



The True Deacon

Training Program

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St. Mary & St. John Coptic Orthodox Church
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H.H. Pope Tawadros II

*Pope & Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria
See of St. Mark*



Hegumen Fr. Antonios Baky

Priest of St. Mary & St. John Coptic Orthodox Church, Pleasanton, CA

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The True Deacon | Training Program

Mission

This program is designed to train deacons to actively participate in church services and most importantly live the life of a *True Deacon*. We obviously cannot expect total behavior change in a year but at least each person has a clear image of the True Deacon. An image they hopefully strive to reach over the years, living an honorable life, representing the Deaconhood and the Orthodox Church and most importantly, our Lord Jesus Christ in a pure and well-balanced manner.

Once this 1 year program is established, God willing we can expand to a 2nd year, more advanced program, hopefully making room down the line for more advanced hymns, bible comprehension, sermon preparation, mission work, and gaining depth and proficiency in the 1st year program.

Workshops

Serving as a deacon is a great privilege and honor, not a right. Deacons are **committed** servants so attendance AND active participation in church services such as divine liturgies, raising of incense prayers (asheya), midnight praises (tasbeha), and required training workshops are expected. Deacons are expected to attend a predetermined number of services on a regular basis, show an attitude of humility, willingness to learn, and commitment. If this is becoming an issue for a particular deacon, he and his family (depending on age) will be notified. If necessary, the deacon might be asked to not dress/serve as a deacon at services until the behavior and attitude have been resolved. This means the deacon will be asked to continue attending and showing commitment without actually dressing as a deacon, but he will still be expected to be in attendance and participating. If problems persist and become a continuous issue for a specific deacon, then he will not serve on feast days, but he will still be expected to attend and participate, held to the same standard as the other deacons. Once he does this over a period of time, then he will be allowed to dress and serve on feast days and regularly throughout the week again.

Each workshop will train and test the deacon for *competency*, not just effort. Deacons must complete all required workshops in the year. The summer term will be used for make-ups on a *case-by-case* basis.

Terms

Fall: October - December

Winter: January - March

Spring: April - June

Summer: July- September

Required

Required - (lecture + quiz/recital, unlimited spots).. have all quizzes and handouts available to them with answers. Hopefully one comprehensive syllabus in binders. Then they can put quizzes in there for reference. Servants can put in comments like a full record for them to know what to improve in.

1. The True Deacon
2. Rites of the Divine Liturgy
3. Reverence
4. Congregation Responses
5. Deacon Responses
6. Prayer Book of Hours: Agpeya
7. Midnight Praises (Tasbeha)
8. The Bible & Church Lectionary
9. Maintaining the Church

Electives

Elective workshops have more hands-on training so there will be limited spots. Deacons need to sign up ahead of time. Missing an elective workshop which you reserved a spot in without notifying the responsible servants 3 days ahead of time will drop you to the bottom of the priority list for future elective workshops. Some workshops might be put together in one day as rotating stations.

1. Cymbals & Triangle
2. Advanced hymns
3. Leadership
4. IT Training
5. Korban

Roles in the Church

Ranks of Deacons

- Psalter (Psaltos)
- Reader (Aghnostos)
- Sub-Deacon (Epi-diakon)
- Deacon (Diakon)
- Arch-Deacon (Arshi-diakon)

Duties of Deaconate Ranks

St. Paul referred to the deacon in his epistles as one who performs both temporal and spiritual services. The spiritual duties are primarily during Liturgies, which may not be performed if the deaconate are not present. The following is a brief summary of the general duties of each of the deaconate ranks, beginning with the highest to the lowest.

The **Archdeacon** is the head of all ranks of the deaconate. He is a deacon, who is additionally charged with making all necessary arrangements for church services, assigning various tasks to deacons, sub-deacons, readers, and psalters; safekeeping of church books, vessels, and vestments; ensuring that charity is received by the needy; acting as a liaison on behalf of the bishop; and participating in recommending candidates for the Holy Orders, playing a role also at the ordinations.

The **Deacons** help the bishop and the priests by preparing the bread, wine, water, vessels, candles, books, and the Sanctuary for the Liturgy. During the Divine Service itself, the deacons are to keep order in the Church, assist the priests and bishop, hold the chalice of the Blood of Emmanuel, and guard the Holy Mysteries during Communion. The deacon is to also teach, distribute money to the needy, visits and comforts the ill, widows, orphans, and prisoners.

The Constitutions of the Apostles states: "The deacon does not bless. He does not give a benediction, but receives it from the bishop and the priest. He does not baptize. He does not offer (sacrifice). However, when the bishop or priest has offered, the deacon gives it to the people, not acting as a priest, but ministering to the priests." In this manner, the deacons "receive the imposition of hands not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry", and hence are the "eyes and hands" of the bishops and priests.

The **Sub-deacons** are the helpers of the deacons, as the title implies; the Greek word "epideacon" means the helper or assistant. Sub-deacons may be young men who have excelled in their role as readers, having learned and truly lived the teachings of the Holy Scriptures which they read to the congregation during the Divine Services. The sub-deacons guard the doors of the church during the Divine services so that there is no disturbance caused inside by the outside.

The rank of **Reader** is given to men who are able to read well out loud to the congregation. In order that the reader reads well, he must understand what he is reading, not only for the sake of adequate reading, but also for the duty of teaching. Therefore he must constantly read in the Bible and expand his knowledge, not in theory, but in practical living the words of God as well as dedicate part of his time to reading the explanations of the holy Church fathers. The reader is permitted to help in the preparation and

arrangement of the vessels before and after the Divine Liturgy, as the prayers of ordination indicate.

Psalters are the chanters during the Divine services. The title "Psalter" is derived from the Coptic word psaltis, from which is derived the word "psalm," because the psalms are the chanted praises to God. Psalters are to learn the hymns chanted in the various services throughout the year. The learned hymns ought to be chanted by the psalters in a harmonious prayerful tune to God so that the listeners are touched and inspired to also pray with depth of heart.

Summary

Regardless of the rank, each individual must not lust (desire) the honor of a higher rank, but rather strive to perform his duties in the best of his abilities to please God. The service of each member must follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give His Life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:26-28). Those who offer honest service to the Master are rewarded as His loyal servants: "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (Jn 12:26). May we hear His tender voice that is full of loving-kindness saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt 25:21).

Ranks of Priesthood

- Priest (Presbyter, Abouna)
- Hegumen (Hegumenos, Abouna, Komos)

Monastic Orders

- Novice Brother (Ukh)
- Brother (Ukh)
- Monk
- Monk Arch-deacon (Arshi – reserved for monks who were married/widowed previously)
- Monk Priest (Presbyter, Abouna)
- Hegumen (Hegumenos, Abouna, Komos)
- Khori Episcopos
- Bishop (Episcopos, 'oskof)
- Metropolitan ()
- Pope & Patriarch

Clergymen are persons ordained to perform religious services. In the Old Testament, God chose individuals to minister to His people as priests, and consecrated them, and commanded that they dress in specially designed robes. We read in Exodus 29:9:"And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his

sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons".

In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ appointed His disciples and gave them authority to preach His works. In His appearance to the disciples after His resurrection, He instructed them saying: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Mat 28:18-20)

After the ascension of our Lord into the heavens, the Holy Church has decreed, through the holy apostles and fathers, that men who possess certain good qualities be ordained as clergy through the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. This sacrament in the Christian Church is the objective guarantee of the perpetual presence of Christ with His people. No clergyman acts on behalf of Christ as though He is absent, but rather as an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, manifesting His presence amidst His Church, which He has purchased with His Precious Blood. No person is considered authorized if he was not a member of the chain of the apostolic succession which was established by our Lord Himself.

St. Mark the Evangelist was the disciple who converted Egypt to Christianity. In his first visit to Egypt, he stayed seven years preaching and teaching the people, who readily accepted the Faith with zeal. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he found worthy individuals whom he appointed as bishops, presbyters, and deacons through the 'laying of the hands', men who would carry out the Heavenly ministry according to God's holy will.

The Holy Order of the Coptic Orthodox Church may be grouped into three basic general ranks:

- The episcopate, meaning the order of the bishop, or the shepherd.
- The presbyterate, in reference to the order of the priest, or the teacher.
- The diaconate, meaning the order of the deacon, or the server.

In his letter to the Magnesians, St. Ignatius instructed them to 'Be zealous to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, honored as a type of the Holy Spirit, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ, Who was from eternity with the Father and was made manifest at the end of time... Be diligent therefore to be confirmed in the ordinances of the Lord and the apostles, in order that "you may prosper in all things whatsoever ye do" (Ps. 1:3)'.

The clergyman, who is chosen for the ministry, is consecrated by the 'Breath of the Holy Spirit', Who gives him the grace, power, and authority to fulfill the duties of his rank. Though all Christians have received the seal of the Holy Spirit at Baptism through the water and the Holy Myron Oil, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the candidate at the ordination is the special gift of authority to perform the duties required in the priesthood.

After the 'laying of the hands', the new clergyman is given a new name after one of the saints. A new name may be given to the clergyman as he moves from one rank, or sub-rank to another. This is similar to when our Lord Jesus Christ gave new names to His chosen apostles. The new name indicates a

beginning of a new life as a servant of God, no more as a layman with worldly concerns, but rather a dedicated man focused on pleasing his Lord.

Prayers are always offered to God on behalf of the Church leaders who are entrusted with the great responsibility of saving and returning lost souls to God. All the three liturgies of St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril include litanies praying for the Church clergymen.

Adapted from an article by Amgad Salama

Requirements for Ordination

Requirements for ordinations to the rank of psalter (Psalto)

The Coptic Orthodox male members of this church who are presented for ordination to the rank of psalter (psaltos) must meet the following *minimum* requirements:

1. Must be at least 6 (six) years old.
2. Must display proper Christian behavior including:
 1. Regular confession, church attendance, and participating in communion
 2. Proper attire and general appearance, such as clothes, hair, etc.
 3. Is not under the sway of bad habits such as smoking or drinking alcohol
3. Must demonstrate proficiency in all the congregation and sanctuary responses of the Divine Liturgy
4. Must demonstrate regular attendance in weekly Divine Liturgies as seen fit by the responsible deacon to this service. (at least 3 out of every 4 Sundays)
5. Must participate and show proficiency in the requirements of the Deacon Training Program Workshops

Requirements for ordinations to the rank of Reader (Aghnostos)

The Coptic Orthodox male members of this church who are presented for ordination to the rank of reader (aghnostos) must meet the following *minimum* requirements:

1. Must fulfill all minimum requirements for the psalter (psaltos)
2. Must be at least 15 (fifteen) years old
3. Must be involved in the service of the church
4. must display good reading ability in the Katameros (Lectionary readings of the church) in at least one of the following languages: Coptic, English, Arabic
5. Must demonstrate proficiency in the following
 1. Prayers
 1. Thanksgiving, Psalm 50 (51)
 2. “Let us praise with the angels saying...”
 3. “Graciously accord, O Lord, to keep us...”
 4. The Trisagion (Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal)
 5. “Hail to you we ask you...”
 6. “We exalt you the mother of the True Light...”
 7. The Creed

8. “Holy, Holy, Holy...”
9. “Have mercy on us O God and have mercy on us...”
2. Hymns
 1. Fourth hoos (canticle/ode in the Midnight Praise)
 2. Regular Verses of the Cymbals
 3. Regular doxologies
3. Responses
 1. Must be able to serve the Offering of the Incense alone with the priest.
 2. Must know well all the sanctuary deacon responses of the liturgy of St. Basil
4. Midnight Praises
 1. Must demonstrate proficiency in the weekly Midnight Praises
6. The candidate must demonstrate an 80% attendance rate in the weekly services: liturgies, vespers, and midnight praises
7. Must participate and show proficiency in the requirements of the Deacon Training Program Workshops.

Requirements for ordinations to the rank of Sub-Deacon (Epi-Diakon)

The Coptic Orthodox male members of this church who are presented for ordination to the rank of Sub-Deacon (epi-diakon) must meet the following *minimum* requirements:

1. Fulfill all the requirements of chanters and readers with commitment, respect, and a humble spirit for a significant period of time.
2. Receive a confident recommendation from the parish priest and father of confession if it is a different priest.
3. Must be at least 24 (twenty-four) years old
4. Be an active, Holy Spirit-driven member & servant to the congregation in general, NOT just in the Church rituals.
5. Ability to *gracefully, rather than authoritatively*, maintain order and reverence among the congregation in the church

Requirements for ordinations to the rank of Deacon & Arch-Deacon

The life of service as a deacon, arch-deacon, or any rank of clergy is strictly a calling rather than something requested or aspired for. The ranks of deacon and archdeacon are commitments to a life of official service. Every person regardless of gender, age, and ability is called to a life of serving God the Holy Trinity and every person we encounter in the world (God's people). However, deacons and archdeacons leave their career, as well as other things, to dedicate all their time to serve officially.

They are also under the direct instruction and leadership of the priest, bishop, and Pope. For this reason, ordination to this rank is done stringently on a case-by-case basis by the serving Bishop (The Pope or diocese bishop if there is one for your church), the recommendation of the parish clergy, and approval of the congregation.

In addition to willingly, wantingly, and consistently fulfilling the requirements and responsibilities of the previous ranks of deacons, the candidate for the ranks of Deacon and Arch-Deacon must be:

1. Fiery for God and the salvation of every person inside and outside of the Church.
2. Consistent in living a **sacramental life** *including but not limited to* prayer, repentance, confession, and communion is an absolute must.
3. Adherent to the Orthodox way of Christian life
4. Striving for perfection in obedience to God's commandments
5. Obedient to the parish priest, serving bishop, and Pope & Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

Blessed be the obedient son

Hegumen Fr. Antonios Baky

General Deacon Guidelines

When reading these guidelines, remember that a deacon is a servant and loving son of God, an example of the angels, an image of our beloved Savior Jesus Christ. These responsibilities are not intended to make a list of rules, do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs, but rather to set a high standard for the deacon. Deacons are a rank in the priesthood and they represent our God and the Orthodox Church.

Being a deacon is a great HONOR and PRIVILEGE, not a right.

Please remember this fact.

I. General Responsibilities of a Deacon

1. Absolutely must have a father of confession and practice confession as arranged with father of confession
2. Must spiritually prepare himself before partaking of Holy Communion: "Sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice" (1 Samuel 16:5).
3. Must receive Holy Communion every liturgy in which he participates, unless otherwise arranged with father of confession.
4. Should adhere to the church fasts, including Wednesday and Friday, or as agreed on with father of confession.
5. Should attend at least one liturgy per week.
6. Should never smoke or consume alcohol.
7. Should not swear, lie, or gossip, that God may accept his service in prayer. "Out of the same mouth should not proceed blessing and cursing" (James 3:10).
8. On the way to church, must recite Psalms 121, 26:4-5, 64:4, 83, 5:7, and 122.
9. Upon entering the church, must kneel in front of the Holy Altar.
10. Recite Psalms 29 and 92 when putting on the tunic.
11. Recite Psalm 47 when taking off the tunic.
12. Should always acknowledge the holiness of the church: "Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever" (Psalms 93:5); "For My House shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7); and "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:17).
13. Be decent in the church, as St. Paul said, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).
14. During the reading of the Holy Gospel, must stand still. If you enter the church during the reading, stop wherever you are in reverence.
15. Treat other deacons with love and carry their weaknesses.
16. Avoid talking during any service for any reason.
17. Be in harmony when chanting congregation hymns without arbitrarily changing them.

18. Must never enter the bathroom or other facilities in the church while wearing his tunic.
19. Must sign himself properly from the head.
20. Organize the books after using them and generally keep the church clean.
21. Older deacons must teach younger deacons how to behave during the liturgy.
22. After the liturgy, treat your tunic with respect, either folding it or hanging it neatly.
23. Must exhibit total obedience without questioning during the service.
24. Must make every effort to learn all of the hymns of the church so that we may preserve the tradition handed down to us and praise God in one spirit.
25. Must make every effort to learn the Coptic language.
26. Must strive to know the church rules and traditions.
27. Every deacon must know his responsibilities in the service.
28. Should be involved in other church services.
29. Entering the Holy Altar should be done from the side doors, not from the main door, which is reserved for the King of Kings, unless you are carrying the Annunciation Gospel (the silver Gospel). The Holy Gospel must always enter through the main door.
30. Deacons should not wear any tunics that have pictures of saints on them. This is not part of our church's tradition.

II. Responsibilities of Deacons Serving in the Holy Altar

1. Deacons serving inside the altar should come before the Morning Raising of Incense, not after. If you arrive and find the priest already at church, you are late.
2. Do not enter the Holy Altar unless you are asked by one of the clergy.
3. If the priest is praying in Coptic, respond in Coptic only. If the priest is praying in Arabic, respond in Arabic only. If the priest is praying in English, respond in English only. No exceptions.
4. Avoid talking for any reason.
5. Do not chant the congregation responses loudly if you are serving in the Holy Altar.