



## What is a Deacon in the United Methodist Church?

The United Methodist Church began ordaining Deacons as a separate ordination from that of Elder in 1996, so we are kind of a new thing in our denomination. Furthermore, there are not a whole lot of us, which means that those of us answering the call to become Ordained Deacons have a need to explain what this means to us and in the life of the local United Methodist Church. Below I have included the “official” understanding; however, living out the role of Deacon varies based on a particular call each Deacon answers.

For me, I have been called to Youth and Young Adult Ministries; I will serve the local church though working with young people throughout my life in ministry. Part of what I have felt called to do is to lead youth into an intentional life with God and to connect them to the Body of Christ, in particular to the larger body of the United Methodist Church. Due to this calling, I have already begun work to connect Youth Workers in the Memphis Conference to one another through a monthly Youth Workers Meeting and their youth groups through our quarterly Youth Gathering that we host here at St. Paul.

Now, I can go on an on about my particular calling, and would be glad to do so (just stop me sometime when you have while). However, I would like to give you a brief illustration at this time that I think best explains my understanding of this role.

The Deacon is the door to the church, to call in the weary of this world into a sanctuary where they can recharge and grow in faith in the loving and safe embrace of God and the Body of Christ. Then once recharge and equipped with the Word and Mercy of God I kick them back out into the weary world to live out their calling as the priesthood of all believers. We need the Church and the fellowship that occurs inside our “walls”; however, we must live in the world and share the Gospel outside our safe community. We do this by practicing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God and Jesus to making the Kindom (I left the “g” out on purpose) of God visible in our darkened world were we are separated from one another by sin and indifference.

The separate but equal language used to describe the difference in the roles the Elder and Deacon acknowledges that both have been called apart (that is the nature of ordination – being one set aside from the laity for a service of leadership within the body of Christ) for a particular role in the life of the Church. The Elder pastors the congregation within a parish, while the Deacon enables the laity to live out Christian Faith in their daily lives. Both are called to Word as a means to equip the body of the church for grow and maturity of faith. Deacons and Elders work together both inside and outside the walls of our local churches to be a light that leads others to a closer walk with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, each is given different gifts and talents so to create a deeper understanding of God, and our ability to spread the good news throughout the world.

**Here is what the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry says about Deacons**

**Deacons** are ordained United Methodist clergy who lead the church in relating Christians to their ministries in the world through worship leadership, preaching, teaching, nurturing spiritual vitality and leading ministries of service, love, and justice. They may work primarily in congregations or they may work primarily in settings like hospitals, social-service agencies, mission agencies, schools, counseling centers, denominational agencies, and more.

Deacons are appointed to their places of ministry by the bishop of their episcopal area. Their appointment may be initiated by the bishop, the district superintendent, the deacon, or the agency requesting the service of the deacon (full or provisional member). While deacons must have an appointment, they do not itinerate. They usually identify their location of service and request from the bishop appointment to that setting.

Deacons may be appointed to serve as their primary field of service:

- agencies and settings beyond the local church, including ecumenical agencies, that extend the witness and service of Christ's love and justice in the world and connect the church with the most needy, neglected, and marginalized
- United Methodist-related agencies, schools, colleges, theological schools, and within connectional structures of the denomination
- congregations, charges, or cooperative parishes, where they participate in leading the congregation's mission to the world and equipping all Christians to fulfill their calls to Christian service.