

# The Deacon in the Worshiping Community

Liturgy and the Diaconate

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# Understanding Diaconal Ministry in Worship

01

## The Liturgical Role

Essential functions of deacons in the Eucharist and other services

02

## Vestments and Identity

Historical and contemporary dress for diaconal ministry

03

## Liturgical Texts

How prayer books define the deacon's role across traditions

The liturgical role is not peripheral to the ministry of the deacon: it is essential. Diaconal spirituality originates in the liturgy and points to service in the world. This study describes the diaconal role in worship and the vestments that may be worn, assuming the normal pattern of deacons assisting priests in parishes.



# The Essential Nature of Diaconal Liturgy

Recently-ordained deacons, and often their priests as well, may be unsure about what they should do in worship. Some parishes may be unaware that deacons have a role in the liturgy and reluctant to accommodate it.

This study emphasizes the deacon's role in the Eucharist while recognizing that some deacons may find themselves presiding at Morning or Evening Prayer, other liturgies of the Word, or communion from the reserved sacrament.

We assume use of The Book of Alternative Services in worship. The traditional Canadian Book of Common Prayer makes few references to the order of deacons and omits most diaconal functions from the Eucharist altogether.

"Diaconal spirituality originates in the liturgy and points to service in the world."



# Learning from Our Catholic Partners

This study gives many references to and comparisons with the Roman Catholic Church, for three important reasons:

## Shared Liturgical Heritage

The liturgical role and vestments of the deacon in the two traditions are very similar and have identical origins in the early church.

## Vatican II Inspiration

The Anglican Communion owes its own revival of the vocational diaconate in large part to the sterling example of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI.

## Covenantal Relationship

The Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina entered into a covenantal relationship in 2011, expanded in 2020 to include Lutheran and Ukrainian Catholic dioceses.

# Core Liturgical Functions of the Deacon

It is essential that deacons fulfil, and be clearly seen to fulfil, their liturgical roles, especially at the Eucharist. The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the ministry of the Word and of the deacon's role in the Eucharist.

## Always Required

- Proclaiming the Gospel
- Preparing the table at the offertory
- Dismissal the people at the end of the Liturgy

## Recommended

- Leading Prayers of the People
- Inviting confession and peace
- Inviting the people to share a sign of Peace
- Introducing the proclamation of "The mystery of faith" during the appropriate Eucharistic prayers
- Assisting with communion
- Supervising ablutions

## Optional

- Carrying the Book of Gospels
- Turning pages for presiding priest
- Making announcements
- Elevating the chalice at invitation



# Ministry of Hospitality: From Door to Door

"There is no diaconal ministry without service in the Eucharist where the deacon, with others, enables the church to express its identity as God's people."

– Rosalind Brown

While the presbyter or bishop convenes the assembly at the beginning of the eucharistic liturgy, it is the deacon who disperses it in the Dismissal, sending the faithful "to love and serve the Lord over the church threshold and out into the world."



## Welcome

Greeting at the church door

## Proclaim

Reading the Gospel



## Serve

Preparing table and gifts

## Send

Dismissing to serve

# Flexibility in Liturgical Practice

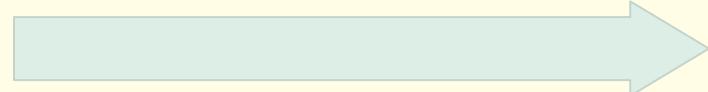
Customs in worship vary considerably from parish to parish and from diocese to diocese. Liturgies range from the basic and simple to the elaborate and detailed. In the Anglican tradition, there are few, if any, fixed liturgical rules.

Much liturgical practice will depend on the constraints or opportunities in a particular church building. Some chancels are small, limiting options for the ministers. Movements such as Gospel processions are dictated by the space available.

 **Important Principle:** There are not "right and wrong ways" in liturgy; there are, rather, recommended ways and varied customs. We should avoid fussiness and stress. The purpose of liturgy is for the community to worship God with joy, dignity and sincerity.

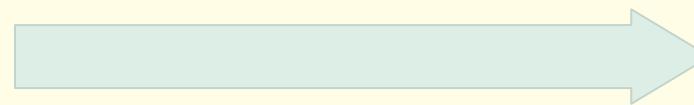
# The Entrance Rite and Gospel Procession

The deacon precedes the presiding celebrant in procession. If the parish has a Book of Gospels, the deacon carries this in the entrance procession as a sign that God is amongst us and is about to speak a word to our current reality.



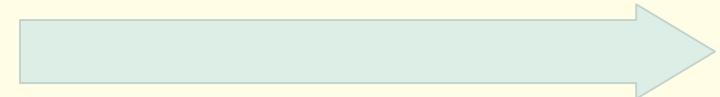
## Carrying the Book

The deacon carries the Book of Gospels just above the eyes, making it visible to the assembly while allowing the deacon to see where they are going!



## Placing on the Altar

The ministers acknowledge the altar according to parish custom and the deacon places the Book of Gospels on the altar.



## Taking Position

The deacon usually sits or stands to the presider's right for the prayers, Gloria, readings, sermon, creed and Prayers of the People.

# Proclaiming the Gospel: The Deacon's Highest Moment

This is the focal point of the Liturgy of the Word and the single most important act performed by the deacon in the Eucharist. If a deacon is present among the ministers of the service, that person always reads the Gospel.



## Who Reads?

The Book of Alternative Services is specific: it is "the function of a deacon to read the Gospel." In the absence of a deacon, the presider or an assisting priest reads the gospel. It is not the usual custom for lay people to read the Gospel.



## Where to Read?

The Gospel should be proclaimed from a prominent location in the church, typically the lectern or ambo. The word comes to us from elsewhere; it is proclaimed, not simply arising out of the community.



## Receiving Blessing

It is customary for the deacon to receive a blessing from the presiding priest or bishop before reading the Gospel, asking that the Spirit be upon them as they bring good news.

"It is the deacon who, even if in the presence of the Pope, is charged to proclaim the gospel during the eucharistic liturgy. This is his irreplaceable liturgical role and hence a key to his identity and mission: his voice must be one with the gospel."

– Deacon James Keating

# The Gospel Procession in Detail



# Leading the Prayers of the People

As those whose ministry brings them into close contact with the needs, concerns and hopes of the world, it is especially fitting that deacons should bring before the community the things they have encountered and bid the community's prayers. However, leading the Prayers of the People (Intercessions) is also fittingly delegated to the laity. The deacon should therefore take a lead on preparing lay people for such ministry in the Liturgy.

The Book of Alternative Services stipulates that deacons or lay people lead the Prayers of the People. By the end of the fourth century, the deacon made the invitation to prayer and spoke the petitions of the litany. The deacon's ministry inside and outside the liturgy makes them the logical minister to lead these prayers.

In practice, the role of the deacon as intercessor is often honoured more in the breach than in the observance. It is important that deacons at times lead or participate in the Prayers of the People through various approaches: **taking their turn in the roster**, introducing and concluding biddings, alternating with lay intercessors, or preparing the intercessions, or offering training and supervision for those who exercise this ministry.



- The Prayers of the People are a vital part of the liturgy. They should be carefully prepared and delivered, meaningful and relevant, but not wordy or preachy. Deacons can play a role by mentoring intercessors and leading by example.

# Confession, Peace, and Preparation of Gifts

## Invitation to Confession

After the intercessions, the deacon may give the invitation to confession and begin the confession, if the presiding priest so wishes. In the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, "the Deacon or Celebrant says Let us confess our sins."

## Sharing the Peace

The presiding priest gives the greeting for the Peace. The deacon invites the people to share the Peace using phrases like "let us offer one another a sign of Christ's peace."

## Preparing the Table

Like the Gospel reading, the preparation of the Table at the offertory is clearly the prerogative of the deacon. The Book of Alternative Services states it is "the function of a deacon to make ready the Table for the eucharistic celebration, preparing and placing upon it the bread and cup of wine."

# Four Steps in Preparing the Table

01

## Prepare the Table

The deacon ensures the altar book is in place. If communion vessels are not already on the altar, the deacon receives them from servers or assistants and spreads the corporal on the altar.

02

## Receive the Gifts

Representatives of the congregation may bring forward the bread, wine in an offertory procession. The deacon receives the gifts directly in front of the altar or they may be received by servers.

03

## Prepare the Gifts

The deacon adds or subtracts wafers as required, ensuring there is a priest's host on the paten. The deacon pours wine from the wine cruet into the chalice. A little water is added to the chalice. This prayer is traditionally said: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in Christ's divinity, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." It is seen by many as a reminder of the issue of water and blood from the side of Christ at his crucifixion (John 19: 34). The mixing of water with wine was common practice at the time of Jesus, as so it is assumed did the same at the Last Supper.

04

## Place the Gifts

The deacon places the gifts on the corporal: ciborium, with chalice covered with the pall, paten with priest's host in front. The financial offering is brought forward and received and blessed, and (ideally) NOT placed on the altar. The only focus on the altar should be the eucharistic elements.

At Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria: "It is the Deacon who prays over the gifts of bread, wine and money. This is because these gifts are given, all of them, for the mending of the world – and it is the Deacon above all whose ministry is to ensure that we steward the gifts we bring for the sake of those in need."

# The Great Thanksgiving and Communion

## During the Great Thanksgiving

The deacon assumes their normal place to the right of the presiding priest, turning slightly towards the presider rather than directly facing the congregation. The deacon always follows the presiding priest's lead in posture and gesture.

The deacon may turn the pages of the altar book for the presiding priest. After the Sanctus and Benedictus, the deacon removes the pall from the chalice and lid from the ciborium. During the eucharistic prayer, the deacon makes a profound bow at the words of institution.

The deacon may raise the chalice at the final doxology while the priest raises the bread. During the Our Father, usually only the presiding priest prays with hands apart (closing them again at the words of the concluding doxology to the prayer). Any deacons should pray with hands together.

## Invitation to Communion

After the breaking of the bread, the presiding priest gives the invitation to communion: "The gifts of God for the People of God." The deacon raises the chalice while the priest raises the paten or ciborium.



The deacon then divides consecrated wafers between vessels and pours consecrated wine into additional chalices as needed. Deacons are traditionally ministers of the cup (but not exclusively so).

# Ablutions and the Dismissal

## Supervising Ablutions

After communion, the deacon supervises the ablutions (cleaning of the vessels). Practices vary greatly, but the key is that ablutions should be discreet and unobtrusive. It is recommended against doing them at the altar. Ministers may gather in the sacristy to consume remaining elements and cleanse vessels, or do ablutions at the credence table.

## The Dismissal

Like the proclamation of the Gospel and the preparation of the table, the Dismissal is one of the "must-do" functions of the deacon. Just as the presiding priest convenes the assembly at the beginning, the deacon adjourns it and sends members into the world. The deacon is the normal minister for the dismissal because the deacon is the sacramental sign of the church's own diaconal nature in the world.

"The Deacon 'un-gathers' the community in the same way that the priest gathers it. He or she leads the community back into a world very much in need of every grace, courage, forgiveness, solace and wisdom we have received."

# Communion from the Reserved Sacrament

Deacons are historically ministers of communion to the sick, visiting individuals at home or in hospital. Justin Martyr, in one of the earliest accounts of the Sunday eucharist, tells us that deacons left after the celebration to bring communion to the sick, imprisoned, and those unable to be present.



## Communion of the Sick

The Book of Alternative Services provides for ministers, ordained or lay (when authorized by the bishop), to bring the reserved sacrament to sick persons. Deacons may also perform anointing of the sick when authorized by the Bishop to do so.



## Communion in Institutions

Deacons may preside at services of communion from the reserved sacrament in care homes, hospitals and seniors' residences. Care must be taken to ensure the liturgy does not give the appearance of a eucharistic celebration minus the words of institution.



## Reserved Sacrament in Church

On occasion, deacons may officiate at a Service of the Word and Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament in a church when a priest is not available. This should only take place in certain circumstances and with the Bishop's authorization.

# Other Liturgical Services



## Morning and Evening Prayer

Deacons may officiate at Morning and Evening Prayer and other Liturgies of the Word, leading the intercessions and thanksgivings.



## Episcopal Liturgies

Deacons assist the bishop in ordination, confirmation, and blessing of oils. At least one deacon should attend such liturgies, assisting with crozier, mitre, and books. Deacons can serve as Emcee, litanists, presenters, and communion ministers.



## Baptisms

Deacons fulfil their normal assisting functions in baptismal liturgies, paying special attention to occasional worshippers. If authorized, deacons may officiate at baptisms in the absence of the priest or if there is a personal connection. The permission of the Bishop is always required.



## Marriages

Deacons assist at marriages, particularly if the Eucharist is part of the service. When authorized and civilly licensed, deacons may officiate at marriages, and always with the prior permission of the Bishop.



## Funerals

Deacons may assist at or officiate at funerals, exercising their ministry of comfort and care for those who mourn.



## Holy Week and Easter

The liturgies assign major duties to deacons: reading the Gospel on Palm Sunday, leading the Solemn Intercession on Good Friday, and carrying the paschal candle and singing the Exsultet at the Easter Vigil.

# Blessings and Emcee

## The Question of Blessings

There is a long-standing custom that bishops and priests may bless **people**, while deacons may only bless **objects**.

Any easy rule of thumb here is to remember that while deacons cannot bless, they can - of course - pray; to that end, when prayer over people who do not receive communion, they may say: "May the Lord bless you and keep you" or "May God fill your heart and your home with holy love".

The customs with respect to blessings by deacons are ambiguous. Deacons need to exercise caution and seek advice from the bishop or priest in charge, as their use of blessings may cause offence and lead to controversy.

## Master of Ceremonies (Emcee)

The deacon often serves as "Emcee" or liturgical coordinator, liaising with other clergy, lay ministers, readers, Eucharistic Assistants, altar servers (acolytes), and musicians to facilitate the participation of the assembly.

"The deacon is the designated worrier for the assembly, which relies upon him when the unexpected occurs."

As the liturgy's principal servant, the deacon needs to cultivate a keen sense of "situational awareness," knowing at all times who should be doing what and helping them do it without appearing to usurp their ministries.

# Vestments for the Deacon

What should deacons wear? The question may seem trivial, yet many religious traditions have dress codes for their adherents. Ordained ministers often wear some form of distinctive dress, both during worship (liturgical vestments) and outside of worship (street dress).

## Street Dress

The use of clerical collars by deacons has been questioned as detracting from the deacon's identity attuned to the "secular" world. Practice varies: some wear collars when functioning liturgically and exercising specific diaconal ministry; others discourage it to avoid confusion with priests.

## Liturgical Vestments

Anglican deacons usually vest in cassock, surplice and stole (worn over the left shoulder and tied at the right hip); or alb and stole (tied as above).

Historically, the most distinctive vesture has been the dalmatic, a knee-length tunic with wide sleeves in liturgical colours.

## Historical Origins

Christian vestments are derived primarily from the customary dress of the people of the late Roman Empire. In the early Church there was no distinctive dress for clergy; they wore the same classical garments as others.

# The Alb, Stole, and Dalmatic

## The Alb

The basic liturgical robe, originating from the tunica alba (white tunic) worn in the ancient world. In church use, the alb symbolized the white robe given to new Christians at baptism. It is worn under vestments like the chasuble, dalmatic and cope.

## The Stole

Has ancient origins as a scarf worn by officials as an insignia of status or by messengers. The wearing of the stole by deacons appears as early as the fifth and sixth centuries in the East. The diaconal stole is worn over the left shoulder, tied at the right hip.

## The Dalmatic

An ancient vestment associated with a servant, originating as ordinary dress in Dalmatia. Its use as an ecclesiastical vestment became general by the fifth century in Rome. Originally decorated with vertical stripes, dalmatics evolved and were decorated in various ways.

# Contemporary Diaconal Vestments

The deacon's stole should not be a priest's stole tied sideways! Genuine deacons' stoles are now readily available. These stoles are normally shaped specifically for the manner in which a deacon wears the stole.



## Latin Style

Worn crossways over the left shoulder and tied at the right hip – the most frequent western usage.



## Eastern Style Orarion

Hanging straight down from the left shoulder, used in many Orthodox churches.



## Byzantine Style

A long stole (double orarion) worn crossways under the right arm like the Latin stole but with ends hanging vertically front and back from the left shoulder. Increasingly used among Anglican deacons.

## The Dalmatic Today

The dalmatic has tended to be reserved for special occasions in both Anglican and Roman Catholic rites. However, Roman Catholic deacons argue the deacon should wear the dalmatic whenever the priest wears a chasuble, as "the dalmatic is for the deacon the equivalent of the priest's chasuble."

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states "the vestment proper to the deacon is the dalmatic, worn over the alb and stole; however, the dalmatic may be omitted out of necessity or on account of a lesser degree of solemnity."

## A note about the Tunicle

The tunicle usually differs from a traditional dalmatic simply in its decoration. A dalmatic usually carries two horizontal orphreys (decorated bars), whereas a tunicle usually has only one.



# General Practice - liturgical colours

Generally, when the presiding priest wears chasuble, the deacon wears the dalmatic, subdeacon the tunicle.



# Why Vestments Matter

"We are a church that makes rich use of outward signs and other aids to religious imagination and expression. Vestments do many things, including offering a link to our religious heritage."

— Deacon William Ditewig

## Baptismal Connection

The alb is a sign and reminder of the white garment of baptism, linking ordained ministry to the baptismal covenant of all Christians.

## Servanthood Symbol

The stole and dalmatic of the deacon express servanthood as well as the servanthood of the entire church in the servanthood of Christ.

## Partnership Demonstration

The partnership of priest and deacon demonstrates to the assembly the link between priesthood and service; between worship of God and care of neighbor; between Word, sacrament and charity.

- Important Practice:** One practice should be discouraged: vesting other people as deacons, whether priests reading the Gospel in the absence of a deacon, or lay persons – the so-called "liturgical deacons." It would be unthinkable to vest as priests those who are not. The same should apply to the diaconate.

# The Deacon in Liturgical Texts

How do various Anglican books of worship prescribe – or not prescribe – the deacon's liturgical roles? We examine the evolution from the First Prayer Book of King Edward VI (1549) through contemporary Anglican, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic texts.

## 1549 - First Prayer Book

Continues mediaeval assumptions about the diaconate but includes a vestige of the liturgical role. Deacons wear albs with tunicles and may read the Gospel.

1

## 1979 - Episcopal BCP

Reflects the early revival of the diaconate, paying considerable attention to liturgical roles. Specifies functions in all major services.

2

## 1959/62 - Canadian BCP

Four hundred years later, registers no change in liturgical function. References to the diaconate are cursory, with minimal roles specified.

3

## 2000 - Common Worship

Church of England's texts reflect lack of enthusiasm for the diaconate, with minimal references and optional roles.

4

## 1985 - Canadian BAS

Surprisingly progressive, giving deacons appropriate roles in almost all liturgies. Compilers were ahead of their time.

5

## 2011 - Roman Missal

Provides comprehensive commentaries and detailed directions. References to deacons abound, reflecting the prescriptive nature of the Roman rite.

6

# Conclusion: Why Deacons Matter in Liturgy

"In liturgy, deacons always perform in relationship with others. Deacons enhance the liturgy and help all Christians – bishops, priests, deacons, and all the baptized – express baptismal ministry in the life and worship of the church."

– Ormonde Plater

3

## Essential Functions

Gospel, Table, Dismissal

7

## Recommended Roles

Throughout the Eucharist

Deacons are an asset to liturgy. They bring to it collegiality and diversity. They draw on the talents of others in the assembly. They help presiders to preside and assistants to assist. Through their ancient office they link us to worship in the earliest centuries of the church.

"Deaconless" liturgies are frequent, even the norm, in many parishes. However, they lack a historic and valuable dimension of the worship of the church. When deacons are available, they should, without question or hesitation, perform their roles in the liturgy.

*Dedicated to Deacon Ormonde Plater (1933-2016), role model for the diaconate and great liturgist.*