

# Emerging Paradigms of Collaborative Diaconal Formation

## Sample Panel Discussion Questions and Answers for *The Iona Initiative*

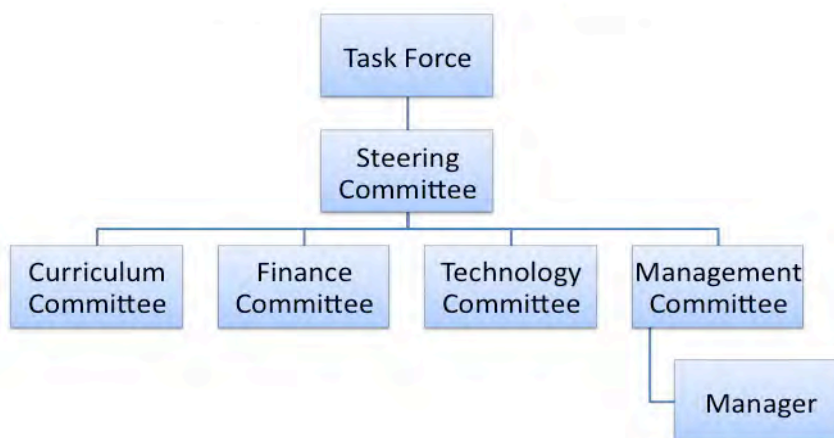
1. Describe the history and development of your collaborative program. How was your program designed and who designed it? Which dioceses collaborate in your program?

The Diocese of Texas has had an internal school, The Iona School for Ministry, since 2004, for the formation of deacons and bi-vocational priests. A number of other dioceses have sent students to this school. It was at the request of the Diocese of Oklahoma that the Diocese of Texas decided to share more widely, through alternative media, this formation program. Conversations with a number of bishops resulted in a group of diocesan representatives meeting to discern the scope of a program which might model the Iona School yet be locally utilized.

The Iona Initiative was designed by a Task Force made up of the initially participating dioceses, the Seminary of the Southwest and the Diocese of Texas. The planning process began in May 2011. A project manager was hired in July 2011 to guide the project. Development of curriculum is complete and the first class will graduate in June 2015.

The Iona Initiative is now a collaborative project of thirteen participating Episcopal dioceses in conjunction with the Seminary of the Southwest and the Iona School for Ministry of the Diocese of Texas. Representatives from all participants make up the Task Force. It will eventually fall under the oversight of The Seminary of the Southwest and will become a certificate program.

IONA INITIATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



**Participating dioceses to date include: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Eastern Michigan, Episcopal Church of Navajoland, Hawaii, Mississippi, North Dakota, Northwest Texas, Oklahoma, Rio Grande, South Dakota, West Texas, and Wyoming.**

2. Describe the practical and logistical arrangements of your program.
  - a. What is the length of your program and how are the units or terms divided?
  - b. What is the time commitment? (days and hours; number of sessions; residential requirements, etc.)
  - c. In what ways is your program flexible? (Can students plug in at any time at their own pace? Must they carry a full load? Can they substitute other education from seminaries, college work, EFM?)

**The Iona Initiative is a three-year program with ten units offered each year. Generally, the units are offered one weekend a month. The program is designed to accommodate students who work or otherwise cannot attend seminary. There are no residential requirements.**

**The curriculum is divided into academic and practical courses. Academic courses are mandatory, however local deans and mentors have flexibility in the selection and teaching of practical classes. The participating dioceses require attendance in a gathered community of students. This is not a classic 'online' program.**

3. Please describe your students' spiritual life and worship opportunities.

**This will vary according to the practices of the individual Initiative diocesan schools. However, worship opportunities and practicums are central to the work and formation of the students.**

4. Please describe how your program is structured financially.
  - a. What is the annual expense to the dioceses which participate?
  - b. What is the annual expense per student participant, and pays it?
  - c. Are scholarships available?

**The diocese pays an annual maintenance fee of \$7500, plus a one-time set up fee of \$1800 for materials. Local costs to run the program are defined locally. Each diocese sets its own tuition and determines logistics of room and board and costs to the students. Each diocese also decides any level of compensation for the local dean, mentors and teachers.**

5. Please describe the technology utilized and the degree of student technological competence required. How is content delivered, discussion conducted, and contact maintained? (In-person only; on-line; Adobe Connect; Webex; Blackboard, Facebook, Youtube, Google Hang-Outs, etc.)

**The program uses pre-recorded videos and other, paper-based materials. Video disks are provided and are designed to be as universally compatible as possible. All educational materials are made available to mentors online via the Moodle Learning Management System.**

**One of the primary goals of the program is building community. For this reason, students and mentors come together for instruction.**

6. Describe how your participants are evaluated. (Portfolio/GOE's/exams/informally.)

**Each diocese determines how its students will be evaluated. Some test with grades or pass/fall. Evaluation of each student is a serious commitment on the part of the individual diocese.**

7. Describe how your instructors are selected. What role do deacons play in formation in your program?

**The Iona Initiative recommends a particular structure for oversight of the program which includes the selection of a Dean (who may individually or with a team or Commission on Ministry, have the role of recruitment of mentors/teachers. It is recommended that deacons be a part of those who are recruited.**

8. Does your program have any successful experience with diaconal:  
a. Students under age 40?  
b. Students in underrepresented groups?  
c. Students whose primary language is not English? (What language was it?)

**The Iona Initiative is completing its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a 3-year pilot. It currently has 60 students involved in multiple dioceses. No research has been done on these questions.**

9. What else is required by your program's dioceses for ordination? (CPE; CPE alternatives; Field Education; Community Organizing/Development, SAFE Church, Anti-Racism or Title IV training). How is it accessed?

**The requirements vary from diocese to diocese, but there is an Anti-Racism component included in the practical curriculum. It is based on Eric Law's Kaleidoscope Institute work.**

10. How do you deal with differentiation between diocesan requirements?

**The Iona Initiative is clear in its content and was originally designed to meet a number of common diocesan requirements. However, each participating diocese determines their specific requirements and will add any formation pieces necessary for its own students.**

11. How does your program factor in the need for contextual adaptation of formation?

**The flexibility in its practical formation pieces allows for a great deal of contextual adaptation.**

12. Can you direct us to a link or website link describing your format? What is the name and contact info for the person to contact for more information?

Website: [www.ionainitiative.org](http://www.ionainitiative.org)

2015 Iona Initiative Project Manager: Nancy Smith, [nsmith.firstlook@gmail.com](mailto:nsmith.firstlook@gmail.com) . Contact her for more information or a comprehensive electronic packet.

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