

Today, in the state of Maine, I am very happy to tell you that we are celebrating Deacon's Day in all Episcopal churches. This gives me the opportunity to share with you my joy and my stories about my journey and experiences as a Deacon. I was ordained on June 12, 2012 at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the culmination of many years, decades really, that brought me to that sacred place.

But first, what is a Deacon, and what do they do? That is a frequent question, and to answer this, I go to the words contained in the Ordination of a Deacon in the book of Common Prayer. A Deacon is not a priest, although all priests start in their ministry as being ordained a Deacon, and then, usually after about 6 or so months, they move on to be ordained a priest. For people like me, I am called a vocational deacon, meaning that it is my call to serve as a deacon, not a priest, and I embrace the promise that I made 12 years ago that still holds me close to this servant role today.

In the section of the Ordination called the Examination, when the bishop addresses all the ordinands- the name given to those who are being ordained that day- and says, "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world."

This is a powerful statement that I committed to: to serve the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely, by redemptive love, and to be an interpreter for the world to the church. Sacred and significant work, isn't it? We collectively refer to people living on the edge of life as marginalized people in our society and in our churches. At some point in almost everyone's life, including mine, we may find ourselves weak, or poor, or sick or lonely; a combination of many of these qualities in our lives.

If you have fallen on any of these difficult times, you understand what I mean when I say marginalized. This person is on the outside looking in, perhaps remembering when they had more and lost it. Or asking God, why do I always have less than others? Or asking will people listen to me, one who does not have much money, or is not healthy or is not popular? People on the edge are often living in very real life, addressing daily things that both judge and save them. I find the people on the edge to often be closer to faith and to God. Other times, they are further away, so disappointed in the church, leaders and their families. They feel broken. I understand both paradigms; I need to be available to both expressions of life.

To these persons that I am committed to serve, my ministry is to exemplify love; by word and example, not only to listen, but to pray with them, to weep and laugh with them, to hold on to them, to forgive them, to give my undivided attention to them, all in Christian love. And who do I look to as a mentor for how to do these things? I look to the ministry of Jesus as my inspiration, as my calling, as my rock to help show me the way. Jesus is all about love, and to me, it is his primary message to all who follow him. Jesus put so much faith in the power of love that it changed his disciples, who then changed the world. I can do no less.

Now, I was not born into becoming a Deacon. I was raised Roman Catholic, part of a large Irish family with 7 children. In college, I looked for another faith that would give me more as a woman, and I found it in the Episcopal church through my then boyfriend, and now husband, Matt, who was a cradle Episcopalian. So, I got the right church, now I had to get the right personality. One thing I knew was brokenness, which I just mentioned previously. I spoke about this on Deacon's Day last year, but I knew the concept of being broken through my own experiences as a child in a large family. That gave me an edge, it instilled in me an empathy for others who found themselves on the outside of life's tasks, life's requirements and life's joys. I was looking in from a young age, and I did not realize it until many years later, but I developed the power of observation, and I noticed things in people that others did not. It was the reason that I majored in the study of Psychology, and likely why my career focused on health insurance. I wanted to be someone who helped others.

It was God who brought me to the Diaconate; He formed me to take on more in my service to the church, and I met many people who treated me well, who saw something in me that I did not see in myself. It was decades of God's slowly working in me until I found myself middle aged and in California, and started wondering if being ordained was something that would be meaningful to me. That then began the time of discernment, where with the wonderful assistance of other lay persons in the church, they helped me to examine myself for whether I had the qualities to go to seminary and to eventually be ordained as a Deacon.

I am different today than during the time that I started my discernment. I was a strong-willed woman, a workaholic, driven, competitive, always looking for the next opportunity for career advancement. I was critical of myself, and I admit, of others close to me. And there were other small measures of goodness, too, that were teased out in me: the ability to be compassionate, to volunteer to help others, to give generously of my time to those who needed more, to pray deeply, and to speak out for those in need.

To me, this is how I define my calling to serve God. It is someone speaking to me, the voice I heard in my heart and mind, over many, many years, that believed in my ability to do more to give more. I was called to the Diaconate in ways large and small. From meeting my boyfriend and going to his church, to all those traits that we all do when we are at our very best. It is all God's work, in some mysterious way, that broke open a new world for me to participate in. To learn about loving others, and myself. And it is a life that has brought me such joy.

I had a dream while I was waiting to be approved by the standing commission to be ordained—the last and pivotal step that one must pass to move forward. The dream told me I was on the right path towards becoming a Deacon. I was sitting in the cathedral in the pews with many priests, some of whom I knew, and I had a red stole around my neck, a priest's stole. We were looking forward and then, suddenly, shouts were heard, and people were rushing in up the middle aisle, carrying people who were hurt in some kind of fire outside. Two people in particular were carrying an unconscious and burned fireman in their arms, bringing him to the steps of the altar. Seeing this, I quickly rose up and left the pew with the body of priests. I went up to the fireman and reached out to him, asking what could I do to help? I then took off my

priestly stole and let it drop to the floor. This was a strong, colorful dream and I knew it was telling me something critical, to pay attention to its message. I never looked back and had the faith that I was meant to be a Deacon.

The interior of a church has always felt like home to me. I have been in many churches my whole life, spread across the country and without question, in every one of them, I loved the feeling that being within their sacred spaces provided for me. It always felt safe. When I served in the church as a Deacon, I felt like I finally belonged somewhere, in a space that welcomed me, that gave me the ability to be seen and to witness to others what I found in my own life, the power of the love of Christ. It was like a warmth flowing through me, and I always smiled when in church. I was and am happy within these walls. When I arrived at St Columba's two years ago to speak at my mother in law's funeral service, upon walking into this room, I felt at home. There was nothing that would worry me, stop me, or create anxiety. All was good. It is this feeling that drives me to serve you and to preach, to share my experiences, my insight, my questions, my answers with all of you.

And this is all why I tell you that it is important that I visit others when they are sick, or lonely, or can no longer make it to church. Visiting people from church gives me a feeling of purpose and I feel close to God when I do. I love speaking with people, sharing my viewpoints and listening to theirs. We discover who we are in our conversations, and especially when I ask them what they would like us to pray for. I cannot tell you of anything more intimate than praying with someone, holding their hands and asking God for help, for grace, for understanding. These moments are the times where I empty myself to another, and to God, sharing my spirit to provide comfort, to provide a sense of love.

I have had many experiences where I felt the sense of the divine in the moment. Last year I told of the physical sensation of feeling the ground move when I stayed with a Spanish man, who was left alone in a hospital room after being paralyzed from the chest down. I do not have a good sense of Spanish, so all I could do was to touch him and speak softly to let him know he was not alone.

There was another time when it was Mother's Day, and my daughter was far away in another state. There was a woman who had a knee replacement and was in a rehab facility. I visited her and we had an excellent conversation about what kind of mothers we were, our joys and disappointments. There was no other way I would have preferred to spend that day.

There was a grief group that I led where we shared in pain the experiences we felt with the loss of loved ones, and how people said inappropriate things because they did not know what to say. Having lost my 12-year-old niece many years before, I had a small sense of what these women were feeling, and we worked on expressing the grief, not holding it inside, and sharing with others our good days and our bad days. The prayers and service we created among ourselves was extraordinary. I felt that this was real life, this made a difference, and I was so fortunate to be among these women.

I have had experiences at St Columba's too, when visiting people in the rehab facility or in their homes. They have shared their lives with me, and I am so often touched deeply by their faith.

I believe we are all part of God's plan to be there for one another in our lives that intersect. Sometimes we hear God, sometimes we don't. At times we listen and at other times, we get too busy. But like watching waves hit the shore, they are unlimited in their unrelenting crashing one after the other at our feet. That is the way I see God at work in my life and in yours as well. We all get messages, unlimited number of times. God has infinite patience with us and will not cease reaching out to give us a calling for our lives. It may be to be a better parent or loved one. To help someone you know is in need. To tell someone about your faith when they need it as they feel their own slipping away. Close your eyes and listen, see what it brings up in you, how do you feel, what are you thinking of doing? That is God's touch, never ending and steadfast in ways large and small, never stopping.

Deacons are one part of the larger church and part of the community of worshippers who come together in a church to lift prayers, music and wisdom with one another and with God. I have met the Deaconate in Maine and can tell you how impressed I am at their passion, their honesty, their commitment to helping others. Please remember today all Deacons, and pray

that we may be strong, continue in our ministries to serve the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely, --- all persons--and to serve with joy in the life of our churches. Amen.