



ASSOCIATION FOR EPISCOPAL DEACONS

ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

Open Space Notes 2020 Buye, Burundi diaconate

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Jean Mweningoma brought his challenge of creating a (vocational) diaconate in the Anglican diocese of Buye, Burundi. There is currently no such vocation in Buye.

Terminology differs from that used in TEC.

Jean's received suggestions from several deacons as to how the program of his theological school (used to educate priests) might be enhanced to provide an additional track for deacon formation. The school also holds training for catechists, men and women, who function as administrators in local churches. Buye has 28 parishes (which correspond more exactly to our notion of deanery, and which share a circuit-rider priest) Each parish is composed of 4-6 churches (each of which is led by a lay catechist, who manages administrative duties). Morning prayer is the norm for worship, with monthly Eucharist. Jean desires to renew the diaconate in Buye so as to add social assistance and social action leadership for church-based supportive activities. It also would open ordination of any kind to women.

The six deacon consultants recommended:

- *Define your diaconate from a positive perspective. State what is a deacon for, as opposed to what are the things that a deacon can't do.
- *Focus first on the deacon's role in the community, not the deacon's role in liturgy.
- *Come up with a job description for deacons, catechists and priests and teach each role about the other one. Teach everyone's role to everyone else. Start with education; don't let the deacon be the one who does whatever others don't want to do.
- *Teach the deacons to teach what they are.
- *Teach the significance of the Deacon's liturgical prerogatives. They are not a matter of taste or an ornament to the liturgy; they are symbolic speech that teaches what deacons are, and enhances the work of diakonia, if they are observed.
- * Teach the deacons from the beginning that they have a unique diaconal lens and a prophetic voice; train them from the beginning to view scripture and church history through a diaconal lens, and to preach with that prophetic voice.
- *Protect them in their prophecy. Don't let their servant identity be used as a way to silence them.
- * Be sure that any cultural issues about women having authority are thought

about and addressed in advance. Be sure you have a biblically-based and thorough answer to objections to women's leadership. Build up the women deacons' own confidence.

*Don't allow the diaconate to be used as a booby prize for those the church does not want to ordain as priests. It's a completely different vocation.

* Develop the supports for deacons (as in our canon "Of the Life and Work of deacons") before you ordain anyone. Have structures of support in place before formation is done. Think about the effect of the education and ministerial demands on diaconal families.

*Think through how everything will be financed, and carefully think through how you will protect the deacons from the church's urgency, especially since they will not be paid.

*Find the mean for what you need: give enough education to support their authority, but don't confuse the call to the diaconate with the possession of an academic degree.

PLAN HOW YOU WILL TAKE CARE OF YOUR DEACONS IN EVERY WAY, and don't let their Servant identity be used as a reason why they should receive nothing.

What Buye needs from us:

* Help in curriculum development and adaptation, in paper or DVD format (Training must take place in this way, because there is no internet in people's homes, only at the residential school where the classes will be held.).

Seminaries? Iona? EFM? Could these be adapted?

*More companion dioceses; more people interested.

* Financial supports for absolutely everything:

Costs for school: residential format (two weeks at a time, four times, over 18 months) for 10 students in a residential format, including food, lodging, books, travel expenses, etc.)

Translation of seminal diaconal texts into Kirundi.

Family supports? (The deacons will be unpaid).

*Other deacons interested in being part of this cadre of deacon consultants.

*People to help write TEC grant applications, in English.

*PRAYER for diaconal vocations in Buye, so that they may be identified.

*TEC Deacons to visit Burundi, to incarnate this order in a new setting (and funds to underwrite their travel).

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