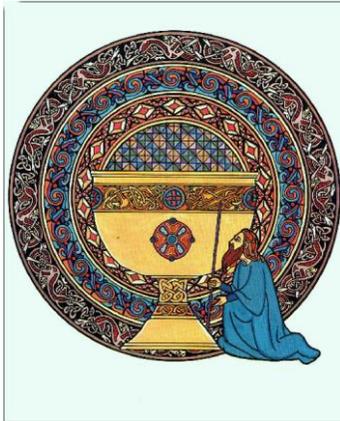


# Patmos Companions – Order of St Columba

Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
*Believe* what you read, *teach* what you believe,  
and *practice* what you teach.

## What is a Deacon?



*“Like those the apostles chose for works of charity, you should be of good reputation, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Show before God and humanity that you are above every suspicion of blame, true ministers of Christ and of God’s mysteries, firmly grounded in faith.*”

*Never turn away from the hope which the Gospel offers;  
now you must not only listen to God’s word but also preach it.*

*Hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.*

*Express in action what you proclaim by word of mouth.*

*Then the people of Christ, brought to life by the Spirit, will be an offering God accepts.*

*Finally, on the last day, when you go to meet the Lord, you will hear him say:*

*‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.’”*

*Cf. Ordination Rite of Deacons #14*

# What is a Deacon?

## Part I: The Ministry of Love and Justice



Deacons were an important part of the early whole People of God. From the foundation of the order of deacon (Acts 6:1-6) those ordained to this order had the special role of caring for the poor and outcast and reminding the members of the whole People of God to do the same. The word “deacon” comes from the Greek *diaconal*, which means “service.” So vital was this ministry of charity that deacons were entrusted with all the worldly assets of the Whole People of God so they could distribute them as necessary to the needy.

By the end of the first millennium, the order of deacons had died out in the Western Church. Ordination to the diaconate became a step along the road to priestly ordination, along with other ancient roles such as lector and acolyte. There are many interesting theories as to why this happened, which we do not need to go into here, but it is notable that the Eastern Church retained the permanent diaconate all through its history. Some still lived the life of a deacon, such as St. Francis of Assisi, who after his ordination as a deacon declined to be ordained a priest, and lived as a deacon for the rest of his life. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) ordered the restoration of the diaconate, but this decree was never implemented.

The restoration of the permanent diaconate by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the result of extensive theological and pastoral dialogue, originating primarily in Germany, on the need to emphasize the servant role of the People of God. The leaders of this movement were a group of priests who developed their thoughts while imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau. For decades they

championed the restoration of the diaconate as necessary for the full life of the People of God. Based on the extensive historical and theological work on the order of deacon prompted by the witness of these priests, the Council decided to restore the permanent diaconate.

While the **bishop** is an icon of Christ the shepherd and the **priest** is an icon of Christ the priest, the **deacon** is an icon of Christ the servant. The deacon must seek out the poor and outcast in the community. They minister to their needs and bring them to the Christian community for continued care. To ensure that the faith community is disposed to welcome the outcast, the deacon is called to remind the faithful of their Christian responsibility to service and justice and to assist them in carrying out this responsibility.

The deacon ensures that the Christian community is a welcoming place for all. By personal service among those on the margins of society, the deacon becomes intimately familiar with their needs as he or she is intimately familiar with the Christian community. Thus, they live in two worlds, seeking to bridge the gap between the comfortable and those in need of comfort. At times, this gap may not be able to be bridged, and, in these times the ministry of the deacon is all the more important in its own right. To those whom society deems less-than—the poor, the immigrant, the imprisoned, gays and lesbians, the divorced and remarried, and all those alienated from society and the People of God for whatever reason—the deacon brings the compassion of the People of God, and to the People of God they present these for whom God has a special love and asks the community to welcome them.

The deacon is the voice of the People of God to the marginalized, and the voice of the marginalized to the People of God.

### **Deacons are people who have**

- experienced a call from God;
- explored and tested that calling;
- undertaken approved and appropriate training, and,
- been ordained.

## **How deacons minister**

With an eye to the ministry of God as expressed in the concept of the Trinity, the whole People of God seeks to explore the specific role of deacons in relationship with that of priests, Bishops and the whole People of God. Thus a complementary style of ministry is seen to be developing among all who serve God and community, in a way which mirrors the ministry of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. James Barnett refers to the Diaconate as ‘a full and equal order’ in both title and text of his book *The Diaconate: A full and equal order*. (revised edition, Trinity Press, Pennsylvania 1995)

## **Where deacons minister**

Deacons are particularly called to minister to people:

- who may be marginalised,
- who might well be on the boundaries and fringes of life and experience, who may be beyond the current sight of the whole People of God or, who may be beyond its capacity to reach.

These people are never beyond the sight of God. The People of God is being stirred to find models of ministry which reach out in love, advocacy and service to them.

This diaconal ministry role is not exclusive to deacons, as many lay people minister in these roles as well. When deacons are ordained they become models and encouragers of diaconal ministry.

## **Where the deacon fits in**

Bishops are primarily called to lead and shepherd people in the whole People of God.

Priests are primarily called to lead and care for the gathered communities.

Deacons are primarily called to minister to people who rarely fit within the often comfortable boundaries of the Abbey or priory or parishes and

dioceses. This raises issues which can be uncomfortable for both deacons and the gathered People of God.

Deacons may be called to serve

- older people confined to homes or aged care facilities,
- groups of homeless people,
- people with mental health issues,
- street kids, and,
- numerous groups who wander the world's stage but largely go unnoticed or unnoted by whole People of God, community and government.

### **Possible Issues and dilemmas**

The renewal of the diaconate raises uncomfortable issues for some members of the whole People of God. There is uncertainty as to the effect deacons will have on other orders in the whole People of God. As a whole People of God we are constantly being faced with contentious ministry issues. The renewal of the diaconate fits with ministry issues such as helping others to grown in their understanding of:

- the movement of women into priestly and Episcopal roles,
- the ministry to and by people within the gay community, and
- the role of whole People of God in politics, and
- the discontent of people who feel 'pushed away' by the Church

These issues tax the minds of the People of God and not all solutions will sit comfortably with all members of the whole People of God. The development of the diaconate may well be a less uncomfortable area for the People of God to explore issues of change and new models of ministry that may then be applied to other dilemmas.

### **Deacons Are:**

- called by God and ordained by the Bishop Protector to serve a lifetime of commitment to the People of God in diaconal ministry;
- called to be servant leaders in the People of God, proclaiming the good news of the gospel to the world;

- advocates for social justice, standing alongside the disadvantaged, oppressed or marginalised;
- members of the whole Body of Christ and accountable to the Abbot - Bishop Protector
- people who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances, and their ministry gifting and focus are diverse in nature;
- called to work within communities, ministry units, or agencies, to carry out specialised pastoral, advocacy or teaching ministries in the community;
- licensed by the diocesan bishop or Abbot -Bishop Protector to perform particular ministry roles and tasks.
- tested and trained for full ministry alongside others. Deacons are oriented towards taking the Gospel and the love of Christ into ‘the world’. Their ministry is one of outreach.
- Some deacons have this ministry as a permanent vocation. They belong to the distinctive or permanent diaconate. Other deacons, those to be priested, retain diaconal ministry as an integral part of their priestly vocation once they are ordained as priests.
- Deacons study together and have fellowship together, sharing stories of mission, worship and ministry.
- Deacons are collegial associates with Diocesan bishop, or Abbot - Bishop Protectors and priests in ministry to the whole body of Christ.

## **The deacon’s licence**

In addition to those roles and functions proscribed in the ordinal and depending on a deacon’s individual gifting aligned to the needs of the people among whom the deacon ministers , **the diocesan bishop or Abbot -Bishop Protector may license individual deacons and/or give them ‘one-off ’ approval to:**

- exercise their diaconal ministry in an approved workplace, with the marginalised, or in a specific context
- preach
- lead worship services
- conduct funerals
- baptise
- conduct marriage services
- act as chaplain to a variety of ministries

- teach theology at tertiary level
- act as an envoy of the Abbot -Bishop Protector in specific circumstances
- be a counsellor
- act as an official advocate for a particular grouping of marginalised people, on behalf of the Diocese/Abbey/Priory
- undertake any other office or function that the diocesan Bishop or Abbot -Bishop Protector deems fit

### **Permission to Conduct a Marriage Service**

Within the Order of St Columba, the Abbot -Bishop Protector upon consideration seek the advocacy of the Presiding Bishop of the Australian Church of Antioch to grant a deacon a licence to celebrate marriage when the need for this licence must be demonstrably related to aspects of their specific ministries.

### **Oversight**

- The diocesan bishop or Abbot-Bishop Protector determines the scope and particulars of the licence to a specific ministry unit.
- An appropriately licensed deacon may conduct baptisms and/or funerals where they flow through and from the deacon's natural ministry.

## **Part II: The Ministry of the Table of the Word**



To the deacon is entrusted the proclamation of the Gospel. The priest proclaims the Gospel only if no deacon is available. We see this historic role of the deacon illustrated in ancient icons, where deacon saints are depicted holding a Gospel book. The deacon's ministry of the Word, the second aspect of their three-fold ministry, is not merely a ceremonial honour.

The Eucharist consists of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Just as the priest plays a principal role in the Liturgy of the

Eucharist, the deacon plays a prominent role in the Liturgy of the Word. The deacon's most complete service in the Liturgy of the Word consists in proclaiming the Gospel, applying it to everyday life in the homily, and leading the assembly in prayer based on this reflection in the General Intercessions (Prayer of the People).

**Why are these roles assigned to the deacon as a servant of the Word?** They flow from their ministry in the world. As an icon of Christ the servant, the deacon ideally helps us to be “doers of the Word and not just hearers” (James 1:22-25). By their familiarity with the needs of those in the wider community, the deacon helps us to avoid becoming too internally focused on our faith community. In the homily, the deacon should call the assembly to compassion and action on the part of those who otherwise would have no voice. They do this by unpacking the social ramifications of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, who came to “bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord's year of mercy” (Luke 4:16-21).

When a priest or bishop or the Abbot -Bishop Protector gives a homily, you will often hear them talk along these lines, for these themes are at the root of our reason for being as the People of God. But when a deacon is really doing their job, even before they begin their homily people will think to themselves, “Here's the deacon. S/he will preach on some aspect of social justice.” That's what deacons do.

The last part of the Liturgy of the Word is the General Intercessions, or Prayer of the People. This is the part of the Eucharist where the assembly exercises its priestly role by praying for the needs of all the world. By virtue of their ministry of service, the deacon is supposed to be familiar with the special needs of those in the community. After proclaiming the Gospel and helping the assembly to reflect upon it in the homily, the deacon formulates prayers for the assembly based on the Gospel as their final aspect of service to the Word. These prayers should be specific and externally focused, encouraging the assembly to pray for the needs of the world as we experience them personally or have knowledge of them from today's news. So the deacon helps us to live

both responses to the needs of the world: action and prayer, “to pray as though everything depends upon God, and to act as though everything depends upon us.”

Hearing. Reflecting. Praying. Acting. As a servant, the deacon assists us in living this response to the Word of God.

## Part III: The Ministry of the Lord’s Table



As we read in the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-6), the first seven deacons were chosen to serve at the table. Today the deacon they receive the gifts of the assembly, prepares the table, assists the Presider, gives directions to the assembly, administers communion, clears the table and finally dismisses the assembly.

After their service to the assembly in hearing and reflecting upon the Word of God, the deacon receives their gifts for the use of the faith community and the poor. They then prepare the table with these gifts. What is more characteristic of one who offers hospitality than setting and clearing a table? The liturgy is filled with reminders of the deacon's role as a servant. They pour the wine.

They distribute the Eucharistic bread into separate containers. They fulfil the ancient role of cup-bearer. And when the meal is completed, they clear the table and cleanse the vessels. During the Eucharistic prayer, their stance is to the side of the Presider, careful to avoid the spotlight. By their very presence, they are a reminder that Eucharist is more than what happens at the altar; it is the source and summit of Christian life and everything such a life entails.

The deacon also provides logistical direction to the assembly. While the Presider leads us in prayer, the deacon offers practical directions, such as when to give the sign of peace, or when to leave. They may offer

other directions as needed, such as when to stand or kneel during special ceremonies, or give the announcements at Eucharist.

What is the most important part of the Eucharist? I once heard a liturgist say the most important part of the Eucharist is when the People of God, having heard the Word and having been nourished by the Eucharist, are sent out from the assembly to live what they have experienced. The very last words of the Eucharist are the deacon's dismissal, reminding us that we are called to be Whole People of God not just in the whole People of God building, but outside in the world. This dismissal is so important that from it comes our very word for Eucharist: we are sent, *missa*.

And so the assembly disperses to become the Body of Christ to all they encounter during the week. Confirmed in their faith through the ministry of lectors, altar servers, musicians, ushers, ministers of communion, the deacon and the priest, God's People are now called to be bread broken for the world in their everyday lives.

**"How will we know when we have enough deacons?** When to gather the gifts of the whole People of God and take them to the world, and to gather the needs of the world and bring them to the whole People of God, has become a habit. When deacons, going back and forth, have worn down the boundary lines we use to keep whole People of God and world separated. When deacons, leading the baptized in and out, have beaten a path between the altar and the gutter so that everyone will see the link between the Blood in our chalices and the blood in our streets. When all people respond to the challenge to live, not in the love of power, but in the power of love."

--Rev. Irma Wyman,

# Deacons in the New Testament

## The selection of the first deacons

During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—"Hellenists"—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. [2] So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor. [3] So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. [4] Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word."

[5] The congregation thought this was a great idea. They went ahead and chose— Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, a convert from Antioch.

[6] Then they presented them to the apostles. Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task.

—Acts of the Apostles 6:1-6

## **St. Stephen gives the first recorded homily by a deacon, and as a result becomes the first Christian martyr**

— Acts 6:8-15

Stephen, brimming with God's grace and energy, was doing wonderful things among the people, unmistakable signs that God was among them. [9] But then some men from the meeting place whose membership was made up of freed slaves, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some others from Cilicia and Asia, went up against him trying to argue

him down. [10] But they were no match for his wisdom and spirit when he spoke.

[11] So in secret they bribed men to lie: "We heard him cursing Moses and God."

[12] That stirred up the people, the religious leaders, and religion scholars. They grabbed Stephen and took him before the High Council [13] They put forward their bribed witnesses to testify: "This man talks nonstop against this Holy Place and God's Law. [14] We even heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would tear this place down and throw out all the customs Moses gave us."

[15] As all those who sat on the High Council looked at Stephen, they found they couldn't take their eyes off him—his face was like the face of an angel!

Acts 7:1-60

Then the Chief Priest said, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

[2] Stephen replied, "Friends, fathers, and brothers, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before the move to Haran, [3] and told him, 'Leave your country and family and go to the land I'll show you.'

[4] "So he left the country of the Chaldees and moved to Haran. After the death of his father, he immigrated to this country where you now live, [5] but God gave him nothing, not so much as a foothold. He did promise to give the country to him and his son later on, even though Abraham had no son at the time. [6] God let him know that his offspring would move to an alien country where they would be enslaved and brutalized for four hundred years.

[7] 'But,' God said, 'I will step in and take care of those slaveholders and bring my people out so they can worship me in this place.'

[8] "Then he made a covenant with him and signed it in Abraham's flesh by circumcision. When Abraham had his son Isaac, within eight days he reproduced the sign of circumcision in him. Isaac became father of Jacob, and Jacob father of twelve 'fathers,' each faithfully passing on the covenant sign.

[9] "But then those 'fathers,' burning up with jealousy, sent Joseph off to Egypt as a slave. God was right there with him, though— [10] he not

only rescued him from all his troubles but brought him to the attention of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He was so impressed with Joseph that he put him in charge of the whole country, including his own personal affairs.

[11] "Later a famine descended on that entire region, stretching from Egypt to Canaan, bringing terrific hardship. Our hungry fathers looked high and low for food, but the cupboard was bare. [12] Jacob heard there was food in Egypt and sent our fathers to scout it out. [13] Having confirmed the report, they went back to Egypt a second time to get food. On that visit, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers and introduced the Jacob family to Pharaoh. [14] Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and everyone else in the family, seventy-five in all. [15] That's how the Jacob family got to Egypt.

"Jacob died, and our fathers after him. [16] They were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb for which Abraham paid a good price to the sons of Hamor.

[17] "When the four hundred years were nearly up, the time God promised Abraham for deliverance, the population of our people in Egypt had become very large. [18] And there was now a king over Egypt who had never heard of Joseph. [19] He exploited our race mercilessly. He went so far as forcing us to abandon our newborn infants, exposing them to the elements to die a cruel death.

[20] "In just such a time Moses was born, a most beautiful baby. He was hidden at home for three months. [21] When he could be hidden no longer, he was put outside—and immediately rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, who mothered him as her own son. [22] Moses was educated in the best schools in Egypt. He was equally impressive as a thinker and an athlete.

[23] "When he was forty years old, he wondered how everything was going with his Hebrew kin and went out to look things over. [24] He saw an Egyptian abusing one of them and stepped in, avenging his underdog brother by knocking the Egyptian flat. [25] He thought his brothers would be glad that he was on their side, and even see him as an instrument of God to deliver them. But they didn't see it that way. [26] The next day two of them were fighting and he tried to break it up, told them to shake hands and get along with each other: 'Friends, you are brothers, why are you beating up on each other?'

[27] "The one who had started the fight said, 'Who put you in charge of us? [28] Are you going to kill me like you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' [29] When Moses heard that, realizing that the word was out, he ran for his life and lived in exile over in Midian. During the years of exile, two sons were born to him.

[30] "Forty years later, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to him in the guise of flames of a burning bush. [31] Moses, not believing his eyes, went up to take a closer look. He heard God's voice: [32] 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' Frightened nearly out of his skin, Moses shut his eyes and turned away.

[33] "God said, 'Kneel and pray. You are in a holy place, on holy ground. [34] I've seen the agony of my people in Egypt. I've heard their groans. I've come to help them. So get yourself ready; I'm sending you back to Egypt.'

[35] "This is the same Moses whom they earlier rejected, saying, 'Who put you in charge of us?' This is the Moses that God, using the angel flaming in the burning bush, sent back as ruler and redeemer. [36] He led them out of their slavery. He did wonderful things, setting up God-signs all through Egypt, down at the Red Sea, and out in the wilderness for forty years. [37] This is the Moses who said to his congregation, 'God will raise up a prophet just like me from your descendants.' [38] This is the Moses who stood between the angel speaking at Sinai and your fathers assembled in the wilderness and took the life-giving words given to him and handed them over to us, [39] words our fathers would have nothing to do with.

"They craved the old Egyptian ways, [40] whining to Aaron, 'Make us gods we can see and follow. This Moses who got us out here miles from nowhere—who knows what's happened to him!' [41] That was the time when they made a calf-idol, brought sacrifices to it, and congratulated each other on the wonderful religious program they had put together.

[42] "God wasn't at all pleased; but he let them do it their way, worship every new god that came down the pike—and live with the consequences, consequences described by the prophet Amos:

Did you bring me offerings of animals and grains those forty wilderness years, O Israel?

[43] Hardly. You were too busy building shrine to war gods, to sex goddesses, Worshiping them with all your might.

That's why I put you in exile in Babylon.

[44] "And all this time our ancestors had a tent shrine for true worship, made to the exact specifications God provided Moses. [45] They had it with them as they followed Joshua, when God cleared the land of pagans, and still had it right down to the time of David. [46] David asked God for a permanent place for worship. [47] But Solomon built it.

[48] "Yet that doesn't mean that Most High God lives in a building made by carpenters and masons. The prophet Isaiah put it well when he wrote,

[49] "Heaven is my throne room; I rest my feet on earth.

So what kind of house will you build me?" says God.

"Where I can get away and relax? [50] It's already built, and I built it."

[51] "And you continue, so bull-headed! Calluses on your hearts, flaps on your ears! Deliberately ignoring the Holy Spirit, you're just like your ancestors. [52] Was there ever a prophet who didn't get the same treatment? Your ancestors killed anyone who dared talk about the coming of the Just One. And you've kept up the family tradition—traitors and murderers, all of you. [53] You had God's Law handed to you by angels—gift-wrapped!—and you squandered it!"

[54] At that point they went wild, a rioting mob of catcalls and whistles and invective. [55] But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, hardly noticed—he only had eyes for God, whom he saw in all his glory with Jesus standing at his side. [56] He said, "Oh! I see heaven wide open and the Son of Man standing at God's side!"

[57] Yelling and hissing, the mob drowned him out. Now in full stampede, [58] they dragged him out of town and pelted him with rocks. The ringleaders took off their coats and asked a young man named Saul to watch them.

[59] As the rocks rained down, Stephen prayed, "Master Jesus, take my life." [60] Then he knelt down, praying loud enough for everyone to hear, "Master, don't blame them for this sin"—his last words. Then he died.

Saul was right there, congratulating the killers.

## **The desired attributes of the bishop and deacon**

This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of Bishop desires a noble task. Therefore, a Bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of the whole People of God of God? He should not be a recent convert, so that he may not become conceited and thus incur the devil's punishment. He must also have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, the devil's trap.

Similarly, deacons must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Moreover, they should be tested first; then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. Women, similarly, should be dignified, not slanderers, but temperate and faithful in everything. Deacons may be married only once and must manage their children and their households well. Thus those who serve well as deacons gain good standing and much confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

—1 Timothy 3:1-13

# **In Summary ...what the Deacon Does within the Order of St Columba**

## **At Eucharist**

- Assists the priest or Abbot -Bishop Protector
- Provides directions as necessary to the assembly
- Proclaims the Gospel
- Preaches the homily
- Leads the General Intercessions (Prayer of the People)
- Administers communion from the cup
- Dismisses the assembly at the end of Eucharist

## **In Everyday Life**

- Works at their regular job to support themselves and their family, if married
- Works with the poor and outcast in the community
- Serves as a minister of the Gospel in the workplace

## **In the Christian assembly**

- Reminds the parish members of their responsibility to the poor and outcast, helps them get involved in social justice work
- Brings the poor and outcast into the parish community
- Serves as the voice of the poor and outcast in the larger society
- Administers baptism, presides at marriages and funerals
- Works closely with the pastor for special needs of the community
- Trains liturgical ministers
- Prepares people for reception of the sacraments
- Presides at various other ceremonies

## **In the Parish/Abbey/Priory**

- Assists the Abbot-Bishop Protector at special liturgies
- Serves as the special helper of the Abbot -Bishop Protector, his/her “eyes and ears”
- Notifies the Abbot-Bishop Protector of special needs of the poor and outcast
- Serves as the Abbot-Bishop Protector’s master of ceremonies for special occasions

## **Who is the Deacon?**

- Three-fold ministry of service: charity, word and altar
- Ordained clergy in the full and equal three ordained ancient orders of bishop, priest and deacon
- Completes a program of formation and study before ordination
- Responsible to the Abbot-Bishop Protector; collaborates with the community/priory/well in which he or she belongs.

Abbot +Stephen M Morrissy  
2011