



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

Pastoral Care for Retired and Non-Parochial Deacons

Facilitator: Priscilla Maumus, Louisiana

Scribe: Jo Weber

Attending: Bonnie Matthews, Connecticut; Kyn Barker, Toronto; Carole Maddux, Atlanta; Aaron Perkins, Maine; Rosemary Trei, Dallas; Jim Visger, Colorado; Veronica Ritson, Arizona; Sandy Turner, Georgia; Michelle Doran, Maryland; Scott Williams, Mississippi; Jo Weber, ECR(scribe); Rose Bogel-Albritten, Kentucky; William Fineout, Michigan; Thomas Tripp, Western New York; Jamsetta Glosson Hammons, Los Angeles; Russ Oechsel, Texas; Bill Joyner, North Carolina; Geri Swanson, New York; Linda Bronsted, Episcopal Churches in Europe; Charlie Perrin, Long Island; Lynn Johnson, New Jersey; Michele Whitford, Fond du Lac; Martha Seaman, Arizona. (25 people)

SUMMARY

Presenting issue: how to create a formal way of keeping deacons in community

The Elephant in the Living Room: dealing with the deacons who are reluctant to retire

Non-parochial deacons

Deacons without parochial assignments but who have recognized diaconal ministries

Problem: in some dioceses, they get lost – not on mailing lists, etc.

“MIA” deacons who have dropped out of community and have no accountability

Deacons over age 72

For many of us, being a deacon is the vocation of our retirement years, and being forced out of that precipitates a spiritual crisis; acknowledge that it is grief

Several dioceses have a rule: “If you are not available for deployment, you are not to serve liturgically.”

Problem: deacons who are resistant and not be willing to resign

How to retire – “courageous conversations” about the “graceful relinquishment” should be discussed early, perhaps even during formation

Resigned deacons should be invited to deacon meetings, retreats, events

One diocese has named a “Senior Deacon” from among the resigned deacons to provide pastoral care for the others

DISCUSSION

Comments and issues

Issue: Formal way of keeping deacons in community

Non-parochial: No accountability

Dioceses who have no idea who their deacons are.

A few deacons who are “MIA”

Some who are floaters

Over 72 who have left active ministry;

Need to begin the conversation early and often (in formation?) and during ministry about what happens when you can no longer physically do the job; need for “courageous conversations”;

What does retirement mean?

“If you are not leading people into the world, why are you dismissing them?”

“The closer you are to the Altar, the less effective you are as a deacon.”

“Can you be a “deacon in the world” if you do not serve in the liturgy?”

Acknowledge and deal compassionately with the grief process

Possibility that those in their 70s need to be in touch with personal spiritual development

Do COMs need to deal with the reality of the “resignation Canon” with those who are in their late 60s?

Practices and problems reported by specific dioceses

Diocese A: Appointed an over-72 deacon as “Senior Deacon” to provide Pastoral Care to the over-72 group and keep the AD informed

Diocese B: AD provides pastoral care to two elderly deacons; bishop and AD provide PC for deacon with terminal illness

Two dioceses: “If you are not available for deployment, you are not to serve liturgically.”

Diocese C: A retired deacon who is hostile and not willing to retire; urban deacons who do not receive extensions of ministry; many deacons who are ordained later in life experience their diaconate as their “retirement ministry”

Transition from “go-go” to “slow-go” to “no go”

Diocese D: No parochial deacons; retired deacons are “serving” in home parish, but no longer on visitation rota; “deanery” deacons – not enough to serve in pairs, AD uses bi-monthly meetings on a Saturday at different locations;

Diocese E: Request for a workshop on “how to retire” – “graceful relinquishment”, the spiritual aspects of retirement

Diocese F: Bishop has a problem with deacons who serve liturgically but no longer have an “active” diaconal ministry

Diocese G: retired deacons are invited to deacon meetings; some presentations

Diocese H: Structures in place to assist retired clergy – a chaplain in each deanery; post-resignation assignment to a different ministry; the “unassignable deacon”

Diocese I: Most of the ones who actually “retire” are those whose health is poor; problem of keeping track of deacons with active ministries which are non-parochial; problem of “deacons at the Altar” who have mobility and disability challenges

Diocese J: Dealing with a younger toxic deacon