



## Archdeacon and Deacon Director's Conference Spring 2013 Open Space Notes

### **"We are willing to take the altar with us."**

–Susanne Watson Epting, in "Waves" presentation

Stories to explain why statement above "resonates":

Woman who discontinued ministry because Standing Cmte said "no" to ordination; the ministry needed to be "wrapped around the Eucharist" and she felt she couldn't do that if she wasn't ordained.

Currently in diocese: Bishop wants deacons, but resistance from priests seems to be taking form of downplaying liturgical role of deacon; Deacons do service, lead the people into service, their liturgical role secondary, less important, a distraction from their "real" purpose/calling; "priests are sacramental; deacons are about service"; feels like a wall being built between deacons and the altar.

Questions:

1. What are our assignments?

--"Only deacon in New Haven." Became too much itineracy. Part of ecclesia: "already took altar out the door"; how take altar to strip of clubs just down the street?

--Oversight of deacons, beck & call of bishop; 80 churches. Deacons take communion to people, imposed ashes on the street—40+ people came; deacon & priest went together.

--Was cathedral deacon; now: serve on 5 commissions, responsible for 1<sup>st</sup> stage of discernment, has parish assignment; ministry: "feet on the street"—walking & being with people on the margins (geographic and social), a ministry of presence, with presbyter, take H.E. occasionally (on street or in a shelter); Maundy Thursday takes little red wagon and washes feet on the street.

--Commission for diaconate: formation; has parish assignment: mission opportunity cmte: "How will the poor people find our church here in Roseville?"; instead: asking poor people, What do you need help with? 'Listening to them will transform us.' Studied "liturgy in mission": connection between what happens at altar and what happens in world? Huge connection: How we are fed & nourished goes out the door in mission. Not necessarily a physical taking of altar into the world. (See articles in Anglican Theological Review, Winter 2010)

--Easy for those working in diocesan capacity to be co-opted by diocesan structure; if deacon community is single most important thing to you, you'll be fine. Primary lenses: Presbyter: sacramental, inclusive; diaconal: interpretive, asking the church to be different. Dealing with how to not feel "complicit" when being part of church; "institutional hypocrisy." Finding altars in the world. Handing out a flower on Easter, along with a scripture. Literally & figuratively. Finding people there. In a small congregation with a ministry, maybe "the priest" is already there.

--Priest & part-time rector; formation director; inside walls vs. outside walls; Wall between deacon and altar and are priests constructing it? Don't want to erect a wall. Go back and talk with her deacon... School ministry: Being "altar" in a child's life, child is not Episcopal: making sure they know God loves them; sacramental ministry without bread & wine.

--Lay person & formation co-director; co-director is a deacon, they tell Commission on Ministry what they're doing; wants to pose this question (how take altar into world) to deacons in formation. Many in the process were already leaders in their churches; get into process and must be more careful about leading and talking about their leadership in parish.

--Oversees process and continuing ed: small office in dio office; works from home; has parish assignment; volunteer chaplain at prison 1 day/wk; creating altars in prison in the form of prayers; priests come occasionally to preside over H.E.; if priest can't make it, deacons can distribute; healing service once a month... "altar is there, we acknowledge it."

2. What do we mean by "the altar"? A specific parish altar? "Diocesan altar"? Metaphoric + literal, but literal takes many forms, from washing feet of homeless to imposing ashes to expressing God's love..... sometimes it means communion or H.E.

The first seven "distributed"; not a permanent solution, but sometimes perhaps deacon should/could distribute communion from reserve...

Offering unction....: BCP says deacons can when priest not available.

Online stuff? "Software altars"?

Maybe by "altar" we mean "sacred space"? Maybe better to think about what we do as creating sacred space in the world?

Ministry wrapped around the Eucharist or Eucharist wrapped around ministry? Both/and.

Do we turn Gospel of abundance into scarcity? Do we hoard Eucharist? Do we hoard sacred space?

Book resources:

Mission-Shaped Spirituality, Susan Hope

An Altar in the World, Barbara Brown Taylor

3. "Willing"? "Should"? "Must"?

Link between diaconal ministry and altar is essential and critical. We are fed at the altar to go into the world and feed—we the ordained and we the laity.

Bristling at language of "assignment"? We're called to our ministries. Have to do with "obedience" to Bishop?