

Ministry Statement **Lauren Page**

I first thought about becoming a minister in 1971 or 1972. Obviously, there have been some delays. Back then, I was thinking about being a Unitarian minister. I was actively seeking God, and was already a worship leader in the Liberal Religious Youth. At that point, all I really had was the visceral knowledge that I could experience transcendence myself, and perhaps help others to that experience.

And then I became a Christian. For a while, all this meant was I read the New Testament a lot, choosing the bits I liked and thinking I could discard the bits I didn't like. But as I began to learn more about Christian doctrine and to attend churches of various kinds, I knew I couldn't call myself a Unitarian any more and I was unsure about the appropriateness of women in ministry. In 1974 I was baptized in a Pentecostal church in California. For a while I was certain, not that the door to formal ministry was shut, but that there was no door there for me at all.

I didn't go looking for that door again for nearly twenty years. In that time, I married, became an Episcopalian (confirmed by the Bishop of Western Massachusetts, January 11, 1980), had a baby, became a single parent, lost and gained jobs, remarried, and kept on going through a life that seemed to be split in two between the person who worked for and served her church, and the person who served her corporate masters. Also in that time I walked with a dear friend, Carolyn Metzler, as she was rejected for ordination in the Diocese of Maine and then, ultimately, accepted after years of alienation and reconciliation. She was the first person who said to me, "You know, you ought to be doing this too..."

Both my academic training and my work life immediately after college were built around the idea that my vocation was helping people; however, the financial realities meant I had to change careers. It was painful to let "my" work go for work in the business world, and the pain has not really diminished. I have always felt that I ought to be doing something else, and other people—close family, friends, and even just acquaintances—have affirmed the same.

I'm seeking ordination as a Deacon for several reasons, both positive and negative.

When I think of being ordained, I feel a well of latent power within me. I don't have a single clear goal for "a mission" at this point, but I sense within myself a spring of energy that moves me forward. I think the kind of leader I aspire to be is more diaconal than priestly. I want to come alongside people as an encourager, rather than stand in front.

I think the most important thing ordination to the Diaconate would give me would be the external symbol of the internal authority I already feel within myself. There's something about a label that inclines people to listen to what the person with the label has to say. And I do think my life experience has given me some unique words:

- About the way bright, “difficult” children are treated in our society and the sort of support they really need to thrive. Most of the younger people I am friends with now would fall into the “bright, ‘difficult’” category. I don’t have their permission to say a lot about them all here, but I think I’m able to model the possibility of a successful adulthood—and I know that some of them who don’t care much for Christians have respect for me, and through me for what I believe.
- About what it’s like to be in the business world and trying to live a righteous and a balanced life. I think I could speak very effectively to and for other people who never climb the ladder very far, and yet are successful because they live full lives.
- About being an equal companion with people who have been made different by God—not a helper reaching down, but a fellow-struggler working alongside. I have a recognition of the common threads in the various states of being human that allows me to work around and under a lot of the barriers that lie between the “normal” and the “other”. I would very much like to make part of my ministry finding a way to help people who are usually perceived as “other” into a fuller priesthood themselves.

In terms of the liturgical work of a Deacon, my work as a Lay Reader and Lay Eucharistic Minister has convinced me that it’s not really the role of a minister or priest to create a worship experience. God and the believing hearts of the people provide that, and it’s our job to create the place in space and time where that can happen. I often feel very strong emotions when I work on the altar, but whether I am nearly overwhelmed by a sense of God’s presence or merely aware of my creaking knees doesn’t matter. I feel the sustaining rock beneath me all the time, the under-girding that makes whatever we do in liturgy part of the glory of God. I feel free to be imperfect in the liturgy, and also free to strive for more. Above all, I see the liturgy as a place where “I” disappear to show forth Christ.

On the other hand, I don’t think the Church needs another middle-aged, overweight priest with bad knees and asthma who has maybe 25 years of useful work left in her, especially if three to five of those years must be given to seminary. While I don’t think the work of a Deacon is less than that of a priest, I do think I could start being of use sooner in that capacity.

There are two things I think the Episcopal Church in general and our diocese in particular could do better, and where I, as a Deacon, could help. We all need to become much better at telling ourselves and others what we believe and why. I believe that one major cause of the decline in attendance in our church is that we—clergy and lay people alike—have difficulty expressing our beliefs clearly and with passion. We’re getting better at this, but we still have a lot of work to do. I think I could teach people something about the joy of living in a world that always challenges us to choose, where the answers are rarely easy, and where the directions of the Bible are alive because they are re-voiced for today’s need. Not discarded; I think the more we deal honestly with the parts of scripture that are hard for us, the better able we will be to affirm our faith.

The second thing I think we need is a more grounded type of social action. I have always been impatient with the idea that one has to go far away from one’s home or it’s not

“mission”. Faith communities are built when people work together towards a worthy goal, and it doesn’t really matter if the task at hand is around the corner or across the globe. I know that if my church in Malden wants to grow, we have to take a significant place in a community that’s increasingly either not Christian at all, or Christian in the “join-us-and-withdraw-from-the-world” sense. I strongly suspect that the story is the same in other communities.

I have considered alternative callings—in fact, I’ve been successful at the work I now do, so it’s more a matter of being truer to my real calling than my current work permits. Regardless of whether I become a Deacon or not, I’m probably at the end of my career in the business world. And many of the alternatives I’m thinking about are things I could usefully do while being a Deacon. They include:

- Getting a Master’s Degree in Religious Education and becoming a Religious Education professional
- Getting a Master’s Degree in Pediatric Counseling, an MSW, or a similar type of certification that would allow me to practice counseling/social work
- Applying the business skills that my current job has developed to helping non-profit organizations win grants and administer grant-based programs
- Doing something with my gifts as a writer to teach and entertain .

I think that doing any work such as this would make me a better bridge between the world and the Church than I am now. On the other hand, I would be content to stay where I am if I honestly felt (or was honestly directed) that the real calling of God for my life was to model as best I can how the high-tech business world and Kingdom of God can exist together at peace.

In terms of the “worldly” work I might do as a Deacon, therefore, I could be used by God in many different ways, and I would rejoice to be so used. Although it seems incredibly pretentious to say so, I believe I am ready to be sent, even if being “sent” means staying put.