (BCP p. 276)

Deacons:

- Read the biddings included in the Solemn Collects (BCP p. 277)

The Great Vigil of Easter (BCP p. 285)

Deacons have the prerogative to:

- Carry the paschal candle in procession to its place (BCP p. 284)
- Chant or say the Exsultet (BCP p. 284) or ask someone else to do it

Holy Baptism (BCP p. 299)

Deacons may:

- Read the Prayers for the Candidates (BCP pp. 305-306)
- Assist the celebrant by pouring the water into the font, holding towels, oil stock, or Prayer Book, lighting candles from the paschal candle, as is the custom of the parish

- Present to the newly baptized a baptismal candle saying, “. . . receive the light of Christ and carry it forth into the world”
- In an emergency, deacons may baptize (BCP pp. 313-314)
- See additional instructions in Bishop’s Permission Addendum D

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

Deacons may:

- Deliver the charge (BCP p. 424)
- Request the Declaration of Consent (BCP p. 424)
- See additional instructions in Bishop’s Permission Addendum D

Ministration to the Sick (BCP p. 453)

Deacons may:

- Lead Part I Ministry of the Word (BCP p. 453)
- Anoint the sick only in circumstances where a priest or bishop is not available (BCP p. 456)
- Administer Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament beginning with the peace and the Lord’s Prayer (BCP pp. 457 & 396)
- Conclude this rite with one of the dismissals

Ministration at the Time of Death (BCP p. 462)

Deacons may:

- Lead this ministration

The Burial of the Dead

Deacons may:

- Officiate at the service (BCP pp. 468 & 490)
- Officiate committal liturgy (BCP p. 501)

Additionally, Deacons may:

- Sing or say the opening anthem
- Carry the paschal candle in the opening procession
- Carry the paschal candle out of the church ahead of the coffin

V. Responsibilities of Deacons

1. Deacons and transitional deacons are expected to attend diocesan events such as Annual Convention, Mission Area Gatherings, the Annual Renewal of Vows during Easter Week, the Annual Clergy Retreat, any gatherings of the Community of Deacons, and other opportunities to engage with others in the life of the church.
2. All active Deacons in ECMN will send a report on their life and work as a Deacon to the Bishop by the First Sunday of Advent each year.
3. Active Deacons are expected to participate in Spiritual Direction, in person or virtually, on a regular basis; quarterly at a minimum.

4. Deacons are eligible for appointment or election to clergy positions on all boards, committees, and commissions of the Church and are encouraged to accept opportunities to serve when they arise, both within the diocese and within The Episcopal Church.
5. Deacons may not enter into the governance of a faith community by serving on the Vestry. Deacons may serve on working committees, where appropriate to their ministry.
6. Deacons represent the Church, not a particular congregation, when serving in the community, whether through public policy advocacy, at protests, vigils, or within community organizations (BCP p. 543).
7. Deacons will provide a written account of ministry efforts and outcomes for the rector, the vestry, and the congregation at the Annual Business Meeting of the faith community they serve.

VI. Deacons and the Faith Community

1. Every Deacon who is assigned to a faith community will have a written agreement, called a diaconal covenant, that is signed by the Bishop, Archdeacon, Rector/Priest-in-Charge (or other appropriate canonical authority), Senior Warden, and Deacon. The agreement will specify the time commitment of the Deacon's service to the community, the specific duties of the Deacon, and confirm the faith community's financial support of the Deacon.
2. The Faith Community is expected to pay registration fees, travel, and housing expenses for diocesan functions where attendance is required. This and any other expenses that the church agrees to pay shall be covered in the Letter of Agreement. The congregation should also provide funding for continuing education for the deacon (books, courses, etc.).
3. In the absence of a Rector/Priest-in-Charge, the Wardens of the faith community are responsible for finding supply priests for all liturgical events where the services of a priest are required.
4. Family members are discouraged from serving on the vestry of a faith community where a Deacon is serving but may do so with the understanding of the Bishop. In such circumstances, the deacon and family member should consider the potential for conflict of interest when making decisions that may have an effect on the Deacon's ministry.
5. A deacon may be in charge of training and oversight of Lay Eucharistic Visitors. Deacons may also coordinate, with the Rector/Priest-in-Charge, pastoral visits to the sick and shut-in persons of the faith community.
6. Consistent with the practices of the faith community, deacons may also have access to a discretionary fund so they may receive and distribute funds in connection with their specific ministries. A specific line item should be in the congregation's budget for these purposes. Ownership of discretionary accounts remains with the parish to which the deacon is attached (Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs, Chapter 5, Section C).
7. The rector may invite the deacon to attend vestry meetings, and be given seat and voice but no vote.
8. During times of clergy transition, a Deacon may be consulted on certain aspects concerning diaconal responsibilities for the church profile (e.g., pastoral care, outreach, and community ministries). However, a Deacon may not serve on the committee, be involved in the search process itself, or ever express any opinion regarding the candidates.

VII. Deacons and Financial Matters

1. Normatively, Deacons are not paid for their clerical duties. However, payment for administrative duties or other non-clerical staff duties is permitted with permission from the Bishop. Deacons may accept remuneration for services such as officiating at weddings or funerals with the understanding that such payment is considered income for tax purposes. The payment is a subject of ongoing conversation within the Episcopal Church.
2. The deacon should coordinate closely with the Outreach/Community Engagement Team and with the Vestry to make decisions about the Outreach budget and the use of those funds.

VIII. Assignment to a Faith Community

1. Congregations wishing to have a deacon shall make their request known to the Bishop by writing to the Missioner for Ministry. Prior to entering into a formal agreement, it is advised that the deacon make unofficial visits to the church during liturgy and coffee hour events and meet with the Rector/Priest-in-Charge on an informal basis. If a fit is determined a more formal meeting with the Rector/Priest-in-Charge and the Wardens/Vestry should take place in order to discuss the options. A Letter of Agreement from the Office of the Bishop may then be negotiated by the deacon and the rector, in consultation with the wardens of the Vestry/Bishop's Committee, and signed by all parties, including the Bishop, within one month of the deacon's arrival at the church.
2. Deacon's Time Commitment: The decision for hours covenanted between rector and deacon depends on both the deacon's gifts and the rector's vision for the congregation. A general guideline is between 8 and 12 hours per week. In addition to one Sunday service per week and special liturgical occasions, (e.g., Christmas, Easter), the deacon works in concert with the rector on social and outreach ministries, and to meet the pastoral needs of the congregation.
3. Covenant Hours: Deacons, insofar as possible, should be aware of the needs and assets of the surrounding community. At the rector's invitation, deacons may represent a congregation on interfaith clergy organizations or other committees, boards, or events deemed central to the deacon's outreach ministry and mission. Such options should be clearly listed in the Letter of Agreement as alternative ways that the deacon may apply his/her covenanted hours. Covenanted hours should also include any service on diocesan committees, and for any diocesan events where clergy are expected by their Bishop to attend.

IX. Deacons Assigned to Congregations in Times of Transition

When the rector of a congregation is on sabbatical, resigns or retires, the deacon, with the permission of the Bishop and in agreement with the wardens, may elect to remain. Depending on that decision a new Letter of Agreement may be advisable. At no time during the transition is the deacon paid for activities in or on behalf of the congregation, other than those diocesan events required for usual coverage in the Letter of Agreement (Annual Convention, etc.)

During the transition, no matter how extended, the deacon is never to be viewed by the church leaders, parish administrator, or congregation as a decision-maker or "supply priest," but only as support for those in

charge of various functions of the church, and to assist others in keeping ministries on track.

When an Interim, Priest in Charge or Rector is called to that parish, the Bishop, in consultation with the deacon, will reassess the deacon's assignment situation.

X. Deacons and Ministry Review

An annual review of the Deacon's ministry in a faith community by the Rector/Priest-in-Charge is strongly encouraged. A Mutual Ministry Review including the Rector/Priest-in-Charge, Deacon, Warden, Archdeacon for the Mission Area in which the Faith Community is located, and the ECMN Missioner for Ministry is recommended for Deacons who have been in their assignments for longer periods.

XI. Disputes Involving Deacons: The Mediation Team

Big process questions! When matters of disagreement cannot readily be settled between a deacon and rector (or wardens), one or both parties shall notify the assigned Archdeacon and Bishop directly. After assessment of the issues, the Bishop may activate the diocesan Mediation Team, consisting of the Archdeacons and a priest from the diocese designated by the Bishop. The Mediation Team engages in prayerful discussion and discernment with the deacon and the rector (or wardens, if the parish is in an interim situation), first individually, and then with both parties together. The Mediation Team provides a recommendation to the Bishop who may then:

- a. Ask that the Diaconal Covenant be reworked to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The deacon resumes assignment under a new Letter, negotiated on a trial basis of six months to one year.
- b. Ask that the Diaconal Covenant be dissolved. All parties agree that the deacon should be relieved of diaconal duties at that church and after a time to be determined by the Bishop given a new assignment.
- c. Assign the deacon to Inactive Status.

XII. Other Matters

Sabbatical: Deacons are entitled and encouraged to take a three-month sabbatical every five to seven years, with the permission of the Bishop.

Inactive Status: A deacon may petition the Bishop for Inactive Status due to health or family concerns; or the Bishop may declare Inactive Status of a deacon due to special concerns. In either case, the deacon is expected to stay in regular communication with the Bishop, to attend clergy or diaconal events whenever possible, and to maintain collegiality with the clergy community. Those who are on Inactive Status due to health or family concerns may return to their diaconal ministries, in consultation with the Bishop, when feasible. Those who are on Inactive Status due to special concerns will need to resolve the situation, in close consultation with the Bishop, within a mutually agreed-upon period of time.

Relocation: When a deacon relocates to or from another diocese and wishes to continue in diaconal service, they must apply to both the former diocese and the new diocese for change of status before

resuming full diaconal status. Deacons who arrive from other dioceses into the ECMN will promptly

schedule an appointment with the Bishop.

Retirement: The age for retirement set forth in the canons is 72 (Title III.7.7). A deacon is ordained for life but may retire from active status with the consent of the Bishop. A retired deacon may wear the clerical collar and participate in the liturgy at the invitation of the rector of a parish with the understanding that the ministry of any deacon assigned to the parish takes priority.

Definition of presider, celebrant, and officiant

Presider: The bishop or priest who leads the celebration of the eucharist.

Celebrant: One who officiates at the altar during a celebration of the eucharist.

Officiant: From the Latin word for “servant,” anyone who ministers to the needs of others, including one who leads worship. The catechism of the prayer book defines the ministers of the church as “lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons” (BCP p. 855)

XIII. Addendums for Deacons in the Liturgy

A: Prayers of the People

Deacons may work with laity on the writing and editing of prayers of the people, and training and encouraging members of the congregation to write prayers and serve as intercessors. In writing prayers of the people, intercessions should include (BCP p. 359):

- Universal Church, its members, and its mission
- nation and all in authority
- welfare of the world
- concerns of the local community
- those who suffer and those in any trouble
- the departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

The BCP Prayers of the People forms are available starting on page 383. Additional prayers are available in Collects: Traditional (BCP p. 199), Contemporary (BCP p. 251). However, Deacons and laity are encouraged to explore prayers of the people that are available from a variety of resources. Deacons are encouraged to write additional prayers reflecting the current or immediate needs of the community, state, and world. Deacons are also encouraged to pray extemporaneously. A possible syntax for such prayers is calling on God, stating the petition or thanksgiving, and asking in the name of Jesus. Example: Gracious God, Heavenly Father/Mother, we pray today for Mary, asking that she feels the healing presence of the Holy Spirit, guide and give wisdom to her doctors and nurses, and strengthen her family as she continues her journey of recovery; all this we ask in the name Jesus Christ. Amen.

B: Elevate the Cup

While the Celebrant elevates the paten, Deacons may elevate the chalice at the Great Doxology when the Celebrant says *“All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory are yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen”* and at the invitation to communion when the Celebrant says, *“The gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in*

remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on Him in your hearts by faith with Thanksgiving."

- Note: not all Celebrants have the deacon lift the chalice at the Great Doxology at the end of the Eucharist Prayer; however, it is allowed if they do so (A Priest's Handbook, P. 63)

C: Eucharist Visitors

It is appropriate that deacons prepare Eucharist Visitors' kits at the altar and send forth the visitors from the altar out into the world to visit the homebound, those in hospital and nursing homes, and others who cannot attend church. Doing so symbolizes a deacon living into the ordination vows (BCP pp 543-544), responding to the needs of the world, and the history of the diaconate where, in the early church, Deacons were sent out by their bishops to feed the poor and minister to the sick.

Form for Commissioning Eucharist Ministers:

Deacon: In the name of God and this congregation, I send you forth bearing these holy gifts, that those to whom you go, [insert names if possible], may share with us in the communion of Christ's Body and Blood.

People: May you carry the prayers of all of us as you take this sacrament of Holy Communion from the altar of [Name of Faith Community]

D: Bishop's Permission for Baptisms, Marriage, and Eucharist

Baptism: Deacons must have the Bishop's permission to be the sole officiant at baptisms. Baptismal water cannot be blessed by a deacon.

Marriage: If deacons are asked to officiate at marriages, prior permission is needed from the Bishop. They can conduct the service but cannot Bless the Marriage. A license from the state is also required. Deacons licensed by the state can conduct non-church/non-liturgical weddings.

Eucharist: Only with prior approval of the bishop, deacons may officiate at the Liturgy of the Word and distribute the Holy Eucharist using reserved sacraments and following the directions on page 408 of the Book of Common Prayer.

E: Eucharist under Special Circumstances (BCP p. 396)

(may be used with Eucharist Visitors)

This form is intended for use with those who for reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the Eucharist. When people are unable to be present for extended periods, it is desirable that the priest/deacon/Eucharist Visitors arrange to celebrate the Eucharist with them from time to time on a regular basis, using either the Proper of the Day or one of those appointed for Various Occasions. If it is necessary to shorten the service, the priest may begin the celebration at the Offertory, but it is desirable that a passage from the Gospel first be read.

At other times, or when desired, such persons may be communicated from the reserved Sacrament. It is desirable that fellow parishioners, relatives, and friends be present, when possible, to communicate with them.



Annual Covenant for Diaconal Ministry Between

The Rt. Rev. Craig W. Loya, Bishop,

and

_____, Deacon,

and

_____, Faith Community.

The Deacon will serve _____ hours (average) per _____ (week, month), using 8-12 hours per week as the standard.

The Deacon will assist at liturgies according to the Book of Common Prayer and the ECMN Deacon Customary.

The Deacon will also have the following responsibilities: (use back of sheet, as necessary)

In the world/community:

In the faith community:

Congregation and/or staff meeting attendance:

In conversation with the supervisor, the Deacon shall be eligible for leave for Sundays off and continuing education.

The Faith Community agrees to:

- reimburse the deacon for necessary expenses related to his/her ministry,
- provide funding for the Annual Deacon's Conference, the Annual Convention, and Clergy Conference
- encourage and financially support the Deacon's continuing education.

The Supervisor of the Deacon is: _____

By the Feast of Pentecost each year this covenant shall be reviewed. The Supervisor and the Deacon will submit to the Bishop and the appropriate Archdeacon an annual review of the way(s) in which the Deacon's ministry has engaged God's mission by interpreting the needs of the world with the gifts of the faith community. Disputes should first be referred to the appropriate Archdeacon and thereafter referred to the Bishop. Any changes to this covenant must be agreed upon by all parties listed below.



Annual Covenant for Diaconal Ministry Between

Deacon

Bishop

Senior Warden

Supervisor*

*Rector/Vicar/Priest-in-Charge or other
canonical authority in the faith community

Archdeacon

Initially Agreed: Month_____ Day_____ Year_____

Please list subsequent review dates below:



Annual Covenant for Diaconal Ministry Between

Covenant Template: Process and Instructions

- Deacon works with Supervisor, Senior Warden, and Archdeacon to complete the template. Archdeacons, as an extension of the bishop, support and assist in this process, making sure it's completed and helps to support the deacon and faith community in honoring the covenant.
- Template is signed by all parties.
- Bishop signs covenant and sends letters to Deacon and the Supervisor and Senior Warden announcing the deacon's deployment/reaffirms current deployment.
- ECMN Missioner for Communication communicates deployment announcements and clergy status transitions throughout ECMN and the mission area in which the Deacon serves.

XV: References

1. Book of Common Prayer
2. Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church 2018
3. Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church in Minnesota
4. *Deacons in the Liturgy*, 2nd edition by Ormonde Plater
5. *The Ceremonies of the Eucharist* by Howard E. Galley
6. *Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as Guide to a Spiritual Life* by Derek Olsen
7. *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* by Marion J. Hatchett
8. *A Dictionary for Episcopalians* by John N. Wall
9. *The Episcopal Handbook (Revised Edition)* by Tobias Stanislas Haller
10. *A Priest's Handbook*, 3rd edition by Dennis G. Michno