Statement on the Diaconate

As with all Christians, deacons find the roots of their ministry within the promises of the Baptismal Covenant. 'To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being' (BCP p. 305). It is the joy of every Christian to discover and live into the servanthood of Christ. Those called to ordained ministry as deacons will have first identified and practiced their servant ministry as members of the baptized community of believers. These ministries are as varied as the people who serve.

The special portion of the work which has been handed to the Diaconate is the care of the poor and marginalized. This ministry has a dual focus on the needs of the world and the servant ministry of the baptized. These foci are drawn from the examination of a deacon in the ordinal. Deacons are to discern the needs and concerns of the world and share those needs with the church. The reverse focus is to assist the baptized to discern their gifts for servant ministry and to empower them to use those gifts to respond to the needs and concerns of the world.Deacons have responsibility to be boundary crossers. They are called to regularly move between the church and the world, speaking the truth in love, and encouraging the sacred and the broken to enter into relationship with each other. This ministry is one of implementation and execution that makes sure the work actually happens. Deacons frequently build organizations behind themselves to carry on their work. It is the deacon's special ministry to challenge those institutions that stand in the way of the work of the kingdom.

The deacon's role is to serve as a manifestation, an outward and visible sign, of Christ's presence in the world. The deacon is one who exercises servant leadership to:

- discern the needs of the world
- speak the needs of the world to the church
- help the laity identify their own calls to mission and ministry
- facilitate the establishment of ministries to the world
- assist bishops and priests in the liturgy

Liturgically the deacon's role is symbolic of the servanthood of Christ. The general liturgical function of a deacon is to assist and empower all who serve in the liturgy. As such, it begins with empowering the ministry of all and is focused on the worship experience of the whole community. The specific liturgical functions in Eucharist are to proclaim the gospel - "bringing good news to the poor…" (Luke 4:18-19); bidding or leading the prayers--sharing the needs and concerns of the world with the Church; inviting the confession--calling the community, individually and corporately, to confess their acquiescence to the injustice of the world; setting, managing and clearing the table - serving the gathered community; and, dismissing the people - sending all to take their ministry out into the world.

The authority of the deacon is centered in the servant ministry of Christ. The deacon serves under the authority of the bishop. A deacon leads by example from a place of empowerment. At no time does the deacon act under their own authority, nor is the focus on the deacon. The prophetic voice of the deacon is focused on justice and the needs of the world. The deacon leads so others may follow and follows so others may lead.

Developed by the Commission on Ministry Task Force on the Diaconate. December 2014.