



ASSOCIATION FOR
EPISCOPAL DEACONS
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

2022 Archdeacon & Deacon Directors Conference March 10-12, 2022

Open Space Report: Bilingual Formation

Session 1: Bi-Lingual Formation

There were four participants: Sue R., the leader, Denis Moyer and Kristin N? Both from the Diocese of Oregon, and Rod Dugliss, Diocese of California, scribe

Sue's diocese (WA) has led the way in creating a full program of formation for the diaconate for persons from Hispanic contexts whose first language is Spanish. They have generously offered to share participation in the program across the AED spectrum. Because of this, Sue was the primary presenter, fielding questions from the others.

We began with self introduction, specifically a brief description of how bi-lingual and bi-cultural formation for deacons is done, or is aspired to.

For Oregon. Both participants new to the task. Denis is just stepping into a role of leader for all local formation with and for all orders. He is a lay academic, Kristen has been a deacon for some year but is new to heading formation for deacons in particular. Oregon has identified congregations and populations of Spanish-first speakers. The diocese has five presbyters who are competent in Spanish—spoken and written. She described the diocese as "well positioned" to begin preparing Hispanic ordained leaders. Big question: where and how to begin.

For California: after a major effort 25 or 30 years ago to prepare one cohort of persons for ordination in Spanish, little or nothing more has been done. The need to do something has become more acute. They are looking at using Washington's program and materials as offered. The principal concern expressed was to learn from Washington how the issues of cultural difference and cultural competence are addressed.

Sue R. reminded us that having deacons at all is quite new to the diocese. When she came there was one other deacon—both of them having moved in from elsewhere. Today there are 30 deacons and 16 in process. The urban core of the Diocese of Washington is pretty diverse. It has 3 to 5 large Latin/Hispanic congregations created in and with the collaboration of dwindling Anglo congregations who welcomed the new folk fully and have deferred to their presence and leadership. At the moment there are 4 persons in formation for the diaconate. Addressing one of the dimensions of concern, Kristen asked about their level of preparation. Of the three ready for ordination, one is sexton for one of the Episcopal Church schools; schooling, maybe 5th grade. The two others are in the hospitality business (hotels) one at a management level (and a HS diploma) and basic English competence, one is janitorial/housekeeping with fifth grade. The fourth with 8th grade in hand. **Key learning:** with Spanish language written materials and support of a Spanish speaking mentor they did more than adequate work and interacted easily as peers to those in Anglo program, several with more than one graduate degree.

Essential to DioWA success was finding a priest, originally from Cuba where he had been Presbyterian and a teacher in the ecumenical seminary, to lead the Hispanic work. He has translated a lot of material. Much around scripture, some history, none on the diaconate. Sue R reminded us that there are Episcopal/Anglican seminaries in Province IX. A province we forget about and neglect is so many areas of church life and governance. Written materials therefrom tend to be inexpensive (Sue said, “cheap,”) and lacking copyright constraints we encounter in the US.

The cohort learn together for the “academic” portion but learn in the deacon community for the deacon formation component. The work of the one priest is absolutely essential—and strikes this scribe as a lot of work on top of being rector in a sizable congregation.

In looking at cultural competence and issues, the participants raised the matter of barriers to ordained diaconate:

- Language looms large and has been significantly addressed in the Diocese of Washington.
- Cost is another. To do this right (to do it at all) means finding money to cover costs faced by all in the process and the costs of translation etc.
- Individual and community are among significant differences. Sue related a story from her time in Minnesota where she and others were supporting an indigenous person through the process. Everything occurred and was referenced in community. As she said, “he never used “I” statements yet the burden of questions in COM and class invited response from “you” singular. Vocation in Latino/Hispanic communities, as well as indigenous, is discerned and articulated in and by community. Anglo processing is highly individualistic.
- Making Episcopal/Anglican deacons. Most, if not all, persons from Latin America coming into The Episcopal Church are culturally and ecclesially Roman Catholic. Finding Spanish language resources that are not RC is challenging. To the degree there is an initial call to the diaconate is likely to be informed by the RC position that deacons are helpers of the priest, period. An example. Early diocesan invitation to explore possible diaconal vocation. 20 folk showed up. When the reality of the diaconate as engaged in ministry in and for the world, interpreting to the church needs, concerns, hopes, energizing baptism etc, was laid out there were 4 people (the current four) left to move forward.
- Written work is hard.
- Latin/Hispanic folk do not do well on screen. Zoom did/does not work for them. In-person is essential.
- Any Latino/Hispanic learner needs a mentor companion to walk with them for support, encouragement, keeping to the plan, and dealing with idiom on both languages.

Diocese of WA is still learning and still developing materials and processes. They are open to sharing what they have with others. And they are happy to learn from the experience of others in this ongoing process of cultural awareness and adaptation in preparing servant leaders for Hispanic, bilingual, and other ethnic communities.

Final word: for Sue the heart and delight is when worshipping together. “Every worship experience is Pentecost,” she said. Each speaks from their language of the heart and yet it all works together.

I am sure I have missed some bit, but this is mostly what we heard and discussed.

Submitted

Rod Dugliss

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