



Understanding Holy Orders

WHAT ARE HOLY ORDERS?

The Diocese of the Upper Midwest of the Anglican Church in North America is committed to the biblical truth that all Christians are called to ministry. The Diocese of the Upper Midwest also is heedful of the biblical call to set aside some for a special work of spiritual service and leadership *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:12). In the Hebrew Scriptures, God established Levites and priests to serve and guide his chosen people. Likewise, God has blessed the Church with the New Testament ministries of deacon, priest (presbyter), and bishop. These three *holy orders*, as they are known in our Anglican tradition, were beautifully articulated in the second century by the early Church Father and martyr Ignatius of Antioch.

The apostle Paul, in exhorting a young presbyter, Timothy, got to the heart of New Testament ordination when he wrote: *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you* (1 Timothy 4:14). In this earliest description of ordination, we see that when spiritual leaders lay their hands on a candidate, that person receives both an immediacy and power in the Holy Spirit (*prophecy*) and a gift of love and service for the Church and those far from the Church.

The creeds proclaim the church to be “one, holy, catholic (i.e., universal), and apostolic.” Bishops are a powerful sign of this reality in their unity across time (from the age of the apostles) and space (throughout the world). Since ordination to any order always comes through a bishop, all ordained ministry participates in this sign. Thus, ordination is not primarily about the individual, or even about the parish, but rather about the Church universal.

People might ask: “If everyone is called to serve, why then are only some ordained?” Ordained ministry is more than a call to serve the Church, it is the call to be the Church’s servant. Ordination is not about being recognized and validated; it is about recognizing and serving Christ in the *least of his brothers* (Matthew 25:40).



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DEACON?

The first of the three orders of ordained ministry is that of deacon. All who are called to holy orders are ordained to this ministry. As Richard Hooker, an important early Anglican theologian explained: *The fundamental order is that of deacon. Every priest, every bishop is first of all and always a deacon.*

The very name of this ministry (Greek *diakonos* = servant) is a reminder of Jesus' teaching that all authority in his church exists for service: *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant (diakonos)*" (Matthew 20:25-26). This servant leadership was perfectly exemplified by the Lord Jesus himself, who *came not to be served but to serve* (Matthew 20:28).

The ministry of deacon is captured in the symbol of the towel. The deacon strives to model the Lord Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper (John 13:1-20). The deacon figuratively *washes the feet of the saints* (cf. 1 Timothy 5:10) by unstinting and selfless service to the parish family and to the poor. The ministry of a deacon is one of "field leadership" as exemplified by the church's first deacons, who assumed responsibility from the apostles for the daily distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:1-7). The specific form that this leadership takes depends on each deacon's unique gifts (e.g., leadership development, Bible studies, pastoral care, visiting the sick, and caring for the underserved and the forgotten).

Some deacons are later called to serve as priests or even bishops. All the same, the order of deacons should never be viewed as simply a stepping stone to other ordained ministry. Rather the servant leadership of the deacon should be seen as a model for all forms of ordained ministry and no one should be ordained a deacon who would not be willing to remain in that order indefinitely or forever.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PRIEST?

The second of the three orders of ordained ministry is that of priest. The Church, in her ordination liturgy, traditionally has identified three essential facets of this sacred ministry: to TEACH, to SANCTIFY, and to GUIDE. Thus, the bishop asks someone about to be



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ordained to the priesthood: *Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine [teach], sacraments [sanctify], and discipline of Christ [guide], as the Lord has commanded and as this Church has received them, according to the Commandments of God, so that you may teach the people committed to your charge with all diligence to keep and observe them?*

As one who *teaches*, the priest must not only *preach the word* (2 Timothy 4:2), but must also *contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 1:3). Thus, one being ordained to the priesthood is asked: *Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Body of Christ all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word...?*

As one who *sanctifies*, the priest is entrusted with ministering the sacred gifts of Word and Sacrament that Christ himself has given *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish* (Ephesians 5:27). Thus, in laying his hands upon one being ordained to the priesthood, the bishop pronounces the following words: *Receive the Holy Spirit for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed to you by the Imposition of our Hands. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. Be a faithful minister of God's holy Word and Sacraments; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

As one who *guides*, the priest must be a true pastor, modeling his ministry on that of the Good Shepherd, *who lays down his life for the sheep* (John 10:11). He must *reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Timothy 4:2). Thus, one being ordained to the priesthood is asked: *Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, ... to use both public and private admonitions and exhortations, to the weak as well as the strong within your charge, as need shall require and occasion shall be given?*

Traditionally, the bishop has presented a Bible and a chalice to each newly ordained priest as part of the rite of ordination. Together, Bible and chalice serve as a powerful symbol of the priest's call to preside at the regular parish celebration of Word and Table.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BISHOP?

The third of the three orders of ordained ministry is the office of bishop. The bishop, like the priest, is called to TEACH, to SANCTIFY, and to GUIDE. Thus, at the ordination and consecration of a bishop, we pray: *give your grace to all Bishops, the Pastors of your Church, that they may diligently preach your Word, duly administer your Sacraments, and wisely provide godly Discipline.* At the same time, the bishop is called to be a living icon of the unity of the church across time and space, as well as the pastor/shepherd of his priests and deacons. The ministry of every priest and deacon is an extension of and participation in the ministry of the bishop (cf. Numbers 11:24-25), just as the bishop, as pastor, shares in the ministry of the one *great shepherd of the sheep*, the Lord Jesus Himself (Hebrews 13:20).

Traditionally, the bishop is presented with a staff and a ring at his ordination. The staff symbolizes the bishop's call to be the visible shepherd of God's holy people (*Simon, son of John, do you love me?...Tend my sheep*"—John 21:16), and the ring symbolizes the bishop's call to love Christ's bride, the Church, just as *Christ loved her and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25).

HOW IS A CALL TO ORDINATION DISCERNED?

Ordained ministry is a *gift* of God — something that is received rather than merited, discerned rather than claimed. Moreover, ordained ministry is a gift *to the Church*, rather than to the individual ordained (Ephesians 4) -- it is about service to others rather than personal recognition or fulfillment. Accordingly, ordination is not a prize or credential that is earned at the completion of degrees, programs, or tasks; nor is ordination the validation of a personal existential encounter with God.

It is the work of the Church, and especially of her ordained ministers, to discern the individuals whom God has called for this purpose. Indeed, it is entirely possible for a parish and its leadership to discern an individual's potential call even before the individual may be privately aware of it. While many are involved in the discernment process (e.g., the individual, fellow members of the parish, and the leaders God has placed over the individual), it is the bishop who ultimately must prayerfully discern an individual's call for ordained ministry.



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In the Diocese of the Upper Midwest, seven specific factors are considered in the process of discerning those whom God has called to ordained ministry:

1. **CALL** - What specific kind of call has God placed on a person's life?
2. **CONTEXT** - Where, when, and how is a person being called to serve?
3. **CHARACTER** - Can a person model Christ for others?
4. **CHARISMS** - Does a person use his or her spiritual gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7) and recognize and encourage the spiritual gifts of others?
5. **COMPETENCE** - Has a person received adequate training and formation for ordained ministry?
6. **COMMUNITY** - Is a person able to live and function well in community and work productively with others (i.e., social “chemistry”)?
7. **CATHOLICITY** - Does a person see the Church beyond the local community as “us” rather than “them”?

We also believe that all called to ordained ministry in the Diocese of the Upper Midwest must be ready and eager to heed God's summons to us to plant a revival of word and sacrament infused by the Holy Spirit.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BE ORDAINED?

It is common in American churches to answer this question: “in two or three years—as long as it takes to finish a graduate degree.” In the Diocese of the Upper Midwest, while fully honoring and encouraging theological education, we see service, leadership, and fruitfulness in the parish as the primary indicators of readiness for ordination. Developing maturity in service, leadership and fruitfulness takes time. The Apostle Paul admonished Timothy to *not be hasty in the laying on of hands* (1 Timothy 5:22). Gregory the Great, several centuries later, underscored the need to avoid undue haste: *No one ventures to teach any art unless he has learned it after deep thought. With what rashness, then, would the pastoral office be undertaken by the unfit, seeing that the government of souls is the art of arts!* With this in mind, the Diocese of the Upper Midwest is committed to “early leadership and later ordination.” Consequently, there is no pre-set period for individuals to prepare for ordination. Accordingly, in this diocese individuals have been ordained not only in their twenties, but in their fifties!



WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR ORDINATION?

An individual passes through four steps in the ordination process: *aspirant*, *postulant*, *candidate*, and *ordinand*:

- **Aspirant (exploring ministry, but not necessarily ordained ministry)** - The rector of a parish, after seeking the counsel of members of the parish that he has chosen for this purpose, determines that a person may have a call to serve the Church in a special way (not necessarily ordained ministry) and invites the person so identified to explore that possibility together with the Church. (Start of the “Seven C’s” process, with special emphasis on CALL and CONTEXT)
- **Postulant (specifically exploring the possibility of ordained ministry)** - The rector of the parish and the Dean with oversight of the parish determine that an aspirant not only has a call to serve the Church in a special way, but that the aspirant’s call may be to ordained ministry and invite the aspirant to explore that possibility with the Church. (Continuation of the “Seven C’s” process, with special emphasis on CHARACTER, CHARISMS, COMMUNITY, and CATHOLICITY)
- **Candidate (preparing for ordination)** - The Deans of the Diocese, together with the bishop, discern that a postulant does appear to have a call to ordained ministry and direct the Canon Theologian of the diocese to help the candidate complete all of the canonical requirements for ordination. (Conclusion of the “Seven C’s” process, with special emphasis on COMPETENCE).
- **Ordinand (presentation to the bishop and final approval for ordination)** - The Dean with oversight of the candidate’s parish and the Canon Theologian determine and certify that the candidate has met all of the canonical requirements for ordination and present the candidate to the bishop, who gives his final approval and sets a date and location for ordination.

Individuals who believe they may have a call to ordained ministry should seek the guidance of the rector of their parish on how to proceed.