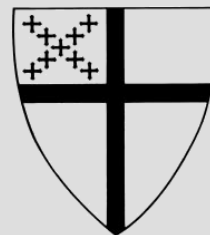
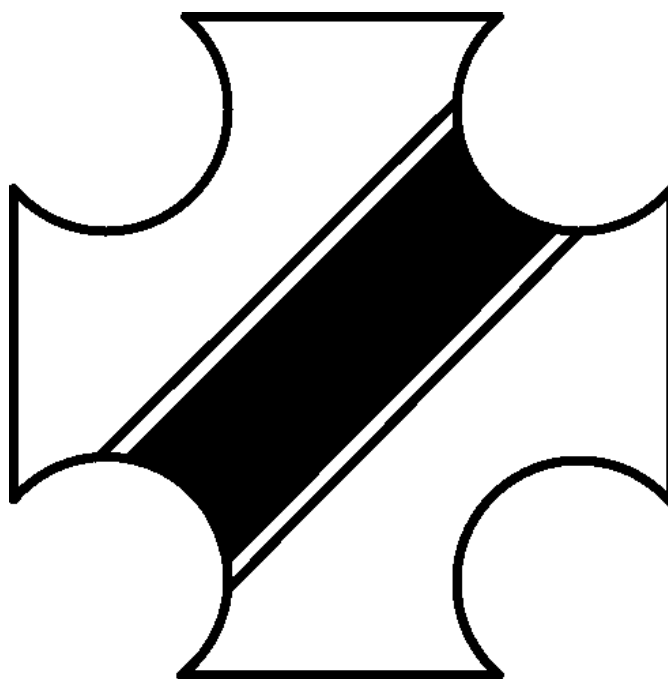




EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
of Southern Virginia



**THE POLICY FOR THE
MINISTRY OF
VOCATIONAL DEACONS**



*At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in
serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself. (BCP, pg. 543)*

APRIL 2026



Icon of women deacons in the early Church

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I. Purpose and Authority

This policy establishes diocesan standards and expectations for the discernment, formation, deployment, supervision, and ongoing ministry of vocational deacons in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia.

This policy is adopted pursuant to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (Canons), particularly **Title III, Canon 6**, and under the authority of the Bishop Diocesan.

II. Nature of the Diaconate

A. Order of Ministry

The diaconate is a distinct and permanent order of ordained ministry within the Episcopal Church. Vocational deacons are ordained to a lifelong ministry of servanthood and witness to Christ in the world.¹

B. Ecclesial Function

In accordance with the Canons, vocational deacons are called to:

1. Assist the bishop and presbyters in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the Church's liturgical life.
2. Interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.
3. Lead the Church in ministries of compassion, justice, and reconciliation.

III. Canonical Relationship and Accountability

A. Authority of the Bishop

The Bishop ordains all vocational deacons. Deacons serve at the discretion of the Bishop and under his or her Episcopal authority. The Bishop retains sole authority for the assignment, reassignment, or removal of a deacon from any ministry setting. From time to time the Bishop may ask a deacon to serve in other ways in the diocese. Our Bishop expects deacons to serve competently and confidently with him or her at liturgical events such as confirmations, ordinations, and Diocesan Convention.

Deacons represent the Office of the Bishop, it is important to remember that a deacon's individual opinions/concerns/issues are superseded by those of the Bishop, and a deacon must never presume to speak for the Bishop.

B. Assignments

The Bishop shall make all vocational diaconate assignments in consultation with appropriate diocesan bodies and clergy leadership. Assignments may include service in a

¹ See Appendix 1: The Call to the Diakonia

congregation, a diocesan ministry, or a community-based ministry, or a combination thereof.

C. Canonical Residence and Good Standing

Each vocational deacon shall:

1. Maintain canonical residence in the Diocese unless otherwise authorized by the Bishop.
2. Remain in good standing under Title III and Title IV of the Canons of the Episcopal Church.
3. Participate in the life and governance of the Diocese as appropriate.

IV. Scope of Ministry

*I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?
And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me." Isaiah 6:8*

It is the goal of the vocational diaconate ministry to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by assisting the bishop of the Diocese of Southern Virginia in his or her responsibilities when leading worship in the diocese. Deacons are called by God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to assist the bishops in their role of being the hands and feet of Jesus bringing worship and fellowship to the faithful in their communities.

A. Liturgical Responsibilities

Vocational deacons may exercise liturgical functions authorized by the Canons and the Bishop, including:

1. Proclamation of the Gospel.
2. Leading the Prayers of the People.
3. Preparation of the Table and assistance at the Eucharist.
4. Dismissal of the congregation.
5. Preaching on occasion.

Vocational deacons shall not preside at the Eucharist or exercise sacramental functions reserved to priests or bishops.

B. Duties and Responsibilities - Assisting the Bishop in Worship

The deacon must be completely familiarized with the customary.

1. When a deacon is requested to accompany the bishop on his or her visitation, the deacon assigned will confirm with the bishop's office via email to let them know they will be accompanying the bishop on his or her visit.
2. The deacon will plan to arrive 45 minutes to one hour prior to the worship service, allowing time to become familiar with the worship space; as well as:

- Familiarize themselves with the bulletin.
- Inquire where the deacon is to sit during worship.
- Inquire where the deacon is to place the bishop's Crosier and miter following the procession.
- Inquire where the Gospel book is placed.
- Inquire where the rector would like the Gospel to be proclaimed.
- Request the rector's preference on how the deacon is to set the table.
- Check that the altar book is placed on the Bishop's left side, the ribbons are ordered from bottom to top, and that the page is open to the appropriate Eucharistic Prayer, for the proper preface, consecration prayer, and post communion prayer.
- The deacon will check in with the bishop when the bishop arrives.
- When called upon the deacon will assist the bishop in preparation for worship.
- The deacon will make sure there is water available for the bishop during worship.
- The deacon will process directly in front of the bishop unless someone else is acting as bishop's chaplain.

3. During the worship service the deacon 's responsibilities may include:

- Proclamation of the Gospel - The deacon will retrieve the Gospel book and proclaim the Gospel from the predetermined area.
- Assisting the bishop during confirmation by bringing the bishop's crosier forward and standing on the bishop's right side holding the crosier during the confirmation. (At a baptism offers to hold his/her Prayer Book/bulletin.)
- Deacon of the mass:
 - The deacon of the mass stands to the left of the bishop during the Eucharistic prayer keeping track of where the bishop is reading at all times. If the bishop should lose his/her place the deacon is to discretely point to the appropriate place.
 - In the case of the Ordination of a Priest, the deacon shall make sure sufficient room is made for the new priest(s) to stand at the altar with the bishop.
 - If the bishop's crosier is outside the altar rail, the deacon is to bring it inside prior to the Post Communion Prayer.

- The deacon will make certain the bishop receives his/her crosier immediately following the Post Communion Prayer.
 - During the worship service, the bishop should never need to be looking around for the crosier when it is needed. Be attentive at all times during the worship service noting anything the bishop may need.
- The deacon will pronounce the Dismissal.

C. Ministry Beyond the Congregation

Each vocational deacon shall maintain a primary ministry of service beyond the walls of the Church. This ministry shall:

1. Address identified needs within the wider community.
2. Be clearly articulated in a ministry description approved by the Bishop or the Bishop's designee.
3. Serve as a bridge between the Church and the world.

D. Congregational Placement

When assigned to a congregation, the vocational deacon:

1. Shall function as an ordained minister of service and mission rather than as an assistant priest.
2. Shall collaborate with clergy and lay leadership in support of the congregation's mission.
3. Shall assist the congregation in engaging in ministries of outreach and justice.

V. Formation and Continuing Education

A. Initial Formation

Candidates for the vocational diaconate shall complete a program of formation approved by the Bishop and the Commission on Ministry, consistent with Title III requirements. Formation shall include theological education, spiritual formation, and practical training appropriate to diaconal ministry, working with an appointed mentor(s). Formation continues through the first two years of ministry after ordination.

It is the expectation that deacons remain to serve in the Diocese of Southern Virginia through the entire formation process.

B. Ongoing Formation

All vocational deacons shall:

1. Participate in continuing education as required by the Diocese.
2. Maintain a rule of life appropriate to ordained ministry.

3. Engage in regular spiritual direction or other approved spiritual disciplines.

VI. Employment, Compensation, and Expenses

A. Vocational Status

Many vocational deacons maintain secular employment in addition to their ordained ministry. If a deacon is serving with a congregation or mission of the Diocese, the deacon will maintain a Letter of Agreement² (LOA) with the Rector of that congregation. The LOA, once signed by the Rector, Deacon, Canon to the Ordinary, and the Bishop is kept on file at the diocesan office and a copy on file with the congregation.

B. Financial Matters

1. The Vestry shall provide the deacon with a stipend of \$25.00, minimum, per month and shall pay the Church Pension Fund Assessment on the sum of the Deacon's total annual stipend.
2. Vocational deacons shall not receive compensation for sacramental or liturgical functions beyond what they receive in their compensation agreement in the LOA.
3. Ministry-related expenses may be reimbursed by the parish or Diocese by prior agreement and in accordance with diocesan financial policies.

VII. Supervision and Evaluation

A. Supervision

Each vocational deacon shall be accountable to the Bishop or to a supervisor designated by the Bishop. Supervision shall include regular communication regarding ministry responsibilities, goals, and well-being. The Rector or Senior Warden is the ecclesial authority of the congregation.

A letter recording all diaconal activities is to be written and sent to the Bishop and to the Archdeacon each January.

The Bishop does not allow a deacon's mass. A communion under special circumstances shall only be performed with prior approval from the Bishop. A priest or a senior warden must also request Bishop's prior approval.

B. Evaluation

An annual mutual ministry review shall be conducted for each vocational deacon with the Rector or Senior Warden. The review shall address:

1. The deacon's ministry assignment and effectiveness.
2. Relationships within the congregation and community.

² See Appendix 2: Sample of a Letter of Agreement

3. Continuing formation and support needs.

VIII. Standards of Conduct and Ethics

Vocational deacons are subject to the Standards of Conduct and disciplinary provisions of Title IV of the Canons, as well as all diocesan policies regarding safeguarding, confidentiality, and professional boundaries. Deacons must keep current with required diocesan training for safeguarding and race reconciliation healing and background checks.³

All deacons are expected to attend Diocesan Convention, just as presbyters are. You must ask the Bishop to be excused. This is usually done through the bishop's secretary. Keep the Archdeacon informed on this matter.

Vocational deacons shall avoid conflicts of interest and dual-role relationships that could compromise the integrity of their ministry.

IX. Leave, Transition, and Status Changes

A. Leave

Any extended leave from active ministry shall be requested in writing and approved by the Bishop.

B. Transition

Changes in ministry assignment or focus require the approval of the Bishop.

C. Retirement

Retirement from active ministry shall be recognized in accordance with diocesan policy and pastoral practice.

X. Diocesan Support

The Diocese shall support vocational deacons through opportunities for collegiality, continuing formation, and pastoral care, recognizing the distinct vocation and contribution of the diaconate to the Church's mission.

It is expected that vocational deacons attend the annual meeting day with the Bishop.

The Archdeacon shall have an LOA that outlines the role, responsibilities, and duties as assigned by the Bishop. This shall be communicated to the diaconate.

³ See Clergy Manual for information on trainings and background check requirements.

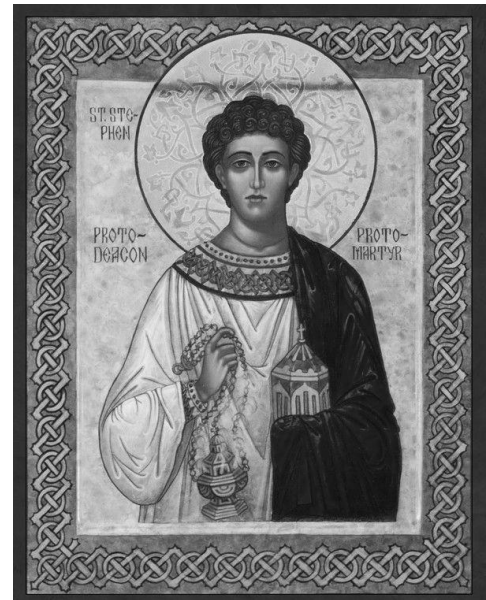
Appendix 1: The Call to Diakonia

What is diakonia? Why is the church called to diakonia? And what do deacons have to do with any of this? Let us look at each of these questions.

What Is Diakonia?

Diakonia is one of those wonderfully rich words that comes from the Greek in which all of the New Testament was written. It is rightfully called a rich word because it has layers and nuances of meaning that make it impossible to translate into a single English word. Diakonia, or one of its forms, appears eighty times in the New Testament.

So, what does diakonia mean? In his book *Diakonia Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*⁴ John N. Collins presents the most exhaustive and accepted study of the use and meanings of diakonia by examining hundreds of documents written in Greek from the fifth century before Christ until the fourth century after Christ. His research involved both Christian and non-Christian documents. The way Collins explains the use of diakonia is to start off by saying that it always involved the idea of a “go-between.” It always had someone who was acting on behalf of another. This acting on behalf of another can then be broken down into three categories that Collins refers to as “Word,” “Deed,” and “House and Table.”⁵ In his book *Many Servants an Introduction to Deacons*,⁶ Ormonde Plater expands on these three categories in a helpful manner. Plater sees “Word” in the sense of message. Thus, the go-between travels from one place to another to carry a message on behalf of another, or to bear a sacred word as a herald, or to interpret the words of the one who sent him. Under the category of “Deed” Plater sees the go-between as one who conducts operations on behalf of another, or one who carries out the desires or commands of a superior, or one who implements another’s plan. And finally, Plater sees the category of “House and Table” as when the go-between waits on another, or cares for the needs of a guest, or when the go-between conducts a religious occasion with decency.⁷ All of these are instances in ancient Greek where diakonia words would have been used.



St. Stephen - first deacon, first martyr

So how are we to grasp the meaning of diakonia? A good way to understand diakonia is to see it as performing a service or ministry but doing that ministry at the request of or in the name of another. A term that is more commonly used nowadays is “servant ministry.” That is a good way to express diakonia if you do not limit servant ministry to only “social work.”

⁴ John N. Collins; *Diakonia Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*; Oxford University Press, 1990; New York, New York.

⁵ John N. Collins; op. cit., p. vii.

⁶ Ormonde Plater; *Many Servants An Introduction to Deacons*, revised Edition; Cowley Publications; Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁷ Ormonde Plater; op. cit.; p. xiii.

Servant ministry does, most assuredly, involve actions such as feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless. But it can, for example, also involve fighting for better education, working for voting rights, or advocating for medical care for everyone, to name a few examples.

Why Is the Church Called to Diakonia?

Diakonia is the very heart of the Gospel. It is the way Jesus saw himself. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter ten tells the story of James and John requesting to sit on Jesus' right and left hand in his glory. Of course this causes a stir among the other ten apostles. Mark tells how Jesus calls the twelve together and instructs them about ministry:

“When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So, Jesus called them and said to them. ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”⁸

The words “servant,” “served,” and “serve” in the above passage are all forms of diakonia. Thus, Jesus saw himself as performing diakonia. Who was he acting on behalf of? His father. Jesus was acting as the agent, the go-between, for his father on our behalf. But this call to diakonia is not just for Jesus. Jesus tells the twelve that they too must be servants, they too must perform diakonia.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells the story of the last judgment, the story of the sheep and the goats. How he will separate those who help others and those who refuse to do so. When Jesus tells the goats, the accursed, to depart from him, they ask Jesus the following question:

“Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’”⁹

What is translated as “take care of you” is diakonia in the Greek. Diakonia is how we will be judged. The reality is that the need to live diakonia is vital to the church's mission.

Do people see in us the very spirit of diakonia? The call to diakonia is what Jesus saw about himself, it is what Jesus called us to, and it is what we must do to be part of God's plan for salvation. What is your ministry, your diakonia?

⁸ NRSV Mark 10:41-45.

⁹ NRSV Matthew 25:44.

The Role of Deacons in the Church Today



...select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.

Who are deacons? What do they do? How are they different from priests? Who can become a deacon? How do you become a deacon? These are just a few of the common questions about deacons and the diaconate. But the most important question of all is “Why does the church need deacons?”

In order to answer that most important question we have to start with three fundamental principles that have applied to the diaconate from the earliest days of the church. The first two of these principles are clear in the account found in The Acts of the Apostles about the choosing of the first seven deacons. At that time, the church was still located in Jerusalem and centered on a communal life devoted “...to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”¹⁰ Chapter six of Acts tells of a dispute that arose at this early stage of the church’s history.

“Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.”¹¹

The first fundamental principle about the diaconate is that at its very roots and meaning are found in diakonia. In the above passage from Acts, the phrases translated as “to wait on tables” and “to serving” are both the same word in the original Greek—diakonia. Thus, both this new group of seven set aside for service and the apostles themselves are both called to diakonia. They are both called to be agents of service. In fact, the title “deacon” is obviously taken from diakonia.

The second fundamental principle about deacons found in this story is that deacons are

¹⁰ NRSV Acts 2:42.

¹¹ NRSV Acts 6:1-5.

called to serve the needs of the church. The church had a problem, and deacons were called upon to solve that problem.

The third fundamental principle about deacons is that the needs of the church change over time and thus what deacons are called to do change with those needs. It is clear that helping to run the primitive church in Jerusalem is no longer needed. But history shows that over time deacons have performed in many different roles. One of the best examples of these different roles is found in the history of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church. Ormonde Plater describes four types or “waves” of deacons in his book.¹²

1. The first types of deacons were missionary or indigenous deacons. They existed from the 1840's until the 1930's. They cared for communities either on the frontier of our nation as it expanded or to the indigenous people. They served where there were no priests. They served alone and took care of their communities by teaching and preaching.
2. The second types of deacons were known as deaconesses. This movement grew out of the squalid conditions of the slums of the industrial revolution in Germany. Starting in 1831, the Lutheran Church trained women to help provide what we today would call “social services.” These women were consecrated but not ordained by the Lutheran Church. The deaconesses lived in communities together. This movement spread from Germany to both England and America. In 1845, a sisterhood was formed in New York City based on the German model. In 1864 the bishop of Alabama “instituted” three deaconesses. In 1889 the General Convention passed Canon 10 titled “Of Deaconesses” which remained in effect until 1970. For most of the existence of the deaconesses they were devoted to charitable and pastoral functions and were restricted to unmarried women or widows.
3. The third type of deacon, the “Perpetual Deacon,” developed after World War II in response to the lack of priests caused by the rapid expansion in the number of Episcopal churches. The General Convention in 1952 restored the diaconate for men only. Their ministry was to be solely in a congregation. They were usually, but not always, older men picked from the congregation.
4. The fourth type of deacon started to emerge in the 1970's. In 1970 the canons were revised. The deaconesses were ordained, and the diaconate was opened to both men and women. By the early 1980's the whole concept of the diaconate had changed. The deacons were seen as serving under the bishop. The deacons were also seen as serving in the world as well as serving the church.

But the question remains, what is the purpose of this fourth type or wave of deacons? What is the need of the church that deacons are to fulfill? One common answer that is often heard is that deacons are to bring the world to the church and the church to world. That is that deacons are to make the church aware of the needs of the world and help the church meet those needs. That is true, but in reality, most people today are well aware of the world we live in and its many shortcomings. When he was the Bishop of North Carolina, The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, described the role of deacons this way:

“We who follow Jesus of Nazareth are called to be a church for others, to give ourselves

¹² Ormonde Plater: op. cit.; p. 31-44.

away for the cause of God's kingdom, for the realization of God's dream. That is one of the reasons that at last year's convention I asked for the expansion and the renewal of the Diaconate. Because I am convinced that deacons are not here to serve us. Let me say that one clearly. Deacons are not here to serve us. They are here to help us serve the world.

That is why we have deacons."¹³

Thus, the purpose of the deacon is to help every member of a parish claim their own ministry. The Book of Common Prayer states clearly "The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons."¹⁴ It is not by accident that lay people are mentioned first. Ministry is a right and an obligation of our baptism.

But are not priests called to lead people into their own unique ministry? Of course they are. So why would a deacon be needed? A good analogy can be found in Christian education. Every priest spends significant time teaching. However, most parishes, recognizing both the importance of religious education and the effort that should be devoted to it, have a staff member whose focus is on religious education. Having a deacon as the person whose focus is on the ministry of all baptized persons does not diminish in any way the leadership and efforts in priests in this vital area. The deacon is an asset provided to help everyone discover and engage in their ministry. Diakonia is at the heart and center of the gospel message. It has never been more necessary for the church to embrace diakonia. The diaconate is the order in the church whose purpose and focus are to help lead each one of us to our own unique call to diakonia ministry.

¹³ The Rt. Rev Michael B. Curry. From "Hearing a Deacon's Call," a video produced by the School of Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, January 2012.

¹⁴ Book of Common Prayer: The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York, NY.; p. 855.

Appendix 2: Sample Letter of Agreement

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

between

The Rev. _____, Deacon,

and

the Vestry of _____, _____, Virginia

This letter of agreement acknowledges the assignment of the Rev. _____ by the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, the Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes, to serve as Deacon at _____ (the Parish) beginning _____, 20__. The length of this assignment will be at the pleasure of the Bishop. The assignment will be reviewed annually.

The following agreements apply:

- A. The Parish will:
 - a. Afford the Deacon with the opportunity to carry out the Liturgical ministry of a Deacon.
 - b. Assure that the Deacon has seat and voice at all vestry meetings.
 - c. Provide financial resources for the Deacon to attend Annual Council and clergy and other conferences and events called by the Bishop.
 - d. Provide financial support to enable the Deacon to attend training agreed upon between the Deacon, Parish clergy, and the Vestry, to include sufficient time to accomplish the training.
 - e. Reimburse the Deacon for approved travel conducted on behalf of the Parish.
- B. The Deacon will:
 - a. Provide diaconal ministry at the Parish on Sundays, _____, major feasts, and _____.
 - b. Schedule personal time off in conversation with Parish clergy.
 - c. Preach and teach as mutually agreed upon between Parish clergy and the Deacon.
 - d. Work with Parish lay leadership with respect to _____.
 - e. Assist in providing training and support to Parish Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Lay Eucharistic Visitors.
 - f. In consultation with Parish clergy and the Vestry, identify and implement opportunities for members of the Parish to carry out their respective ministries.
 - g. Collaborate with Parish clergy to provide pastoral care as needed.
- C. Time Commitment, Accountability, and Supervision
 - a. The total amount of time spent by the Deacon in ministry at the Parish, including liturgical services, shall be ____ to ____ hour(s) per week, on average.
 - b. Parish clergy and the Deacon will conduct a Mutual Ministry Review annually.
 - c. The Vestry shall provide the Deacon with a stipend of \$25.00, minimum, per month.
 - d. The Vestry shall pay the Church Pension Fund Assessment on the sum of the Deacon's total annual stipend.
 - e. The Rector/Senior Parish clergy person shall be responsible for the supervision of the Deacon and his/her ministry. Supervisory meetings will take place weekly.
- D. Terms of Agreement
 - a. This Letter of Agreement will be reviewed annually by the Rector/Senior Parish Clergy Person, the Deacon, and the Vestry.
 - b. This agreement may be terminated at any time by the Bishop of the Diocese of Southern Virginia. It may

- also be terminated by mutual agreement of the parties.
- c. In the event of the departure of the Rector/Senior Parish Clergy Person, this Letter of Agreement shall automatically expire, and a new Letter of Agreement may be entered into if the Bishop, in her sole discretion, deems it appropriate and desirable.
 - d. The Rector/Senior Parish Clergy Person and the Deacon may make such changes to sections A and B, above, as they deem necessary. The Vestry shall be informed of any such changes, and the Bishop shall be notified in writing.

_____ Deacon	_____ Date
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_____ Rector/Senior Parish Clergy Person	_____ Date
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_____ Reviewed: Canon to the Ordinary	_____ Date
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_____ Approved: Bishop	_____ Date
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