



The Permanent Diaconate in ANIC

Preamble

All Christians are called to minister by word and deed in the name of Christ (Eph 4:12). In common with many other traditions and the practice of the early church since at least the second century, the Anglican tradition recognizes three orders of leadership within the body of Christ: bishops, presbyters (priests), and deacons.¹ Although every bishop and priest must first be ordained a deacon, some deacons are called to the **permanent diaconate**, a role the recent resurgence of which the Anglican Network in Canada welcomes. This document thus provides guidelines on how permanent deacons are called, prepared and deployed within the Anglican Network in Canada.² Please refer to the companion document, “**ANiC Ordination Process**,” for more background about the pathway towards potential ordination.

1. The Ministry of the Permanent Diaconate

Christians who believe they are called by the Holy Spirit to the work and ministry of a deacon must have their calling tested by the wider church. Similar to the process of discernment toward the ordination of a priest or presbyter, that concerning a deacon—whether transitional or permanent³—should take place within the local church over a period of at least three years.⁴ This time should include parish discernment, appropriate education, practical ministry training and experience, and meetings with both the Bishop and the Diocesan Ordination Chaplain (DOC). By the end of this period, both the candidate and the parish and diocesan representatives should have been able to discern his or her suitability for, and calling to ministry, including having identified his/her gifts, spiritual maturity, and godly character.

The requirements listed below presume a commitment to the permanent (i.e., vocational) diaconate.⁵

¹ The term “deacon” means “servant”; all ministry is service, following the example of Jesus himself (Mark 10:35-45, Phil 2:5-11).

² Typically, the diaconate is the first order of ordination that all clergy (continue to) share; however, permanent deacons, also called vocational deacons, differ in that theirs is a lifelong call to this ministry. In other words, the permanent diaconate is not a steppingstone to ordination to the presbyterate.

³ On the difference between deacons who are “transitional” vs. “permanent or vocational” (these terms meaning the same thing), see the previous note.

⁴ Exceptions to the minimum three-year period will be at the discretion of the bishop. (A possible case might be that of an ordained person with formal theological training in a different tradition who wishes to enter ANiC as a deacon.) In any such case, there must still be an adequate period of training in, and acculturation to the Anglican tradition.

⁵ Should a permanent deacon later sense a call to the presbyterate, further rigorous discernment would be required to test that call.

The office of a permanent deacon is unique in many ways. The New Testament indicates that that office was originally created in response to a need within the developing Church to attend to the needs of the poor. Full of the Holy Spirit, the first deacons were gifted in evangelism, and full of faith and wisdom (Act 6:5, 10). The gifting required for most diaconal tasks was nonetheless different from that required to fulfill the charge given to apostles (Acts 6:1). Given the nature of its origin in the early church, the calling of a deacon is therefore to fulfill the local needs of the church and the surrounding community to which it ministers.

A deacon's ministry beyond the bounds of the parish is outward facing. It looks to those who are not yet members of the Church, encouraging their curiosity about the gospel and the person of Jesus. Whatever job description permanent deacons assume, the foundation of their ministry is the same: love for Jesus, a deep understanding of the Scriptures as the Word of God,⁸ and a desire to reach out to others with the gospel in word and deed.

The ministry of a deacon is a high calling. After establishing a proven track record of spiritual maturity with both the parish and its clergy, a deacon is normally granted trust and authority above that of an average lay person (1 Tim 3:13). As a trusted officer of the Church, a deacon is morally chaste, and willing not only to serve but to suffer. The choices, character, and values he or she exhibits are to be exemplary over time (1 Tim 3:8-12). As with a priest or a bishop, a deacon demonstrates a leadership model based on servanthood. A deacon is an attendant who demonstrates humility while rendering service and help to others (Phil 2:3; Rom 12:3). Such a person is a helper or patron (Rom 16:1-2)⁹ who shares a concern for the ministry of the Church and who seeks to advance its cause through his or her work. A deacon has a reputation for being an admirable person, one who is respected by those both inside and outside of the Church (1 Tim 3:8; cf. v. 7). A deacon represents Christ and the Church to the world. In view of all these things, the trust and responsibility invested in the office of a deacon is great.

The tasks of a permanent deacon can vary from place to place and time to time, depending on the deacon's individual gifting (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-8; 1 Pet 4:7-11) and the local needs and context of the parish. (Such varying factors might include stipend, hours, job description, and so forth). In short, for permanent deacons to have a successful ministry, they must be prepared to adapt to local changes and circumstances

⁸ See the declaration by the ordinand in the 2019 BCP, p. 473: "I, N.N., do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation, and I consequently hold myself bound to conform my life and ministry thereto, and therefore I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of Christ as this Church has received them."

⁹ At least two deacons were noted for performing miracles (Acts 6:8; 8:6) and preaching, as well as having a high view of, and mature grounding in the Scriptures (Acts 6 & 8). In Romans 16:2 the deacon Phoebe is described as a *prostasis*. This term has been translated variously as 'helper' or 'patron.' The basic meaning is 'benefactor.' This implies that Phoebe was a woman of some financial means who gave generously to the church in Cenchreae and to 'many' others. Not all deacons will be wealthy, as Phoebe seems to have been, but all should be generous with their time, abilities, and goods.

as they respond to the call of the Spirit, as agreed upon by the bishop and the priest in charge.

As implied earlier, each prospective deacon should be an established member of a local parish for a minimum of three years.¹⁰ Within this time, the candidate must exhibit trust in Christ, growth in the faith, and leadership potential. There must be no hint of hypocrisy in the candidate's acts or speech in the name of Christ. In addition to not being hypocritical in speech, the candidate must not be subject to addiction, unhealthy appetites, or greed for money, all which harm church communities and hinder their gospel witness to the world (1 Tim 3:8-10). Therefore, no one should come quickly to this calling (1 Tim 3:10; cf. v. 6) but should first undertake discernment by serving a local parish community on a trial basis for an extended period time.

The New Testament contains directives on the nature of a deacon's family and community life. A deacon must reflect strong spiritual health and good patterns of relationship (1 Tim 3: 8-12; cf. vv. 4-5; 5:4). Those in leadership are not to neglect their own families (1 Tim 5:1, 8) and must strive for a mature consistency in their relationships with those at home and in the church (1 Tim 3:2-7; Titus 1, 6-8). The NT stipulates that church leaders show fidelity in marriage, limiting sexual expression to within it alone (1 Tim 3:8, Titus 1:6; cf. Mat 5:27-28).

2. Educational Preparation for Diaconal Ordination

Each candidate for the permanent diaconate, in consultation with the Diocesan Ordination Chaplain (DOC), should complete the equivalent of at least one year (defined as seven to ten one-semester-long courses) of graduate theological education at an approved ANIC/ACNA institution.¹¹ This is in addition to completing the parish training program described in this document.

Candidates should demonstrate competency in Bible content, Christian theology, pastoral care, and Anglican worship and polity. Where possible, at least one-third of their academic courses should be taken in-person within an Anglican College that includes a daily rhythm of prayer and worship.¹²

For the deacon to be permitted to preach or conduct catechesis classes, more training is normally required, including courses on preaching and exegesis, biblical theology, and principles of interpretation.

¹⁰ Flexibility may be needed in applying this guideline. Any change must take place in consultation with the bishop and other chief ministers.

¹¹ A good example at present is the Diaconal Certificate of Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

¹² "At least one third" is defined as at least three one-semester courses. ANiC aspires to offer more substantial in-person liturgical and devotional formation not only for prospective deacons, but also for those preparing for the presbyterate.

Similar to the ordination process for a priest, that for a deacon should include a Parish Discernment Process, a Discernment of Vocation interview (conducted by the DOC and selected clergy of the diocese), a psychological screening process, and a competency exam administered by the DOC.

3. The Deacon's Role in the Local Parish and Beyond

The permanent deacon's role can be more diverse than that of other ordained offices of the church. The Ordinal of the BCP mentions two spheres of ministry: 1) *tasks related to church services*; and 2) *proactive outreach* to the needy both in and outside the church. Beyond these two spheres, the role of each deacon can vary based on gifting, need, and the parish's desire for local outreach. Allowances should be made for the calling and charism of the deacon and the needs of the parish. Each parish is encouraged creatively to consider ways in which a prospective deacon might be able to fulfill responsibilities that involve *missional expression*.

Permanent deacons may serve part-time, bi-vocationally, or full time depending on context, need, resources and calling.

Normative roles of the permanent deacon may include performing and/or providing leadership for ministries of visitation, prayer, healing, pastoral care, outreach to the poor and marginalized. As noted above, duties relating to catechesis or preaching will normally require further competency in these areas.¹³

3.1. Stipend

As with the ACNA as a Province, most deacons in ANiC will be non-stipendiary. However, there may be exceptional cases where, depending on the ability and spiritual needs of the parish and the gifts and financial needs of the deacon, a full- or part-time stipend is appropriate to offer to a deacon. Any stipendiary offer will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3.2. Pastoral Care and Oversight

Though called sacrificially to serve, deacons must never be taken advantage of. The deacon's responsibilities and schedule should thus be established in consultation with the priest in charge and other leaders of the parish. The priest should ensure not only

¹³ Because AMMIC has special cultural and linguistic requirements, AMMIC candidates should consult with the bishop responsible for AMMIC to ensure that these requirements are met. Based on the report of ANiC's "Harvest Task Force" (see <https://www.anglicannetwork.ca/harvesttaskforce>), AMMIC has developed a school for lay leadership training and the vocational diaconate (see <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/#inbox/FMfcgzGwHpSgmczXXHNVJLCvqrMnWMQW?projector=1&messagePartId=0.2>) and an e-brochure describing the vocational diaconate with AMMIC (see <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/#inbox/FMfcgzGwHpSgmczXXHNVJLCvqrMnWMQW?projector=1&messagePartId=0.3>).

that the permanent deacon's assigned responsibilities are carried out, but that they are fair and reasonable.

The parish placement and licensing of a deacon is the responsibility of the bishop. Indeed, as part of the process of exercising pastoral care for and ultimate oversight of the prospective permanent deacon, the bishop will ensure that each deacon is assigned an archdeacon or other minister, to provide pastoral care and oversight and to mediate in cases where a conflict or significant difference arises between the deacon and the priest in charge.

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Revised and Approved by the ANiC House of Bishops, December, 2023

December 14, 2023