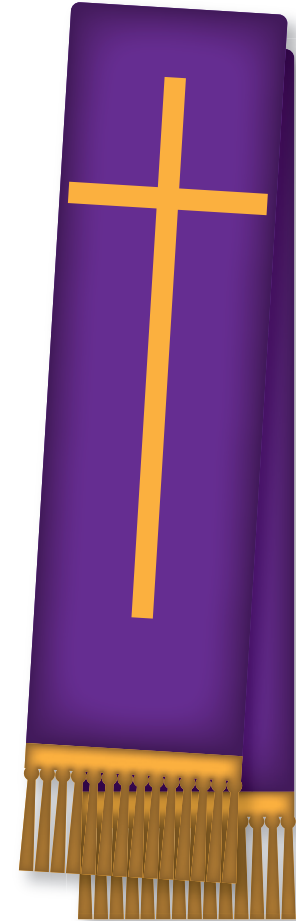


# HOLY ORDERS



**The ministry of bishops,  
priests, and deacons**

## Living Signs

But there is another bundle of questions in the ordination liturgy. The bishop asks candidates about their devotion to prayer and study and their commitment to fashioning their personal and family life according to Christ's teachings. This is a very important line of questions because it highlights the way we live together as Church.

In a similar way, all three Holy Orders are assigned not merely a job description but a particular place within the life of God's family. Ordained ministry, from a biblical perspective, includes the work of preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments, but it also means living as models of discipleship, fostering relationships within the beloved community, guiding the body into mission, and a simple yet steady ministry of presence.

## Grace and Holiness of Life

People in Holy Orders are to be living signs of Christ's grace and love set within the Church, a community that needs to see Christ's face and hear his voice anew in each generation. For this reason, when a person in Holy Orders retires from actively serving in a local congregation, the state of being a deacon or priest or even a bishop doesn't evaporate. We believe that persons ordained in Holy Orders continue to be ordained in our common life as Christ's Church. To be sure, those in Holy Orders are not perfect; they continue to be sinners saved by grace, striving for holiness of life and relying on the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our clergy point us to God's justifying grace and sanctifying presence.

The great poet George Herbert perhaps put it best in "The Windows":

Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?  
He is a brittle crazy glass;  
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford  
This glorious and transcendent place,  
To be a window, through thy grace.  
But when thou dost anneal in glass thy story,  
Making thy life to shine within  
The holy preachers, then the light and glory  
More reverend grows, and more doth win;  
Which else shows waterish, bleak, and thin.

Doctrine and life, colors and light, in one  
When they combine and mingle, bring  
A strong regard and awe; but speech alone  
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,  
And in the ear, not conscience, ring.



We are a Christian ministry based primarily in the Episcopal Church, a member of the Anglican Communion. Since 1878 we have published educational resources of various kinds and *The Living Church* magazine.

## Christ is the source and model of all Christian ministry, and when he “ascended on high, he gave gifts” of different ministries — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — for the Church’s mission (Eph. 4:11-13).

Among various ministries, Jesus set apart his 12 apostles for special forms of leadership within the Church. After the Lord’s resurrection, he breathed on the apostles — the same breath that blew at creation, the Holy Spirit — and at that moment Jesus ordained them for a ministry of reconciliation and pastoral leadership (see John 20:22-23; cf. Gen. 1). Likewise, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit rained down on the same apostles, they were empowered to share the good news of God’s work of salvation with every tribe, language, and nation. Many people were baptized as a result of the apostles’ preaching on Pentecost (Acts 2:36-41). While there are several ministries in the Church, the Holy Orders of bishops, priests (presbyters), and deacons have their origin among the first apostles, who were set apart by Jesus.

### From Generation to Generation

As the Church spread across the known world, those in Holy Orders exercised leadership and passed along what they first received from Christ: reconciliation with God the Father through the mediating work of God the Son in the renewing power of God the Holy Spirit. And the tools for this continuing apostolic labor were the comforting yet challenging ministry of preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, gifts also instituted by Jesus.

**Bishops** exercised a ministry of guidance, oversight, teaching, and celebrating the sacraments. They also served as guardians of the original testimony of the first apostles, what is often called the apostolic deposit of faith. For this reason, early Christian writers counseled new believers

to stay close to their bishop because he would safeguard and relay the truth handed down from Christ and the Church. **Priests** ensured that pastoral care, preaching, and the celebration of the sacraments were received in congregations. **Deacons** exercised a servant ministry, one that liberated bishops and presbyters to more fully engage in preaching and teaching (see Acts 6:1-4).

### Holy Orders in Anglicanism

During the Reformation of the 16th century, the Church of England retained this same apostolic pattern of leadership. Anglicans, therefore, have continued to rely on bishops, priests, and deacons to lead the Church in mission. In this respect, Anglicans claim an evangelical inheritance. We celebrate what Jesus set in motion with the first apostles so that the gospel might reach to the ends of the earth. This evangelical inheritance ensures our solidarity of spirit with Protestant Christians in our commitment to preaching and opening up the riches of Holy Scripture.

Likewise, Anglicans claim a Catholic inheritance, celebrating what has worked so well for the execution of that very mission in ages past and up to this very day. This Catholic inheritance ensures that our way of life remains familiar to Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, fellow believers with whom we earnestly desire to be co-laborers in the mission field and with whom we strive for the unity commended by Jesus (John 17:21).

Our evangelical and Catholic heritage is manifest in the ordination liturgies used across the Anglican world. Bishops,

as the guardians of the original apostolic testimony, are charged with leading these services during which they prayerfully lay hands on candidates for Holy Orders. This was how the first apostles passed on leadership. Within the liturgy, a candidate for Holy Orders is presented by the Christian community to the bishop. Holy Orders are never discerned in privacy or isolation, but rather in community.

In the 1662 Ordinal, the bishop asks candidates for priesthood several questions, in words since repeated or echoed in Anglican ordination rites the world over. Among them were these:

Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded . . . so that you may teach the people committed to your cure and charge with all diligence to keep and observe the same?

Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourselves to their godly judgements?

This last question underlines how Anglican Christians understand the Church to be a community of mutual forbearance. We lay aside a great deal of individual autonomy. In short, we are called to sacrificial relationships, a chief mark of Christ’s Church.