

CUSTOMARY FOR DEACONS  
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NEWARK  
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

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## CUSTOMARY FOR DEACONS EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NEWARK

### Vision Statement of the Association for Episcopal Deacons

*“A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ’s servant ministry for all people. As agents of God’s compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world’s need, hopes, and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to those needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ’s presence as they embody Christ’s servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.” (Association of Episcopal Deacons)*

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**Purpose: This Customary is written to clarify the role of deacons as ordained ministers in service to the world and the church, and to communicate the ways in which deacons will function and be supported in the Diocese of Newark. These customs shall be regarded and observed in this diocese by lay persons, bishops and presbyters as well as deacons. The information herein is presented with the approval of Bishop Mark M. Beckwith, current Bishop of the Diocese of Newark, and is guided by the vision statement of the Association for Episcopal Deacons, with reference to customaries from several other dioceses.**

- A. **The Relationship between the Bishop and the Deacons:** Deacons serve immediately under the authority and the pastoral leadership of the Bishop. The Bishop assigns a deacon to a congregation after consultation with the deacon, the Archdeacon(s), and the member of the Clergy exercising oversight at the proposed assignment. The rector of a congregation oversees and coordinates the day-to-day activities of the deacon’s parochial ministry. The Bishop may also assign a deacon to a non-parochial ministry, (Title III, Canon 7.4). In these instances, the deacon is still answerable to the Bishop, but oversight and coordination of particular job responsibilities are governed by organizational structure.
1. **Diaconal access to the Bishop:** Though the Archdeacons are responsible for updating the Bishop on general activities of the diaconate, a deacon always has direct access to the Bishop on matters of confidential, personal, or parochial importance.
  2. **Reporting to the Bishop:** Upon renewal of contract, or when leaving an assignment, the deacon shall write a one page letter to the Bishop, summarizing his/her ministry, areas of growth and learning, and/or vision for the future. The deacon should also include major milestones and life changes. The Archdeacon(s) shall also receive a copy of this letter.
  3. **Obligatory Attendance:** Deacons are expected to attend certain diocesan-wide events: The Clergy Renewal of Vows during Easter Week, The Bishop’s Day with the Deacons, and the Annual Convention. Deacons shall consult directly with the Bishop for any adjustments to

this expectation. All deacons are also strongly encouraged to be involved in a regular rota to accompany the Bishop on ecclesiastical visits to congregations that do not have a deacon.

4. Deacons and Diocesan Governance: Because the deacon offers a prophetic voice wherever the Church makes decisions, deacons are also encouraged, if employment time and geographic location permits, to have a voice in at least one decision-making body of the diocese. Deacons are eligible for appointment or election to clergy positions on all boards, committees and commissions of the diocese.

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**B. Deacons In Service to the World: Social Service Ministries in the Community**: The central focus of diaconal ministry is service to the community outside the boundaries of a parish. Given the call of the Episcopal Church to be a Missional Church, a deacon's role in the world is particularly appropriate. The ministry of deacons varies widely, taking such forms as hospital or prison ministry, specialized counseling, ministry to the elderly, poor, dying, or homeless, and persons with mental illness; or at the local or state level, to advocate for social justice and change.

1. Paid Social Service Ministry: Deacons may exercise their ministry in the community on either a volunteer or paid basis. The Bishop approves the specific form of diaconal ministry and the deacon is accountable to the Bishop for that ministry.
2. Full-time Social Service Ministry with a congregational assignment: Full time social ministry does not preclude a limited congregational assignment, as long as the rector and congregation fully understand the deacons' ministry/job commitments and are willing to accommodate for these in their Letter of Agreement.
3. Full-time Social Service Ministry with no congregational assignment: Deacons in a full-time community or social service ministry assignment and not also assigned by the Bishop to a local congregation, still have several options for Sunday diaconal role in the liturgy. With full knowledge and prior permission of the Bishop, and assistance from the Archdeacon for Deployment, the deacon may:
  - a. Attend a single church where no other deacon is serving, and offer to serve upon occasion, during the Sunday liturgy.
  - b. Attend and/or serve in the chapel attached to the ministry in which he/she is engaged (hospital, hospice, nursing home or assisted living).
  - c. Make his or her 'officially unassigned' situation known to two or three diocesan churches within the county or district and rotate attendance, thereby coming to know several congregations that are close in proximity. This arrangement could present new opportunities for congregational interactions.
  - d. In these, or other options which may arise, the deacon shall:
    - i) follow the guidelines for a deacon in the liturgy outlined in the following section on Parochial Assignments
    - ii) not enter into any church polity, other than attendance at coffee hour

- iii) not accept any remuneration for services unless specifically invited to serve in a supply situation (see “D”, below), and may not represent the congregation in any official capacity at any diocesan function or community event
- iv) Change in Contractual Status: at any time, and again with full knowledge and permission of the Bishop and the Archdeacon for Deployment, the rector and the deacon may change their informal status to a permanent contractual arrangement. (e.g., placement of the deacon on the preaching rota, remuneration for attendance at Annual Convention, or inclusion in decisions for outreach ministry).

**C . Deacons in Service to the Church: The Parochial Assignment**: Congregations wishing to have a deacon shall make their request to the Bishop known in writing. In addition to the gifts of the deacon and the needs of the congregation, the Bishop and the Archdeacon for Deployment will consider distance and geographic location of the church from the deacon’s home and place of employment.

1. Congregational Preparation: Prior to entering into formal agreement, it is strongly advised that the deacon make several unofficial visits to the church during liturgy and coffee hour events, meet with the rector/vicar on first a social and then on an official basis, and attend a vestry meeting to discuss the options that have been reviewed with the rector.

A Letter of Agreement from the Office of the Bishop may then be negotiated by the deacon and the rector, in consultation with the wardens of the vestry/executive council, and signed by all parties, including the Bishop, within one month of the deacon’s arrival at the church. The usual tenure for assignment is three years. Renewal for a second three-year period is optional based on the mutual agreement of Bishop, Rector and deacon.

However, for all newly ordained deacons in their first assignment, or at the request of the rector or the deacon, or at the Bishop’s recommendation, the Letter of Agreement may initially be binding for one year. At the conclusion of a year, the deacon, rector, and Bishop will evaluate the suitability of lengthening the assignment to three years.

2. The Priest/Deacon Relationship: The deacon-priest relationship has primary importance in the success of the deacon’s assignment, and on every aspect of the deacon’s ministry. Each works as a cooperative ministry partner with the other, and both understand the relevance of role distinction. Good communication cannot be emphasized enough. The priest/deacon team will meet regularly (strongly recommended: 2 times/month) for prayer, mutual review of the deacon’s ministry, and planning.
3. The Deacon’s Time Commitment: The decision for hours covenanted between rector and deacon depends on both the deacon’s gifts and the rector’s vision for the congregation. A general guideline is between 8 and 12 hours per week. In addition to one Sunday service per week and special liturgical occasions, (e.g. Christmas, Easter), the deacon works in concert with the rector on social and outreach ministries, and the pastoral needs of the congregation.

A deacon may also be in charge of training Lay Eucharistic Visitors, and with the rector, coordinate pastoral visits to the sick and shut-in person of the congregation; or in other outreach settings such as nursing homes, hospitals, or county jails.

Covenanted hours should also include any service on diocesan committees, and for any diocesan events where clergy are expected by their Bishop to attend.

Other Covenant Hours: Deacons, insofar as possible, should be aware of the needs and assets of the surrounding community. At the rector's invitation, deacons may represent a congregation on interfaith clergy organizations, or other committees, boards, or events deemed central to the deacon's outreach ministry and mission. The rector may also invite the deacon to attend vestry meetings (seat and voice but no vote). Such options should be clearly listed in the Letter of Agreement as alternative ways that the deacon may apply his/her covenanted hours.

5. Family members: Family members are of course welcome to attend the church where the deacon is serving. As regular members, they may serve on parish committees, but are strongly discouraged from serving on the vestry.
6. Financial Status: The Deacon is Non-Stipendiary (but also not free).
  - a. Deacons are non-stipendiary, but the congregation is expected to pay registration fees and mileage for obligatory diocesan functions such as the Annual Convention, the annual Renewal of Vows (during Holy Week), annual Clergy Conference and the Bishop's Day with the Deacons. This and any other expenses that the church agrees to pay shall be covered in the Letter of Agreement. Mileage from home to church is typically not reimbursed **but is negotiable**.
  - b. Other expenses relating to the deacon's ministry for church (e.g. mileage, books, and materials, tools) should be negotiated prior to the deacon's assignment and also stated if supported fully or partially by the church's budget in the Letter of Agreement; or in separate discretionary fund designated by the vestry, and subject to an annual audit.
  - c. The deacon shall coordinate closely with the Outreach Committee and with the vestry to make decisions about outreach funds. In addition, deacons will provide a written account of ministry efforts and outcomes for the rector, the vestry and the congregation at the Annual Business Meeting.
  - e. **Clergy of the diocese are expected by the Bishop to engage in the spiritual discipline of tithing, though where, is up to the individual deacon.** Financial giving is an important piece of our own spiritual wellness, but how we do so is a matter of personal capability and conscience. However, without feeling obligated to reveal where, or the amount, we should, as a matter of professional courtesy, inform our rector that we make regular financial contributions someplace.

- f. Deacons will be paid at the same rate as the diocesan rate for Supply Priests when the Rector is ill, on emergency leave, vacation, or sabbatical, if no supply priest can be found and if the deacon takes full responsibility for the service. (See “**D**” below.)
- g. Deacons may accept **fee for service** from a funeral home, if the deacon is the sole provider of such services, either at the funeral home or in the church.
- h. A deacon is restricted from holding any paid position in a church where the deacon is assigned.

**D. Deacons in the Liturgy:** The rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Canons, and the Diocesan Bishop’s expectations always guide the liturgical functioning of the deacon at the diocesan and the local parish level. The rector shall encourage the deacon to function in all roles specific to the diaconal order, as well as in accordance with local parish custom.

1. During any worship service, the deacon will usually: carry the Gospel Book in the processional and place it on the altar; read the Gospel; introduce the Prayers of the People, lead the Confession of Sin, (if there is a Eucharist), set the table, receive the gifts, stand by the celebrant during the Great Thanksgiving, lift the cup at the Words of Invitation, and say the words of dismissal.

The deacon may also lead the Nicene Creed, assist the priest in breaking the bread following the Words of Invitation, act as chalice or assist in distribution of the bread at the invitation of the priest/vicar, and clear the table after communion. When it is the custom, the deacon may cense the Gospel book. If the Bishop is present, the deacon shall ask the blessing of the Bishop before reading the Gospel.

If the deacon anticipates handling the consecrated elements, then he/she also participates in the ablutions prior to the initiation of The Great Thanksgiving. The deacon may also arrange the liturgical Sending Forth of Lay Eucharistic Ministers following the Prayer of Thanksgiving following the Prayer of Thanksgiving (but before the Dismissal).

2. **Preaching:** The priest/vicar is primarily responsible for preaching the Gospel to the congregation. However, the deacon and the priest/vicar shall work out a preaching schedule which allows the deacon to proclaim the Gospel several times a year, or ideally, on a regular basis (e.g. 1/month; once every six weeks) during the liturgical year.
3. **Clerical Attire:** Clerical attire (i.e., clergy shirt and collar) is usually reserved for liturgical or pastoral occasions. Deacons are encouraged to wear an insignia of the Order of Deacons (pin, pendant or cross with deacon’s stole) to promote the visibility of the deacon. Alb and stole shall be worn only when the deacon is functioning as a deacon in the worship service. A dalmatic, if any, should be in keeping with the vestments worn by others in the service. Cassock and surplice with deacons’ stole or tippet is appropriate for non-Eucharistic worship services or when the deacon is not a participant in the altar party.

4. Liturgical Acknowledgement of a Deacon's Service: Soon after arrival, and in the context of the Sunday liturgy, the rector and the wardens shall introduce the deacon to the congregation, with prayers and tokens of welcome for the newly assigned deacon. A letter from the Bishop acknowledging the assignment may be read. The deacon's time of leave-taking should be similarly marked with liturgical celebration, again possibly with a letter from the Bishop. (Refer to: The Book of Occasional Services.)

#### **E. Special Liturgical Occasions:**

1. Holy Baptism: When a deacon assists at baptism, he/she may read the prayers for the candidate, assist the celebrant by pouring the water into the font (but not saying the Blessing Prayers over the water), holding the towels, oil stock, prayer book and otherwise serving. Deacons are not ordinarily the sole officiant at baptisms and must have the Bishop's permission to do so. The deacon may administer the water and the words of baptism, but does not make the signation. In the absence of a priest, the deacon may provide the pre-baptismal counseling.
2. Holy Matrimony: Alongside the presiding priest/vicar, a deacon may deliver the charge, ask for the Declaration of Consent, read the Gospel, read the Prayers and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist. In the Diocese of Newark, a deacon is only permitted to participate in the marriage ceremony in the presence of an ordained priest/minister, as Assistant, but never as the sole Officiant. However, **deacons are permitted (State law) to perform civil marriages outside the church. (no blessing)**.
3. Ministration to the Sick: A deacon may lay hands over, or anoint a sick person using oil previously blessed by the Bishop and by substituting "us" for "you" and "our" for "your" in the concluding prayers.
4. Burial of the Dead: In the absence of a priest, a deacon may preside at service for the burial of the dead, the committal and the internment, in the absence of a priest, but may not consecrate the grave. Should the family wish the Eucharist and no priest is available, the deacon shall first seek permission from the Bishop.
5. The Daily Offices: The deacon may officiate at all Daily Offices.
6. Communion from the Reserved Sacrament (to be revised): A deacon may conduct a service of Communion from the Reserved Sacrament, either following Morning Prayer, or following the Liturgy of the Word, and using liturgies approved by the Bishop and the Diocesan Music and Liturgy Committee. Certain other caveats apply:
  - a. The rector or wardens are not able to engage a supply priest; and/or a deacon is assigned to the congregation and is able to provide the service.
  - b. The deacon is limited by general permission of the Bishop to six services in a calendar year within a single congregation, or in other congregations in the Diocese.

Beyond that number, or for special occasions (e.g., a funeral with Eucharist), the deacon must seek the Bishop's permission.

- c. Before each service, the deacon presents a short explanation to the congregation, about the difference between a Eucharistic Service and Communion from the Reserved Sacrament;
- d. The Service is referred to as "Morning Prayer Followed by Communion from the Reserved Sacrament" or "The Liturgy of the Word Followed by Communion from the Reserved Sacrament", **never as a "Deacon's Mass"!**
- e. The deacon will use a format and liturgical prayers that have been approved by the Bishop of the Diocese of Newark specifically, and only for this purpose.
- f. When acting as supply, whether in his/her own congregation or in another, the deacon shall be paid the going rate for supply priests in the Diocese of Newark. The deacon may, at his or her discretion, return the same amount to the congregation, to a charity of his or her choice, or in good conscience, choose to keep the stipend.

**F. Blessings:** In their role as ordained clergy, deacons may be invited to bless on many occasions: petitions for protection and strength; dedication (not consecration) of persons, spaces or objects to lay service and ministry; babies brought to the communion rail, the blessing an unborn child, birthdays or anniversaries, for healing of self or others; offerings, or objects like food for the hungry, a new car, Anglican beads, or pets. These blessings are known in the Roman church as 'sacramentals'.

Deacons may lay hands upon the shoulder or above individual, object or space to be blessed; use plural pronouns such as "we", "us" and "our", acknowledging the Communion of Saints who stand as witnesses, and offer gratitude for the person's gifts of ministry; or ask for Christ's healing love, etc.

Words of petition, blessing or healing are often preceded by the word "May" but without the signation. Examples are Numbers 6: 24-26; or the general blessing from "Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals. (Zondervan Press, 2010).

If appropriate, the deacon may also sprinkle holy water (already blessed by a priest), as in receiving the body in a memorial service; or administer healing oil (already blessed by the Bishop) in a healing service, or at bedside of the sick or dying.

A deacon may NOT: Bless the waters of baptism, or give the sign of the cross over the candidate for baptism at the words of baptism; give a marriage blessing; bless or dedicate any object designated for use in a consecrated space (e.g., wall hangings, a new Gospel book or vestments) or consecrate a gravesite.

**G. Deacons Assigned to Congregations in Times of Transition:** Diaconal ministry in a time of transition is a complex and challenging undertaking. Almost every situation has special circumstances. When the rector of a congregation resigns or retires, the deacon, with the permission of the Bishop and in agreement with the wardens, may elect to remain. If this is the case, these special issues must be thoroughly explored and creatively addressed by the deacon with the Bishop, the Wardens, and if possible, with the former Rector before he or



she departs; and certainly, with the Bishop and wardens on a continuing basis during the transition time.

1. Within two months of the transition, a new Letter of Agreement **must** be negotiated between the deacon and the wardens of the congregation.
2. Wardens are responsible for finding supply priests for all liturgical events where the Eucharist is required, and for weddings, baptisms, and for funerals where Eucharist is desired. Marriage counseling should be conducted by the priest who is going to be celebrating the service. In the absence of an available priest, the deacon may provide baptismal counseling.
3. If a supply priest is not available for a Sunday service, the deacon may serve as a supply, deliver the homily, and use Communion from the Reserved Sacrament. The deacon shall then be paid at the same salary scale as a supply priest. The deacon may also receive payment from a funeral home for memorial and burial services when he/she is the sole supplier of those services and no Eucharist is desired.
4. At no other time during the transition is the deacon paid for activities in or on behalf of the congregation, other than those diocesan events required for usual coverage in the Letter of Agreement (Annual Convention, etc.)
5. The deacon may be consulted on certain aspects concerning diaconal responsibilities for the church profile (e.g. pastoral care, outreach, and community ministries) but may not serve on the committee, be involved in the search process itself, or ever express any opinion regarding the candidates.
6. During the transition, no matter how extended, the deacon is never to be viewed by the church leaders, parish administrator or congregation, as a decision-maker, or “supply priest”, but only as support for those in charge of various functions of the church, and to assist others in keeping ministries on track.
7. When an Interim, Priest in Charge or Rector is finally called to that parish, the Bishop, in consultation with the deacon, will be reassess the deacon’s assignment situation.

**H. Disputes Involving Deacons: The Mediation Team:** When matters of disagreement cannot readily be settled between a deacon and rector (or wardens), one or both parties shall notify the Archdeacon for Witness; or the Bishop directly. After assessment of the issues, the Bishop may activate the diocesan Mediation Team, consisting of the Archdeacon for Witness and a priest from the diocese designated by the Bishop.

1. Mediation Options: Considered on a case-by-case basis, the Team engages in prayerful discussion and discernment with the deacon and the rector (or wardens, if the parish is in an interim situation), first individually, and (if appropriate), with both parties together.
2. Though not limited to the following options, the Bishop may then:

- a. Ask that the Letter of Agreement to be reworked to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The deacon resumes assignment under a new Letter, negotiated on a trial basis of six months to one year;
- b. Ask that the Letter of Agreement to be revoked. All parties agree that the deacon should be relieved of diaconal duties at that church and after a time to be determined by the Bishop, be given a new assignment.
- c. Assign the deacon to Inactive Status (See below, “L”);

**I. The Spiritual Life of the Deacon:**

1. Practicing a Rule of Life: The deacon will engage in regular worship and prayer practices, study of Scripture, an annual retreat, and Spiritual Direction at least four times a year.
2. Tithing: As a matter of spiritual wellness, a deacon is expected to commit to donating a regular financial gift either to the church to which he/she is assigned, to a social service ministry of his or her choice, or to a diocesan outreach ministry (e.g. Alleluia Fund).
3. Clergy Collegiality: Deacons are expected to engage both spiritually and socially with other clergy of the diocese at such events as clergy conversations, clergy convention, and clergy days, and Bishop’s Day with the Deacons, unless excused by the Bishop.

**J. Sabbatical**: Deacons are entitled to, and should take a three month sabbatical every five to seven years, or roughly the equivalent of two (2) three-year assignments.

**L. Inactive Status**: A deacon may petition the Bishop for Inactive Status due to health or family concerns; or the Bishop may declare Inactive Status of a deacon, due to special concerns. In either case, the deacon is expected to stay in regular communication with the Bishop, to attend clergy or diaconal events whenever possible, and to maintain collegiality with the clergy community.

Those who are on Inactive Status due to health or family concerns may return to their diaconal ministries, in consultation with the Bishop, when feasible. Those who are on Inactive Status due to special concerns will need to resolve the situation, in close consult with the Bishop, within a mutually agreed period of time.

**M. Relocation**: When a deacon re-locates to or from another diocese and wishes to continue in diaconal service, he/she must apply to both the former diocese and the new diocese for change of status before resuming full diaconal status.

**N. Retirement**: The age for retirement set forth in the canons is 72. A deacon is ordained for life but may retire from active status with the consent of the Bishop. A retired deacon may wear the clerical collar and participate in the liturgy at the invitation of the rector of a parish with the understanding that the ministry of any deacon assigned to the parish by the Bishop has priority; or in diocesan liturgies, when invited by the proper authority.

**O. The Roles of the Archdeacons in diaconal governance:** The Bishop may assign either two, or if needed, three deacons to the position of Archdeacons to share the duties, and privileges of diocesan and diaconal administration. If only two Archdeacons are required, then these two may share the responsibilities as their skills and time allow, in consultation with the Bishop.

**The Archdeacon for Witness:** This person is the primary liaison between the deacons and the Bishop of the Diocese. This person assists the Bishop with the deacons' spiritual and pastoral welfare, and outreach and communication with the community of deacons; mediation and resolution of disciplinary issues; relationships and programs for priests, deacon and/or church leaders; review with the Bishop and/or writing policy documents; and other diocesan liturgical and clerical duties as assigned by the Bishop.

**The Archdeacon for Education and Deployment:** This person is responsible for all educational and budgetary concerns of diaconal students; continuing education for ordained deacons; placement, transition and redeployment of deacons throughout the diocese and other liturgical and clerical duties as assigned by the Bishop. (Note from 2012: the current Archdeacon for Education and Deployment also serves on the Commission on Ministry as Chair of the Diaconal Committee for Training and Education of Diaconal Students.)

**The Archdeacon for Administration:** This person is responsible for the communication of deacons' activities, events, programs and informational articles in The Voice and other diocesan public or social media; arrangements for the annual deacons' retreat and keeping them informed of other programs of spiritual, educational or outreach interest; tracking and recording information such as current disposition of deacons and number of services of Communion from the Reserved Sacrament; scheduling deacons for confirmations and other diocesan events; all budgetary concerns; and other liturgical and clergy duties as assigned by the Bishop.

**P. Annual Letter to the Archdeacon for Administration:** As the diaconate in our Diocese grows, and assignments and life styles become more diverse, it is ever more challenging to "keep track", and be pastorally in touch with the needs of our community and the deacons for whom we care. Therefore, on or near the anniversary of their ordination, deacons in the Diocese of Newark are tasked with writing a one-page letter to the Archdeacon of Administration outlining service ministries and/or life status of the past year.

**This letter is a requirement of diaconal service and ministry, whether the deacon assigned to a congregation or a social service ministry, or is on 'inactive' status due to illness or other circumstances; that is, until the deacon has been officially retired or released from ministry by the Bishop.**

**Q. The Tinning Center for Diaconal Ministries:** The Tinning Center for Diaconal Ministries is located in on the second floor of The Rectory, at St. Stephen's Church, Millburn. Thanks to the generosity to the congregation of St. Stephen's and the rector the Rev. Sheelagh Clarke, the archdeacons have been given the use of an office on the second floor, to carry out the official business of the diaconate of the diocese. A second room, shared with St. Stephens, may be used for formation classes for diaconal students, continuing education for all deacons. A third room, The Parlor, may be scheduled for Spiritual Direction, retreats, or small group meetings

**R. Forms of Clerical Address:**

Full Title:	The Reverend Deacon
Abbreviated Title:	The Rev. Deacon
Letter Salutation:	Dear Deacon [Jones]
In Conversation:	Deacon [Jones]

5/13/2014