

DIACONAL MINISTRY

Introduction

Since its inception in 1887, the Diaconate has held a special place not only within the Church but also in the communities of Scotland at large. Originally an office for women within the Church, the Diaconate is now open to all. Like Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Elders, Deacons are ordained to their life-long office and are part of the Courts of the Church. As with other forms of ministry the Diaconate is undergoing a time of radical rethinking. The Church is beginning to see new and exciting patterns of ministry emerge.

All Christians are called to be ministers to those around them. Within this context, the Church recognises distinctive kinds of calling to particular roles and functions. Deacons offer a ministry that is complementary to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Their work is primarily focused on care and compassion for the poor and oppressed, and seeking social justice for all. It is characterised by loving service and usually takes place in the context of a larger team. Deacons are enablers, who strive to bring out in others the gifts they have to offer to the Church and the community at large.

Diaconal Ministry in the Community

Deacons are rooted both in the congregation and the community. As such, they are able to challenge the worshipping congregation on issues concerning the community – issues such as poverty, housing, education and social exclusion. Deacons are free to do this because they are released from some of the obligations placed on the Parish Minister.

Many Deacons are employed as Parish and Presbytery Workers – offering pastoral care in the community, and working with specific groups such as young people (often in schools) or with families. In many places they are called upon to conduct funerals and offer bereavement support. Deacons are able to conduct weddings.

Deacons can also serve the community through work in various types of Chaplaincy and other recognised diaconal appointments.

Caring, Teaching and Encouraging

Deacons meet people in all of life's circumstances and in all kinds of places. Their role as carers is rooted in the wider pastoral ministry of the whole people of God, and often has a specific focus in the crisis points of people's lives.

Deacons are involved in many aspects of teaching programmes in Church and the community and through their involvement in issues of social justice, Deacons often take on the role of encouragers, standing alongside those who feel the isolation and loneliness of struggling against oppressive systems and people. Increasingly Deacons are being sought to work in Priority Areas Parishes – Scotland's poorest communities.

Deacons may also engage in a prophetic role towards the Church arising out of their experience in such demanding community situations.

Through their work with young people and children some Deacons may work alongside people with special needs, offering assurance that they have an equal place in society and much to contribute to it.

Ecumenical links

Over the years Deacons have represented the Church of Scotland in larger Ecumenical gatherings both within the United Kingdom and beyond. There are strong links with the Diaconal Association of the Church of England, the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Deaconesses within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The Diaconate of the Church of Scotland is a member of **World DIAKONIA**. This is an organisation for Deacons, set up after the Second World War to build bridges and to bring about reconciliation and healing. In the beginning it was European but is now world-wide, linking diaconal groups across the globe and across the cultures. Deacons of the Church of Scotland were involved in the beginning and are still there. Over the years a number of Deacons have held office within the organization and many have represented us at Conferences across the world.

Another link in through a group called **KAIRE** which has a meeting every two years bringing together Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Reformed and Orthodox women for spiritual experience and retreat.

Work and Worship

Deacons usually work as part of a team, and may regularly be involved in leading worship. This means they have to be people who know how to co-operate with others in a common task. They are always looking for the potential in others and seeking ways to help them fulfill it.

Many people today choose not to worship on a Sunday morning. Deacons will be called on to work in partnership to devise new patterns for the worshipping life of the Church. They will strive to enable those with whom they come into contact to see the gospel as something relevant to their life and work.

As bridge builders between Church and community, Deacons seek ways to enable the community at large to celebrate the presence of God, both in the ordinary and in the crucial transitional points of life.

Where do I go from here?

Should you wish further information or wish to apply to be considered for training as a Deacon please contact:

Ministries Council

e-mail: vocation@cofscotland.org.uk

Tel: 0131 225 5722 ext 348/419

For more information on requirements for Diaconal Candidates, please see the Diaconate Candidate Handbook on the website:

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/subjects/ministries_resources#cps

Course Requirements for Diaconal Ministry

1. All those who have a full theology degree from either Aberdeen University, Glasgow University, St Andrews University, Edinburgh University or Highland Theological College (Recognised Providers) will be expected to produce evidence of the classes they undertook and, perhaps, in the light of the classes they have taken, will be directed to undertake further study in preparation for Diaconal Ministry. They will also be expected to undertake at least one term-time placement and a summer placement before commencing a probationary period as a deacon.
2. Applicants who have not undertaken theological studies with a Recognised Provider, but who have an academic theological education will be expected to study for at least one year, depending on the nature of their studies elsewhere. The course, when determined, will be based on what topics they have covered and the necessary acknowledgement of the core curriculum, as outlined in the Deacons of the Gospel Report to the General Assembly. The course agreed upon will be in line with the Deacons of the Gospel Report and be flexible to the extent that it will take cognizance of the theological and other studies which any applicant may have undertaken prior to making an application.
3. Those who have no formal theological education will have to enroll in a faculty of divinity of a Recognised Provider. In order to do this, they will have to have the formal qualifications to allow them to be admitted to the university. The course that they undertake in one of these faculties will be the BD degree, similar to that undertaken by a Candidate for Ministry of Word and Sacrament. They will therefore have to study Old Testament, New Testament, Systematic Theology, Church History and Practical Theology. They will be encouraged to develop special interests in areas which will enrich their work as a future deacon of the Church. This might encompass work within hospitals, youth or community work, or other parallel skills and interests.
4. All candidates are required to attend conferences arranged from time to time for Candidates for Ministry and the Diaconate: these will usually take place in September and April. All Diaconal Candidates will be expected to attend the Diaconate Council when it meets twice a year (January and June).
5. All candidates are required to undertake 2 placements as an essential part of the process and each year reports will be required from supervisors and candidates. The placements will last 25 weeks during term time, and ten weeks during the summer period, when required. The probationary period will be 12 months full-time, paid at a rate related to the minimum stipend. No accreditation will be given for placements undertaken elsewhere and for other forms of ministry and service within the Church of Scotland or other denominations, as the Church believes this is a specific form of service which needs appraisal and development which focus immediately on its distinctive aspects.
6. All candidates will engage in the Candidate Review Process and the Ministries Training Network.

The above notes are guidelines which reflect the findings of the Deacons of the Gospel Report submitted to the General Assembly in 2001 and may be subject to revision in the future.