



ASSOCIATION FOR  
EPISCOPAL DEACONS

ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

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

### Open Space Report: Developing (Redeveloping) a Diaconal Program

Facilitator: The Ven. Sue von Rautenkranz, Diocese of Washington  
March 12, 2022

Description: What does the diaconal formation program look like? Where do you begin developing a program from scratch? Focus is on what needs might be, lessons learned, questions, what's working, challenges, opportunities.

#### Highlights:

- We had introductions all around. Representatives from the dioceses of Idaho, Colorado, Toronto (Canada), West Tennessee, El Camino (CA), Washington DC, and Los Angeles (CA) were present. Every diocese seemed to be in a different place with its diaconal formation program, from early beginnings to well developed to in flux.
- Archdeacon Sue shared her learnings with the group out of her experience serving in multiple dioceses:
  - Overall, there is a problem (i.e. inconsistencies) in the US with its diaconal formation programs.
  - When she started in the Dio of Washington DC in 2012, there were no deacons.
  - When Mariann Budde was ordained bishop, she wanted a program to raise up deacons. A taskforce (including Archdcn Sue and others) developed a deacons program. Currently, there are 30 deacons + 16 in formation including Spanish speakers. A taskforce was necessary to make it work. Details of their diaconal formation program is given on their website: <https://edow.org/diocesan-resources/lay-ordained-ministry/exploring-a-call-to-the-diaconate/>
  - Three key words to creating a program: What? Who? How?
    - What? The diocese decided what the diaconate is, i.e. stating clearly what the diocese wants of and for their deacons. This statement was affirmed by the Bishop, COM, Standing Committee and helped them clearly defined the materials needed for the formation program.
    - Who is called? The Diocese sponsors a Workshop Day (9 am to 3 pm) biennially for anyone interested in the diaconate/diaconal ministry. One's priest and a layperson from their congregation must also attend with the aspirant/seeker. Speakers at the workshop include the Bishop and representatives from the Standing Committee and COM. Aspirants/seekers learn about the role and responsibilities of deacons. After the workshop, aspirants/seekers have 1 month to consider the calling and submit paperwork to the Diocese. The Diocese is looking for aspirants/seekers who have a passion in the world, who are already in the world, who can help motivate others.
    - How? Resources need to be defined. Dio Washington DC "built the ship [their formation program] from the ground up." Sue noted that the diaconal formation programs out of Iona, CDSP, Bexley-Seabury came later. The leadership of the

Diocese must buy into the program. The Dio Washington DC built a formation program that is a 4-year process. Generally, here are the steps:

- Attend Workshop Day and apply in the Fall after the workshop
  - Jan – June: go through local discernment process with congregation
  - Summer: become a postulant
  - Fall: meet with cohort to begin one year of academic work
  - Enter 18 month period of practicum, spiritual formation, human relationships
  - Fourth year: Ordination
- The group discussed challenges of the discernment process:
    - Recognizing the call to laity vs the diaconal call. There are similarities and differences.
    - Some discernment processes in dioceses are open ended (“Is it priest, deacon or laity?”), while others have specific outcomes (“I know that I want to be a priest”).
    - The language of discernment is tilted toward priestly ordination. Laity don’t claim their role due to lack of formation.
    - Should the discernment process for the diaconate be separate from priesthood? Deacons possibly considered as “less than” in a joint process.
    - Dioceses are all using different approaches.
    - Important that deacons and priests understand each other’s roles.
    - There is overall lack of understanding of the role of deacons liturgically.
  - Participants were asked to share how long their formation processes are and what the costs are to the postulant:
    - Toronto: 3 years; cost in flux, scholarships available
    - LA: 4 years; Dio pays ½ of tuition (\$3K per semester)
    - El Camino: 3 years; cost in flux, Bishop’s appeal helps with scholarships, congregations help, \$1K per year.
    - Oregon: 4 to 7 years; cost in flux, Dio pays for some things but not tuition, no financial barriers.
    - W. TN: 4 years; Dio pays tuition, 2 year formation with Univ.of the South (\$5K)
  - One person asked what participants thought about a 2-year formation process. Responses were:
    - That timetable is too fast
    - Deacons need time for theological education and formation.
    - If people already have an MDIV, the academic process can be skipped and formation shortened.
    - Continuing formation must happen after ordination. Dio Washington is using CDSP for ongoing formation after ordination, and they tell the newly ordained deacons what classes to take.