

**Convictions and Practices Concerning the
Diaconate and Ordination**
Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes, Anglican Church in North America¹

Introduction

The conviction and practice of our Diocese concerning “every member ministry” is that in every local church: the Holy Spirit calls and empowers all Christians to the work of ministry. Discussions of ordination and the offices of the clergy only make sense in the context of the local church where every member of the body contributes to Church’s ministry and mission (Eph 4:11-16).

Within the context of the Church, God calls and gifts some Christians to serve in offices of leadership. This paper expands upon our beliefs and practices regarding the offices of leadership and ordination in the Church with a specific focus on the ministry of deacons.

Our Anglican tradition sets apart people for three offices – deacon, priest, and bishop. So why limit this conversation to ordained ministry for deacons? Because the diaconate is the defining ministry for all leadership in the Church, both lay and ordained. The roles of priest and bishop will be mentioned as necessary, but our primary aim is to set out a clear foundation for Christian leadership and ordination. In that regard, the diaconate plays a pivotal role. Said more directly, the ministry of deacons informs and shapes ordained ministry as understood and practiced in our Diocese.

We therefore seek to affirm and promote the diaconate as essential to the life and ministry of the Household of God. Sadly, in most of our Anglican world, the diaconate is undervalued and underrepresented in comparison to the priesthood. As we seek to fulfill our mission as a Diocese, we are intent on recovering a robust ministry of deacons. We hope this short paper will contribute to that recovery.

Setting the Stage for Christ-Shaped Leadership

Before diving into the particulars of ordained ministry, we must first establish our basic understanding of the nature and character of leadership for Christians in general, and within the Body of Christ, more specifically.

First, it is important to see that leadership is a God-given part of all human institutions and social relationships. This is not simply an observation of reality: leadership and authority were part of the altogether-good and ordered world God created. Specifically, God created humanity alone to bear his image and likeness. He delegated the responsibility, and the commensurate authority to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” and to “subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” to men and women

¹ ADGL is grateful to the bishop and staff of the Diocese of Christ Our Hope for permission to utilize this material.

(Gen 1:28-29). Therefore, leadership and authority are “in the image of God” and are necessary to effectively accomplish God’s purposes for humanity.

However, this same gift of human leadership and authority was profoundly distorted and corrupted by the Fall. That distortion began when we rejected God’s authority over us. Moving out from under God’s authority effectively altered our authority: we were cut off from the source. As a result, human leaders, even when well-motivated, are sometimes abusive, destructive, self-serving, greedy, or simply ineffective.

Second, we believe that Jesus Christ came to redeem every aspect of human life, including leadership. He both embodied and taught a renewed vision for leadership as was intended from the beginning of creation. His disciples were required to set aside self-promotion and arrogance. In their place, they were called to imitate him in sacrificial servanthood (Matt 20:25-28; Phil 2:5-8). Jesus thus instructs each of his followers, whether the leader of a family, a member of a church vestry, a pastor, a college professor, the CEO of a corporation, or a political leader with legislative power, to sacrificially serve those under his/her responsibility. This renewal is so radical that many Christians have been inclined to replace the word “leader” with “servant” or “servant-leader.” Regardless of one’s convictions concerning what word to use, this is clear: we need Christian leaders in the Church and in society who lead by taking initiative and responsibility, and who are servants for the sake of others. Such servant-leaders foster transformative knowledge of God, human flourishing, justice and peace, the effective care of creation, and thriving, moral, and ethical communities (Cf John 10:10).

Third, Christ’s redemption of leadership offers the possibility of what might be phrased “the operation of true *spiritual authority*¹ through, and for, people.” Christians serving

¹ The phrase *spiritual authority* is not found directly in Scripture. The Bible declares that “there is no authority apart from God” (Rom 13:1), so one can make a case for simply using the word *authority*. Matthew 7:28-29 offers a powerful commentary on Jesus’ teaching in contrast to that of the scribes that would support this approach. The scribes were experts in the law (i.e., they were well-educated and intelligent), and they had positions of influence and leadership. But Jesus (who certainly had intelligence, learning, and position as Lord of all), *had (i.e., possessed) authority* within himself. His personal authority was something different, something beyond the skills of the scribes. It was recognizable by its operations and effects. The centurion who sought Jesus’ healing of his servant in Matthew 8 intuitively recognized this authority in Jesus. His authority was, in that sense, self-evident, and it convinced the centurion that Jesus had the power to give health and life, even from a distance.

However, this distinction between personal and positional authority (*having authority within oneself* in contrast to the authority or power that comes from skills and position) is difficult to maintain in our minds. Therefore, we are using the phrase *spiritual authority* to emphasize an internal authority that enables leaders to serve as God intends, for the genuine benefit and blessing of others. We intend to communicate a concept of *authority* that is different from (more than) power based on skill or intelligence, or the power that comes with an office or position. Someone in a position of leadership can accomplish much through skill,

as leaders (in any realm of human endeavor) must acknowledge that leadership has been tragically twisted by sin. In Christ, we are called to exhibit transformative models of Christ-like leadership that operate with genuine *spiritual authority* as well as great human skill. Following are several important observations about spiritual authority (as we are using this term).

1. Spiritual authority comes from God himself. Spiritual authority may be mediated through human servant-leaders, but it ultimately flows from God himself. God's authority is always and fully, *spiritual authority* (1 Cor 15:20-28).
2. Regardless of one's views of the relations between the members of the Godhead, spiritual authority is manifest within the Trinity. Therefore, it is an eternally good, essential aspect of humanity in the image of God, reflecting his glory. (John 5:19-24).
3. Jesus Christ, God the Son, serves among us with true spiritual authority. Jesus' authority was given by anointing from the Father (Matt 3:17; Luke 9:7) and learned through his lifelong obedience, trust, and submission to the Father (Luke 2:40,52; 22:39-42). Jesus' ministry came with spiritual authority, and brought life, wisdom, blessing, and joy.
4. Through his redemption, Christ opens up the way to live under, and to serve with, spiritual authority from the throne of God. (Matt 16:17-20; 28:18-20). Spiritual authority is given to us as we pursue lives of personal godliness, submitting to God directly by faith, obedience, and worship, or indirectly by submitting to the authorities God has placed over us in life (1 Pet 2:13-17). In other words, the only way a human being can have spiritual authority is to be under spiritual authority. All Christians who have the calling to lead therefore must seek to live consistently under the authority of God in their lives.
5. Christ emphatically calls people who lead in the Church (Heb 13:7, 17) to lead with spiritual authority. We see the operations of true spiritual authority by its fruit – things such as peace, love, joy, patience, etc. (See Gal 5:22-23); empowerment, protection, care, guidance, and nurturing of others; and communities characterized by compassion, righteousness, justice, and freedom.
6. The rejection of spiritual authority in human relations leads to a distortion of power, through coercion, manipulation, self-promotion, and abusive control. The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost interrupts this cycle by anointing church leaders to carry out their work in the life and power of the resurrection.
7. Genuine spiritual authority is counter-cultural and runs in the face of human pride and selfishness. Therefore, it is often misunderstood (and even opposed) by people

wisdom, and intelligence. But *spiritual authority* (as we are using it) is a step beyond power to effect change. It is an authority that exhibits wisdom and truth in the ways it operates. It is the kind of authority, possessed and given by Jesus Christ, that leads to transformation, healing, illumination, and abundant life. Leadership that operates with *spiritual authority* is especially central to the family and the Church (the Household of God).

until they are won over through the experience of consistent godly spiritual authority and the work of the Holy Spirit.

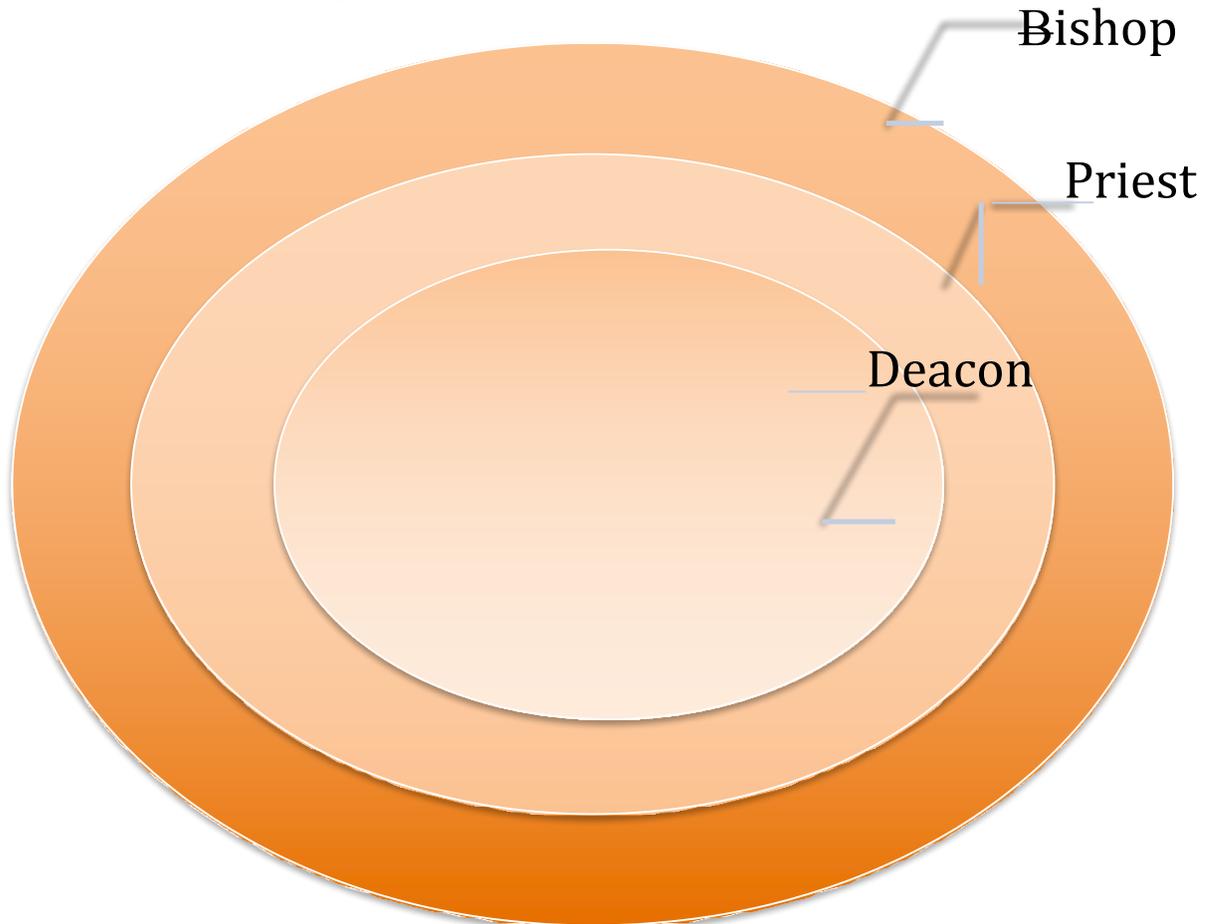
8. Even when misunderstood and opposed, godly spiritual authority is an apologetic for the beauty and goodness of Jesus as Lord and the Kingdom of God he brings to us in this life (and in eternity).
9. To expand the conversation, spiritual authority within the Christian community is developed over time through the active pursuit of at least five specific self-understandings and practices.
 - a. Sanctification: Understanding ourselves as children of God, called to lives of growing sanctification as we pursue a life of personal holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit in prayer, confession, and repentance.
 - b. Stewardship: Seeing ourselves as answerable to God and placed in positions of influence and care for the wellbeing and flourishing of others.
 - c. Submission: Submitting to God by obedience, reverence, worship, and faith.
 - d. Servanthood: Practically serving others in our daily lives and activities.
 - e. Sacrifice: Ultimately understanding that the call to follow Christ (and serve his people) is a call to “take up your cross daily” and die to self.

Spiritual authority in the Church, the authority that only comes through personal and corporate submission to God, **always** constitutes a call to sacrificial servanthood.

It is our prayer and aspiration that spiritual authority will particularly operate in the lives of all ordained ministers in the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes. We believe that recapturing a robust diaconal ministry will aid us in fulfilling that hope. Following, you will find more about our vision for vibrant diaconal service in our churches.

A Vision for the Ministry of Deacons

The orders of the church are often graphically illustrated by a pyramid of hierarchy: bishop, priest, deacon, laity. That image communicates one important truth about Anglican Church order, the flow of spiritual authority. But it falls short of communicating other fundamental truths about ordained ministry regarding the definition and nature of the ministry of the clergy. Instead of a pyramid, visualize three concentric circles.



This simple graphic communicates a critical truth: the ministry of a deacon is the heart of all ordained ministry in the Anglican Church. A priest is always a deacon. A bishop is always a priest, and even more to the point, he is always a deacon. If a bishop or priest forgets that the essence of his calling is diaconal, he cannot fulfill his calling to be a bishop or priest.

The diaconate is the defining, centering ministry of Anglican clerical orders. Even more broadly, it is the defining ministry for all Christian leadership. Therefore, the principles that describe and define the ministry of deacon form the foundations of all leadership, and especially ordained leadership, in our Diocese. All truly Christian leadership is “deacon-shaped leadership.”

Principles and Practices of Diaconal Ministry

The following words and phrases help flesh out the vision for diaconal ministry in the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes:

Servanthood: The word “deacon” is a transliteration of the Greek word, DIAKONOS, which is sometimes translated as “servant” or “minister.” The verb form of this word, DIAKONEO, is a rich term with five colorful uses in ancient Greek:

1. To function as an intermediary
2. To perform obligations, services, and duties, to render assistance, or to wait at table
3. To meet immediate needs, or to help
4. To carry out official duties
5. To care for, or take care of, others

Clearly this word communicates a broad meaning for the diaconate as *servanthood*.

Leadership-as-servanthood is fixed in the New Testament in Jesus’ example. Jesus’ own servant-ministry is powerfully communicated in passages such as John 13, Matthew 20:20-28, and Philippians 2:1-11. Together these passages portray a renewed vision of God’s intention for human leaders: Jesus, God in the flesh, laid aside personal glory, took on human flesh in the form of a servant, and served to the point of a shameful, ignominious death on the Cross.

The office of deacon is therefore the office of servant. This office is at the heart of all Christian leadership and ordained ministry, and it serves as a powerful aid to keep Christian leaders and followers grounded in the essential understanding of Jesus-shaped ministry. Considering that every Christian has the opportunity to influence others throughout his / her life, deacons remind us to do that as servants, for the sake of others.

Practical Servanthood: Therefore, we learn that the very word “deacon” is not just the title for an office. Deacons are called to service within the Church and under the authority of the local rector or bishop.

That involves openness to meeting immensely practical needs. A deacon is called to be alert at all times to ways in which he / she can help practically to meet needs, alleviate pressure, and directly care for others. No task of true service is beneath the deacon. Regardless of whatever other gifts or ministries a deacon may offer, all deacons should lead the church in following Jesus’ example and command to “take up the towel and wash the feet of others.” This broad call transforms any “menial service” into “Christian ministry and good works, unto the Lord.” (See 1 Cor 15:58.)

In Anglican tradition, this practical service also involves liturgical ministry in the local church alongside the priest. Deacons read the Gospel lesson at public services. They set the table in preparation for the Eucharist. They charge the congregation to embrace its mission, sending the church back into the world week after week to love and serve the Lord. At the priest's request, they serve in whatever practical ways are needed from Sunday to Sunday – from preaching to praying to picking up bulletins after the service.

From Within: If we consider the universal calling to servanthood given to all Christians, why have deacons in the first place? Aren't we all called to serve according to the gifts and calling each of us has received? Aren't we all supposed to be *deacons*, i.e., servants?

Yes, we are all called to serve. But that does not preclude the fact that God raises up leaders within his people – people set aside and called to exercise influence and spiritual authority for the sake of the whole. Life-giving leadership, influence, and authority have always been part of God's plan for his people. Consider the judges, kings, and prophets of ancient Israel. Consider how God called them to account for the spiritual condition of the nation. Remember the Levitical priesthood and God's intention for the care and instruction of his people. Consider how God also called them to account for the spiritual, political, and social condition of the nation. Fast forward to the Church: Jesus designated twelve apostles and gave them authority to establish the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember the universal presence of recognized local leadership everywhere in the New Testament. (See Heb 13:7,17.) Leadership is normative and expected for God's whole created order, and certainly therefore his Church.

In a particular way, deacons are raised up as leaders **from within** the local church. Their service is deeply connected with the intimate life of the local community. Following the example of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2.25 and the first deacons in Acts 6, we learn that a deacon's influence is meant to be infectious, shaping the local church in its essential Christian life and ministry, **from within**. The leadership of a deacon is "as one of the flock," a sheep who nevertheless is exemplary in lifestyle and service.

It is helpful to draw the contrast of this emphasis with the role of priestly ministry in the Anglican context. The priest of the flock serves as the shepherd of the flock under the authority of the Great Shepherd, Jesus. In this calling, he / she is shaped by the rich biblical imagery of "the shepherd of the sheep." The theology of the shepherd flows from the creation mandate in Genesis 1-3 – to lovingly serve, care for, and tend the whole world. It is repeated in the call of leaders for the nation of Israel (Ex 3-4; 19; Deut 17-18). Tragically, the shepherds of Israel proved to be generally corrupt (Ezek 34), and the people suffered because of neglect and abuse. God promises in the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, to raise up a new Servant-Shepherd who will genuinely care for his people. That Great Shepherd turns out to be Jesus, God incarnate – who died, was buried, and was raised to authority at God's right hand on high (John 10).

After he established the Church, Jesus' shepherding care for his sheep was mediated through elders of the Church as under-shepherds of Christ (See Acts 20:17-32; 1 Pet 5:2). In Anglican polity, these elders (*presbyters*, the Greek word translated "*elder*") are also called *priests*. An Anglican presbyter or *priest* is ordained as an elder.

The rich metaphor of a shepherding ministry reminds priests to stand apart from and alongside the flock in order to direct, guide, lead, guard, and protect it. They must diligently watch the flock and determine how to keep it safe and united through crisis and danger. They must decide where to find food, water, and shelter, how to care for and bind up the broken, and how to recover the lost.

While the flock must have that shepherding ministry, it is incalculably helpful to also have "sheep within the flock" who particularly sense and follow the leadership of the shepherd. From within, deacons embody what the Lord calls the church to do and to be. Such people – deacons – have lasting healthful influence on the ministry and mission of the local church **from within**. Influence by example, transformation by infectious influence, are the particular blessings God gives his church through deacons.

Mission: In Anglican tradition, deacons lead the way in personal evangelism and in compassion ministries to the poor and needy.

The biblical story continually reorients God's people to care for the weak, marginalized, poor, and alien in society. The biblical laws of community life (Ex 22:21-24; Deut 24:10-22) as well as the laws for liturgical season (Lev 23:33-55; Deut 15:1-18; 16:9-17) consistently orient Israel to care for those in need. The Psalms celebrate God's own compassion for the helpless (Pss 10:14; 68:5-6; 146:9). And the chief charge of the prophets against the political and spiritual leaders of Israel is their failure to care for the poor, widows, orphans, and sojourners (Isa 1:17, 23; 58:6-14; Jer 5:28; 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 34:1-6; Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11). "Lowly tasks for lowly people" is a byword for the people of God. As those who know our own poverty before God (Matt 5:3), Christians accept the call to be the hands and feet by which God ministers to the needy.

Not all people are needy and poor physically or materially, but everyone is lost apart from the grace of God through Christ Jesus. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. The central mission of his life was the Cross. Following Christ's ascension, the universal mission of the church is to "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18-20). In their ordination, deacons are called and commissioned to lead the local church in its evangelistic ministries and mission efforts.

While all Christians are called to mission, God also calls and specially gifts some to this ministry (Eph 4:11-12). The Church should be especially alert to the fact that God can unite diaconal calling with powerful spiritual gifts of evangelism and prophetic, apologetic preaching or teaching. With these gifts, and ministering "from within," deacons exercise a formative influence on the entire church toward our common calling

to mission. (See Acts 6-7. As well as maintaining wise service to needy people within the Church, two of the first deacons, Stephen and Philip, were highly gifted evangelistic, apologetic preachers.)

To sum up, deacons lead in both ministries of outreach – in compassion for the poor and needy, and in zealous Gospel proclamation to those who are disconnected from God (rich or poor). Therefore, by calling, deacons connect the local church with the unreached community, setting the example for the whole Church in its calling to bring Christ to the world through word and deed.

According to Gifts and Calling: As noted, Anglican deacons are expected to offer specific kinds of ministry, liturgical service, missional leadership, and intensely practical “nuts and bolts” service. However, those normative diaconal ministries are always filtered through the particular spiritual gifts and personalities of each individual deacon. A deacon can be a gifted preacher or teacher. A deacon can be a wise strategic leader and administrator. A deacon can be a gifted, apostolic missionary, called by God to break into new territory open for the Gospel. A deacon can be part of a church planting team. A deacon can be a gifted musician and worship leader. A deacon can have gifts and ministries of counsel, encouragement, wisdom, and pastoral care.

Whatever the specific spiritual gifts and ministries God has given to a particular deacon, he or she must be given full opportunity to express those gifts for the sake of the local church and the work of the Kingdom. We believe that Scripture, and the tradition of the Church, unite to teach that both men and women are called to life and service as deacons.

To sum up, as a Diocese, we are praying and working to recapture a robust diaconate for the health and wellbeing of our local churches and our collective mission.

What Happens at Ordination?

Though Anglicans have a variety of views on the sacraments, we all agree that two foundational sacraments are directly commanded by our Lord, baptism and communion. Anglicans also believe in a broad sacramental world in which heaven and earth are being reconciled through Christ, headed toward the consummation when “earth and heaven are one.” In this present world, Christians are being fully redeemed and reconciled to God. We should expect all of life to be infused with the presence and work of God. “In him we live and move and have our very being” (Acts 17:28). (See Romans 8:1-17, John 14:1-27, and Acts 2:1-21 for a fuller explanation of the active presence of God the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s children.)

Even though all of life is meant to be “a wedding of heaven and earth” for the followers of Jesus, there are particular callings, not required or expected of all Christians, in which God sets apart people for special identity-level relationships and service. These callings are historically signified and administered by the Church. The “sacramental callings” commonly understood and practiced by Anglicans are marriage, confirmation, and ordination. These are moments when God the Spirit meets a response of faith and commitment to his gracious calling in our lives with blessing, strength, renewal, and gifts.

Confirmation is understood by many Anglicans as “the ordination of the saints for the work of ministry.” It is the climax of a season of catechesis (discipleship / formation) in which participants come to a mature knowledge of the Christian faith and a mature commitment to a life of discipleship and service. In that context, those being confirmed come before the local church and receive prayer and anointing by the bishop. The bishop prays for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order that each confirmed believer will receive strength, gifts, and graces from the Holy Spirit to live and serve as a faithful, lifelong disciple of Christ.

Ordination shares similarities with confirmation. It is the result of an in-depth process by which the local church recognizes and discerns that God has raised up an individual for leadership within the Church. That local discernment is confirmed by a process of examination that includes other Christian leaders and the bishop of the diocese. Once a person has been discerned as a likely candidate for ordained leadership, there is a season, normatively a year or more, of in-depth spiritual formation and practical training for ministry.

The culmination of this process is ordination, a liturgical service in which the individual is charged with his / her ministry, exercised through vows. Dedicatory prayer is offered by the congregation, clergy, and bishop. It is a service “thick with the Holy Spirit” when the Lord greatly blesses his Church with a new servant-leader. The climactic moment of prayer and anointing with oil seals the newly ordained with the spiritual gifts and graces needed for his / her new life in the service of Christ and his Church.

Some Anglicans believe that ordination is an “ontological change,” a transformation of the person’s core identity. While that is not the teaching and practice of the Diocese of the Great Lakes, for ontological change takes place at baptism when we are given a new nature, we believe ordination is a sovereign sacramental moment endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit which establishes a new shape and direction for the life and work of the ordained person.

How should the local church respond to the ordained person? Above all, with gratitude to God for a fellow Christian who has been raised up for particular service. From this flow honor and respect, attention to his / her leadership, and submission as appropriate to the direction and life of the local church and its ministries (or, in the case of a bishop, to the overall direction and ministry of the Diocese).

How does the ordained person respond? According to the vows taken, the one being ordained submits to a calling to a life of radical discipleship, sacrifice, and service, of thorough-going holiness and spiritual discipline, of humility and prayerful dependence on God.

Implications for the Life of the Church

We believe that we are called to articulate a clear vision for the diaconate, to pray for God to raise up effective deacons, and to seek to strengthen and expand the ministry of deacons within the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes. Through this, we pray for a number of important results as we look ahead:

1. A greater value attached to humble service within the life of the Church that will encourage joy in ministering to one another through simple acts of service and kindness.
2. A greater value attached to the ministry of deacons that will bring balance and health to our local churches.
3. A release of spiritual gifts and creative ministries in our local churches. People will be encouraged to operate within their gifts, and leaders will be encouraged to equip, serve, and release people to operate within their gifts.
4. A clear picture of servant leadership to shape our life together.
5. More men and women serving as deacons in local churches.
6. An increase in practical Gospel mission, both in evangelism and ministries of compassion in our churches and local communities.

In sum, a healthy diaconal ministry will bring forth the life, beauty and effectiveness of the entire Body of Christ in the world.