



Non-Parochial Diaconal Ministry

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.

Facilitator: Deacon Charlie Perrin, Convener of Deacons, Diocese of Long Island

Number of Participants: 9

In many places a deacon is assigned to a parish or other type of congregation for a period of time that could be as short as a year or two, or as long as the deacon is active.

There are positives to this approach, some of which are these:

The deacon can develop close relationships with both the congregants and the Rector/Priest-in-Charge as well as other clerics on staff.

The deacon becomes attuned to the needs of the members and the community in which the congregation is located.

There are also negatives including these:

Unless vigilant, the deacon can become a pseudo-curate given tasks more appropriate to presbyteral ministry.

The congregation can lose sight of the fact that the deacon's primary relationship is with the Bishop and sees the deacon's primary relationship as with the congregation.

Non-parochial diaconal ministry offers a different approach and can take many forms.

As practiced in the Diocese of Long Island, deacons are assigned by the Bishop to a Deanery. The assignments cover multiple congregations and each deacon is charged with encouraging and coordinating joint ministries of the congregations in the communities served by that Deanery.

The positives of this approach include these:

The deacon's relationship with the Bishop is emphasized.

Where the Rector's or Priest-in Charge's focus is necessarily on each congregation, the deacon can focus on determining the needs of the surrounding communities.

The negatives can include these:

This model may not work in Dioceses where there are fewer congregations spread out over larger distances.



This model will not work if the Rectors and Priests-in-Charge involved do not cooperate. It takes time to work out the deacon's liturgical participation at each congregation

For such an assignment to bear fruit it is important for the following things to be taken into consideration.

The more the deacon knows about the area's political structures, demographics, etc. the better.

It is helpful if the deacon lives in the area or close to it. This allows the deacon to spend time there and makes meeting with authorities easier.

It is important for the deacon's liturgical participation on Sundays (and other times) be spread out among the congregations so that all may experience worship with a deacon participating and the deacon may build relationships with congregants.

Another model for non-parochial diaconal ministry was suggested for those Dioceses that have fewer congregations spread out over longer distances.

A Bishop could assign one or more deacons with the necessary skills to assist a congregation with a particular task. The deacon(s) would be assigned to that congregation for whatever time is needed to accomplish the specific task at hand. While there the deacon(s) would fully participate in the life of that congregation, both liturgically and otherwise. When the task is completed, the deacon(s) would move on.

The positives of this approach include these:

The deacon's relationship with the Bishop is emphasized.

This model will work in all situations (e.g. Dioceses with geographically distant congregations as well as Diocese with congregations in close proximity with one another).

The negatives can include these:

This model requires a goodly number deacons with a wide variety of skills.

There may not be enough congregations with such specific needs to keep these deacons occupied.

Conclusion:

One "size" may not fit all. Assigning all deacons to parishes, or to regions, or to task forces may not be the best use of deacons. Perhaps the best approach would be for all types of assignments to be used in each diocese as they are needed.