



Some Thoughts on Attending the 2017 World Diakonia Conference

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Loyola University, Chicago, IL

By Deacon Pam Nesbit

The Federation for World Diakonia will hold its quadrennial assembly next summer in Chicago. The last one was held in Berlin in 2013. I was the only Episcopal deacon to attend that event, and I'm very glad I did. I strongly urge Episcopal deacons to take advantage of this opportunity to meet our sister and brother diaconal ministers from around the world without having to travel long and expensive distances.

Episcopal and Anglican deacons live out our ministry in the context of the transitional diaconate. For good and ill, our church's most prevalent model for diaconal ministry is people who are serving an apprenticeship for the priesthood. I never saw how strongly that affects my own sense of what a deacon is until I spent time with diaconal ministers – most of whom are deaconesses – whose sense of themselves is grounded exclusively in their ministries. Please let me be clear. I'm not complaining about the transitional diaconate. (That's another article!) I am saying that we serve among priests who have been ordained as deacons. And the professional orientation of transitional deacons – people who are going to make a career of being priests – affects, I believe, our understanding of ourselves as professionals in the church. This is not a bad thing. But it makes a difference

The vast majority of members of World Diakonia are women serving in community among the poor, sick and otherwise marginalized. As we Episcopal deacons vow to obey our bishops at ordination, these deaconesses vow to serve in community. This makes a difference. When the Episcopal Church made our deaconesses into deacons, whether the deaconesses wanted to make that change or not, the church assumed it was doing them a favor. And perhaps it was. But there was loss – in particular a loss of community.

I know I'm being a little provocative in what I'm saying. Please feel free to disagree to challenge or correct me where I'm wrong. I'm hoping to provoke the Episcopal diaconate into looking beyond the assumptions of our community and our ecclesiology. I'm hoping to challenge us to spend time with diaconal ministers whose world of ministry is in many ways exactly the same and in others quite different. My hope is that we will see ourselves in a larger context than just The Episcopal Church or the Anglican Church in Canada in order to more effectively and joyfully serve in the world in Christ's name.

P.S. World Diakonia is an international organization. All written materials are in English and German and all meetings are simultaneously translated. Opportunities to expand your perspectives are everywhere! Please attend! I hope to see you there.

For information visit <http://www.diakonia-world.org/2017/Chicago2017.shtml>
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