

Formational Outcomes for Permanent Deacons in ACSA

A working grid, offered for engagement

About this grid in relation to the ACSA Fellowship of Deacon's grid

The Fellowship of Deacons of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa has produced *A formation framework for deacons* (2025), setting out eleven competency areas across three columns and drawing on the Theological Education Anglican Communion (TEAC) grid for vocational deacons, the Church of England's formation criteria, the Anglican Church of Canada's competencies, and the canons of the Episcopal Church. It is the fullest statement of diaconal formational expectation that ACSA has, and it has been made by those who exercise the ministry. Nothing here is offered in its place.

What is offered here is a distillation: seven domains at a level of detail that can be held in view in a single sitting and read across by a bishop, a Fellowship of Vocation and Discernment Committee, a Training for Ministry officer, a theological education provider, or a candidate. The Fellowship's framework does work that this grid cannot do; it gives the detail against which particular formation can be designed and particular evidence weighed. This grid attempts something a longer instrument cannot easily do; it makes the shared reference small enough to be easily shared. The two are intended to be used together, and the crosslink table below shows how each domain here draws on the Fellowship's areas.

Where the two differ, the Fellowship's framework should be taken as the fuller statement.

Four moments rather than three

The Fellowship's framework, following most of the grids it consulted, uses three columns: pre-ordination, at ordination, and throughout lifelong learning. This grid follows the TEAC grid for vocational deacons in using four, unbundling the third of those into two.

The reason is not a quarrel with the Fellowship's structure but an attempt to give continuing formation some internal shape. If ordination is a waypoint rather than a destination, what follows it needs more than duration. The third column here names a particular moment, after three years in orders and at the point of episcopal review, at which the church can reasonably ask what has been learned, what is working, and what needs strengthening. The fourth names a threshold ACSA has not yet had occasion to consider: the point at which a deacon becomes a formator of other deacons. The framework document observes that the contribution of practising deacons to the formation of new deacons is a resource the church has not yet drawn on; setting out what makes a deacon ready for that work is one way of preparing for it.

The fourth column is accordingly the least tested part of this grid, and the part most in need of correction from those who have done the work. Dioceses using the Fellowship's framework can read the third and fourth columns here as two readings of its third.

How the grid is meant to be used, and how it is not

The Fellowship's framework quotes at length the cautions offered by the Anglican Church of Canada about statements of competency: that they do not constitute standards; that they are not a curriculum; that they do not advocate a single path; that they are not an ordered checklist but a guide supporting judgements that can then be better articulated; that they cannot list every skill a ministry requires; and that competence without call, character and passion is ineffective. Those cautions apply here with more force rather than less, since what follows is more compressed.

Three things are worth adding.

The grid describes outcomes, not routes. Nothing in it prescribes how a candidate arrives at what it describes. A Bachelor of Theology, a Higher Certificate supplemented by designed and resourced formation, and a portfolio built on properly assessed prior learning can each bring a candidate here; the framework document treats all three as legitimate pathways for contextual application.

The grid describes a direction of growth, not a high-jump bar to be cleared. The columns are cumulative, and the later ones assume the earlier. What appears at selection is potential and disposition; what appears later is practice, and then the capacity to hand practice on.

The grid is not a demand for omnicompetence. The Fellowship's own caution is well made here: no minister handles all situations and matters well, and an instrument that appeared to require it would do harm to the people it was meant to serve.

Crosswalk: seven domains and the Fellowship's eleven areas

Domain in this grid	Fellowship of Deacons areas drawn on
1. Vocation and diaconal identity	1. Call to ordained ministry; 4. Diaconal studies (in part)
2. Anglican and diaconal understanding	4. Diaconal studies; 5. Anglicanism; 3. Academic studies (church history, tradition and liturgy)
3. Spiritual life and character	2. Character, including in relation to spouse, family and dependants; 6. Discipleship
4. Contextual awareness and engagement	9. Social context and social justice; 10. Mission and evangelism
5. Biblical and theological literacy	3. Academic studies
6. Pastoral and practical competence	11. Practical competencies; 6. Discipleship (liturgical practice); 7. Human awareness (communication)
7. Relationships, leadership, and collaboration	7. Human awareness, communication and understanding; 8. Leadership and collaboration

Two judgements in this crosswalk are open to challenge. The first is the treatment of mission and evangelism within a domain of contextual awareness and engagement rather than as a domain of its own; the argument for the arrangement is that diaconal mission is characteristically contextual, and the argument against it is that mission thereby loses its own name. The second is the separation of biblical and theological literacy from Anglican and diaconal understanding, where the Fellowship holds church history, tradition and liturgy together with Bible, doctrine and ethics under academic studies. The separation here is made because the qualifications discussion bears most directly on one of these and hardly at all on the other, and it seemed useful to be able to see that.

Using the grid

The grid is offered to several categories of readers and is likely to be used differently by each.

Bishops and dioceses may find its principal use in the design of formation rather than in the assessment of candidates: reading down a column, a diocese can ask what its present provision actually forms for, and where the provision it has assumed would carry a domain is in fact carrying very little of it.

Fellowships of Vocation and Discernment Committees may find the *At selection* column useful in distinguishing diaconal from presbyteral vocation, which is the discernment that most often goes wrong.

Theological education providers may find the *At ordination* column useful in mapping what a programme delivers against what the church is looking for, and in identifying what a qualification does not, on its own, produce. This is the point at which the pathways question and the outcomes question meet: the gap between what a given qualification delivers and what this column describes is the measure of the supplementary formation a diocese must design and resource.

Bishops at episcopal review may find the third column, *After three years in orders*, a workable agenda for the conversation after three years.

Deacons themselves may find the grid useful for reading their own formation, naming what they want next, and locating where they are being stretched.

What the grid does not settle

Several things are deliberately left open.

The weight of the domains. They are set out in an order, not in a hierarchy. Whether some carry more weight than others, and whether that varies by context, is not addressed here.

What counts as evidence. The Fellowship of Deacons's framework and the grids behind it use the language of evidence being shown. What kind of evidence, gathered by whom, and weighed against what, is a question for those designing formation in particular contexts.

Who assesses. The grid describes outcomes without saying who determines that they have been reached, and the answer is likely to differ across the domains.

Whether mission and evangelism should stand alone. As noted in the crosswalk, the arrangement adopted here is a judgement and not a settled matter.

The fourth column, *Before involvement in the formation of others*. It describes a threshold ACSA has not yet had much occasion to cross. It is offered as a first attempt, and those who have accompanied others into diaconal ministry will improve it.

This grid, like the Fellowship of Deacons framework document it accompanies, is offered as work in progress. Comment, correction and contribution are welcome, and are the point.

The Formation of Permanent Deacons in ACSA: A framework offered for engagement

Domain 1: Vocation and diaconal identity

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates can speak of an inner call to diaconal service that has persisted over time and can say how it has changed their life and been responded to. That call is to the diaconate itself and is not a thwarted vocation to something else; candidates can distinguish diaconal from presbyteral ministry and have some grasp of the historic understanding of the order. Others have recognised the call: candidates can name those in the local church, and perhaps in the wider community, in whom that recognition has been found. There is evident desire to serve the sick, the lonely, the stranger, the imprisoned, the powerless and those discriminated against, and to advocate alongside them.	Ordinands are convinced of their calling within the diaconate and can articulate its nature, roles, tasks, possibilities and limits. They can name the charge to interpret the needs, concerns and hopes of the world to the church, and to show that in serving the powerless they serve Christ himself. They understand the tension between the personal and the ecclesial dimensions of the call and can hold both. The local Anglican community has been prepared for their ministry and is willing to receive them.	Deacons can give an account of a vocation exercised rather than a vocation held: what the years have asked of them, what is proving generative, and where they are being stretched. They can speak of the joys and the difficulties honestly, and of the questions the work has raised about the deacon's place in the church. They can describe the insight and support they have received from colleagues and community. The community to which they are assigned continues to receive and value their ministry.	Deacons can give an account of their own formation that is of use in someone else's: they can describe how a diaconal vocation is tested, what confirmed theirs, and where it was mistaken about itself. They have accompanied others through discernment and can distinguish the encouragement of a vocation from its manufacture. They have ministered in more than one context and can speak of the diaconate as it is lived by deacons unlike themselves.

Domain 2: Anglican and diaconal understanding

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates are committed, though not uncritically, to the worship, mission and ministry of the local church, and show some awareness of the ethos of Anglicanism and of its tradition and practice as these are met locally. They know at a basic level how the diaconate is understood, practically and liturgically, within their own expression of Anglicanism, and have studied the Ordinal of ACSA. They are willing to work within Anglican structures, including the discipline that canonical obedience brings, and are open to diaconal ministry as the bishop may deploy it.	Ordinands can articulate coherent Anglican understandings of the diaconate, drawing on biblical, patristic and modern sources, and can trace the development of the order from the early church to the present sufficiently to interpret that tradition in ACSA today. They understand the historic relationship between bishop and deacon, and the present relationships among bishops, priests, deacons and lay ministers. They can explain the sacramental character of the Anglican church and the diaconal role in the liturgy, and how that role relates to missional engagement in the community. They can articulate the newer understandings of diakonia and why they matter for the order.	Deacons can give their own account of the emerging shape of their diaconal ministry, and of how the diaconate is being lived in ACSA. They have interacted with diocesan and provincial structures and have learned something of diaconal practice elsewhere in the province, in the Communion, and in other Christian traditions, including through diaconal networks such as the Fellowship of Deacons and Diakonia DRAE. They understand the legal, canonical and administrative responsibilities of the office and exercise appropriate accountability. They continue to ask substantive questions about the deacon's place in the church.	Deacons can teach the theology and history of the order and can hold its contested and developing questions open rather than resolving them prematurely for those they form. They can locate ACSA's practice within the wider Communion, and can help a candidate distinguish what is Anglican, what is provincial, what is diocesan, and what is local custom.

Domain 3: Spiritual life and character

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates are confirmed communicants with a developing pattern of individual and corporate prayer, worship and the reading of Scripture, familiar with the Daily Office and open to spiritual direction or accompaniment. They show insight, openness, maturity, integrity and resilience under pressure; a growing self-awareness; and the capacity to manage strong reactions and disappointment. They can accept fair criticism with good grace, speak honestly when that is hard, and respect confidentiality. There is a history of sound relationships, interests and concerns outside the church, and evidence of care both for others and for themselves. Where there is a spouse, family or dependants, the demands of selection, formation, ordination and ministry have been fully discussed with them.	Ordinands are rooted in disciplined personal and corporate prayer shaped by the expectations of public ministry, are practised in the Daily Office, and can speak of the accountability and challenge they have found in spiritual accompaniment. They take intercession seriously and can help others to pray. They can reflect with insight on their own strengths, gifts and vulnerability; they can balance formation, work, household, the care of others and the care of self; and they can approach the sacrificial impact of ordained ministry on the whole of life with wisdom rather than with either romance or dread. They understand safeguarding good practice and can implement it.	Deacons are sustained by patterns of prayer and life that have proved durable under the pressures of public ministry, and by support networks and honest friendship, mentoring or spiritual direction. They can live with disappointment, unanswered questions, and situations that do not resolve. They are at ease occupying the boundaries: liminal people, secure alongside those at the edges of the church and of society. They have evaluated the effect of their ministry on their household and have attended to what that evaluation showed.	Deacons can accompany another person's spiritual life without conscripting it into their own; they can recognise a rule of life unlike theirs as sound. They are able to name in a candidate what they would rather not name, and to do it with care. Their own practice bears examination, and they are willing to have it examined.

Domain 4: Contextual awareness and engagement

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates show appropriate awareness of and sensitivity to their context: historical, political, social, economic, cultural, linguistic and environmental. They can make accurate observations about the world around them, have some experience of meeting immediate need in their community, and have some awareness of the differing responses the church has made in diverse contexts. They show the disposition to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor and intercede for the world, and are alert to prejudice and unfair discrimination, including racism and sexism. They have a personal commitment to mission and a desire to share Christ in word and deed, and exercise appropriate care in the use of social media.	Ordinands can make interpretive and theological sense of their context and communicate that understanding in a way that helps the local Christian community respond. They can name the particular pains and stresses of their own setting and the spiritual and ethical questions raised there. They can articulate the prophetic element of diaconal ministry from biblical sources and can explain the missional aspect of diakonia. They have had practical experience of mission in a setting with a missional dimension and have learned in a context outside their own comfort. They understand something of how information and misinformation move in contemporary society, and of the church's opportunities for collaborative work with ecumenical partners, other faith communities and secular agencies.	Deacons can read the cultural, historical, economic, social, political and religious character of a community, and discern God's mission in and beyond the church. They mobilise others to meet need and engage in advocacy in the public arena and build partnerships with community agencies on shared commitments to justice and human dignity. They are committed to their context and thoughtfully critical of it, alert to the danger of being driven by its pressures. They have found ways of developing the prophetic role of the diaconate, and can inspire others toward the concerns of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. They can articulate questions of inculturation and contextualisation with reference to their own ministry.	Deacons can help a candidate read a context that is not their own and can resist transferring the pattern of their own engagement onto a setting that requires something else. They can teach contextual and theological reflection as a discipline rather than convey its conclusions and can speak candidly about engagement that failed and about what it cost.

Domain 5: Biblical and theological literacy

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates have the intellectual capacity and quality of mind for a course of theological study and for the intellectual demands of ministry. They have a good basic knowledge of the key beliefs of the Christian faith as expressed in Scripture and the Creeds, a general overview of the Bible's sweep and message, an eagerness to understand it better, and the ability to reflect critically on their own faith. They can prepare and lead a Bible study. They appreciate the value of church history, liturgy, ethics and social action; they are aware that disciplines other than theology bear on diaconal ministry; and they respect the lives and cultures of people of other faiths and of none.	Ordinands have engaged with and completed a prescribed programme of biblical and theological study and are aware of the need for study to continue. They can interpret Scripture in a range of settings with sound exegetical and hermeneutical skill and can contextualise and apply it accurately. They have a working knowledge of the Old and New Testaments; of Christian belief and its development in historical and cultural contexts; of the history of the church and of Anglicanism; of the Anglican understanding of the authority of Scripture; of the sacraments; of liturgy and its theological foundations; and of Christian ethical reasoning. They can identify the biblical themes foundational to diaconal ministry: diakonia, hospitality, the poor, equality, justice and mercy. They can draw on disciplines beyond theology and integrate them with theological insight, and they meet those who differ from them theologically with humility.	Deacons have continued to study, through continuing ministerial education and by other means, and can show it. They use Scripture across a wide range of settings with appropriate contextualisation, and can nurture others in understanding it, including those with little previous knowledge. They apply Scripture and the tradition critically and reflectively to specific issues, including ethical and socio-political ones. They can give an account of how their own understanding of God has changed through the experience of ministry, and they make creative use of theological and contemporary resources in the church's bridge-building across contexts and cultures.	Deacons can teach: they can judge what a learner needs next, can hold questions open, and can distinguish their own theological position from the range within which a candidate should be able to work. They read beyond their immediate requirements and can point others toward what is worth reading. They can supervise theological reflection on ministry and assess it fairly.

Domain 6: Pastoral and practical competence

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates show potential for the practical dimensions of diaconal ministry: care of the vulnerable, communication of the gospel, teaching in appropriate settings, and the specifically diaconal liturgical roles. They can speak and write clearly and engagingly, listen well, and give and receive feedback. They can give a reasoned account of what makes a good sermon. They have some familiarity with parochial, diocesan and provincial structures, and some experience of basic administration or the willingness to learn it. They are aware of the need for safeguarding and understand what a safe church means. They give evidence of good time management.	Ordinands are competent to exercise the specific liturgical roles linked to diaconal ministry in their context and can communicate their meaning and significance. They have had training and practice in preaching and can evaluate their own preaching honestly. They understand something of how children, young people and adults learn, sufficient to serve a teaching ministry, and have had basic training and experience in it. They have learned from a range of pastoral situations and can be a provider of pastoral care. They communicate the faith engagingly and appropriately in varied settings, including through digital and social media. They understand basic administration: stewardship of resources, vision, prioritisation, collaborative working, finance and accountability. They know current policy and procedure for handling allegations of abuse.	Deacons are competent and at ease in the liturgical, teaching and pastoral roles proper to the diaconate, and use appropriate forms of liturgy in a variety of settings. Their preaching draws on the resources of Scripture and theology; their teaching enables others to learn and to gain confidence in informal, non-formal and formal settings. They have undertaken whatever further training additional delegated roles have required. They have demonstrated adequate administrative capacity, know how to access and interact with parochial, diocesan and provincial structures, and can articulate the importance of safeguarding and respond well to survivors of abuse. They keep a record of the work they have done.	Deacons can teach a practice and not only perform it: they can break a liturgical role, a pastoral encounter or a sermon into what a learner can take hold of. They can observe another's ministry and give feedback that is both honest and usable and can judge that a candidate is not yet ready without discouraging the vocation.

Domain 7: Relationships, leadership, and collaboration

At selection	At ordination	After three years in orders	Before involvement in the formation of others
Candidates can establish healthy relationships with people similar to and different from themselves and have the potential to handle relational difficulty wisely. They show empathy and an awareness of how others perceive them, and an interest in learning from those culturally, socially or otherwise other than themselves. They have some experience of how groups work, are attentive to others within them, and can collaborate productively. They show some awareness of their own social status and of the power that attaches to it, recognise situations of conflict, and acknowledge that accepting the authority of others may be demanding. They are keen to mobilise others for diaconal ministry and understand the importance of engagement with the local community.	Ordinands value integrity, respect, empathy and honesty in relationship and learn from those relationships. They can form and sustain good relationships with people inside and outside the church, including those from whom they differ, and understand issues of sex, sexuality, gender and power in working life. They understand how groups work and can function in ways that draw out the participation and initiative of others. They can read power relationships in a group, describe ways of responding to conflict including their own preferred approach, and are developing strategies for its transformation. They understand canonical authority and accept supervision and the guidance of those with experience in ministry. They can discern, nurture and support the gifts of others and can mobilise others for diaconal ministry. They show awareness of diaconal models of leadership and are capable of being a public representative of the church.	Deacons form and sustain relationships across a wide range of people, including in conflict and under stress, and build relationships that go beyond the superficial while maintaining clear boundaries. They facilitate group work and function within teams that engage communities. They are conscious of their own status and privilege and make suitable corrections; they can create environments in which sensitive matters can be raised honestly and bring dissent into the open without damaging relationship. They exercise authority in ways that release and equip others, can supervise and mentor in a range of roles, and can build partnerships of trust with agencies outside the church. They can reflect with insight on the use and abuse of power in church and institutional settings.	Deacons can hold the asymmetry of a formational relationship well: they can be trusted with what a candidate discloses, can decline the role of friend where the role of formator is what is required, and can recognise where their own influence has grown too large. They can work within a formation team and can raise a concern about a candidate through proper channels rather than privately.