

# Diocesan Program for Diaconal Formation



*Answering God's urgent call*  
**TOGETHER**

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS

Diaconal ministry is servant leadership...  
outside the four walls of the church itself.



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This booklet is designed to be helpful to anyone seeking to know more about the ministry of deacons in the Episcopal Church and the diaconal formation program in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

*What is a deacon?* The word “deacon” comes from the Greek language and the biblical concept of diakonia. Diakonos is commonly defined as servant ministry, particularly to the poor, the sick and the oppressed.

*What is its historical origin?* The church has had deacons since New Testament days. The deacon’s service is a sign or sacrament of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve. Jesus is the model for servant leadership and a deacon is called to exercise servant leadership in a variety of ways, including encouraging and enabling others to serve. A deacon has one foot in the world and the other in the church.

*If one feels called to be a deacon, what training is required?* Diaconal ministry is servant leadership, serving under the direction of the bishop. Deacons are students of Scripture, interpreting the Gospel to the world, and bringing the needs of the world to the church. In the church today, the diaconate is one of three distinct orders of ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church—deacons, priests and bishops. An individual may be ordained a deacon after completing the required three-year course of study and formation.



## FORMATION

### Liz Good

"The formal learning opportunities in the deacon formation program are as varied as they are interesting. But for me, the informal learning might be even more valuable. We've all come to the program by different paths and from different backgrounds. When I hear other people's stories, I am strengthened. When I hear about their doubts, my own doubts don't seem so awful. I would never have gained as much by trying to learn on my own.

As I go into my third and final year of formation, I've become involved with the diocese's creation care initiatives. I enjoy educating people about our responsibilities as faithful stewards of God's creation and helping parishes achieve "green" goals. It's a way of combining my science background with my baptismal vows. I expect to continue this work—but I'm open to other directions as well. If there is one thing I've learned, it's that I should expect to be called in ways I don't expect!"

The Book of Common Prayer provides roles for deacons within liturgies and defines the responsibility of deacons in serving others in the name of Christ and in leading and training lay people in such service. Many deacons define their true ministry as being outside the four walls of the church itself, often at the ragged edges of society and our comfort zones.

The Diocese of Massachusetts has been ordaining deacons since 2001, and has opened its Program for Diaconal Formation (which is outlined on the following pages) to dioceses throughout Province I. For more information on discerning a call to the diaconate and how to apply to the ordination process in the Diocese of Massachusetts, please review the Ministry Discernment Handbook found on the "Ordained Vocations" page of the diocesan Web site at [www.diomass.org](http://www.diomass.org) or contact the Office for Ordained Vocations, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 138 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111 (617-482-5800).

## Program Overview

Everyone who is accepted as a postulant for ordination to the diaconate in the Diocese of Massachusetts is thereby enrolled in the diocesan Program for Diaconal Formation. The mission of the program is to provide academic and practical education for the diaconate as a distinct and equal order of ministry. The program's components, described here, have been developed under the general oversight of the diocesan bishop, to whom deacons have a special responsibility, with the aim of meeting the prescriptions of the Episcopal Church and the needs of the diocese.

Participation in the program is required in each of the three years prior to ordination as a deacon. Active engagement in every aspect of the program is a condition of admission to Holy Orders, and is expected of everyone who enters the ordination process, irrespective of previous studies or experience. Participants who successfully complete the program are awarded a Certificate of Diaconal Studies.



The two main components of the Program for Diaconal Formation are (1) residential weekend colloquiums, built around academic and practical instruction, and (2) internships and individual learning projects. Deacons-in-formation must also fulfill certain other requirements, which are listed on page 13. The diocese charges no fee for the weekend colloquiums for Diocese of Massachusetts participants, but a considerable investment of time and effort is necessary.

Deacons-in-formation from other Province I dioceses may apply to the program subject to approval of their diocesan bishop and the canon for ordained vocations in the Diocese of Massachusetts, in conjunction with the archdeacon for diaconal formation. A cost will be incurred and can be paid on a quarterly or annual basis. Those who are accepted participate fully in the weekend colloquiums; other requirements are set by their home diocese.

The hospitality of the Order of St. Anne has been a blessing to the program since its inception.





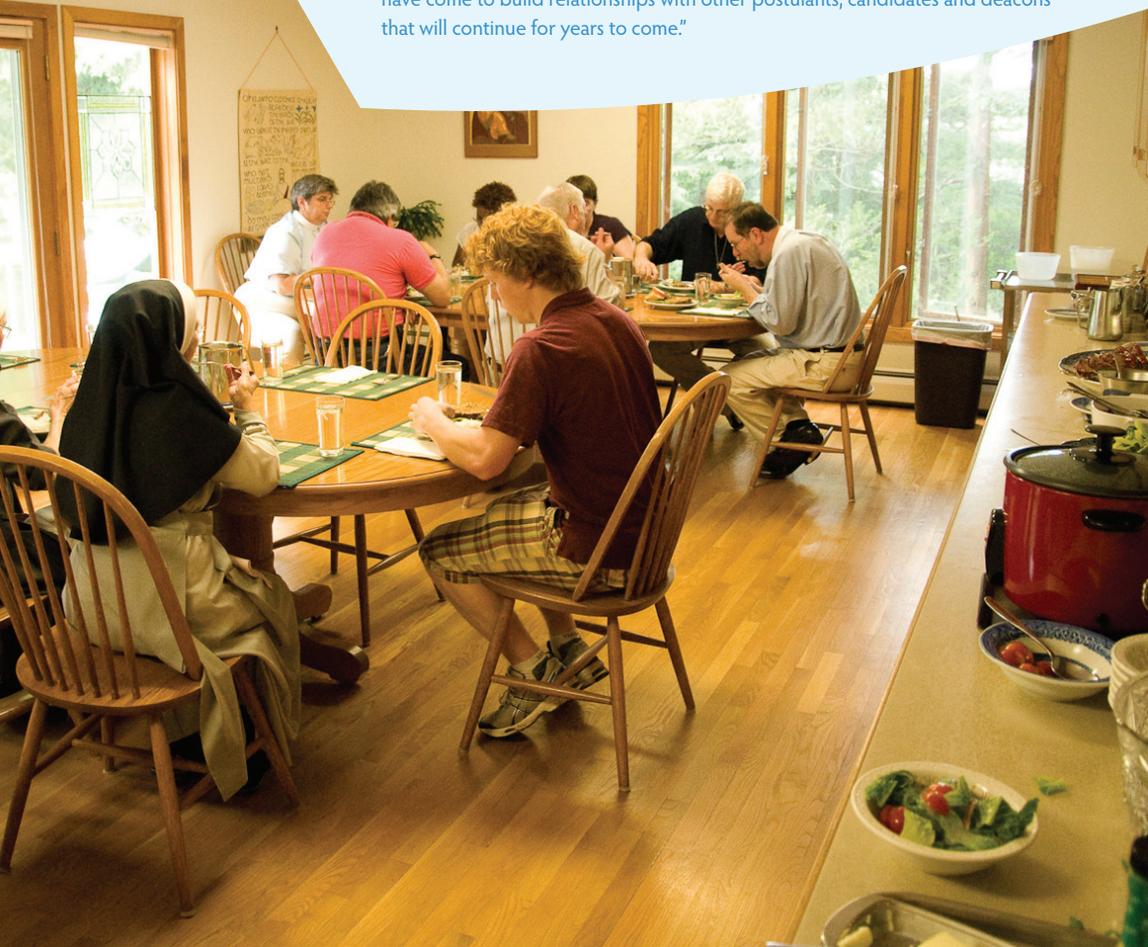
## THE COMMUNITY OF DEACONS

### Bonnie Matthews

"As a postulant for the vocational diaconate in the Diocese of Connecticut, I feel blessed to be part of the Diocese of Massachusetts deacon formation group. The experience I have received on my weekends in Massachusetts at St. Anne's Convent has been very rich. It is difficult to put into words how one feels in such an intimate setting for a whole weekend with the primary focus being God's mission through the work of the vocational diaconate.

The most enlightening part of my weekends was during Sunday worship. We celebrated Eucharist with postulants and candidates reading the lessons, reading psalms, performing the role of deacon, reading the Gospel and preaching. I did not fully realize that I am on a path that God has chosen for me until I was able to offer the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation to my brothers and sisters whom I have so intimately come to know.

As is evident by my attending the Diocese of Massachusetts deacon formation program, the work of God's mission is not divided by state lines or dioceses. I have come to build relationships with other postulants, candidates and deacons that will continue for years to come."



# 1. Weekend colloquiums for deacons-in-formation

## Format and schedule

Once a month, from September through June, postulants and candidates for the diaconate gather for a weekend colloquium, which combines academic instruction, worship and community building (March is an exception). The colloquiums are coordinated by the archdeacon in charge of formation, working with the canon for ordained vocations.

Each colloquium runs from Friday afternoon—ordinarily the third Friday of the month—through noon on the following Sunday. Housing and meals are provided. Ordinarily the colloquiums take place in Arlington, Mass., at the convent of the Order of Saint Anne—Bethany (OSA) whose hospitality has been a blessing to the program from its inception. Deacons-in-formation are expected to arrange their schedules so as to arrive promptly and be present for the whole weekend. In March, the colloquium is replaced by the diocesan retreat for postulants and candidates, which is likewise obligatory for everyone in the program.

### Friday evenings

Each monthly colloquium begins at five p.m. on Friday with Evening Prayer, for which participants join the OSA sisters in their chapel. A typical colloquium will continue with supper in the refectory, followed by an evening session led by one of the current deacons-in-formation.

### Saturday

Most of Saturday is devoted to instruction, led by a member of the program's faculty. These Saturday sessions are planned according to a three-year cycle, so that all the areas of study will be covered at some point during everyone's participation in the program, regardless of the point at which they enter the curriculum cycle. The Saturday evening is more informally structured. Participants often have their supper together at a local restaurant.

### Sunday

At 7:30 a.m. on Sunday morning all the deacons-in-formation take part in the OSA Eucharist, which is open to the public. Each participant in the program is assigned to preach at one or more of these liturgies. Another participant acts, by special permission of the bishop, as the liturgical deacon. Following breakfast, the sermon and the liturgy are discussed and evaluated by the whole group in the first part of the morning meeting. The colloquium concludes with a further instructional session, which may include an introduction to the following month's topic.

## Areas of study

Instruction at the formation colloquiums is provided by a number of scholars and experts, whose presentations and assignments vary with the gifts and graces of the instructor and with the subject matter being taught. The following areas are included in the three-year curriculum. Not all of these areas are covered every year, and the specific topics listed below are typical but not exhaustive.

### Holy Scripture

- Form and contents of major books of the Old Testament (Torah, narrative books, prophets, Psalms) and New Testament (synoptic gospels, Johannine books, letters of Paul)
- Critical and historical approaches to biblical study
- How Scripture is used in theology, ethics and spirituality

### Homiletics

- Purposes and types of preaching; sermon preparation in different contexts
- Use of the voice in speaking and chant; styles and techniques of sermon delivery

### Christian theology

- Basic doctrines of Christianity, as affirmed in the Creeds and the Book of Common Prayer
- Significant 20th and 21st-century theologians and theological trends

### Human awareness and contemporary issues

- Principles of moral decision making
- Case studies of problems and opportunities in the world at present
- Canon law and other ecclesiastical structures
- Pastoral ministries

### Spirituality

- Forms and practices of prayer, individual and corporate
- Ascetical theology and faith development

### Anglican studies

- Origins and development of the worldwide Anglican Communion
- Early, medieval and Reformation Christianity
- Sources and contents of the Book of Common Prayer
- History of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Massachusetts

In any given year, the topics presented may vary, as may the sequence of presentations, but the whole three-year cycle of Saturday instruction is meant to go forward along the lines of the following sample curriculum. Evaluation of the academic component is carried out through written and oral examinations in the third year.

## Example of Saturday Curriculum

| MONTH            | YEAR ONE  | YEAR TWO                                      | YEAR THREE                                  |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>September</b> | Diaconate:<br>Introduction and history  | Diaconate: Roles                              | Preaching:<br>Preparing sermons             |
| <b>October</b>   | Christian Theology:<br>doctrines of the Creed   | Christian Theology:<br>Grace, sin, redemption | Christian Theology:<br>Anglican theologians |
| <b>November</b>  | Voice, breathing, chant   | Global Anglicanism                            | Church history:<br>Reformation              |
| <b>December</b>  | Spirituality  | Prayer: Forms and practices                   | Pastoral care                               |
| <b>January</b>   | Old Testament overview: Content and criticism   | Torah and former Prophets (historical books)  | Latter Prophets and Psalms                  |
| <b>February</b>  | Christian Ethics: Conscience  | Moral Theology: Norms and criteria            | Canon Law (including Title IV)              |
| <b>March</b>     | Annual Diocesan Retreat for Postulants and Candidates at the Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center |   |   |
| <b>April</b>     | Synoptic Gospels  | Epistles, especially Paul                     | Gospels and letters of John                 |
| <b>May</b>       | Liturgy : Principles and rites  | Liturgy: Practicum                            | Liturgy: Eucharistic belief and practice    |
| <b>June</b>      | Episcopal Church and social justice   | Contemporary issues: Racism                   | Contemporary issues: TBD                    |

## 2. Internships and individual learning projects

Deacons-in-formation are required to complete an internship in each of two of their years in the Program for Diaconal Formation. One internship is carried out in a parish setting, the other in a non-ecclesial or secular agency. In the year that does not involve an internship each deacon-in-formation carries out individual learning projects. Like the Saturday instruction, this component of the program follows a three-year cycle. Thus, in a given year, all the deacons-in-formation will either be serving in an internship or completing an individual learning project.

Parishes and non-ecclesiastical agencies that are appropriate sites for internship placement are determined by the archdeacon, in consultation with prospective interns. The parochial internship may not be carried out in the faith community that is "home" to the intern, and deacons-in-formation are encouraged to choose congregations that will challenge their preconceptions and help them to develop new skills for ministry. Examples of secular internships to which deacons-in-formation have been assigned include:

- Hospice of Cape Cod, making home visits to allow respite time for caregivers in families
- Linden Ponds residential care facility, providing pastoral care to residents suffering from Alzheimer's
- Living Waters, a church-sponsored and housed drop-in center for homeless men and women

In both secular and parochial settings, the intern's duties and expectations are settled in advance with the prospective supervisor, and an internship agreement is signed and filed with the Office for Ordained Vocations. The diocese does not expect that interns will be compensated otherwise than by the formative experience they will gain through their ministries. At the conclusion of the internship, intern and supervisor evaluate the learning and service that have taken place, and both write a formal assessment, submitted to the archdeacon and the Office for Ordained Vocations.

In addition to the two internships, each deacon-in-formation will develop, propose and carry out learning projects, suited to their particular needs and aspirations for future ordained ministry. Examples of acceptable learning projects are as follows.

## Learning Projects

- Chaplaincy training
- Language skills, for instance in Spanish, sign language or another language that would enhance ministry in this diocese
- Online courses at an Episcopal seminary, as approved by the archdeacon
- Participation in a Leadership Development Initiative project
- Visiting a selection of eight parishes, as approved by the archdeacon
  - a. requires two deacons-in-formation working together
  - b. research parishes that have never had a deacon and do not know about the diaconate program
  - c. meet with the rector or priest-in-charge to develop a plan on how best to educate parishioners regarding the diaconate, specifically,
    - i. lead an adult forum
    - ii. preach about the diaconate at a Sunday service
    - iii. recruit future inquirers to diaconate program
- Self-designed project, as approved by the archdeacon

It is expected that the aims and scope of each project, and how it is to be evaluated, will be carefully planned with the archdeacon and, like the internships, agreed upon in advance with the canon for ordained vocations.

## Other requirements

In addition to completing the Program of Diaconal Formation, everyone who is accepted into the ordination process must fulfill a number of requirements set by the Diocese of Massachusetts and by the canons of the Episcopal Church. Arranging to meet these requirements is the responsibility of each individual, in consultation with the canon for ordained vocations. A part of the cost incurred will be subsidized by the diocese for certain requirements but not all. The requirements include:

- Regular meetings with a spiritual director
- Leadership Development Initiative workshop
- Safe church training
- Anti-racism training
- Title IV training
- Background check and criminal reports
- Psychological evaluations and testing
- Medical examination and report



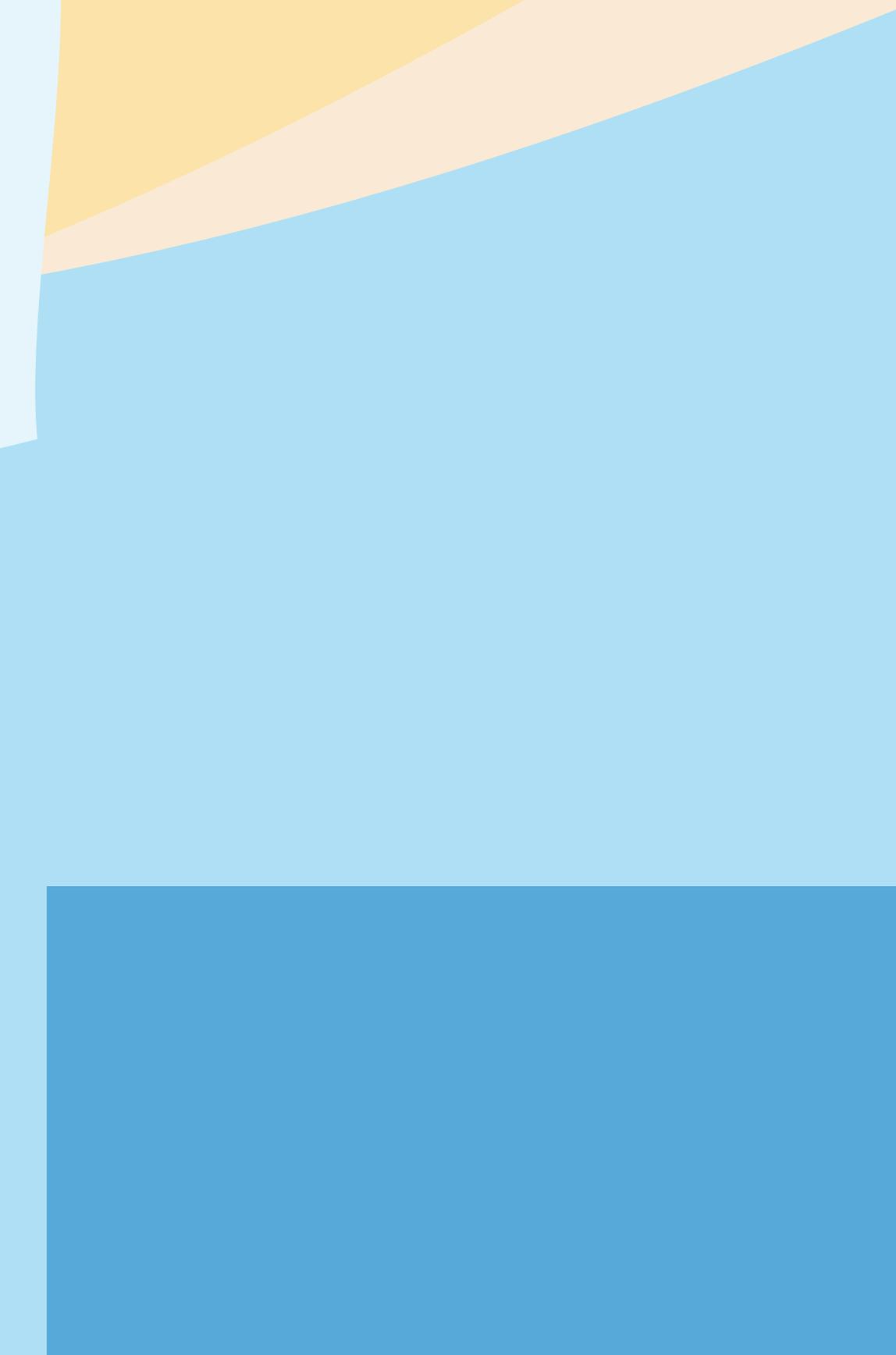
## A DEACON'S WORK

### Dan Horgan

"As a deacon I've been asked to help coordinate the development of a Plymouth/Cape and Islands mission hub project.

The goal of our "hub" is to encourage Cape parishes to work on a common mission project here in our neighborhoods. We hope to strengthen ties between our communities and highlight real service as our faith-filled expression. We have also empowered our lay people to take charge of these endeavors and are planting seeds for young and old to work together and get their hands dirty, learning from one another and from those we may serve."







**Office for Ordained Vocations**  
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