



Archdeacon and Deacon Director's Conference Spring 2015 Open Space Notes

Report from Open Space Group on Cross-Order Formation

Submitted by Mary Lenn Dixon, Diocese of Texas

Participants: Maureen Hagan, convener (Oregon, Academy for Formation and Mission); Cookie Clark (N. California); Marti Holmes (Alabama); Warren Hicks (Western Massachusetts); Janet McNally (Minnesota, School for Formation); Mary Lenn Dixon (Texas, Iona School for Ministry); Meg Engelson (Washington); Maylanne Maybee (Winnipeg, Centre for Christian Studies)

(NOTE: Summary of discussion is in regular font; comments by individuals are in *italics*.)

I. What is our experience with (or plans for) cross-order formation?

Experience to date is limited. Both the Academy for Formation and Mission (AFM, reported by Maureen Hagen) and the Iona School for Ministry (reported by Mary Lenn Dixon) have experience with formation of priests and deacons together, but both have only a little experience with including lay formation. The Centre for Christian Studies (Maylanne Maybee) has focused on lay and diaconal ministry.

AFM is for all church leaders, but to date has served mostly those for ordination; they have all classes together except one hour each weekend.

Alabama Iona Ministry School (AIMS) is launching a crossover school this fall, using the Iona Initiative program.

The School for Ministry in Minnesota has had an academy for discipleship and ministry for lay formation only, but is now adding formation for priests and deacons. Anyone can take one of the classes as a one-off for CEU.

The Iona School (Texas) forms bi-vocational priests and deacons together. They share the academic core courses, the first year "practical" courses in ministry areas, spirituality, liturgy and homiletics, and selected courses the last two years. Fieldwork sessions (the last two years) are separate, and deacon-specific courses are offered, in consultation with the Committee for the Diaconate (responsible for discernment).

The Bishop Kemper School for Ministry (Dioceses of Kansas, West Missouri, Nebraska, and Western Kansas) offers two years for deacons and three for priests, according to Maureen Hagen, who had visited there as part of her research for the AFM.

The Diocese of Washington is creating a new formation process for deacons. They will be working with Maryland and Virginial West Virginia and several nearby seminaries. They intend to bring lay leaders into the process in the future, but not yet as they start up this fall.

The Centre for Christian Studies is a 100-yr-old academy for deacons in the United Church. As principal, Maylanne Maybee holds a full-time paid job in United Church of Canada and is working to adapt the curriculum for Anglican students. Elements of the program are also appropriate to the formation of priests. It is primarily an adult education model with some diaconal formation and practical courses.

II. What are our goals and hopes for cross-order formation?

Baptismal Ecclesiology.

Cross-order formation may be most conducive to a shared ecclesiology, how everyone (all orders) lives out our baptismal ministry, so that in our various roles and functions we are working toward a common vision of the church's calling. Mixing the orders is a way of breaking down hierarchical attitudes. It would stretch us, and that's a good thing.

Warren Hicks expressed the need for a shared view of ecclesiology, articulated by the bishops. What are the things our leaders could do that would free the ordained for their proper ministries: priests for preaching and teaching, deacons for discerning and proclaiming and organizing to meet the world's needs, concerns, hopes.

Janet: one of the things we've found most fascinating (I'm facilitator for deacon cohort). Deacons and priests answer the questions and deal with the subject matter very differently. Really evident in missional church class. Important in hearing and respecting each other's voice and call.

More thorough discernment of call.

There was some interest in starting discernment and formation in a way that delays the question of orders, or at least leaves it open during the formation process.

AIMS (Alabama) will consider the first two years of their formation process to be part of the formal discernment process.

Warren Hick, a priest, has been charged with retooling the diaconal preparation process in Massachusetts and is now turning it over to a group of deacons. He raised the question of how to provide basic vocational discernment as part of the larger understanding of our Baptismal Covenant.

In the Diocese of Texas discernment is initially done as a condition of admission to the ordination tracks at the Iona School of Ministry, but both the students and the diocesan discernment committees continue discernment through the three years of school. Switching tracks has become easier as we have had experience with how the continuing discernment works. It no longer requires laying out of school for a year and starting the process over. Most recently, one of our deacon students moved to the priest track at the beginning of his second year in school, with the approval of the Bishop and the involvement of the Committee for the Diaconate and the Committee for Bi vocational Priests.

Maylanne Maybee noted the disproportionate attention the church gives to discernment for clergy; lay people should have discernment taken equally seriously.

In the Diocese of Northern California, there are two six-month series of workshops for discernment, according to Cookie Clark. Meg Engelson emphasized that since all are called, cross-training is important. You can learn as you go, that you don't need to be a deacon to do some specific ministry—that you are called instead to be a servant leader as a lay person. As a priest, she finds it disturbing when someone who thinks they have a call to the priesthood decides because of the circumstances of their lives to revamp and “settle” for deacon; that's not discernment. Part of what we're called to do as a community of believers, she said, is to be sure people can follow their own authentic call.

Warren Hicks also noted the need to develop lay followers as well as lay leaders. He suggested that without extending discernment to the call to follow, congregations place many unfair expectations on their priests. We need to counter a consumer mentality, where people think they are here to have their needs met, rather than to become hosts themselves.

III. What are our concerns about cross-order formation?

What is the end point of lay formation?

We discussed the end-point of lay formation: if laity and clergy are receiving comparable formation, will there be a sense of being “slighted” by the laity since they will not be ordained at the end? We mentioned the need to consider carefully whether “licensing” or “equipping” should be the goal of lay formation. We agreed that any licensing needs to be more than a reward for time in church or “churchiness.”

How will multiple orders (and perhaps varying timeframes) affect community formation for the school?

This has not been a problem where priests and deacons are already being formed together. The mutual respect and understanding of roles the orders are learning in community would be extended to the laity formed with them.

To the extent that programs of different praxis and different lengths might “interrupt” tight community, it would offer the opportunity to learn how to form intentional “porous” or permeable communities, which would be skills needed in our churches.

Different perspectives would enrich everyone's learning and build a more robust community. As Janet McAnally (facilitator for the deacon cohort in Minnesota) noted, one of the most fascinating findings is that deacons and priests answer questions in class and deal with the subject matter very differently. This is really evident in the missional church class. This is important in hearing and respecting each other's voice and call.

Community building needs to be intentional, in any event. Some have experienced isolation when they have gone to campus-based programs for shorter-term classes.

Maureen Hagen noted that community is not an issue at their school. People coming for different lengths or to take only one class often discover they have a hunger for something more and end up increasing their commitment.

Cookie Clark noted that the no. 1 emphasis at Berkeley is community.

Maylanne Maybee noted that the CCP has intentional community for those who are taking a full year. They have experimented with how to include others who come for short courses out of the curriculum—e.g., 5-day learning communities on topics like end-of-life care.

How do we do formation across large geographic spaces?

This may be even more pressing for lay ministers, who will not have ordination as an endpoint.

What happens when priests accept full-time, paid positions after formation that required no more of them than their unpaid colleagues (e.g., deacons)?

IV. Other notes and comments

Academy for Formation and Mission, Oregon, chooses PhD faculty for their academic courses, people with experience/special reputations for praxis. Praxis courses include teaching, small group management, and deep listening.

Most agreed that our diocesan preparation of laity for leadership roles is spotty and needs to be strengthened. Warren Hicks noted we generally don't even prepare our LEMs adequately.

One of the emerging implications of Province 1's new program is that they will start with a two-year model; one class entering each year. They need local options for formation of priests for contextual theologies. They are asking how they will start discernment on a broad level for disciples, delaying the question of orders.