

DEACONS

“Every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls [the deacon] to a special ministry of servanthood directly under the bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, [deacons] are called to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.” BCP, pg. 543

Our diocese currently has seven vocational deacons active in six parishes. We met with Bishop McConnell in February to touch base and get caught up with one another. At that meeting we shared with our bishop that we would like to attend the National Assembly of the Association of Episcopal Deacons in Minnesota, for which he gave his blessing and support. Five deacons from Pittsburgh gathered with deacons, laity, priests and bishops from across the U.S. to engage in conversations, to honor deacons’ ministries, and to learn from one another. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry celebrated and preached at the opening Eucharist. There were many focused discussions on topics of deep concern for our communities such as human trafficking, environmental justice, gun violence, racism, addiction and abuse, to name only a few, from which we each gained much insight and useful information for serving in the neighborhoods and communities in our diocese.

One of the best moments of that assembly for us Pittsburgh deacons was on Saturday evening when Deacon Ann Staples received the award in *Recognition of Diaconal Ministry in the Tradition of St. Stephen*. Deacon Ann founded Coal Country Hangout Youth Center in Northern Cambria in 1996 where she has served for the past 20 years to bring hope and opportunity to the impoverished children and youth who live in this isolated region of Appalachia.

Deacon John Mark Feuerstein was invited to join an Open Space discussion at the assembly on the topic of making the diaconate better known and more accessible to young people. The median age of a deacon in the Episcopal Church is similar to that of a priest, which is 59 years old. (*The Episcopal Church 2014 Episcopal Congregations Overview, pg. 4*)

Among other highlights:

Deacon Wade Lawrence was fully restored as a licensed ordained deacon by Bishop McConnell and now serves at All Saints, Brighton Heights. Wade previously served the Diocese of Pittsburgh from 1990 until 2012.

Deacon Jean Chess, parish deacon at St. Andrew’s Highland Park, is currently coordinating a calendar for the deacons to accompany Bishop McConnell on his parish visitations this coming fall.

We will continue to develop the many programs we already have in place covering such critical issues as racism; literacy; for children and youth who live in poverty and for those who are abused and neglected. Over the next year we will actively seek to connect and work with individuals in the diocese who have an active compassion for the poor, the sick, the weak and the lonely and who possess a desire to advocate for them in order to discern ways we can join together to better serve Jesus Christ.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Rev. Lorena Ringle, Deacon