



# The Distinctive Ministry of The Deacon

What it means to be a Distinctive Deacon in the Diocese of Melbourne



ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

# THE DISTINCTIVE MINISTRY OF THE DEACON

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## Holy Orders in the Anglican Church

It would be difficult for anyone to give an account of what it means to be a deacon in the Diocese of Melbourne without first addressing the issue of holy orders – in particular asking the question: Why has the church taken one of the holy orders, that of deacon, previously assumed to be an order passed through on the way to becoming a priest, and restored it to a distinctive and permanent order without the assumption that the minister who is a deacon will ever be ordained to the priesthood?

The short answer is that the ministry of deacons has a long history dating back to biblical times. The deacon in the early church was a permanent order. It is only since the Middle Ages that the order has been used as a transitional order, i.e. a period of training or preparation for the priesthood.

An examination of the liturgies for ordination in 'A Prayer book for Australia' (pages 785 & 793) will show differences in emphasis between the ministry of a deacon and that of a priest.

Why ordain deacons at all? Why not join deacon and priest into one order? There are those who argue for this and those who argue that, in effect, bishop and priest come out of the same 'stable,' but the deacon has a different reason for being. Bishops oversee and delegate to priests their episcopal authority to gather, teach and nurture the community of Christ, whereas the bishop authorises the deacon to assist the bishop to focus the church and the world alike on issues of justice, mercy and compassion.

Deacons are not apprentice clergy. They are emissaries of the bishop and servant leaders in the 'diakonia' (ministry of service) of Christ. They carry out a distinctive ministry to the world and to the church. They work in many different fields and may often be found outside the mainstream of the church, at the boundaries and in the ditches of society.

Rethinking the role of the diaconate in the contemporary church has meant rethinking and re-framing the roles of everyone who is baptised into the church of God. Thus baptism is the primary calling to ministry.





## Why renew the diaconate?

In summary the reasons are:

- to recover the 'diakonia' of the whole body of Christ;
- to clarify what it means to be a member of God's church today;
- to bring about change in the culture of the church, refocussing it towards Christ's mission;
- to bring into sharp focus our current ways of doing and being;
- the Fundamental Declarations section in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia commits us to a threefold order of ordained ministry;
- each order is understood out of reference to the other. A strong priesthood and episcopate needs a strong diaconate.

## What does the renewed diaconate offer?

By recovering the distinctive role of deacon on a more permanent basis, the Diocese of Melbourne sees opportunities to:

- imaginatively explore new possibilities for ministry;
- develop a clearer vision for the ministry of all believers;
- develop a clearer understanding of what it means to be bishop, priest, or deacon within the context of a ministry belonging to all baptised believers; and
- use deacons as signposts for a renewed outward-focussing church.

## What does the renewed diaconate look like?

### Images and metaphors

There are many images that are used to give some idea of the role and being of a deacon:

- go-between
- servant leader
- bridge to the world
- prophet
- fellow-traveller
- evangelist
- intercessor
- apologist
- teacher
- pioneer
- messenger
- envoy
- herald
- adviser
- healer
- advocate
- enabler
- ambassador
- bridgebuilder

All of these metaphors encapsulate the role of deacon. These ways of being and doing are not exclusive to the deacon; they are shared with everyone else in the church. A deacon however can demonstrate the outworking of these ministry metaphors for the benefit of the whole church.



## What do the deacons in this Diocese do?

The ministry of deacon in this diocese is as varied as the number of deacons. some possibilities for ministry include the following:

### Chaplain

A number of deacons in the Diocese have roles that include aspects of chaplaincy. Their ministry may be centred on schools, local nursing homes, aged-care facilities or hospital chaplaincy units. They may be licensed to these ministries or operate from a home base church but spend most of their time equipping others for ministry at the margins of society, away from the gathered church. They care for the young, poor, the sick, the lonely, the outcast, and the marginalised and bring their concerns to the attention of the local church.

### Deacon in the Parish

Deacons are licensed to a local parish as part of their ministry responsibility. Within the liturgy, they represent the church scattered, bringing the hurts of the world to the attention of the church. Some of these deacons will have a specific ministry to special groups (e.g. children's ministry; developing and leading pastoral care groups; leading parish home and hospital visiting teams; working with mental health patients.) In all of these activities, they work in association with the incumbent of the parish.

### Diocesan Deacon

Several of the deacons operate at the diocesan level employed by Diocesan agencies in specific areas appropriate to their order and ministry.

**All of these deacons work to support, encourage and equip the work of others for ministry in the church of God.**

## Where do we need more deacons?

The church needs deacons in ministry leadership, in education, in parish ministry and in prophetic and advocacy work.

We need advocates and prophets. There are some people with these gifts, working to bring justice to all levels of governance in church and society. They often work at the margins, critically questioning unjust structures. They are prepared to be unconventional and challenging. They are prepared to break new ground, to be a 'burr under the saddle' of those in authority.

We need deacons with gifts, knowledge and a passion for the environment, nursing, education, working with children and young people, among indigenous people, and more.

The Diocese is concerned with issues such as poverty, the environment, justice, the needs of marginalised groups, and the reconciliation of Aboriginal people and later migrants to the rest of Australian society.

There are many members of the church ministering in these areas in the Diocese., Some of these may have the call to the diaconate but are not sure what it means for them.



## Diocesan Policies concerning Ministry Training

The following Policy excerpts from the Policy Document of the Diocese of Melbourne relating to Ordination are pertinent to those considering a call to ministry as a Deacon. They are essentially the same as for those preparing to be ordained to the priesthood. The section headings are numbered as in the Policy Document from which they come.

### B. Policies relating to Selection for Training

#### 1. Personal call to be affirmed by the Church.

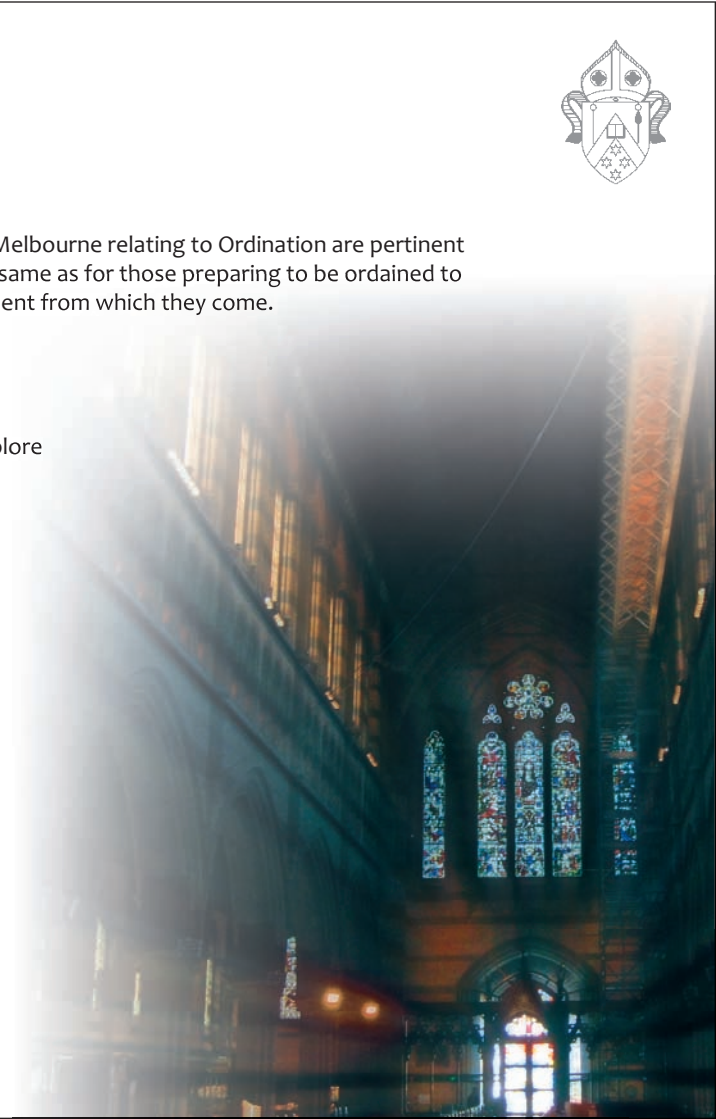
All enquirers presenting to the Director of Theological Education to explore a sense of call to ordination will have their sense of personal call tested and confirmed by the Church before admission as a diocesan candidate for ordination. Not all those offering for selection for training may have their own sense of call validated and confirmed by the responsible Church authorities as an outcome of this process of discernment.

#### 2. Archbishop advised by Examining Chaplains.

The Archbishop is assisted in the task of selection of ordinands and the management of the training process by a panel of Examining Chaplains made up of both lay and ordained members of the Church whom he appoints. Candidates are required without exception to be available to the Examining Chaplains for interviews and meetings throughout the process of discernment and training.

#### 3. Admission to the processes of Discernment and Selection.

Attendance by an individual at the Year of Discernment program and a Selection Conference will be by invitation and not as of right or as an automatic outcome of participation in the Inquiry process. The satisfactory completion of preparatory requirements as stated in the procedures is a prerequisite for an invitation to be issued.



## C. Policies relating to Theological Education and Ordination Training

### 1. Delegation of Training for Ordination.

The Diocese delegates to the two approved theological colleges (Ridley Melbourne and Trinity College Theological School) responsibility for the training of those who have been accepted as candidates for ordained ministry. (Trinity College Theological School is affiliated with the Melbourne College of Divinity and Ridley Melbourne with the Australian College of Theology).

### 2. Duration of Training.

Four years full-time training is the requirement for those with no prior theological education. However, where a student has undertaken prior theological education, not less than one year will be spent as a candidate in full-time preparation for ordination. This is to allow integration of theological, biblical and pastoral studies and development as a professional. In completing the four-year requirement, part time study is an acceptable component, provided that at least 2 years are spent in full time studies.

### 3. Required Elements in Training

The Archbishop will from time to time specify in some detail, the required elements in training for ordination.

### 4. Clinical Pastoral Education

A unit of CPE or an equivalent approved by the Archbishop is required of all candidates for ordination.

### 5. Reporting on Candidates

Each college will provide annual reports to the Director of Theological Education on all Diocesan Candidates as to progress in formation, development of ministry skills and ongoing suitability as a candidate.



### 6. Supervised Theological Field Education

STFE is a required element in Training. Students on 8/12-hour placements are to be assisted by a 'ministry grant' of \$3,000, paid by the parish or agency of placement. Travel Allowances at the current Diocesan rate are paid by the Parish to those doing a 4 hour Sunday placement.

### 7. Financial Support of Ordination Candidates

The Diocese has a limited capacity to assist Candidates financially and assistance is subject to Diocesan budgetary conditions from time to time. It is expected, however, that candidates will be largely self-supporting during training. Training grants are not available to candidates over 50 years of age.

### 8. Training for Distinctive Diaconate

The Board for Ministry in April 2006 resolved that "all Deacon Ordinands normally be required to complete preordination academic requirements equivalent to those for Transitional Deacon Ordinands"



## Specific Provision for training and support for the Order of Deacons

There will be a designated unit of study within the pre-ordination training program, which explores the distinctive nature of diaconate as an order of ministry.

Deacons must participate in the formal post ordination training activities organized for the clergy of the diocese.

In addition, specific events and opportunities are provided for Distinctive Deacons to encourage a sense of collegiality in their particular order, and to deal with issues which pertain more particularly to their circumstances of ministry.

A Committee for the Diaconate operates as a sub-committee of the Board for Ministry in drawing Deacons together on a regular basis for fellowship and training including conferences.

## The Deacon in the Liturgy of the Eucharist

Liturgical practice in the Diocese is varied but generally follows the rubrics of A Prayer Book for Australia. The Prayer Book records definite liturgical roles for bishops, priests and deacons. If a deacon is not present, a priest or an authorised lay person exercises the role designated for the deacon.

As a distinctive order, deacons are encouraged to play their role in all aspects of the liturgical life of the church community. While actual practice depends on local circumstances, the following may be seen as specifically 'deacon's' ministry:

- the call to repentance (prophetic role)
- the reading of the gospel (heraldic role)
- serving at table (servant role)
- the dismissal (go in Peace... mission role).

## A Final Word

The grace of orders enables us to fulfil the tasks that would otherwise be impossible, including the changing commitments that impact both on our own family and the other members of the church. The community of faith has placed their faith and trust in the ordinand to be a faithful servant leader and a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Ordination involves family and community transforming old relationships into new ones. It brings shared pain and shared joy. Ordination is a call to faithfulness and accountability through which we pray we might also grow in holiness of life as imitators of Christ.



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