



Norms for Deacons Serving at Mass

Introduction

General Principles

The Deacon, as for all members of the Church, the liturgy is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows.” For the Church gathered at worship, moreover, the ministry of the deacon is a visible, grace-filled sign of the integral connection between sharing at the Lord’s Eucharistic table and serving the many hungers felt so keenly by all God’s children. In the Deacon’s liturgical ministry, as in a mirror, the Church sees a reflection of her own diaconal character and is reminded of her mission to serve as Jesus did. (ND33)¹

The texts that are to be pronounced in a loud and clear voice, whether by the Priest or the Deacon, by a reader, or by everyone, the voice should correspond to the genre of the text itself (GIRM38)². The Christian faithful, who come together as one, are to sing together Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles. Great importance should be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass (GIRM39-41). The gestures and bodily posture of the Priest, the Deacon, other ministers, and of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all (GIRM42-44). Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times (GIRM45).

This document is offered as an aid for Deacons who assist a Priest or Bishop during the Celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. It is important that the Deacon understands the significance of his role in the liturgy and that he is prepared to carry it out that role in a reverent and efficient manner.

Black Type: General Norms for serving Mass where a Priest presides.

Red Type: Guidelines for serving Mass where the Bishop presides.

Mass with a Deacon (GIRM171)

When a Deacon is present at the celebration of the Eucharist, he should exercise his ministry, wearing sacred vestments. In fact, the Deacon:

- a. assists the Priest and walks at his side;
- b. ministers at the altar, both as regards the chalice and the book;
- c. proclaims the Gospel and may, at the direction of the Priest Celebrant, give the Homily;
- d. guides the faithful people by giving appropriate instructions, and announces the intentions of the Universal Prayer;

¹ National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States. (ND)

² General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) Third Edition, 2011.

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- e. assists the Priest Celebrant in distributing Communion, and purifies and arranges the sacred vessels;
- f. carries out the duties of other ministers himself, if necessary, when none of them is present.

Vesture

The dalmatic, worn over the Alb and stole (which is worn over the left shoulder, crossed and fastened at the right side) is the vestment proper to the deacon (GIRM 338). The dalmatic underlines the relationship between the diaconate and the episcopate, since it is a vestment which is common to both orders. The dalmatic may be omitted for some necessity or on account of a lesser grade of solemnity (GIRM 338).

Seating

In the Eucharistic assembly, the seat for the Deacon should be placed next to that of the Priest (GIRM 174). When a second Deacon assists, he is seated on the opposite side.

Deacons present but not specifically assisting, would normally participate as a member of the assembly (not vested or specially seated). However, during large diocesan celebrations or funerals, a larger number of Deacons may be present, “vested but not assisting” will to process in and be seated together (in choir) in a designated place. The liturgical posture and actions of Deacons when “in choir” will to mirror those of the congregation.

Preparation for Mass

Preparations for Mass are of utmost importance to the celebration. Ordinarily the sacristan and other ministers help with these preparations. However, if some or all these ministers are unable to complete their usual tasks, the Deacon is expected to fulfill these roles. The Deacon is to make certain the necessary liturgical books, cloths, vessels and vestments are properly arranged for the celebration, that enough altar breads, wine, and water are prepared, and the tabernacle key is conveniently located. The Lectionary should be properly marked for the readings of the day and placed on the ambo (GIRM117-119).

At Sunday and some special liturgies, it is preferable the *Book of Gospels* is used for the proclamation of the Gospel and it be carried in the opening procession by the Deacon of the Word. Alternatively, the *Book of Gospels* may be placed on the altar prior to the beginning of Mass. In the absence of a *Book of Gospels*, the Gospel may be read from the *Lectionary for Mass*, however, unlike the *Book of Gospels*, the *Lectionary* is NOT carried in procession.

When two Deacons assist at Mass, one assists as the Deacon of the Word and the other as the Deacon of the Altar.

Serving with the Bishop... Deacons are encouraged to arrive at least 30 minutes in advance to receive instructions from the Manager of Bishop Matters.

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Movements and Posture

Liturgical actions must always clearly manifest the unity of the People of God as a structured communion.³ Thus there exists a close link between the ordered exercise of liturgical action and the reflection in the liturgy of the Church's structured nature. This happens when all participants, with faith and devotion, discharge those roles proper to them.

To promote the proper identity (of various roles) in this area, ... In Eucharistic celebrations deacons and non-ordained members of the faithful may not pronounce prayers — e.g. especially the Eucharistic prayer, with its concluding doxology — or any other parts of the liturgy reserved to the celebrant priest. Neither may deacons or non-ordained members of the faithful use gestures or actions which are proper to the same priest celebrant. It is a grave abuse for any member of the non-ordained faithful to "quasi preside" at the Mass while leaving only that minimal participation to the priest which is necessary to secure validity.⁴

The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered. Therefore, attention should be paid to what is determined by [the GIRM] and the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice (GIRM42).

The normal posture for the deacon when standing or moving to his appropriate places, when not carrying items or performing his prescribed liturgical tasks, is with prayer hands. (*Figure 1*)



Figure 1: Prayer Posture

³ Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 26-28; C.I.C., can. 837

⁴ *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest. Vatican City 1997

The Ministry of the Deacon in the Celebration of the Mass⁵

Introductory Rites

Entrance Procession

Deacons in the Procession... Vested and carrying the *Book of Gospels* (the Book) with the binding to the right and slightly elevated, the Deacon of the Word walks directly in behind the Processional Cross, Candle Bearers, and other Altar Servers. If there are two Deacons assisting, the Deacon of the Altar processes directly in front of the Priest.

Number of assisting Deacons... The norm is two Deacons assist the Bishop. A third Deacon, envisioned by the *Ceremonial of Bishops* (CB 26), is most often filled by the Manager of Bishop Matters.

Order of the Procession...

- A Thurifer with a thurible with burning incense and the incense boat.
- A server carrying the Processional Cross
- Two Candle Bearers
- Master of Ceremony for Deacons
- The Deacon of the Word
- Other Deacons (vested in alb & stole) processing two by two.
- Master of Ceremony for Priests
- Concelebrating Priests, processing two by two.
- The Deacon of the Altar
- Bishop
- Manager of Bishop Matters
- Miter Bearer/Crosier Bearer

If the Book of Gospels is excluded from the Procession... the Deacons process side by side in front of the Bishop.

In the absence of servers to assist with the miter/crozier... The Bishop will manage his needs independently.

Reverencing the altar... Upon arriving at the sanctuary, the Deacon omits the sign of reverence and moves directly to the Altar laying the Book flat or on a provided stand (GIRM 173). After placing the Book on the altar, he waits for the arrival of the Priest and together they venerate the

⁵ GIRM 172-174, 46-54

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altar with a kiss. If the Deacon does not process with the Book, the Deacon makes a profound bow (or genuflection⁶) with the Priest in the customary way before entering the sanctuary.

Deacons “in choir” Reverencing the Altar... Deacons in choir process to the front of the Sanctuary perform a profound bow and move to their assigned seating.

Incensation of the Altar and Cross

If incense is being used, the censer (and incense boat) bearer approach the altar. The Deacon assists the Priest in putting some incense into the thurible. The Deacon(s) assistance entails “accompanying” the Priest in the process of incensing the altar and cross, where practical and the expectations of the local norms. (CB 131)

Incensation with the Bishop... The Deacons will accompany the Bishop in the process of incensing the altar and cross, unless otherwise instructed or space impedes doing so safely.

After the incensation, the Deacon(s) go to the chair with the Priest and sits to his right, if a second Deacon is assisting, he should sit to the Priests immediate left.

Penitential Act

Using the third option of the Penitential Act, the Priest, the Deacon (or another minister) may announce/sing the invocations. Using the first (*Confiteor*) or second (“*Have mercy on us, O Lord...For we have sinned against you...*”) options are to conclude with the *Kyrie, eleison* without invocations. While the rubric is silent, the Priest may allow the Deacon or other minister, to say/sing the *Kyrie, eleison*.

Penitential Act with the Bishop... Most often, the third option of the Penitential Act will be utilized when serving with the Bishop. The Deacon of the Word is expected to announce the invocations.

Sprinkling Rite

If the Rite of Sprinkling is used, the Deacon may assist the Priest sprinkle the congregation.

Sprinkling Rite with the Bishop... the CB envisions the Bishop receiving the sprinkler from one of the Deacons and accompanying Bishop as he sprinkles the people. The Deacons may be asked assist Bishop in larger gatherings.

⁶ If the tabernacle is located in the sanctuary, the Priest, Deacon and other ministers should genuflect when they approach the altar before entering the sanctuary. They should do this again when they leave the sanctuary at the end of the Mass, *but not during the celebration of Mass itself*. Ministers who are carrying the processional cross, candles or Book of Gospels bow their heads instead of genuflecting (RM274). This practice of genuflection may be modified to bowing due to physical incapacity or as local custom suggests.

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Liturgy of the Word⁷

Proclamation of the Readings... The Deacon remains seated at his place for the Liturgy of the Word until the time of the Gospel. If the scheduled Readers are absent and no suitable replacements can be found, the Deacon may proclaim the other readings as well. However, every effort should be made to ensure the presence of Readers for the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy.

Gospel Reading

Incensing the Book... If incense is used during the procession with the Book, the Deacon may assist the Priest as he places incense in the thurible during the singing of the *Gospel Acclamation*.

Priestly Blessing... Before beginning the procession to the Ambo, the Deacon makes a profound bow before the Priest and asks for the blessing, saying in a low voice, "*Your blessing, Father.*" On receiving his blessing the Deacon signs himself responding, "*Amen.*" (RM 14)

If incense is not used in the procession but is used to incense of the Book, the Deacon waits to place incense in the thurible immediately prior to the incensation.

Bishop's Blessing While Standing... When the *Gospel Acclamation* begins, everyone but the Bishop stands. If incense is used during the procession with the Book, the Thurifer takes the thurible to the Bishop, and the Server & Master of Ceremonies holds the incense boat while Bishop (who is seated) spoons the incense into the thurible and blesses it.

After Bishop stands, the Deacon makes a profound bow before him and asks for the blessing, "*Your blessing, Father.*"⁸ The Deacon signs himself responding, "*Amen.*"

Bishop's Blessing While Kneeling... Alternatively, if desirable, the Bishop may remain seated. In this case, the deacon, kneeling, assists him with the boat, omits the profound bow, and requests the Bishop's blessing.

Retrieval of the Book... The Deacon approaches the altar and makes a slight bow, picks up the Book and holds it up. With the book slightly elevated, the Deacon moves to the ambo. Servers with lighted candles may precede the Deacon. If incense is being used, the procession is led by the Thurifer with smoking thurible followed by servers with lighted candles and the Deacon.

If the Book is not used, the Deacon goes directly to the ambo without a procession.

Announcing the Gospel... At the ambo the Deacon opens the book and greets the people (with hands joined) chanting/saying, "*The Lord be with you.*" After the people's response he signs the

⁷ GIRM 175-177, 55-71

⁸ Note the same words (including the word "Father") are used when asking the blessing from the Bishop (CB140).

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page with his thumb while chanting/saying, “*A reading from the holy Gospel according to ____.*” He then signs a cross with his thumb on his forehead, mouth, and breast.

Incensation of the Book... When the Book is to be incensed and incense was not used during the procession to the ambo, the Deacon who proclaims the Gospel places incense in the thurible at this point.

He reverences the Book with a bow, incenses the book with two swings of the thurible, (center, left, and right (CB 140)) then bows again, returning the thurible to the Thurifer.

After the Proclamation... The Deacon chants/says, without raising the book, “*The Gospel of the Lord.*” Without raising the book, venerates it with a kiss and quietly prays, “*Through the Words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.*”

Veneration of the Book and Imparting a Blessing... Before Mass, the Deacon of the Word should verify with the Manager of Bishop Matters, or the Bishop directly, whether he wishes to venerate the Book.

When the Bishop chooses to venerate the Book, the Deacon does NOT venerate the book himself, but rather takes the Book directly to Bishop who will venerate it. For this veneration the book is to be kept opened.

In more solemn celebrations, the Bishop will venerate the Book, then impart a blessing over the people. All are to remain standing, while the Bishop venerates and blesses the people. In either situation, the Deacon receives the book back from Bishop.

If Bishop choose not to venerate the Book, the Deacon venerates the Book in the way prescribed earlier.

The Deacon as Homilist... After placing the Book in its usual place, the Deacon returns to his chair unless he is presenting the homily. While the Priest is the usual homilist, he may delegate this to the Deacon.

General Intercessions... After the Priest introduces the General Intercessions, the Deacon announces/sings the intentions from the ambo or another suitable place (See the GIRM 70, and RM Appendix V for Examples of Formularies 1-11).⁹ Remain at the ambo while the Priest concludes the intercession prayer.

⁹ Writing and presenting intercessions in the name of the assembly has traditionally been the role of the Deacon because he, by serving as a minister of charity among the people, knows well the needs of the community and gives voice to those needs. In a sense the general intercessions are the prototype of diaconal prayer.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist¹⁰

Preparing the Altar & Reception of the Gifts

Preparing the Altar... While the Priest remains at the chair, the Deacon prepares the altar by placing the corporal and vessels. He may be assisted by an acolyte or other minister, but it is the Deacon's place to take care of the sacred vessels and books (GIRM 178)

The Deacon of the Altar... prepares the altar with the assistance of the Deacon, Seminarians, or other ministers for large liturgical celebrations.

Receiving the Gifts... When the bread and wine are brought forth by the people the Priest receives the gifts. According to the local custom, the Priest passes the gifts to the Deacon, servers, or other ministers. If the servers or other minister receives the gifts, they will bring them to the Deacon who is waiting at the Altar (GIRM 178)

When the Bishop Receives the Gifts... The Deacons will go with him flanking him to either side and receive the gifts from him and return to the altar.

Preparation of the Gifts... With the Priest standing by, the Deacon receives and prepares the gifts at altar, which includes pouring the wine and mingling a little water into the Priest's chalice only (RM 24). Once prepared the Deacon presents the paten, then the chalice, as the Priest prays the prescribed prayers. Local custom will dictate the flow of these events, the Deacon is reasonable for learning, responding, and assisting as directed.

The Deacon of the Altar Prepares the Gifts... While the Bishop waits, the Deacon of the Altar prepares the gifts as described above while the Deacon of the Word stations himself behind and to the left of the altar. After all is prepared and presented to the Bishop the Deacon then moves behind and to the right of the altar aligned with the Deacon of the Word.

Incensation... When incense is used, the Deacon assists the Priest as before. After the Priest finishes incensing the gifts the Deacon receives the thurible, makes a profound bow and incenses the Priest with two swings of the thurible, (center, left, and right) then bows once more. While the Priest washes his hands, the Deacon incenses any vested Priests (as a group) with a single swing (center, left, and right), and then the people (as a group or by section—depending on local circumstances) with a single swing (center, left, and right). A profound bow precedes and follows the incensation of each group (GIRM 178).

Receiving the Thurible from Bishop... The Deacon receives the thurible from the Bishop, as described above the Deacon incenses the Bishop. The following order of

¹⁰ GIRM 178-181, 72-83

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incensation follows with a profound bow and single swings as described above: other vested Bishop(s), vested Priests, the people.

NOTE: *Deacon's in choir stand with the people during the incensation.*

Eucharistic Prayer

Position of the Deacon... During the Eucharistic Prayer, the Deacon stands slightly behind and to the right of the Priest, so he may assist as necessary (GIRM 179). Where two deacons are serving the Deacon of the altar is behind and to the right, the Deacon of the Word is behind and to the left.

Presence of Concelebrants... The Deacon should be slightly behind the Concelebrants.

During the Epiclesis... The Deacon kneels from the epiclesis until the elevation and showing of the chalice. That is, he kneels as the Priest extends his hands over the gifts and remains kneeling until he says, "*The mystery of faith.*" (GIRM 179.2). If there is some good reason, the deacon may stand (GIRM 43.3). If there are two Deacons assisting at a Mass and one is unable to kneel, both should remain standing to maintain a uniform posture.

NOTE: *Deacon's in choir kneel with the people during the Eucharistic Prayer.*

Final Doxology... As the Priest concludes the Eucharistic Prayer the Deacon moves to his right side, receives the chalice from the Priest, and standing next to the Priest holds the chalice elevated as the Priest elevates the paten, until the great "*Amen*" is acclaimed. The Deacon returns the chalice to the Priest (GIRM 180).

NOTE: *The doxology is the prayer of the Bishop, Priest and concelebrating Priest alone. The Deacon should not say nor lip the words of this prayer.*

The Communion Rite¹¹

The Our Father... During the Our Father the Deacon maintains his prayer posture.

The Sign of Peace... With hands joined and facing the people, the Deacon of the altar invites all to exchange the sign of peace saying, "*Let us offer each other the sign of peace*" (RM 128). He receives the sign of peace from the Priest and may offer it to the other ministers near him.

Multiple Deacons as Ministers of the Cup... At large diocesan celebrations, vested Deacons are called upon to serve as Ministers of the Cup. During the Sign of the Peace a Master of Ceremony will move these Deacons into place for the reception of Communion.

¹¹ GIRM 181-183, 84-89 and Norms for Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion found in the Roman Missal

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Breaking of the Bread... During the breaking of the bread, while the Lamb of God is being sung, the deacon assists the presider in breaking the bread and pouring the cups (Norms 37).

Distribution to Concelebrants... After the *Agnus Dei*, the Deacon may be asked to assist with distributing consecrated hosts to the Concelebrants. The Deacon does not hand the host to a vested Priest; the Priest himself takes the host from the paten. Once complete the Deacon returns the paten to the Priest and returns to his place.

Distribution to Concelebrants... At large diocesan celebrations the Master of Ceremony will distribute the Body of Christ to the concelebrants and other vested Priests.

Reception of Holy Communion... Once the Priest's communion the Deacon(s) are to move to the right of the altar to receive under both kinds from the Priest. When there are Concelebrants, they will approach the altar to receive the Blood of Christ from the Priest's chalice (GRIM 182).

Multiple Deacons Receiving Holy Communion... At large diocesan celebrations, vested Deacons serving as Ministers of the Chalice will receive the Body of Christ from the Bishop. They will receive the Blood of Christ from the assisting Deacons and go to their assigned Communion stations. Deacons assigned to present the Blood of Christ to other vested Priests are to offer the Chalice and purificator without words.

NOTE: *Deacons never self-communicate from the altar under either kinds. (Norms 39)*

Distribution to the Assembly... As a rule, the deacon administers the chalice (GIRM 182, 284). The vessel for distribution is handed to the deacon by the priest. The deacon may assist the priest in handing the vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion (Norms 38, 40).

After Communion...

Collection of Remaining Consecrate Hosts... When distribution is completed the Priest and the Deacon return to the Altar to collect any remaining Consecrated Hosts. These are to be consumed or the Priest or Deacon takes the remaining Consecrated Hosts to the Tabernacle (Norms¹² 51).

Consumption of the Remaining Precious Blood... The Precious Blood may not be reserved. The Deacon and other Ministers of the Chalice, once they complete the distribution, return the chalice to the Altar where the Priest or Deacon consumes the remaining Precious Blood. If many chalices are used, the ministers may return them to the credence table or other appropriately designated space and consume the Precious Blood. In the event of an abundance

¹² Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds (Norms)

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of Precious Blood remaining in a chalice another Deacon, Priest, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may assist in the consumption. (Norms 52).

Purification of the Sacred Vessels... Purification of the Sacred Vessels used for the distribution of Holy Communion may take place at the altar, at the credence table, or in the sacristy according to local custom. Purification is completed by the Deacon, Priest, or an instituted acolyte (Norms 53). It is permissible to leave the vessels on a corporal and suitably covered to be purified immediately following the dismissal of the people. The Deacon is to ensure that this important matter is tended to with reverence and all due haste. While carrying out the purification of the Sacred Vessels the following prayer is said, *“What has passed through our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time, may be our healing for eternity.”* (GIRM 183)

Large Community Celebrations with the Bishop... At large diocesan celebrations, the first two deacons who complete distribution will return to the credence table and purify all returning Sacred Vessels immediately.

The Concluding Rites¹³

Solemn Blessing

Instruction Prior to Solemn Blessing... If a solemn Blessing formula is used, after the Bishop or Priest says, *“The Lord be with you”* and the people respond, *“And with your Spirit”* the Deacon, with hands joined, says, *“Bow down for the blessing.”*

Dismissal

After the final blessing, the Deacon, with hands joined and facing the people, dismisses the people, by singing/saying one of the four dismissal formulas (GIRM 185).

NOTE: *On the Easter Vigil, Easter Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter and Pentecost, the dismissal is sung with a double Alleluia added.*

Recession

Together with the Priest, the Deacon moves to the altar, with the Priest venerates the altar with a kiss, then moves to the front of the altar. Taking his que from the Priest, makes a profound bow (or if the tabernacle is in the sanctuary, all genuflect upon leaving the sanctuary). The Deacon processes in front of the Priest. If two Deacons have served, they will process side-by-side in front of the Priest.

Recession with the Bishop... After the dismissal the Deacon(s) move to the altar with the Bishop, reverencing the altar with a kiss with the Bishop, then moves to the front of

¹³ GIRM 184-186, 90

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the Sanctuary. If there is one Deacon, he stands to the left side of the Bishop, with two Deacons, they flank the Bishop one to each side. Bowing with the Bishop, they turn and proceed the Bishop.

Recession with Deacons in Choir... When multiple Deacons are vested, after the Dismissal they are to move into place behind the Cross Bearer & Servers, turn to face the altar with the Bishop and Concelebrants reverence the altar with a bow, with the Bishop then turn to process out.

Recession at Large Diocesan Events... The Deacons in choir will be moved into place by the Master of Ceremony after the Dismissal of the people. Once all clergy are in place, and taking their que from the Bishop, all reverence the altar with a bow and begin to process out two by two.

Notes & Special Circumstances

1. The diocesan Office of Liturgy & Music will annually produce the norms for seasonal liturgies including: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Confirmation, Church dedications, and Ordinations, which will be shared by the Office of the Permanent Diaconate with all Deacons.
2. At the Chrism Mass, besides the Deacons serving on the altar, three other Deacons will be asked to function as bearers of the urns containing the Oil of the Sick, Oil of Catechumens and the Sacred Chrism. These Deacons will be vested in dalmatic, Alb and stole and be seated in choir with the Deacons.

The recessional is modified for this Mass so that the Bishop may greet all the clergy. The recessional order will be: servers with processional cross and candles, Bishop, Priests, and Deacons.

3. Ordinarily during Mass, no specific persons or objects (water, gifts, gift bearers, etc.) are blessed by the Deacon. Should a communicant approach with arms crossed, the Deacon may put his hand over their head and say a quick silent prayer.
4. There are times when a Deacon will be asked to serve as a Master of Ceremony for large diocesan liturgies. In such cases the Deacon will be vested in cassock and surplice (without the Roman Collar).