



**ASSOCIATION FOR  
EPISCOPAL DEACONS**  
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

**Open Space Notes 2020**

Open Space Technology session notes on Regional Deacons

March 7, 2020

Led by Rev. Jan Grinnell, Rhode Island, and scribed by Rev. Dorcie Kafka Dvarishkis, Montana

Twelve in attendance

Jan opened us in prayer, then shared the history of the new pilot for regional deacon deployment in RI:

- From a high of 30+ deacons back when Jan was ordained in the 1990's, RI deaconate has now eight active deacons within their 50 worshipping communities
- Formation program experienced 17-year-hiatus without Bishop support
- Idea for regional deacon was modeled on CT program; began Advent 1, 2019
- Objective was to grow ministries and the love of God visible in the communities served by deploying deacons in ways to better utilize the limited number of deacons, while expanding diaconal visibility, awareness, and understanding
- Guidelines included that Deacon Grace would be in liturgical rotation among three parishes on three consecutive Sundays, with the fourth Sunday off; preaching on a rotational basis; and understanding that a collaborative schedule would need to be accommodated; there would be a focus on outreach, collaborative ministries; and the Archdeacon would meet quarterly for check-ins with Grace and the respective priests
- Ministry includes three parishes in NW RI, all within a five-minute drive of one another
- Discussed first with Bishop, priests first to get buy-in
- Important to deploy more tenured, grounded, healthy, mature deacon to such a ministry, with clear boundaries and adherence to such
- May also want to consider deployment in like-cultured churches
- Shared story of Grace taking the idea of a ministry well-rooted in one parish to the other two, who both got involved

Other participants shared their regional deacon experiences:

- Bonnie Matthews (Connecticut)
  - LOA include one week off per month
  - Also have regional missionaries to coordinate gatherings across deaneries/regions; some regional projects have expanded Diocesan-wide
- Charlie Perrin (Long Island, now Central Florida)
  - LI Bishop wanted to get more creative in utilization of deacons, and reinforce that the deacon works in partnership with the Bishop, rather than "belonging" to the priest
  - He was assigned first to four city parishes which reflected a variety of cultures and mixed priest support
  - Second assignment was to four less-wealthy churches in the boroughs of NY

- He concentrated on the people within the congregation, and engaged them in what was needed in community
- Was attending one church each week, then switched to two weeks per church to build continuity
- Positives – promoted awareness across parishes of deacon service, one another; each parish became part of energy across churches, and broadened knowledge of greater church; practice also eliminated the de facto curate status sometimes projected on deacons
- Concerns – found it best for a deacon with some experience, and for those where one of the parishes wasn't their home parish
- Holly Hanback (Virginia)
  - Have a deacon who worked in parish for day job, so was assigned regionally to facilitate/collaborate across region
- Janet Tidwell (Atlanta)
  - Served between two parishes, with three weeks serving one location, one week in the other. Her travel was 20 minutes to each. With 118 congregations and 25 deacons, such a program would help to reach more parishes. She has found some priestly interest, but deacons need to be willing to try it in order to even explore it.
- Bradley Peterson (CDSP in California)
  - Reported from N California experience of four team deacons that were assigned to four parishes, where they served their parish three Sundays, then rotated on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays
  - Lasted about two years; model broke down when one no longer wanted to participate
  - Positives – shared ministries like food pantry, ashes to go
  - Looking at starting again in San Francisco with three deacons, five parishes, no actual church assignment

### Discussion questions

Kate Harrigan (Central Pennsylvania)

- In RI Grace's service, what would happen if rather than promoting one ministry for three parishes, she was asked to support a unique ministry in each parish? Too much bandwidth to support?
  - Jan – support ended up expanding community discovery of needs/volunteers
  - Bonnie – in their model, goal wasn't to promote sharing of a ministry, because it was successful as it, but rather to look to the community to learn about and nurture other ministries
- Was deployment for a Sunday or week-long?
  - Jan – it was left up to Grace, not mandated by Diocese
- Consider the icon of the deacon; having a deacon in more parishes could encourage a stronger culture for the diaconate, and deacon could also be call-scouting in more parishes
  - Charlie – with 140 congregations and only 14 deacons, the experience raised the visibility of the diaconate, and by traveling with the Bishop, also promoted Bishop/deacon partnership

David Curtis (Virginia)

- If the deacon is at a parish less often, what is the impact on prophetic voice, relationship/trust, empowerment to say no?
  - Jan – important that archdeacon helps deacons to establish and keep boundaries, and choose deacon wisely
  - Bonnie – early oversight important. Parish has to have their autonomy, with deacon as connector to community leaders. In some cases, having greater exposure expanded thoughts, prophetic voice
  - Bradley – view deacon as facilitator, catalyst. May raise up volunteers across parishes
  - Charlie – rotation encourages the ministry of the people; in his experience, it was not a problem getting to know people, and there was good encouragement for sharing resources. His tenure as a deacon added to the trust experienced.

Carter Hawley (Oregon)

- Does this promote the idea of trying to do more with less, rather than addressing a capacity/need issue?
  - Jan – motivation was to bring parishes (and thus, Diocese) together

Bradley

- Where did the dollars come from to support shared ministry?
  - Charlie – participating parishes contributed for miles, other expenses incurred
  - Jan – each parish paid \$200 to Diocese toward deacon's CE, plus expenses
  - Bonnie – suggested CE be same as for presbyter
  - David – support concern for those deacons placed in under-resourced churches, or community placements
  - Bradley – might larger churches contribute dollars toward a regional/shared ministry budget?

Patty Soukup (Rio Grande)

- Noted Bishop was supportive of shared deployment, but the distance between parishes challenges concept