

Deacons in the Episcopal Church and in the Diocese of Washington

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When Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde relaunched the diaconate in the [Episcopal Diocese of Washington](#) (EDOW) in 2014, she articulated a clear theological purpose: deacons exist to bridge the life of the Church and the world, especially the lives of those who are poor, marginalized, suffering, or oppressed. This vision echoes the [1979 Book of Common Prayer](#), which charges deacons to “interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world” and to serve those in need. EDOW describes deacons as “boundary crossers”—ordained ministers who move between the worshiping community and the wider world, bringing the concerns of each to the other.

► Read [The Episcopal Diocese of Washington’s 2014 Statement on the Diaconate](#)

The diaconate is an ancient order, rooted in the early Church’s ministries of service, care, and practical leadership among those in need. While its forms have evolved over centuries, the central vocation has remained constant: to connect the Church’s worship and witness with the pressing needs of the world. In a 2017 sermon to the first cohort ordained under the revived EDOW program, Bishop Budde captured this calling succinctly: “Don’t be the servant; teach us as a church to serve.” Rather than performing the Church’s service on others’ behalf, deacons help communities recognize that responding to suffering and injustice belongs to the baptismal vocation of every follower of Jesus.

► Read [Bishop Budde’s 2017 sermon, “The Ministry of Deacons”](#)

Deacons identify needs, build relationships, and speak truth to the Church, equipping congregations to respond through compassion, advocacy, reconciliation, and action. They also carry a prophetic responsibility: by listening to and amplifying voices often ignored, and by bringing realities of poverty, violence, and exclusion before the Church, deacons call the community to see clearly and to act faithfully. Liturgically, this theology is embodied as deacons proclaim the Gospel, lead prayers for the world, assist at the Eucharist, and dismiss the congregation—standing symbolically at the doorway between worship and mission. In this way, deacons help faith communities carry the Gospel beyond their walls and live out God’s call to transform the world with service, compassion, and justice.