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You Are an Elder (93A2265)

You Are a Member of the Diaconate (93A2266)

You Are an Usher (93A2268)

You Are a Church Trustee (93A2267)



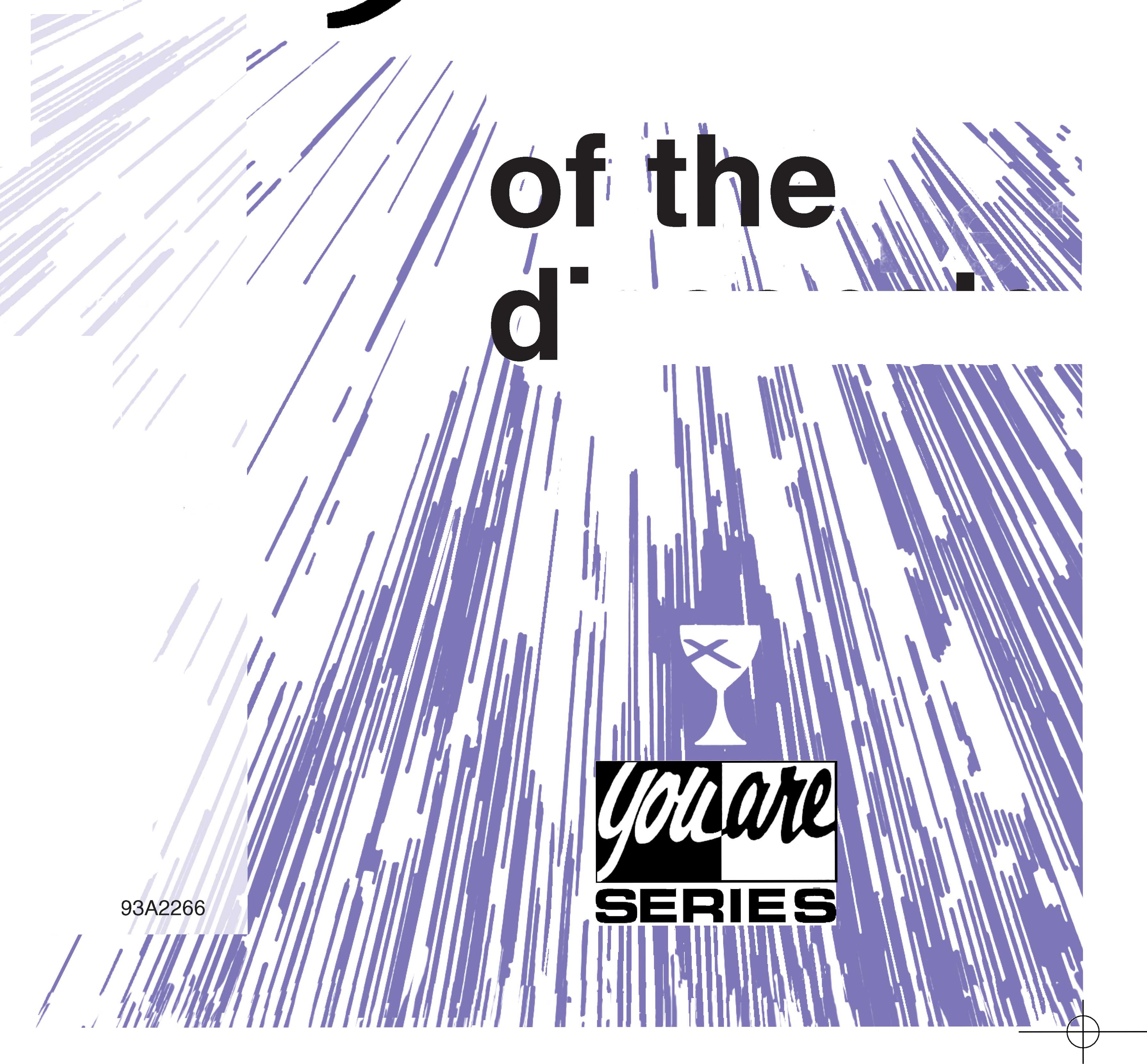
This is one of a series of nine pamphlets offering  
guidance to members and leaders of congregations in  
the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

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You Are a Church Teacher (93A2270)

You Are a New Member (93A2269)

You Are a Volunteer (93A252)

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have been chosen by your congrega-  
tion to be a member of the diaconate.  
This pamphlet is intended to help you  
think through what this means to you

and to the church. First, you need to know that  
the diaconate has a rich tradition both in the  
Bible and in the history of the church. The office  
you hold is a vital and important position within  
the church.

The Diaconate in the Bible

The word diaconate is an English translitera-  
tion of the Greek root word diakon. The word  
occurs in three words in the New Testament:  
diakonein—the verb "to serve"; diakonos—the  
noun "server" (from this we get the word  
deacon); and diakonia—the office of those who  
serve, or the diaconate.

The word is used in a general sense of  
serving tables as in the story of Mary and  
Martha in Luke 10:38-42. But Jesus uses this  
word with much more meaning than merely  
serving tables when he says, "... whoever  
wishes to be great among you must be your  
servant (diakonos),... just as the Son of Man  
came not to be served ( d) but to  
serve (diakonesai), and to give his life a ransom  
for many" (Matthew 20:26,28).

The apostle Paul also uses this word in a  
meaningful way: "So if anyone is in Christ,  
there is a new creation: everything old has  
passed away; see, everything has become new!  
All this is from God, who reconciled us to  
himself through Christ, and has given us the  
ministry (diakonian) of reconciliation... " (2  
Corinthians 5:17-18). But Paul not only uses  
the word diakonia (service, ministry) in a  
general sense, he refers to himself as a diakonos  
(2 Corinthians 6:3,4 and Colossians 1:24-25).

So, as you are called to be a member of the  
diaconate, you need to see that you are follow-  
ing in the rich tradition of the apostle Paul!

Later in the New Testament writings, the  
church established the office of the diaconate.  
There are references in the first chapter of  
Philippians and the third chapter of 1 Timo-

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thy. Acts 6:1-5 tells us that the church or-  
dained seven to distribute and serve food to  
the widows. This office of the diaconate was  
so important that the names of the seven are  
recorded. Stephen is among them.

then, as a member of the diaconate,  
are in great company. What you are  
called to be and to do is very impor-  
tant.

Men and Women as Deacons

The New Testament indicates that both men  
and women served in this important position  
in the early church. Both men and women are  
mentioned in the charge to the diaconate in  
1 Timothy 3:8-13. In Romans 16:1 Paul states,  
"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a  
deacon of the church at Cenchreae." This fits  
with Paul's emphasis in Galatians 3:28: 'There  
is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer  
slave or free, there is no longer male and  
female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

In the past few years this emphasis has been  
restored as many Christian churches are  
moving toward one office with men and  
women serving side by side with equal tasks.  
Formerly most churches had two offices—  
deacons and deaconesses. The one combined  
office is called the diaconate. The earlier  
separation may have been brought about by  
the confusing translation of diakonia in some  
English Bible translations. The same word was  
translated deacon in some places and deaconess  
in others.

With the recent New Revised Standard  
Version of the Bible, the word diakonos is  
translated as deacon for both male and female.  
Thus we can not only say, as this pamphlet  
does, "You are a member of the diaconate,"  
but we can also say, "You (either man or  
woman) are a deacon."

Characteristics of a Deacon

Once you recognize the importance of the  
office to which you have been called to serve,

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you will want to recognize in yourself and  
develop further these characteristics:

1. A spirit of love. The most important  
   characteristic of a deacon is to have love. Jesus  
   said the two greatest commandments are to  
   love God and to love our neighbor, and Paul  
   eloquently spoke of love in 1 Corinthians 13.  
   As a deacon you are called not so much to rule  
   or to judge as to love those you are called to  
   serve. As important as all the following char-  
   acteristics are, Paul tells us that if we do not  
   have love, we gain nothing.
2. A spirit of commitment. Deacons  
   should be among the most committed mem-  
   bers of the church. This certainly means taking  
   diaconate assignments seriously and fulfilling  
   all tasks involved. This also means being in  
   worship regularly and being regular in atten-  
   dance to meetings connected with the  
   diaconate and perhaps congregational board  
   meetings. In addition this means being com-  
   mitted to the whole program and ministry of  
   the church and serving in some specific areas.

In short, the church and the church's minis-  
try should be a high priority in your life.

1. A spirit of giving. As a deacon you will  
   want to be a leader in the stewardship of your  
   time and money. Some people feel, may not  
   give much money, but I give time." Others  
   may feel, "Don't ask me to make calls. I send  
   my check." Both time and money are impor-  
   tant. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is,  
   there your heart will be also."
2. A spirit of cooperation and respect As  
   a deacon you will not be carrying out your  
   tasks in isolation, but working with others.  
   Cooperation is very important. If you are a  
   member of your church's governing board,  
   you will have a voice in policy decisions,  
   program matters, and the direction of the  
   church. You may not always agree with  
   everyone else or with every decision made.  
   Others may not always agree with you. But a  
   mutual respect is essential, and once a deci-  
   sion is made, everyone needs to move ahead.

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1. A spirit of support. As a deacon you  
   will want to show support for all the leaders  
   of the church and for the pastor. This is not to  
   say you have to agree with everything the  
   pastor does or says, but you can recognize that  
   each pastor has his or her own strengths as  
   well as weaknesses. You can be a great benefit  
   to the church by helping members see and  
   appreciate the pastor's strengths.
2. A spirit of openness. Be open to new  
   ideas and new ways of ministry. There is noth-  
   ing more inhibiting to a church than the spirit of  
   "We've always done it this way." Preserve what  
   is best of the past, but be open to the new.

This applies to your personal faith as well.  
Seek to be open and to grow in your faith.  
Attending church school classes, Bible studies,  
workshops and seminars, and developing a  
social conscience can help you grow in your  
faith and enable you to help your church grow  
spiritually.

Function of the Diaconate  
(What Do Deacons Do?)

1. The serving of communion. In an earlier  
generation, the deacons as deacons did much of  
the work and programming, and as such per-  
formed vital functions in the church. Since the  
establishment of functional departments in the  
church, some have felt that deacons were left  
with only ceremonial functions—"All we do is  
pass the communion trays on Sunday."

Certainly the diaconate needs to be utilized  
more than a few minutes on Sunday morning,  
and we shall say more about that. Yet it is  
necessary to say first that what is done during  
the communion service should never be looked  
on as "merely passing the trays." Holy commun-  
ion or the Lord's Supper is the very heart of  
worship in the Christian Church (Disciples of  
Christ), and you as a deacon are given the sacred  
privilege of serving in the Lord's name. There-  
fore what you do there is very important.

The preparation and serving of this sacred  
meal is truly a ministry, and your attitude about  
what you do will be conveyed to those you serve.  
This involves such things as faithfully carrying  
out your assignments of preparation and obtaining  
a substitute if you cannot do the task. It may  
involve cleaning and polishing the communion  
trays. It also involves the preparation of yourself  
on the day you are to serve. Begin your prepara-  
tion with personal prayer, asking God to use you  
as God's servant (diakonos).

* 1. Other important functions. As impor-  
     tant as the serving of communion is, the  
     diaconate needs to serve in other ways in the life  
     of the church. What this means may vary from  
     church to church. The first question those in the  
     diaconate must ask is, "What are the needs in the  
     church and the community?" The function of the  
     diaconate should be determined by needs.
  2. Relationships with committees or  
     departments. Different congregations may  
     have different names for groups that carry out  
     specific ongoing parts of the church's ministry,  
     but most congregations have some such  
     groups. The diaconate needs to see itself not so  
     much as an isolated entity, but as a part of the  
     whole body of the church. Thus there needs to  
     be a working relationship with the committees  
     or departments. This might be accomplished  
     in one of two ways:

First, in consultation with the committees or  
departments, the diaconate as a group might  
take on some task (such as the evangelism task  
of calling on prospective members, or the  
nurture task of teaching a class or calling on  
inactive members, or some task connected with  
some other committee.) The diaconate should  
not compete with these committees, but seek to  
work with them, always addressing needs.

The second way the diaconate might serve  
with the committees or departments is not as a  
group but as individual deacons—each deacon  
serving on some functional committee. If your  
diaconate chooses this method of serving, you  
need to realize you are serving on the commit-  
tee as a deacon and therefore fulfilling the  
obligation of the diaconate to serve more than  
on Sunday morning.

* 1. Serving those in need. Some congrega-  
     tions, using Acts 6:1-5 as a model, empower  
     the deacons to set up, administer, and raise  
     money for a diaconate fund that can be used  
     to meet emergency economic needs among a  
     congregation's members or other people.
  2. Mutual support. As a deacon it is  
     important that you feel support from other  
     deacons and that you yourself become a part  
     of this mutual support. As a member of the  
     diaconate, you may wish to meet regularly (or in  
     a yearly retreat) for this purpose, for spiritual  
     growth, or for leadership training. However that  
     might be structured, it is important that you  
     experience a closeness to other deacons as you  
     perform your ministry.

A Closing Word

have been called to the office of the  
diaconate. It has a rich tradition  
within the Bible and all throughout  
church history. As you accept this  
office you carry on this tradition of those who  
have served and will continue to serve in the  
name of Jesus Christ. So commit yourself to  
this office so you might be able to say with the  
apostle Paul, "... as servants ( )of

God we have commended ourselves in every  
way" (2 Corinthians 6:4). And Paul will  
answer, "Finally, brothers and sisters, fare-  
well. Put things in order, listen to my appeal,  
agree with one another, live in peace; and the  
God of love and peace will be with you"  
(2 Corinthians 13:11).

A Resource for Study

Available from Christian Board of Publication  
are the resources Your Calling as a Deacon and One  
Diaconate, Women and Men Building a Community of  
Ministry and Service.\*

\* This and many other very helpful resources are available.  
Check with your minister to help you find the resources you  
need[ or phone Christian Board of Publication at 1-800-366-  
3383 for information about the latest resources.

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