

What is Required?

AGE: She must be at least 23 years of age.

MATURITY AND MENTAL STABILITY: Because a Deaconess is in the role of helping others, she herself must be a person of mental stability and maturity. She should be a woman who usually exhibits good judgment and who is not inhibited by excessive personal stress or depression..

CERTAIN SKILLS: Since there are certain duties all Deaconesses will be asked to do regardless of personal talents, a skill or training in teaching, social work or pastoral care is required.

COLLEGE DEGREE: This academic ability is necessary because a Deaconess embarks on a life-long study to improve her ability to teach and represent correctly the history and current policies of the church. Often this knowledge must be gained through persistent reading and self-instruction.

A TRUE CALLING: A valid candidate is responding to a calling by God to set her life apart from the normal material world and to turn instead to a life that is dedicated to the Lord and His Church. A candidate should feel that her calling is for life even though in unusual circumstances the church will allow a Deaconess to leave her duties. This should never be a burden of obligation but instead a voluntary and joyful giving.

*O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully
to receive the prayers of thy
handmaidens who call upon thee;
and grant that they may both
perceive and know what things
they ought to do, and also may
have grace and power faithfully
to fulfill the same; through
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen

Adapted from the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*
Morning Prayer, page 588

(The Process, continued from inside)

At some point you will be given the **Canonical Examination** to complete. This is a similar exam to the one a man preparing for the priesthood takes. It is a long open book exam which teaches as much as it tests. Plan to spend months working on it. Ask your Priest and other Deaconesses for help in finding resources. Use a computer. It is invaluable for this effort. You will submit the your completed exam to the members of the Examining Chaplains for approval. This may be done as you finish each chapter. During your formation period you may be asked to meet with the Examining Chaplains for progress checks.

After you have completed the activities in your Plan of Preparation and the Canonical Exam your Priest and your mentor will determine whether you are ready to go before the Examining Chaplains one last time. If the Examining Chaplains decide that you have completed your preparation and are ready to be Set Apart, they will recommend you to the Bishop. The Bishop, who always makes the final decision about the appropriateness and readiness of a Deaconess candidate, will probably recommend that you be interviewed by the Standing Committee, an advisory committee to the Bishop. Once all of this information is in, the Bishop will make his final decision. If he feels that a candidate is **ready to be Set Apart** he will set the date and location for the service.

This church service is conducted by the Bishop. He formally sets you apart for the Lord's work and welcomes you into the church as a Deaconess. During the service you will receive the Deaconess Cross and you may officially begin to wear the Deaconess light blue jacket as an outward sign of your commitment.

From this point forward you will be a special vessel for God's work. It is a demanding life but also a very rewarding one. For a woman who has an actual calling it is truly gratifying. It is a life which satisfies a yearning and provides a fulfillment that is beyond initial imaginings.

If you have further questions about becoming a Deaconess ask your Rector. If he requires additional information, he may contact the Chairman of the Board of Examining Chaplains.

Rev. 8/7/2008

Becoming an *Q P Q* Deaconess

There are many women called to service in the church. They work tirelessly in schools, Altar Guilds, offices, missions and in a wide variety of other church activities.

These women are most needed and valuable to the clergy who are responsible for administering Christ's Church.

The woman who seeks to be a Deaconess, however, is different. She is specifically and rigorously trained for a life-long commitment to service in the church.

While she remains in a lay ministry she seeks a much deeper commitment than the normal parishioner.



Anglican Province of America

What is a Deaconess?

IN THE PAST: It is believed that women have served the church in the role of Deaconess (Diakonos) as early as the Apostolic period (Romans 16:1). A Deaconess cared for the poor, women and children, had special duties during the Baptism of women and in the women's galleries during the Eucharist. The role of the Deaconess remained strong until the Middle Ages when it went into disuse. It was revived again in England and Europe as part of the Reformation because there was a great need for the services provided by a Deaconess. The role of Deaconess remained an important lay vocation until 1976 when the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) mistakenly began to ordain women. The Traditional Anglican Church did not make this change.

IN TODAY'S WORLD: Today's Deaconess in the Traditional Anglican church is a lay woman who has answered a calling to work for Christ and His Church. She works under the direction of her Rector or her Bishop and her duties can be on the parish, Diocesan, Provincial or community level.

What does a Deaconess do?

A Deaconess is a woman who has made a long-term commitment to Christ and His church. She brings her God-given abilities to its use. Just as Paul describes the church as a group of people with many different talents so also will a group of Deaconesses have many different capabilities. The Rector of her parish will decide how a Deaconess's talents are to be best used in his church. Almost all Deaconesses, however, will teach at some point either formally or informally. Almost all will be involved in assisting parish families, women and children in particular. She will help care for the poor and the sick. She will assume other non-sacerdotal duties based on her unique talents and the needs of her parish.

Who should consider becoming a Deaconess?

A woman should consider becoming a Deaconess if she has already experienced working for her parish in several capacities, yet she finds she desires an even deeper spiritual life and a more permanent commitment. She feels called by God to commit herself to furthering His work on earth and she wants to answer that call. This decision is best made over several months and with the counsel of her Priest.

What is the Process?

First seek God's advice and listen to your heart to determine whether you have a **true calling**. Do not be surprised if a certain amount of fear or confusion occurs at this point. That can happen. In some cases a woman might feel a calling but resist it for any number of reasons. When this happens it is best not to commit too quickly. A true calling will be persistent and eventually overcome any uncertainty. Certain personal reasons, however, may be serious enough to prohibit consideration for the present. Their subsequent resolution may make a later commitment possible. A woman who is married needs to have the full unconditional support of her family, particularly her husband. The preparation and the life of a Deaconess take significant time away from the family so its members need to be in agreement with her decision. The Provincial Canons require that the preparations to become a Deaconess take at least two years.

Talk with your Priest. If you both agree that you may have a calling, obtain and complete the **APA Deaconess Application** but do not talk to others (other than your family). This is a time of quiet reflection and exploring. The Priest should contact the Chairman of the Examining Chaplains for the form. This application includes items such as past work history, copies of college transcripts and written recommendations from people with whom you have worked. It will also include a background check and a psychological examination.

Submit the completed application to the Bishop's Advisory Committee. They will review your application to ensure that it is complete and then schedule an interview. Be prepared to meet with them to describe your interest in becoming a Deaconess and why you feel called to that ministry. If the results of the interview are favorable they will forward your application to the Board of Examining Chaplains recommending that you proceed to the official year of discernment. This starts the clock on your discernment year.

The Time of Discernment is a time when you and your Priest know that you are considering a life as a Deaconess but you do not tell others. It is a quiet time that will last for usually a year as you begin to do some of the duties of a Deaconess and evaluate its appropriateness for you. This is also the time for you to decide on a **personal Rule of Life**. A basic Rule of Life includes saying daily personal and intercessory prayers as well as Morning and Evening Prayer, regular attendance at church services and on-going Scriptural study. This is a personal discipline which lasts for as long as a woman remains a Deaconess. Faithfully adhering to your Rule of Life not only improves your spiritual life but also strengthens your personal self-discipline. This step is important because a Deaconess often is in situations where she is trying to help others strengthen their self-discipline and having been through the process herself improves her ability to help others. Also, in keeping her own Rule of Life faithfully, a Deaconess becomes a role model for others. Your Rule of Life should be approved by the Rector or the Mentor.

While you are in your Year of Discernment it is necessary to prepare a **Testimonial of Fitness**. The Testimonial must state that the woman in question is a communicant in good standing in an APA church and possesses at least one of the

following skills: teaching, social work or pastoral care. The Testimonial must be signed by two Priests and twelve communicants, six of whom must be women.

Also during this time you and your Priest should create a proposed **Plan of Preparation** which you will discuss with the Examining Chaplains. It is the plan for your formation which you will follow during the next two years. To create this plan discuss your talents with your Rector and identify any areas of weakness that need strengthening. Design a Plan of Preparation which enhances your strengths and improves your weaknesses. The following are some starter ideas for a plan.

* All Deaconesses must be prepared to teach. Whether she will teach Sunday school, adult classes, confirmation classes, retreats or informal instruction, she is bound to find some form of teaching in her future. She can study through formal class work, personal reading or a combination of the two. The Priest should take the lead in planning what should be studied. Scripture, church history and current church issues are good starting points.

* A Deaconess should be very familiar with the 1928 Book of Common Prayer and be taught to lead Morning and Evening Prayer properly.

* Hospice training, Pastoral Care classes (often given in hospitals), Stevens Ministry classes and volunteering in a hospital or other community service could be part of the training.

* The Priest may assign and mentor the Deaconess-in-Training using specific parish pastoral care situations. This would be excellent hands-on training.

* Further formal training in your areas of strengths or weaknesses could be included.

* Training in church skills such as Altar Guild could be included

At the conclusion of the full discernment period, you will meet with the Board of Examining Chaplains for the official interview to begin the formation process for the Deaconess ministry.

Once you are approved by the Board of Examining chaplains to begin your **Formation Period** you are officially a Deaconess Candidate and will be assigned your **Mentor**. Together with your parish Priest, your mentor will oversee the implementation of your Plan of Preparation. During this period of formation and for a time after your setting apart you must write an **Ember letter** to the Bishop each Ember season. This is a short letter which describes your progress during your formation or your activities as a Deaconess before you have been Set Apart.

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