



February 7, 2025

Dear partners in ministry,

Many of you are aware that in January I gathered the deacons of our diocese at Christ the King for a time of conversation and fellowship. Even though the weather outside was less than ideal, inside was warm and inviting. And, even though the weather outside was less than ideal, happily, a majority of our deacons attended.

We had a full and joyous day together and this letter will certainly not be able to capture the collegiality and affection that marked the event. Neither will this letter be able to fully convey the detailed discussions we had concerning the nature of the diaconate in the Episcopal Diocese of Albany.

That said, there are some very important developments that emerged from our time together. As ordained ministers of the diocese, priests and deacons, it is important that I share those with you. In fact, the primary purpose of gathering in the first place was to ensure that our communication is sound and that everyone is on the same page.

Much of the work we accomplished at the January gathering was inspired by conversations I had with your Director of Deacons, Justine Guernsey. During my first year in the diocese, it became clear that there has been a lack of clarity concerning the understanding, shape, and expression of diaconal ministry across the diocese. We have found that not only do the deacons hold a variety of views, so too do their supervising priests.

After building a foundation with prayer and scripture, we explored our key foundational documents. To establish greater theological consistency, we spent time carefully exploring the diaconal ordination service in the Prayer Book. We had a great discussion and discovered that while each deacon lives out a ministry that is uniquely personal and authentic, there is much in that liturgy that defines the shape of diaconal ministry.

We also spent time exploring the Canons of the Episcopal Church. If you haven't recently, I encourage you to revisit Title III.7 of the Canons entitled [Of the Life and Work of Deacons](#). I think some of us were surprised by some of the contents, but they will help us create a common understanding of diaconal ministry in the context of the Episcopal Church.

If you do explore the Canon, you will see that the opening section reads: "Deacons serve directly under the authority of and are accountable to the Bishop." This is an incredibly important point for

understanding why there can develop diverse understandings of the ministry. Some of our deacons are now serving in their fourth episcopacy. It is also important because I have a vision for the diaconate that will require adjustments.

APPOINTMENTS: Deacons are under the appointment of the Bishop. In the past, that has been true for some of our deacons; others have made their own arrangements; some have been working under the assumption that they will stay with their sponsoring congregation indefinitely. In some cases, priests have “hired” deacons and later sought the consent of the Bishop.

I see diaconal ministry as a ministry of the diocese. The reason the Bishop appoints deacons is so we are able to best address and respond to the changing needs of the diocese. As it is, we have some churches with multiple deacons while the entire city of Albany (which is home to six of our churches) has a total of one deacon. We are missing opportunities to enhance and expand our ministry to the world when our deacons are static.

This will mean that deacons and priests will need to trust that I have the needs of the entire diocese at heart. And at times it will be uncomfortable when a deacon is asked to begin a new ministry with a new community. I understand that and (I think most of you know that my leadership style is not authoritarian) I intend to work closely with the clergy when I feel it is time to appoint a deacon to a new ministry.

Related to the appointment system, the Deacon’s Council is currently crafting a revised Letter of Agreement. The LOA will articulate clear expectations for the deacon, the priest, and the congregation. We have found that location greatly impacts the opportunities our deacons have. We hope to lessen the experiential variance and ensure that each deacon has a fulfilling ministry.

The new LOAs will take effect on July 1 of this year. At that time some deacons will be appointed to new congregations; others will be re-appointed to their current churches. I invite conversation around the appointment of deacons. Archdeacon Justine and/or the Bishop will be in touch with any deacons I intend to assign elsewhere. All appointments will be for three years, with the possibility of indefinite re-appointments. All active deacons will be appointed; deacons beyond the mandatory retirement age of 72 are also welcome to be appointed to a congregation (though one year at a time, as mandated by the Canons).

COMPENSATION: Traditionally, diaconal ministry has been non-stipendiary in the Episcopal Church. However, we have found that that has been inconsistently practiced in the diocese. Some deacons have been earning supply money from nearby parishes. Some have been paid by the congregation they serve. Others not at all.

Because diaconal ministry is a ministry of the diocese, the practice around compensation has been confusing and undermines my understanding of the ministry. Beginning July 1, deacons will no longer be paid directly for supply ministry within the diocese. Instead, we are creating a Deacon’s Fund, administered by the Deacon’s Council, that will allow us to invest more intentionally in our deacons. The supply rate will still be paid by the parish benefiting from the deacon’s service, but it will go into the fund, which we will use to offer continuing education, retreats, and emergency funds for deacons in need. The deacons will still be directly paid a mileage reimbursement at the IRS rate.

Instead of earning through supply work, the Deacon’s Council is preparing a resolution for Convention which will require a small, manageable stipend be paid by the parish to their deacon. The parish will

also make a contribution to the Church Pension Fund (for those eligible) which will allow our deacons to receive benefits, including free life insurance, a retirement benefit, and the opportunity to participate in CREDO, a health and wellness program. Details will emerge closer to Convention but we do believe this will honor our deacons and their important ministry.

Diaconal ministry is essential to the flourishing of our Diocese. The Church and the world desperately need the unique and profound charisms of our deacons. And we are blessed with a talented and faithful community of deacons that, I know, is equal to that sacred task. I am excited to see the community continue to grow in faith and numbers as we move into this new chapter.

Thank you for trusting me as we walk into, what I believe, will be a rich future of mission and ministry. Please contact me or Archdeacon Justine if you have any questions.

Your pastor and companion,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bishop Jeremiah