



Difficult Placement of Deacons

Archdeacon and Director's Conference: Open Space Notes - Spring 2014

Every year, AED convenes a large group of Archdeacons and Deacon Directors for a professional learning lab. Using [Open Space Technology](#) methods to shape the discussion, these experts in diaconal formation and management of deacon programs provide peer review of adaptations made in their local programs, or raise timely issues for general discussion. Discussion notes are kept. These “Open Space Notes,” while often written informally, provide the best and most recent thinking on a variety of diaconal theological and management challenges by a body of experienced deacons with a wealth of knowledge. Names listed are those of the Conveners. Contact information to initiate further discussion may often be located in the [Directory of Deacons](#) published by AED annually.

Convened by: Bill Joyner / North Carolina

Scribe: Priscilla Maumus / Louisiana

Participants: Carole Maddux, Atlanta; Catherine Wagar, Los Angeles; Kristi Neal, Western North Carolina; Ron Goldfarb, Indianapolis; Geri Swanson, New York; John Gaskill, East Carolina; Veronica Ritson, Arizona; Michelle Doran, Maryland; Beth Mallon, Oregon; Jo Weber, El Camino Real

Topic was sharing of practices of making deacon assignments. There are many different practices, and there is no one right answer for all places. There is much dependency on past practice and on the bishop. Are there some best practices that we think are common to these scenarios?

Good outcome of this session: all appreciated that they were not alone and many had common concerns.

What causes deacons to move/be moved?

- change of rector
- difficult relationships within parish or with rector
- deacon comes to talk to the archdeacon, would like to
- work in a parish has a dynamic timeline
- deacons approached by another parish

Information from some dioceses represented:

North Carolina

Letter of agreement renewed every three years if rector is in place. If rector changes, deacon moves.



Oregon

Bishop no longer assigning deacons to home parishes. New deacons are aware of this change in practice, however approximately 75% of deacons are in their original parishes, some for decades. Attempting to move these entrenched deacons has been very difficult in the past. Often becomes a problem when a new rector is called. Additionally, deacons reluctant and parish priests reluctant to raise up deacons if they will be moved.

Maryland

Deacons are formed knowing they will not go back to their home parishes. Time/distance also a consideration. Parishes who want a deacon required to write to the archdeacon of deployment saying why they want a deacon. Bishop asks deacon where he/she would like to be, then proceeds. Expect deacons to stay 3 years in a parish, then change. Difficult deacons are handled on an individual basis. Big issue: getting deacons to retire. In Maryland, deacons end their assignment in May, have summer off, the start new assignment in September.

East Carolina

Rule when ordained, go to new parish. New archdeacon said his own experience helped him to understand his different role (moving from the parish where he was raised up, was warden, etc.) Electing a new bishop-- so in limbo for now.

Atlanta

Used to be that the deacons stayed in their own parishes, regardless of who is rector. Next bishop said deacons do not go back to the home parish. Created a book of deacons -- picture and ministry description to give to new bishop. Created list of best practices. Bishop re-vamped guidelines for deacons. Deacons in place for 3 years, then moved. Deacons have no say. Last summer all 20 deacons that could be moved (not too remote) were moved; lost some deacons in process. Priests were upset. Concept is good: separate deacon from a parish identity. Now have gone to a system where parishes apply for a deacon and say why they want a particular deacon. Have a grading system for applications: How does this request fit in to the diocesan plan, points for geography, parish need, understanding of what a deacon does.

New York

Having deacons talk to deacons who have moved and had positive experience can be valuable.

Northern California

Deacons in formation go to a new parish at the beginning of the second year for field placement

El Camino Real

Students sent to a new parish to do a one year community organizing project.

Arizona

Place deacons where they are raised, but seeing need to rotate or ask for a deacon to move. Formation: parish assignment for 6 mos. Select a parish as close to opposite of their own parishes Issues in rural areas, where being raised up, they tended to be the former junior, senior wardens, then new rector comes in.



Indianapolis

Deacons go elsewhere when first ordained for one year, then can go to own parish by mutual agreement. Challenge: how to attract younger people.

Louisiana

Deacons should not shop around (without bishop and archdeacon knowing). Bishop and archdeacon can feel out priests and help make match. Retired deacons should not be “lone rangers” and serve on altar without an understanding and agreement of bishop, archdeacon.

Deacons who move into a new diocese must contact bishop before contacting archdeacon or any rector about serving in the diocese. Should also undergo a background check. Non-parochial deacons can be a “slippery slope.”

Western North Carolina

Third year of deacon school is after ordination. Deacons do one Sunday in their home parish, and then go to another parish. Try to get within an hour of their home. They must stay there until Advent 1 of the next year. Near the end of that time, deacon, archdeacon, and bishop consult and make a new assignment. About half do not return to their home parishes.

Are there best practices to be commended, regardless of the assignment policies?

- Have parishes apply for deacons, giving rationale with a form
- Have deacons have a resume of gifts, strengths, and weaknesses
- Have a “book” with deacons, photos, experience, etc.
- Should be an understanding of how long, if at all, should deacon stay in parish which raised them up
- Have a customary for deacons so that deacons moving in get an understanding.
- Have new deacons, deacons coming in, or deacons moving go to a deacon-specific Fresh Start
- Have resources for retiring deacons so they can “retire with dignity.”
- When priest leaves, deacon should leave for a period (3 months?) before asking (the bishop or archdeacon) about an assignment back to that congregation.
- Be sure deacons understand that they are the “movable one” in a parish; rector has been called by congregation and congregation is not leaving if there is a disagreement/incompatibility.