



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

“Depth vs. Breadth” in Deacon Formation Programs

Question: Where should the emphasis be in formation programs – on depth or breadth of knowledge and skills?

Deacon formation by its nature is a ‘generalist’ formation with the expectation that more will be learned after ordination as we value lifelong learning.

The Canons provide the framework for formation.

Dioceses have a variety of approaches: some start with ‘theory’ (theology, polity, etc.) and move to ‘practical ministry’ (learning and practice in preaching, liturgy, etc.) and other dioceses do the reverse. There needs to be a balance in the program and decisions about depth and breadth will change from time to time based on the knowledge, skills and abilities of those in formation. Programs use feedback from participants as a resource for making these adjustments. Programs are always evolving to respond to the needs of those in formation.

Some examples of how this is addressed in various dioceses:

- Each Canonical competency has a syllabus and someone in the Examining Chaplains group who oversees that competency. Deacons-in-formation are evaluated in some form by the assigned EC. Learners develop a portfolio of resources for themselves.
- Invite the postulants’ spouse/significant other and their rector to attend one program in formation each year so they have a sense of what the postulant is experiencing and the opportunity to learn more about the diaconate and the formation program. Invite deacons to attend also.
- Emphasize the importance of the deacon being flexible
- Requires two fieldwork experiences, one in the parish, one in an agency.
- For canonicals, deacons are invited to write the questions.
- How well do all of the entities involved in formation work together – the formation program director, the CoM, the Examining Chaplains? Do they each know what the others are doing? And do we trust each other?
- Like all well-designed ‘tests’ the canonicals should be a learning experience.
- Use ‘students,’ i.e., postulants,, as teachers in the program.
- What are alternatives to the traditional canonical examinations that would be more effective with deacons? (For ideas, see the notes from the “Portfolio” open space discussion.)