

5. The Role of the Deacon: Please answer both parts.

1. Describe how the roles of lay, deacon, priest, and bishop are modeled in our liturgies, and how those roles help to shape their more public expressions.

In the Episcopal church we tend to look at the four orders (lay, deacon, priest, and bishop) as a hierarchy, but they are also a division of labor, a little like spiritual gifts as explained by Paul in I Corinthians 12. If the whole church were any one of the orders, who would lead?

In the Book of Common Prayer, the liturgies are built from the list of Sacraments and the rubrics for each declare who may exercise that particular liturgy.

Sacraments described in the Gospels

- ☐ **Baptism.** A bishop or priest is preferable, a deacon if neither bishop nor priest present, and in the case of an emergency, any previously baptized person. These provisions emphasize the primacy of baptism as criteria for initiation into the Body of Christ, and thus the Church.
- ☐ **Eucharist.** Only priests and bishops can consecrate the elements of bread and wine, although deacons assist by preparing the table, raising the cup, and “cleaning up.” For the deacon, this is symbolic of the servant nature of her/his calling.

Sacraments that are a means of grace, but not necessary for all persons as Baptism and Eucharist

- ☐ **Confirmation.** Bishops are the only order empowered by the church to confirm. Confirmation is a personal acceptance of and commitment to the promises made at one's baptism.
- ☐ **Penance.** Absolution of sins confessed may be given only by priests and bishops, but when confession is urgent a lay person or deacon is permitted to hear confession and pronounce a declaration of forgiveness.
- ☐ **Unction of the Sick.** Priest (or bishop), blesses oil and anoints, but deacon may anoint using oil previously blessed by a priest or bishop.
- ☐ **Matrimony.** Priest or bishop is preferable, but deacons may under certain circumstances.
- ☐ **Orders.** Only a bishop may ordain priest and deacons. Three bishops are required to consecrate a new bishop.

Liturgical responsibilities not outlined in BCP, but fall to each order and shape public expression.

- ☐ **Laity-** After 45 or so years as an Episcopalian, I've come to believe loud and hearty “Amens” and other responses specified by BCP are a vital lay responsibility in the liturgy. Sometimes that thought makes me chuckle to myself as I respond “Amen” and “Alleluia” at various places in the liturgy. I've made a 180° turn around from my high school days in a small town. There was a Four Square Gospel Church across from the courthouse square. For a while it had a fiery preacher and high-school students were known to sit across the street and be amused by the loud and enthusiastic amens and alleluias that spilled out of the open church doors on warm Sunday nights.
- ☐ Certainly the a large portion of the church members who impact change in the world are the laity, and for good reason. For a long time, I've thought of it this way: If, for some dire reason, a congregation stops paying the minister, he/she will probably eventually stop showing up. On the other hand, most laity don't get paid, and they keep coming back.