



ASSOCIATION FOR EPISCOPAL DEACONS

ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

Open Space Notes 2020

2020 A3D Conference Rural Area Deployment

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Issue: Deployment of deacons in rural areas is challenging:

- The majority of deacons reside in larger towns and cities, while many small congregations in rural areas do not even have a priest on a regular basis.
- It is generally not possible for a deacon who resides in a rural area to move to another area; therefore, some bishops will allow a deacon to return to the church that raised him/her up.
- Some postulants are being raised up by mission churches with part-time vicars.
- In some congregations, lay leadership is in charge of the church.
- Resources available to deacons in rural areas are frequently less than the resources available to deacons in urban areas.
- In some instances, a deacon serving in a rural community may be asked to perform functions normally reserved for a priest (weddings, baptisms), etc. The deacon's letter of agreement should clearly state what is expected/required/allowed.
- While ecumenical collaboration in rural areas is very helpful (e.g., Lutheran pastors serving Episcopal congregations and vice versa), the Episcopal polity and the Episcopal diaconate are not translatable in other denominations.
- A lack of education within some dioceses about the role of deacons has resulted in some deacons being drawn away from engaging in social ministry and instead being steered into the role of mini-priest. In some dioceses, deacons have been raised up and formed as mini-priests. In these instances, it is very difficult for both the congregation and the deacon if the bishop moves the deacon to a different congregation.

- Deacons sometimes have pressure placed upon them to act in a pastoral role to keep a congregation together. This is a difficult position for the deacon. It is very important that clear boundaries be established regarding the role of the deacon. This includes educating lay leaders about the differences between the Order of Priests and the Order of Deacons.

Some possible options to consider regarding the formation of deacons:

- Some formation programs allow for academic preparation for the diaconate to be accomplished digitally through a platform such as Zoom or through online programs such as the Center for Anglican Leadership and Learning through Church Divinity School of the Pacific.
- A program entitled *Total Ministry* has been developed to allow priests, deacons, and lay leaders to be formed together.
- One diocese has two separate Commissions on Ministry: one for the diaconate, and one for the priesthood. The formation of deacons and the formation of priests is completely separate in this diocese.

Some innovative possibilities regarding the deployment of deacons in rural areas:

- In some areas, deacons are going to different congregations to lead Morning Prayer and preach (not to preside at a Deacon's Liturgy/Deacon's Mass).
- Some dioceses are considering asking a retired deacon to serve liturgically in different congregations.
- One diocese is considering pairing a supply priest with a supply deacon to serve in rural areas, thereby allowing deacons to have a presence in the congregations. In this instance, the issue of remuneration must be considered; a priest is paid the supply rate, but would the deacon's mileage/travel expenses be reimbursed?
- Perhaps a diocesan fund could be established to assist deacons who lack resources in carrying out their ministries.
- Some dioceses are able to rotate deacons through parishes. This keeps the role of the deacon in perspective; he or she is not seen as someone who works for the priest. This also mitigates the issue of members of a given church presuming that the deacon works for them.
- If planned in advance, it is possible for congregations in rural areas to work together to share resources. This may include the pairing of congregations with different demographics.
- Deacons in some dioceses are able to collaborate across diocesan boundaries with deacons in other dioceses to engage in ministries.