Module 1
Understanding Diakonia and the Diaconate

Opening Reflection

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832.

Reflect upon the ministry of a deacon you know. How did this person’s example influence your call to the diaconate? What part of their ministry do you hope to emulate? What part of their ministry do you hope to expand upon or do better?

Objectives

After completing this module, the postulant will be able to:

- Explain the Biblical and traditional foundations of diaconal ministry;
- Display a familiarity with the duties of a deacon outlined in The Examination at diaconal ordination from the Book of Common Prayer;
- Articulate the role of the deacon in liturgy, preaching and in catechesis;
- Demonstrate an understanding of “diakonia” and an affinity for the Christian theology of servanthood;
- Explain the various ways the word “deacon” is defined in other Christian traditions;
- Recognize the character attributes of a deacon and explain how his or her own personality is congruent or not congruent with those attributes;
- Explain ways in which the role of deacon may change, reward and challenge the person who assumes it; and
- Identify two role models for diaconal ministry.

Required Reading


Brown, a priest and lecturer at the Institute of Theological Education, Sarum College, Salisbury (who was ordained and began her ministry in the United
States), explains the three places where deacons minister (the church, the world, and at the margins), the three strands of their ministry (in liturgy, in pastoral care, and as catechists), and the three actions of their ministry (praying, loving, and remembering).


Deacon Ormonde Plater explains the history of the diaconate beginning with the early church and including first-hand accounts from modern deacons. He also discusses formation, training and deployment of deacons.

**Assignments**

1. Read *Many Servants: an Introduction to Deacons, rev. ed.* Write a 3-5 page paper summarizing the book. In your paper, you should (1) contrast the role of the deacon in the early church with the role of the deacon in The Episcopal Church today; (2) demonstrate familiarity with the duties of a deacon outlined in The Examination at diaconal ordination from the *Book of Common Prayer*; and (3) explain how your own calling correlates with the current understanding of diaconal ministry in The Episcopal Church.

2. Read *Being a Deacon Today: Exploring a Distinctive Ministry in the Church and in the World* in which Rosalind Brown explains the three places where deacons minister (the church, the world, and at the margins). After reading Brown’s book, interview a deacon who has been ordained for at least three years and prepare a written summary of the interview explaining how your interviewee ministers in the church, in the world, and at the margins.

3. Peruse newspapers and periodicals to identify ways in which a deacon could minister in various social and political areas in contemporary society and in your local community. Prepare a written summary, diagram, collage or piece of art to express your ideas.

4. Watch the movie “Dead Man Walking.” Name at least four parties to which this sister’s ministry related. Consider the impact she had on each and in what ways her actions proclaimed the Gospel to each. Reflect upon how the authority of the Church bestowed on her through her membership in a Roman Catholic order contributed and/or distracted from her ministry. In what ways did her ministry parallel or not parallel diaconal ministry? Be prepared to discuss your conclusions.

5. Compile a list of at least five questions for your mentor which will help you better understand what you have studied.

**Coffee Hour Question**

You have recently been assigned to a new parish. While chatting with a group of parishioners at coffee hour, you realize that some have mistaken you for a priest, and others are not sure what a deacon is. Some want to know whether deacons are in the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Others are familiar with the diaconate, but believe that in fact, all baptized Christians
are deacons. Without opening any books, write an essay describing your response to these parishioners.

**Synthesis**

Now that you have completed your assignments, consider how your answers to the questions in the opening reflection would be different. List three differences. Now, choose two persons who you would like to emulate in your diaconal ministry.

**Suggested Supplementary Reading (optional)**


Barnett, a priest, focused on the diaconate for his D.Min. from the University of the South, School of Theology. The book is a study of the diaconate from biblical times until the present, emphasizing the value of diaconal ministry.


Booty offers a set of theological and historical criteria by which diocesan and parish leaders, as well as Commissions on Ministry, can examine assumptions and experiences regarding ordained ministry, particularly that of deacons.


Collins clarifies his scholarly work, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* (below), and explains what the results of his research mean for real world diaconal ministry.


Collins shows that Greek word “diakonia” has been misused and provides new insight into what early Christians meant when they wrote about *diakonia*. He rewrites the lexicon and challenges theologians to rethink the idea of diaconal ministry, to restructure attempts at renewal of the diaconate, and to redraw the profile of “the servant church.”


This report explores theological reasons for the existence of a diaconate and the variety of present forms of diaconal ministry. It concludes that the recent renewal
of the diaconate provides a place where commonality can be found among Christian denominations and presents opportunities for ecumenical ministry.


A retired bishop delineates the differences between the three orders.


The book examines the challenges of achieving the Christian vision of a righteous social order. Lewis examines the witnesses of social justice leaders such as F.D. Maurice and William Temple, as well as issues raised by liberation theologians, third-world debt, and questions of race, gender and human sexuality.


Pohl demonstrates that hospitality is central to the life of Christian faith, shows the shape of this practice from Biblical times, and demonstrates how the practice continues today by interviewing members of contemporary communities of hospitality.


Sims brings the pastoral wisdom of a bishop together with insights from his years as director of the Institute for Servant Leadership to explain the kind of servanthood that integrates the religious and secular dimensions of life and work in a leadership style modeled by Jesus, the consummate "servant leader."


William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 until his death in 1944, is by common consent among the greatest holders of that office and one of the most remarkable Englishmen of this century. This book gives clear and popular expression to views which Temple held, in general, for most of his working life. Temple asserts the Church's right to intervene in economic questions and shows that the Church has something worthwhile to say about those questions. He also emphasizes the need to determine the proper balance between the profit motive and service to the community, and between the power of the state and the freedom of the individual.