

Waverly Statement

May 1981

The theological basis and ministerial functions of the diaconate are clearly set forth in the Book of Common Prayer: the preface to the ordination rites, the rites of ordination of bishops and of deacons, and the catechism. How these functions can best find expression in the present day church will emerge from a continuation of the dialogue and prayerful study that renewed interest in the diaconate has begun.

Although the concept of the diaconate is new to many bishops, priests, deacons, and laity, it is being carried out in the church today by increasing numbers of deacons. This fact we believe to be the most significant sign of the leading of the church by the Holy Spirit into the restoration of the diaconate. It is important to listen to these deacons.

The ministry of the deacon is an extension of the promise of the bishop to "encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries." The deacon is charged to exercise a special ministry of servant directly under the bishop, particularly serving the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely; by making Christ and his redemptive love known by word and example; by interpreting to the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world; and "to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself."

The bishop promises to "guide and strengthen the deacons," and the deacon promises to be guided by the pastoral direction and leadership of the bishop. Great care and attention must be given to the development of patterns for this special relationship between deacon and bishop, emphasizing particularly four areas: theology, selection, training, use.

Bishops and their Commissions on Ministry can undertake an historical and theological study of the diaconate. An excellent resource is [The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order](#) by James Monroe Barnett, published by Seabury Press (available in October, 1981).

In addition to the canonical requirements in selecting candidates for the diaconate, the church needs to consider in particular the kinds of diaconal ministry already manifested in a candidate's life. A clear distinction must be made between the process of admission to the diaconate and the process of admission to the priesthood by Commissions on Ministry, as well as to the differences and similarities in training candidates for these two orders.

Basic training in church history, scriptures, liturgy, pastoral theology, and spiritual formation must be done, ordinarily within a community of people preparing for the diaconate or for lay ministry. However, this would not preclude preparation for deacons through seminary education. Generally speaking, deacons would need additional training in the particular forms of ministry to which they are called.

The diaconate can enable and extend lay ministry and free priests to do their ministry more effectively. The fear of some that a revived diaconate will stifle lay ministry or conflict with priests has been disproved by the successful use of deacons in many dioceses in many ways. Again, let us listen to those deacons and to the bishops, priests, and laity with whom they work.

The deacon acts in a servant role in the liturgy, proclaiming the gospel and, through the prayers of the people, serving as a link between the church ministering to the world and its worship of almighty God. The deacon interprets to the church the needs of the world, beginning in prayer and proclamation and leading the redeemed into ministry and proclamation in action by dismissing the faithful to: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

We believe that the most helpful source for understanding the use of the deacon in liturgy is The Deacon in Liturgy by Deacon Ormonde Plater of St. Annas Church, New Orleans, published by the National Center for the Diaconate, 14 Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02108.

Waverly, Georgia

Note: James M. Barnett's The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order was republished by Trinity Press in a revised edition in 1993. Ormonde Plater's book was revised as Deacons in the Liturgy and published by Morehouse Publishing in 1992; he is now at Grace Church, New Orleans.