

The Community of Deacons

submitted by The Ven. Harry Leip, Archdeacon

Recently, I came across a quote from the 17th century Anglican cleric Jeremy Taylor who wrote that “Your vocation is your life, lived out in the way that you and God work out together, a way uniquely appropriate to who you are and also linking you to the world in which you live.” While I am unsure of Taylor’s immediate context which inspired this unique definition of vocation, like all timeless bits of wisdom I feel that he is speaking to the heart of what we’re about as Christians and in particular, speaks to the ministry of deacons – who embody a vocation which links the Church and the world around us. As part of our diaconal vocation, I share with you some highlights of the past year.

Within a few short weeks after last year’s convention, our diocese was blessed by the ordination of Deacon Angela Ferree and transitional Deacon Josh Huber. In June, they were joined by transitional deacons Mtipe Koggani, Erin Pickersgill, and Jessica Wachter. While the transitional deacons continue their journey to the priesthood, the Church is enriched by their brief time as deacons, with a focus on servant ministry in a world reeling from the pandemic and other issues. For those who may not have previously attended an ordination service, I would commend them to you since they illustrate the Episcopal Church’s rich and joyful theology on our ordained orders.

The Canons of the Episcopal Church specify that deacons constitute a *Community of Deacons*, which meet on a regular basis. Part of my role as the archdeacon is to regularly call the Community together for fellowship, support and learning opportunities. This year we’ve had discussions about preaching, virtual formation resources, reviews of diocesan ministries in which our deacons serve, Safe Church training and best practices for ministry and self care. While some of these subject may seem a bit dry, I can witness that the Community jumps in with lively discussion – and at times with both laughter and tears.

Working with our bishop, this year has seen an expansion of new models of diaconal deployment which faithfully respond to both diocesan and parish needs. Some of these new models include:

- Bi-Locational deacons: Deacon Jerre Birdsong serves two parishes
- Diocesan focused deacons:
 - Deacon Dayna Jewson served at Deaconess Anne House
 - Deacon Barbi Click is the Diocesan Missioner for Jubilee Ministries
- Deacon-in-charge of a parish: Deacon Deb Goldfeder serves both Calvary Episcopal Church in Louisiana and St. John's Episcopal Church in Eolia
- Parish deacons

In all these ways (and more to come) deacons continue to find new ways to serve both our location faith communities and the greater community.

As with these reports (and Oscar speeches), there is lengthy list of those persons to whom I am indebted, and this report is no exception. There are so many people who assist in diaconal ministries and support us - ways both large and small – that I will ultimately fail to mention everyone. I am profoundly grateful for the work, energy and boundless vision of our bishop. I cannot imagine a better advocate for the diaconate and very much appreciate the many ways he supports and encourages us in our challenging vocation of ministry in the 21st century.

I am so very fortunate to be part of the Diocesan staff who diligently work (often with little notice or praise) on behalf of the diocese and bishop. This small group of my colleagues do amazing and wonderful work – and I am enriched by getting to know them better this year.

One of the efforts we successfully completed this year was the first phase of the Diaconal Ordination redesign. This allows persons pursuing the diaconate to have a better understanding and a clearer path to the overall process. This also includes reworking learning agreements and formation plans so they better reflect diaconal learning competencies so we can better form deacons for the Church. I am sincerely grateful for all those involved in this important work: Ms. Lynette Ballard, the Rev. Lu-Anne Conner, the Rev. Dr. Marshall Crossnoe, the Rev. Dn. Deb Goldfeder, Sr. Donna R. Hawk-Reinhard, Ms. Jillian Smith and Canon Whitney Rice.

Lastly, I am greatly indebted to my sibling deacons who are an amazing and fiercely compassionate force for God's holy work in our world. To say they graciously embody a vocation of servant ministry would only begin to describe the heartfelt compassion they pour into their ministry. With over 193 years of collective diaconal ministry, the Community of Deacons continues to serve the diocese with distinction, humor and fierce determination. Thanks be to God!

<https://www.diocesemo.org/community-of-deacons/>