

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH
Guidelines for the Deacon Candidate's Retreat

The Nature and Purpose of the Diaconal Retreat

Within the biblical parameters for selection of deacons, there is room for a range of personalities, temperaments, and gifts. While all deacons “must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain” holding “the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” and “managing their children and their own households well” (cf 1Tim 3:8ff, ESV), some deacons are contemplatives and some are activists, some are traditional and some are contemporary, some are high church and some are low. God calls as servants of church and world those whom He will, in blessed variety.

Just as there is no “standard” deacon, there is no “standard” model for the diaconal retreat. What follows is not a prescription for how the retreat *must* be conducted, but rather suggested guidelines for how the retreat *may* be conducted to fulfill the fundamental purposes of this time before ordination.

Why does the Anglican Diocese of the South (ADOTS) recommend a diaconal retreat? If the periods of aspirancy, postulancy, and candidacy are considered as the “six days” of God’s creation of a deacon, then the diaconal retreat may be seen as the seventh day, the candidate’s Sabbath. It is a gift in time – a holy day to rest, reflect, and relate. Just as God consecrated the Sabbath and commanded his chosen ones to remember it, ADOTS asks the diaconal candidate to remember the need to rest, reflect, and relate prior to ordination and the commencement of diaconal ministry.

Rest

Diaconal ministry is servanthood – the meeting of needs and the bringing together of the needs of the world with the resources of God in the church. There is much to be done. But that doing must be part of the sacred rhythm of mission and Sabbath, work and rest. The diaconal retreat is such a moment of rest when the candidate withdraws from doing and rests in being: in being beloved of God, in being chosen for service, in being part of the royal priesthood of all believers, past, present, and future. It is a moment when nothing is required: no programs to administer, no visits to make, no classes to teach, no tables to set. It is a gift of grace, which is the essence of ministry and which must precede and support all holy doing. The diaconal retreat is a call to rest.

Reflect

The process of diaconal formation – from the initial stirrings of the call to vocational ministry, to the communal discernment process with priest, parish committee, canon,

and bishop, to the required psychological evaluation, gifts assessment, and theological examination – is one extended act of reflection, a vocational *examen*. The diaconal retreat invites the candidate to a different mode of reflection. Until this moment, reflection has focused on questions: Am I called to vocational ministry? Will the church – laity and clergy – recognize, affirm, and support this call? Am I adequately prepared for diaconal ministry? Now, the candidate is invited to reflect on this great wonder: that the single answer to each of these question is yes. It is time to reflect not on the questions, but on God’s gracious answer. Yes, you are called to ordained ministry. Yes, the laity and clergy, from the parish priest to the diocesan bishop, have recognized and affirmed your call and have pledged prayerful support of your ministry. Yes, even with all the flaws and weaknesses of our common humanity, by the grace of the Holy Spirit you are prepared for diaconal ministry, and that not of yourself; it is a gift of God, by grace through faith, lest you should boast. Reflect on these answers.

The diaconal retreat also invites the candidate to reflect on imminent ordination and ministry, to look forward through Scripture, prayer, liturgy, and imagination. This act of reflection explores the blessings and challenges of diaconal ministry itself and serves as the prelude to kenosis and incarnation – the emptying of oneself to incarnate the servanthood of Christ. The diaconal retreat is a call to reflect.

Relate

Jesus informed Pilate that His kingdom was not *from* this world – *for* it, certainly, but not *from* it. So it is with every true vocational ministry – *for* this world, but certainly not *from* it. The strength of one’s diaconal ministry lies not in a multitude of skills or an abundance of knowledge – characteristics valued by the world – but in the depth of one’s relationship with Christ. The diaconal retreat calls the candidate away from the world to spend time alone with Christ. It invites the candidate to an intentional focus on nurturing that most fundamental and essential relationship of all through silence and listening, through prayer and sacred reading, through praise and worship, and to consider ways of protecting and nurturing that relationship in the sometimes difficult days of ministry ahead. The diaconal retreat is a call to reflect.

The Structure of the Diaconal Retreat

ADOTS suggests a one or two day personal retreat before ordination. The structure of that retreat will vary based upon duration, location, and the individual needs and interests of the candidate. Above all else, the retreat should occur in the context of prayer and worship, likely following the Daily Office. Beyond that, what should the candidate include? Some suggestions follow.

Lectio Divina: Suggested Texts

The Ordinal of the Anglican Church in North America: The Form and Manner of Ordaining Deacons¹

The readings appointed for the ordination of a deacon:

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (Acts 6:1-7)

Luke 12:35-40

John 15

Ephesians 1:3-23

Philippians 2:1-11

The Christian Priest Today, Michael Ramsey

In the Name of Jesus: Reflection on Christian Leadership, Henri J. M. Nouwen

Journaling: Suggested Topics

1. If you have a rule of life, consider it anew in light of the nature of diaconal ministry. Is it adequate to address your changing role or does it require revision? If you do not currently have a rule of life, begin to develop one. This is a long-term project, but it might be helpful during retreat to begin considering how your new role reshapes your priorities, activities, and relationships. What scaffolding will you need – in terms of practices, rhythms, etc. – to support your life and ministry?

2. Consider your diaconal ministry in its specific context. Write a brief “mission statement” for that ministry, one or two sentences. What is most important both to do and to be in your ministry?

Activities

1. Take a short nap – not to avoid an encounter with God, but to be refreshed for it. You might begin and end with the Antiphon for the Song of Simeon:

¹ Available at <http://adots.org/liturgy/> at Texts for Common Prayer.

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

2. Take a walk and contemplate God as revealed through creation. You might begin and end with selections from Canticle 12, **A Song of Creation**, BCP² 88-90.
3. Sing a hymn or chorus, or chant a psalm. Listen to a piece of music that lifts your heart to God and enjoy His presence.
4. Sit silently before God. You might begin with this sentence of Scripture from Habakkuk:

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him Hab 2:20, BCP 78).

5. Fast.
6. Celebrate the Eucharist, if possible.

Prayers

For the Ministry (Ember Days), BCP 256-257

Prayers for the Church, 7-11, BCP 816-817

For Guidance, 57-58, BCP 832

For Quiet Confidence, 59, BCP 832

A Prayer of Self-Dedication, 61, BCP 832-833

The Blessing of the Diaconal Retreat

The diaconal retreat is not another item to check off the list of ordination requirements; it is a gift of time to relax, reflect, and relate – a Sabbath to celebrate the works of God in the creation of a deacon and a diaconal ministry. May it be a blessing.

Special thanks to John Roop of Apostles, Knoxville, Tennessee for preparing this guide.

² All such references are to *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979.