

Some things to think about . . .

Many of us are familiar with the phrase, “the priesthood of all believers,” which points us toward the call to all of us to share Christ’s work of reconciliation. But we probably haven’t heard much about the “diakonia of all believers.” Diakonia-what?? Diakonia is a Greek word that some of us believe is important to carry into today’s world – so important that we wish to share this theological statement with you.

Gather your friends and ground yourselves in thoughts, prayers, bible study, and plans for action by sharing this statement.

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The board of the Association for Episcopal Deacons and the directors of diaconal formation church-wide are profoundly grateful to the Lutheran World Federation for their statement, Prophetic Diakonia: For the Healing of the World. This prayerful and profound work has both inspired us and served as the foundation for our statement on behalf of deacons and all who engage in the diakonia of all believers, both in The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada. We are especially grateful for the permission of the Lutheran World Federation to adapt their words.



***Diakonia** is a Greek word which means caring for those in need, carrying out God’s vision in word, action, and in attending to all of God’s creation. In today’s world where power can be determined by wealth, but resources only available to some, healing and transformation are possible if we examine that call to diakonia. Join us in thinking, praying, and forming a plan of action in working toward that transformation.*

On Engaging the *Diakonia* of all Believers

Diakonia is central to fulfilling the church's mission as servant leaders. Diakonia is not optional in the Gospel of Jesus Christ; rather it is an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons created in God's image, and all of God's creation. While diakonia begins in unconditional service to neighbor in need, it leads inevitably through advocacy and prophetic proclamation to bear witness in word and deed to God's presence in the midst of our lives.



We are shaped to serve others through worship, where we celebrate God's gift of grace in the Word, water, bread and wine, through which we glimpse the fulfillment of God's promise. In this broken world where sin and injustice abound, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit shapes us as a gathered community. Thus, we become the voice, hands and feet of Christ and agents of grace for the healing of the world.



All Christians are called through the baptismal covenant to live out diakonia through what they do and how they live their daily life in the world. This is the first and most fundamental expression

of diakonia. Organized expressions of diakonia occur at the congregational level, as well as through those who are set apart as ordained deacons. Deacons are to model and lead, by inspiring, empowering, and engaging every baptized person in living out the diakonia of all believers in everyday life. Deacons do not – cannot – “do” diakonia on behalf of the baptized, but they help to lead all people, including the ordained, into the servant ministry of all believers which is the essence of our baptismal covenant.



Because of the holistic mission of God, diakonia is deeply interrelated with *kerygma* (proclamation of the Word) and *koinonia* (sharing at the Table). Diakonia is witnessing through deeds. It is rooted in the sharing of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The mutual sharing inherent in the communion of the Church bears witness in word and deed to the unjust power relations that often are present in some diaconal work, such as between “wealthy givers” and “poor recipients.” In diakonia those serving and those served are both transformed; the purpose of diakonia is to make Christ's redemptive love known by word and example not to proselytize.

Diakonia is not the strong serving the weak, which can lead to paternalism by assuming that some churches are unable to engage in diakonia because of their lack of resources or expertise. As Episcopalians, we envision that

diakonia is part of the calling of all churches, regardless of size and all Christians, regardless of wealth, because we believe that all of God's people, individually, and as communities, are blessed with gifts to share.



We must challenge all theological interpretations that do not take seriously the suffering in the world, a world afflicted with poverty, violence and injustice, and environmental degradation. We must also challenge all theological interpretations that do not take seriously the systems, structures, and powers that foster, or even benefit from, poverty, violence, and injustice, and environmental degradation. As Episcopalians, we are shaped by both an incarnational theology and a theology of the cross. In the incarnation, God's identification with all of humanity, indeed with all of creation, compels us to identify with all of our sisters and brothers, and the environment in which we live. Christ's suffering on the cross compels us to identify especially with those of our sisters and brothers who suffer today, moving beyond politeness and pretense, breaking the silence and risking speaking truth to power, even when this threatens the established order and results in hardship or persecution. This is the heart of the prophetic diaconal calling.