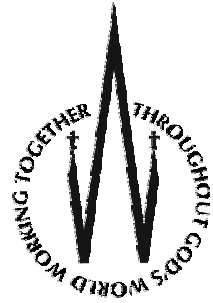
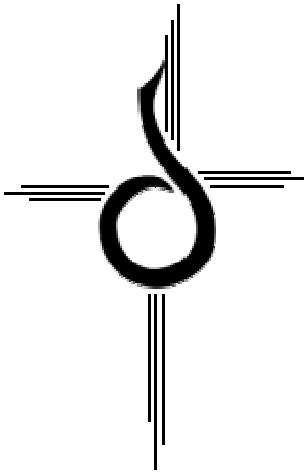


Diocese of Wakefield



Called to be a Deacon?



The Church of England follows the ancient form of church order, having an ordained ministry consisting of bishops, priests and deacons. All candidates for ordained ministry are first ordained deacon; ordination to the priesthood is almost invariably a later event, often a year after ordination as deacon, and ordination as bishop usually only happens several years later. Being ordained priest does not mean someone stops being a deacon, any more than being ordained bishop stops someone being a priest. Most people know that many, if not most, of those ordained priest are not also ordained bishop. But it is less well-known that there are some clergy in the Church of England who are simply ordained deacon. This is not because they have failed to win promotion, or to climb some sort of career ladder, but because they believe that the ministry of the deacon is their particular calling from God. Other clergy are ordained priest, but the diaconal strand of their ministry may be more significant than the priestly strand, either for a particular phase of ministry, or for the whole of it.

So what's involved in being a deacon? The Common Worship ordination service describes it in the following ways:

Deacons are ordained so that the people of God may be better equipped to make Christ known. Theirs is a life of visible self-giving. Christ is the pattern of their calling and their commission; as he washed the feet of his disciples, so they must wash the feet of others....

Deacons are called to work with the Bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people. They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.

Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the Church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism. They assist in administering the sacraments; they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.

Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people, that the whole Church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world. They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us.



That's the theory – but how does it work out in practice? Here are some stories of diaconal ministry from the Diocese of Wakefield and further afield – mostly from distinctive deacons, but also from those who are ordained priest but particularly value the diaconal component of their ministry:



Barry is now working in the parish of St. Mary Magdalene, Lundwood, where there is also a Turnaround Team and the parish has had a high profile through the *'Priest Idol'* television programme. His ministry here is varied and growing. He is involved with keeping an eye on relationships within the church as new people are brought in and integrate with the existing congregation; with baptisms and baptism preparation and new families; with taking funerals; with nurture courses; and indeed with all the various initiatives which are occurring through the regeneration of this parish. He is very much linking church and community and responding to needs.

Glenn, a priest serving in his home parish alongside his secular job, writes of the early stages of his ministry:

“Early in my diaconate our church began to question the use of our buildings, in particular a house bought in 1991 and opened in 1992 as a community facility. For a variety of reasons the house was never really used by the wider community. The church had made good use of it but continued vandalism, difficult young people and the obvious cost of maintaining the building raised a number of questions about its continued use. I agreed to lead a team tasked with determining the future of the house. God has used this to take me into an unexpected calling.

In short, we have researched our parish and used this as a tool to develop a relationship with our surrounding community. There have been wide ranging community meetings in the aforementioned house which have included both councillors and the town's MP. The purpose of these meetings has been to build our relationship with our community and simply say that God loves our community and we want to be a real part of this. Essentially it has been about re-engagement. The result of our work is the prospective appointment of a youth worker, a small joint project working with young people and a couple of holiday clubs for younger children. It is in this context that my calling has come.

I have increasingly felt a tension between my role within my church and in the wider community. It seems that the heart of my ministry has to change from leading worship, serving and equipping the people of God whilst offering pastoral help and support. Instead my call appears to be into a ministry outside the church proper. Whilst this in no way means that I will cease to be a worshipping member nor that I will no longer lead worship but rather my ministerial focus will be upon working with the wider community. My role will be increasingly focussed on social action,

working with others, who may not be connected with the church, to make our parish a better place. It would appear that the diaconal ministry will take precedence over my priestly ministry for a season at least.”



From *Chris*, a (non-stipendiary) parish deacon:

“I became aware that there was a need for real support for some potentially problem families with a child, or maybe more children, under five years old. A meeting was held at which we were told about a national organisation, Homestart, which trained volunteers to befriend such families in need and thus hopefully prevent a crisis. It was decided that this organisation would meet our need and a committee was formed to investigate the possibility of forming a local group. I am not a committee person but was persuaded that it would be helpful to have someone from the Church as a member. After some time and a lot of work, a Homestart group was formed. I encouraged the churches (Churches Together) in the town to be involved. They gave some financial support but also volunteers came forward for training. I led two of the training sessions on each course and was there to support the paid staff, members of the committee and volunteers as required. Eventually I became ex officio to the committee and was chaplain to the group. I continued to encourage church members to volunteer and kept the churches informed of progress and the need for their support. When I left the area I was able to hand on to another deacon.”

Betty says that her ‘diaconal days’ were a wonderful, rich time serving the church as a parish deacon and then in the diocese as a sector minister. Betty was in training for the diaconate from 1985 to 1988, then a Deacon from 1988 to 2003. When women were priested, there was a conference for women clergy to help in the discernment process. For Betty this was not a hard decision – “it was not the right way for me”.

Betty’s first post was as stipendiary Parish Deacon at Sowerby. In the parish she had a liturgical role which dovetailed with her pastoral work. She found reading the Gospel liturgically very important as proclaiming the Gospel in church in this way links with proclaiming and living it elsewhere in everyday life. The liturgical dismissal was also a high point for her. This was very special and she missed it in her later diocesan job. Betty appreciated the servant role and felt that there was a huge freedom in that.

From 1992 she spent 11 years as the Children’s Work Adviser for the Diocese of Wakefield. For the first two years she hated it as it was office based and involved a lot of administration. Her choice was to either leave or to make the job her own, to change the job she had inherited. So Betty made the decision to emerge out of the Office at Church House where her role was formal and narrow, to move out to people and situations, to serve the needs of people in their work for children

It was fantastic to develop a real servant role in this ministry. She visited many different parishes, considering their needs in a wide range of situations, with the freedom to serve them - across a wide range of churchmanship, tradition, sociology, culture. There were huge challenges in wildly different situations and the need to work with them where they were.

Instead of simply re-presenting secular parenting workshops, Betty wanted to pioneer work about being a Christian parent and what it means to be a good parent in the worship of the church. She ran many summer holiday workshops, activity days, and parents' workshops, which always had a spiritual context. Some family situations were grim and desperate, but somehow shaky little lives found their way into the church and growth happened. She has many fond memories of particular stories and individual children who experienced something of the security of God's love.

Whilst driving around the diocese she preferred, and had the time, to use the back roads, getting to know the whole area well, knowing which parishes she was going through, the people there and their needs and she used to pray for the parishes as she did so, a real intercessory time, which she sees as a great diaconal work.



Gill was ordained deacon in 1999 after training on the Northern Ordination Course and served her first post in the Parish of St. Mary the Virgin, Barnsley. She worked very much as a curate involved in the life of the parish at many levels, liturgical, pastoral, and civic, with schools and children's work, etc. After 4 years she was appointed as one of the Ministry Development Officers with the Wakefield Ministry Scheme, working with parishes as they develop collaborative ministry and also being Spirituality Continuity Tutor for people training on the diocesan Ordained Local Ministry course. This is a half time post. Helping to encourage and enable the gifts of others within the Church is a diaconal work.

Two days a week she works at Wakefield Hospice as Assistant Chaplain – she has a deep appreciation of this as a diaconal work, mirroring the deacon's dismissal at the end of the Eucharist and being privileged to accompany people as they move towards taking their leave of their life on earth and journeying into the next.

Gill is a member of the Diocesan Prayer and Spirituality Group and is also involved in the ministry of spiritual direction. She is Honorary Parish Deacon in the Parish of St. Mary Magdalene, Outwood.



From *Roy* a (stipendiary) Deacon and one-time Head Verger of Portsmouth Cathedral:

Part way through my final academic year of a Bachelor of Theology course, David Stancliffe was appointed Bishop of Salisbury. A few weeks after the announcement, he asked me if I would come to Salisbury with him to be his domestic/liturgical chaplain and driver and “to look after him”. I agreed to come, provided I could finish my course, and so I moved to Salisbury in June 1994.....and yes, I did get my degree.

For me, the job was the best thing that could ever happen to me: it was doing all the things I was good at and enjoyed doing, and by doing so enabling another’s ministry. In a nutshell, the job was to get the Bishop to the right place, at the right time and with all the right gear! In a large diocese – just over two thousand square miles – a lot of time was spent travelling, so the back of the car became a mobile office. And, believe me, the Bishop used every available moment to work, no matter what time of day or night.

Most Sundays of the year we were in churches around the diocese, and it was important to respect the tradition of each church and also to encourage good liturgy. One of my major tasks was to liaise with the clergy in arranging services at which the Bishop presided. Where necessary I would act as the Bishop’s agent or representative by taking rehearsals and organising the choreography of a service. Blessings of lifeboats, church bells, tower floodlights, war memorials, new homes, crops and harvests – you name it and a bishop might be asked to bless it.

The maintenance of the Bishop’s chapel for the daily offices and the celebration of the Eucharist, together with his intercessory prayer for the diocese and its clergy, were also part of my ministry in enabling the Bishop’s prayer life. This developed into the collation of the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer on a regular basis.

Hospitality was, and still is, part of the Bishop’s ministry. Serving at table was thus one of my tasks: acting as butler by answering the door and serving drinks at gatherings, be they large parties or small intimate dinners.

Now retired, I continue as a member of DACE (Diaconal Association of the Church of England), though no longer an executive member, being responsible for editing its Newsletter. I talk at seminars and diocesan vocation days, act as a year tutor to two Readers, and – when I have the energy – occasionally work on my little vegetable plot. By serving and even ‘servicing’ others, I see my life as one dedicated to enable others to undertake their ministry of worship, oversight, and care. Being a representative and agent of Christ - the supreme deacon - and his gospel has taken me into areas and places I least expected to go, and into meeting people with whom I least expected to work.



For the last 12 years *Anne* worked in mental health chaplaincy working mainly amongst people with dementia and with a focus on personhood. She was also chaplain to young people in a secure unit which she found very challenging and rewarding.

She sees that her calling as a deacon is different to that of a priest in that she feels she is working in the margins of the church and within the gaps. She works where the church is not easily seen and has a world and secular focus. She feels she acts as a doorkeeper (with a responsibility to welcome people to worship and also to move into the world as God's agent) and that she is to encourage collaboration and partnership.

She has often felt drawn to be a priest but has remained a deacon as she sees the potential. She believes that in ordaining her as deacon the church was ordaining 'the ordinary'. She believes that the diaconate reflects incarnational theology - 'heaven in ordinary'.



Who Are Deacons?

A statement from a working party in the Diocese of Wakefield

What is God doing in his world? – Loving, caring, particularly reaching out to the unloved through those he gifts to do his work today. Christ was sent by God. He came not to be served, but to serve.

ALL by baptism are called to diaconal discipleship so the diaconate is worked out by priests, deacons, lay leaders and lay people. Deacons themselves work collaboratively. They demonstrate, encourage and enable the baptismal diaconal calling of all disciples. Ordained deacons are there to stimulate the diaconal ministry of the whole church.

Just as ordained priests focus the priesthood of God and the priesthood of all believers, so ordained deacons focus the diaconate of God - they are representatives of Christ the deacon, Christ the servant, ambassador and prophet.

Deacons are ambassadors for the Church – relating church and world. They are mission minded – proclaiming the Gospel and making God's love and care visible in the forgotten corners of the world. They go out from the Church, being prophetic by perceiving needs – God's spies - and bringing the needs of the world to the Church, thus leading the Church in its mission to the world by prayer and practical action. For many deacons, this finds an expression in the liturgy, calling the people to worship, confession and intercession, proclaiming the Gospel, assisting in sacramental service and sending out God's people to their diaconal and priestly work in the world, but the liturgical role of both priest and deacon is but the tip of the iceberg of their overall

ministry. They are primarily focussed on the community - with people and situations on the edges, at the margins.

Deacons are go-betweens, agents of change and servants (not doormats!). Their work is as much about 'being' as doing.

Want to know more?

Further information can be found on the following websites:

DACE www.societies.anglican.org/dace/
(The Diaconal Association of
the Church of England)

The Diocesan website: www.wakefield.anglican.org

The Church of England website
www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/ministry/



If you would like to talk to someone, please contact:

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