



ST. JOHN'S NORWAY

ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE BEACHES

How is a Vocational Deacon different from a Priest or a Transitional Deacon?

*This is the second of three articles on diaconal ministry.
Much of the content of these articles is from The Iona Report.*

At their ordination, in Anglican Church of Canada, deacons offer themselves as servants of the church, “ministering to make Christ and his redemptive love known... and to interpret to the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.”

The order of Deacon is an ancient one. In the Book of Acts, chapter six, we hear about the appointment of the seven, who had hands laid on them so that they could fulfill a ministry of diakonia ~ service. The service that they were specifically chosen for was care for the widows who were being neglected in the daily ministry. This passage is traditionally seen as the institution of the role of deacons in the church. There are also references to deacons in Paul's letters to the Philippians and Timothy. From this we learn that deacons were servants in the early church and since hands were laid on them for ministry, it is a ministry of apostolic succession.

In the Middle Ages, the role of deacon was diminished as presbyters took on the role of deacons along with their priestly duties. The order of deacon was retained in the Reformation in the Anglican church, but it was changed to be a transitional order for those who were pursuing a call to be ordained to the priesthood. Our church continues this pattern of formation to this day, with priests being ordained deacon before they are priested. We often refer to priests who are ordained deacon for a time as “transitional deacons”. Our own Yohan Dumpala is an example of this!

In the early 20th century, the Church began a journey to rediscover and redevelop the order of deacon, as a distinct call and ministry in the life of the church. This full and equal order is not transitional, but rather a permanent call to a vocation. We refer to these deacons as “Vocational or Permanent Deacons”. The restoration of the role of vocational deacons calls the church to a deeper and fuller commitment to follow the example of Jesus in the ministry of diakonia ~ “bringing good news to the poor” and being agents of God’s justice, peace, mercy, and love for all people and for the earth. At the beginning of the 21st century, we as a church are continuing this journey of recovering the ministry of deacons in our midst.

Deacons are most often “raised up” in their own communities of faith. It is an affirmation of the gifts and charisms they offer to live out a life as sacramental signs of Christ’s care and concern in and for the world. Deacons live out the consecrated life as they are called in their time and place, inspiring the faithful to join them in this work; to live out personal and collective calls to the ministry of diakonia. The presence of a deacon in the church is a call for all to live into the life of service that Jesus.