



ASSOCIATION FOR EPISCOPAL DEACONS

ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

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

Open Space Report: Online Discernment

Presenter Stan Baker, Archdeacon Diocese of Vermont

Prayer: contemporary collect #24 for daily work

He saw a need for a cohesive group focused on deacons; to provide clarity for the preparation of deacons. DRIVE, an effort to reorganize the administration of the dioceses of VT, NH and ME. Stan is the chair of the focus group as well as a member of the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee.

When he started the monthly on line discernment group, he cast a wide net, including a newly ordained deacon who is serving a “constellation” of parishes in the “northeast kingdom” the most sparsely populated area of VT, a deacon to be ordained in June 2022, one person in discernment, one restarting the process, and one person considering their call. Six participate in the group including Stan.

The Diocese of VT uses the Province I School for Deacons. The School for Deacons is a two year program that meets for four weekend gatherings per year. The process of formation has been a topic clarified within the group. What meets the competencies? The process has previously used a portfolio how to do that, and what goes in it?

In order to recruit/publicize the group, Stan “advertized” to the monthly on-line clergy meeting. In Province I 6-12-2022 is the Sunday of the Diaconate. Deacons are encouraged to preach in a parish, not their own, which has no deacon. In VT there are approximately 40 parishes and 13 deacons. This is an opportunity for people to see deacons as a vocation of action, and connection. This invites a different type of aspirant. Parishes who have deacons generate new deacons. A four year old girl asked Stan, “Why can't girls be deacons?” She had only seen male deacons and female priests. We need to demonstrate a variety of role models.

The format of the on-line group is prayer; a gospel from Sunday, ie. The temptation of Jesus; to provoke reflection and discussion, “How are we tempted?” check-in-“What kind of support do you need from this group?” One hour, meeting on Sunday afternoon 4PM.

VT has a three member Deacons' Council who assign deacon mentors at the time one is admitted to postulancy, and a liaison is assigned by COM to each aspirant throughout their process.

Questions: We have a similar process in the Diocese of Toronto which is off-line and out-of-line; deliberately not part of the process. Are there advantages/disadvantages to have the group on/off? A: In VT as Archdeacon, I can help smooth the way.

Can people be assigned to the parish that raised them up? Why send off our most active members? A: (specific to each diocese)

This group is open to people who are just thinking about vocation-especially those who have young families. You don't have to be a postulant.

In diocese (which shall not be named) two bishops ago, bishop was dismissive of deacons. People started in the process and were notified after years that they were not to proceed. People are still wary. Aspirants, priests, and parishes grieved.

A: Assure them that you are called by God, but not necessarily to the diaconate. In some places people have been under-valued, impeded, the process wasn't clear. One member in the on-line group was in a long, long process and became quite bitter-now about to be ordained, it has become a revelation of patience. The group's importance is to provide a supportive environment. The members are so compassionate with one another. Likewise, in the Diocese are quarterly on-line meetings of all deacons, with a theme; also mutually supportive.

How can we get the word out to priests to encourage aspirants to come forth?

A: We announce our meetings to the priests at the monthly clergy on-line meetings. We need to do more because, "People who see deacons, want to be deacons."

It's important to communicate with the bishop, travel with the bishop on visitations, participate in the pipeline of communication.

The convening of this group doesn't take much of my time; it's low energy/high yield.

Community of deacons travels with the bishop in MO. If there is no deacon in a parish, the bishop invites the deacon to speak to the parish, "What is the role?" Get your elevator speech ready-three minutes or less.

Closing prayer for clergy and people BCP #9.