

Concerning the Deacon in the Liturgy

A customary for the Diocese of New Jersey

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Introduction

When the Bishop ordains a deacon, the Bishop charges the candidate to "...assist the Bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments..." (Book of Common Prayer, page 543). This charge means that the liturgical ministry of a deacon is a ministry of service, as are all the other aspects of diaconal ministry. A deacon does not normally preside at any liturgy because the ministry of presidency is the ministry of the Bishop and priests. Historically, the deacon carries out functions which in the ancient world were exercised by the chief steward or servant in a household. These are primarily ministries of *preparation* and *proclamation*. Such ministers prepared provisions (the deacon sets the table) and served as cupbearers (see Nehemiah 1:11-2:8, or the Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18); they stood at their lord's right hand, in an excellent position to pass on announcements to the assembly (the deacon proclaims the Gospel and dismisses the congregation, and retains responsibility for the cup). Just as a chief steward is responsible for coordinating the work of other servants, deacons (according to Canon III.3.5.c) have the responsibility of coordinating the ministry of Lay Eucharistic Ministers. A deacon therefore assists all other orders of ministry: laity, bishops, and priests in carrying out their own responsibilities. These ministers are assisted by deacons, and when all orders are functioning according to their proper order, the fullness and the cooperation of the ministry is displayed by the Church.

The liturgical ministry of the diaconate is presented in two sections. In the first section, we explore the normal ministry of the deacon assisting a Bishop or a priest in the regular liturgies of the Church. In the second section, we explore those occasions when deacons are permitted to do things which are normally done by a Bishop or a priest. In every case, such permission is granted with a restrictive rubric which reads something like this one governing Palm Sunday: "In the absence of a bishop or priest, the preceding service may be led by a deacon..." (Book of Common Prayer, page 272). These permissive rubrics should be understood as allowing deacons to lead services when, due to a genuine emergency, it is absolutely impossible to obtain the ministration of a priest.

Section I The Normal Liturgical Role of the Deacon

The Daily Office

Anyone may lead the four offices provided in the Book of Common Prayer. This certainly includes deacons, who may, from time to time, be called upon to officiate at Morning Prayer, an Order of Service for Noonday, Evening Prayer and Compline. However, before a deacon assumes the officiant's role on a regular basis, the deacon should reflect upon the fact that these offices, having their origin in monastic tradition, were traditionally the ministry of the laity. It may be better for deacons to serve as instructors, teaching lay officiants how to lead the office rather than taking on this ministry themselves.

In the Order of Worship for the Evening, the deacon is to dismiss the congregation.

When Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer takes the place of the ministry of the Word of God at the Eucharist, note that the reading from the gospels, required by the rubrics, need not necessarily be read by a deacon. In this context, it may be read by a lay person, and a person of whatever order reading it should remember that it is announced and concluded as a reading at Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer not as the Holy Gospel at the Eucharist.

The Great Litany

A deacon may lead the litany and might sing it on solemn occasions.

The Holy Eucharist

The deacon may say the exhortation on page 316.

The deacon may say the Decalogue in the Penitential Order and should bid the Confession of Sin.

In Rite I:

The deacon should offer the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church. The deacon should invite the Confession of Sin. The deacon may read one or more of the "comfortable words" on page 332.

In Rite II and in those parts of the Eucharistic liturgy common to both rites:

The deacon is always to read or sing the gospel and should, therefore, carry the gospel book in the procession before the liturgy and in the procession to the place from which the gospel is to be read.

The deacon is licensed by the Bishop to preach sermons. Deacons should focus their homilies upon the essential character of their ministry: servanthood to the Church, to those in need, particularly to the sick, the poor, and the neglected, and presentation of the needs and hopes of the world to the church. Preaching at the ember seasons is especially suitable.

The Deacon may introduce and begin the recitation of the Nicene Creed.

The deacon should always have a principal role in the Prayers of the People. Forms I, IV and V of the Prayers of the People in the Book of Common Prayer (pages 383, 388 and 389, respectively) are preceded by rubrics which give the deacon priority over other leaders in offering these prayers. In the case of other forms of the Prayers of the People, the deacon may be asked to provide to the intercessor those

names and concerns for which prayers are asked. The deacon may also compose and lead intercessions for the Eucharist.

The deacon should bid the Confession of Sin.

As the Prayer Book states, "Deacons should also serve at the Lord's Table, preparing and placing on it the offerings of bread and wine." The Deacon may elevate the chalice at the Concluding Doxology and the Invitation "The Gifts of God for the People of God" when the celebrant elevates the consecrated bread.

The deacon assists in administering Holy Communion. The normal minister of the consecrated bread is a bishop or a priest. If there are insufficient bishops or priests present, then deacons may administer the consecrated bread. The normal minister of the chalice is a deacon. If there are insufficient deacons, then priests or licensed lay persons administer the chalice, as the instructions on page 408 of the Book of Common Prayer clarify.

If applicable, before the post-communion prayer, the deacon, using the form in the *Book of Occasional Services*, gives any lay Eucharistic ministers the sacrament to take to the sick and the shut-in.

The deacon should assist with or coordinate the ablutions according to the custom of the parish.

The dismissal is always to be said or sung by the deacon. Alleluias are always added to the dismissal during Eastertide. When the deacon is present, the use of the dismissal is encouraged even when it is not absolutely required.

Communion Under Special Circumstances

As the Book of Common Prayer explains, "This form is intended for use with those who for reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the Eucharist." (P. 396.) The entire rite may be done by a deacon, who should pay careful attention to the rubric on page 398 which requires that a deacon leading this liturgy change the absolution into a prayer for pardon by changing the pronouns from second person plural to first person plural. The deacon must conclude the rite with a dismissal, not with a blessing.

Congregational Communion from the Reserved Sacrament in the Absence of a Priest

Ordinarily, the Bishop or a Presbyter will preside at all celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. However, the liturgy of the pre-sanctified may be authorized to meet the needs of a congregation where the ministrations of a priest are unavailable. This is done only under the direction and prior written permission of the Bishop at the request of the priest-in-charge of that congregation. The order of the worship is to follow the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, pages 408-409.

Proper Liturgies for Special Days

Ash Wednesday

The deacon is to read the gospel as he or she would do at any celebration of the Eucharist. A deacon may assist with the imposition of ashes and the recitation of Psalm 51 which is meant to accompany the imposition of ashes. The deacon is expected to perform those normal ministries associated with the celebration of the Eucharist as outlined above, if that rite is to follow.

Palm Sunday

The deacon reads the triumphal entry gospel and bids the procession. At the Eucharist which follows, the Gospel is the Passion of the Lord. Rubrics allow it to be read or sung by persons other than the deacon; however, the deacon might organize such a dramatic reading or chanting of the gospel, and certainly might participate in it. It is particularly suitable for the deacon to be the narrator. The deacon's functions in the Eucharist which follow are those previously outlined.

Maundy Thursday

The deacon should assist with the [hand or] foot-washing.

Good Friday

The deacon may assist in the proclamation of the passion as outlined above in the notes on Palm Sunday. At the Solemn Collects, the deacon and the celebrant have a cooperative role. The deacon reads or sings the biddings which precede the prayers ("Dear People of God...according to their needs," page 277 of the Book of Common Prayer). The deacon also reads or sings the biddings which introduce each of the five categories of prayers asked of the congregation: The Church, the nations of the earth, the sick and suffering, the mission of the Church, and the dead. (For example, in the section for the mission of the Church, the deacon would sing or read "Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ...and lead them to faith and obedience." Then, the deacon might bid the congregation to kneel in silent prayer and then arise. Finally, the celebrant would conclude the section by singing or saying the prayer "Merciful God, creator of all...one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.") The music for these texts is found in the section of the Altar Service Book called Proper Liturgies for Special Days.

If a cross is brought into the Church (see the rubric on page 281 of the Book of Common Prayer) the deacon may carry it. The deacon prepares the altar for Communion from the Reserved Sacrament, bids the General Confession, and assists in administering Holy Communion.

Holy Saturday

The deacon may read the conclusion of the Passion Gospel, and might lead the anthem "In the Midst of Life."

The Great Vigil of Easter

The deacon always carries the Paschal Candle in the opening procession and says or sings the *lumen christi*. The deacon sings the *Exsultet*; if the deacon cannot sing, he or she could say it or could cense and circumambulate the Paschal Candle as another minister sings the *Exsultet*. If Baptism is to be celebrated, the deacon takes the role outlined below in the section on Baptism. At the Easter Vigil Eucharist, the deacon should perform all those ministries outlined above in the section on the Holy Eucharist. The

deacon should note that the dismissal at Eastertide is followed by alleluias, not preceded by them (see the Hymnal 1982, S-175 and S-176.) As these alleluias are an essential seasonal variation for Easter, the deacon should ensure that they are used throughout the Great Fifty Days of Easter.

Other Rites

Holy Baptism

The deacon is to read the gospel. The deacon might preach the sermon, providing that such a sermon always reflects some aspect of servant ministry. The deacon might lead the Prayers for the Candidates and carry the paschal candle to and from the font. A deacon may fill the font, pour the water over the candidate in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and present to the newly baptized a candle lighted from the paschal candle. For further diaconal duties on the four great Baptismal Days, see the section on Holy Baptism below.

Confirmation

A deacon is to read the gospel. A deacon might be a presenter of candidates for Confirmation. If the Baptismal Litany on page 305-6 of the Book of Common Prayer is to be used, the deacon might sing or say it. Deacons may act as the Bishop's chaplain and assist the Bishop as required, as well as perform the other diaconal functions at the Eucharist which may follow Confirmation, as outlined above.

A Form of Commitment to Christian Service

There are no diaconal roles prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer in this liturgy. Because the liturgy emphasizes service, a key aspect of deacons' ministry, a deacon might present the candidate before the offertory and might lead the prayer permitted in the second rubric on page 421 of the Book of Common Prayer.

Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

While the BCP (page 422) allows a deacon to perform a wedding when civil law permits, and no Bishop or priest is available, deacons may preside at marriages. This may be done with the Bishop's specific approval on a case by case basis, the deacon omitting the Nuptial blessing after the Prayers.

When a bishop or priest is available, a deacon may deliver the charge and ask for the declaration of consent. A deacon always reads the gospel and might preach the homily, remembering that servant ministry is always to be a deacon's homiletic theme. It is very appropriate for a deacon to lead the prayers for the couple on page 429 of the Book of Common Prayer. If a nuptial Eucharist is to be celebrated, the deacon should exercise the full diaconal ministry in that part of the liturgy, including preparing the altar, elevation of the consecrated species, administration of Holy Communion, ablutions, and dismissal of the congregation, as outlined above.

In cases where the deacon has a special pastoral relationship with the couple, the liturgy should be planned in such a way as to give the deacon the maximum liturgical role as outlined above. Even at liturgies which are personal and pastoral in character, such as weddings, we hope to show to our congregations, and to those who visit our churches, the fullness of Christian ordained ministry, each order functioning in its proper way and working together to build up the body of Christ.

The Blessing of a Civil Marriage

A deacon reads the gospel at the Ministry of the Word of God. The prayers for the couple, found in the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage on page 429 of the Book of Common Prayer, may also be used in this liturgy, and it is appropriate for the deacon to lead them. The deacon performs the normal diaconal functions outlined above if a Eucharist is to follow.

An Order for Marriage

This liturgy may be undertaken by a deacon with the bishop's specific approval and direction, again omitting any Nuptial blessing.

Thanksgiving for a Child

A deacon may lead the psalm or canticle prescribed on pages 441-3 of the Book of Common Prayer.

The Reconciliation of a Penitent

There is no normal role for a deacon in the liturgy because of its private nature and because the ministry of absolution is the ministry of the episcopate and the priesthood. In an extreme emergency, a deacon might hear a confession and offer a prayer for pardon such as the one which appears at the bottom of page 448.

Ministration to the Sick

The deacon may lead the entire service with these exceptions. The deacon substitutes a prayer for pardon for the absolution on page 455 of the Book of Common Prayer. A deacon may not bless oil. A deacon may anoint the sick only in circumstances where a priest or bishop is not available. The deacon may administer Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament beginning with the peace and the Lord's Prayer on page 398 of the Book of Common Prayer. Note that, because this is a private ministration rather than regular public worship, the restrictions outlined above concerning communion from the reserved sacrament do not apply and a deacon is expected to undertake the ministry as a regular part of diaconal service. A deacon concludes this rite not with a blessing, but with one of the dismissals.

Ministration at the Time of Death

A deacon may lead all of this service, which provides to the dying the "last rites" of the Church.

Vigil of the dead

A deacon may lead all of this service.

Reception of the body

A deacon may lead this entire liturgy. If a deacon is assisting a priest, it would be suitable for the deacon to carry the paschal candle before the coffin as it is carried into the Church.

The Burial of the Dead

The deacon may sing or say the opening anthems and may carry the paschal candle in the opening procession. A deacon always reads the gospel and might lead the psalm when it cannot be sung. A deacon could preach the homily. A deacon may lead the prayers of the people. If a Eucharist is to follow, a deacon should do the normal deacon's functions in that liturgy. If the Paschal Candle is carried out of the church ahead of the coffin, the deacon usually performs that ministry. When the ministry of a priest or a

bishop cannot be obtained, a deacon can preside at the entire liturgy, which is then curtailed according to the rubric on page 496 of the Book of Common Prayer: After the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer is said, other prayers are added, the Commendation follows (only if the corpse is present) and the Dismissal is added.

The Committal

A deacon may do this entire liturgy.

An Order for Burial

A deacon must not attempt to organize a liturgy under these guidelines without the direction of a bishop or a priest.

Section II

Ministry of a Deacon in Emergencies

The Daily Office

- If a priest is not present at the recitation of the Daily Office, a deacon replaces the absolution following the confession of sin with a prayer for corporate pardon by changing the pronouns from second person to first person plural.
- In the Order of Worship for the Evening, the deacon, in the absence of a priest, is to read the Prayer for Light.

The Holy Eucharist

The normal minister of Holy Communion at the Eucharist is, in the case of the consecrated bread, a bishop or a priest. In the absence of sufficient bishops or priests, a deacon may administer the consecrated bread.

As indicated above, a deacon may administer Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament as a service of public worship using the outline of instructions on page 408 of the Book of Common Prayer under the guidelines indicated. On such emergency occasions, a deacon is to notify the bishop prior to the administration. In the unlikely event such notification is impossible, the deacon is to proceed using prudent judgment and notify the bishop following the liturgy.

Proper Liturgies for Special Days

Ash Wednesday

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the whole Ash Wednesday liturgy as outlined on pages 264 through 269 may be led by a deacon. In such a case, the deacon remains kneeling after the Litany of Penitence and says the prayer for pardon from Morning Prayer.

Palm Sunday

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the whole Palm Sunday liturgy, as outlined on pages 270 through 273, may be led by a deacon.

Maundy Thursday

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the Maundy Thursday liturgy may not be celebrated. A deacon should lead, or cause to be led, a liturgy of the Daily Office.

Good Friday

In the absence of a bishop or priest, the Good Friday liturgy, as outlined on pages 276 through 282 may be led by a deacon.

Holy Saturday

In the absence of a bishop or a priest, the Holy Saturday liturgy, as outlined on page 283, may be led by a deacon.

The Great Vigil of Easter

In the absence of a bishop or priest, a deacon may lead the first two parts of the service, the Lighting of the Paschal Candle and the Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, and the Ministry of the Word of God from the Easter Eucharist, concluding with the Prayers of the People, the Lord's Prayer, and the Dismissal with Alleluias.

Holy Baptism

In an emergency, a deacon, or a lay person, may baptize using the form on pages 313-314.

The great baptismal days are the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints' Day or the Sunday following All Saints' Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. On these days, if the ministry of a bishop or a priest cannot be obtained, the Bishop may authorize a deacon to preside at Holy Baptism in the case of a pastoral emergency. In such a case, the deacon omits the prayer for the candidates and the chrismation on page 308.

The Reconciliation of a Penitent

In an extreme emergency, a deacon may hear a person's confession and offer a prayer for pardon such as the one which appears at the bottom of page 448.

Ministration to the Sick

While the deacon may lead most of this liturgy, as outlined above on page 7, the deacon may anoint the sick only in emergency circumstances in which a bishop or a priest is not available.

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