



2021 Archdeacon & Deacon Directors Conference

Open Space Report: Raising the Diaconal Profile

Session #3, March 6, 2021

Meeting Notes: Raising the Diaconal Profile to encourage diverse and plentiful recruitment. Facilitated by Chelsea Stanton (postulant) and Deacon Linda Brown

We had about 17 attendees representing the dioceses of CO, MN, MI, ID, TN, Canada, ONT, ATL, KY, El Camino Real (CA), MA, San Diego (CA), Central PA, North. CA, and Buye.

During the introductions, attendees offered up their issues and reasons why they were interested in this session:

- Desire to bring diversity to the diaconate
- Have an aging diaconal community
- Want to see economic support for young deacons
- Wondering how to shorten the journey to ordination
- Desire to grow the ministry numbers and include people of color
- What can be done so that people can see themselves as deacons?
- Role of the deacon is not well known, and it's not understood by priests
- How to be more diverse? People (especially those young and with gifts for ministry) are discouraged from the diaconate
- There are barriers to the diaconate

During the conversation, various constructive ideas and comments were offered by attendees:

- The Diocese of San Diego created a 30-page customary for deacons and addresses the role of the deacon.
- When visiting other churches, it's important to preach about the role of the deacon and do recruitment during coffee hour.
- The Diocese of El Camino is revamping its diaconal formation and how to recognize deacons and raise them up in all places. They are forming people to go back into their culture. They are working to remove language barriers by creating a Latinx track. Discernment of call is not just at the parish level but also at the diocesan level. It's important to remove barriers to formation and ministry, especially if you have a family and are working (i.e. younger than retirement age) by removing the time limit for the process, letting people go through the process

on a part-time basis, offering hybrid online and in-person training, and making the training affordable.

- It would be helpful to have brochures about the diaconate with pictures of people representing different age groups, color, and ethnicities. People need to see role models. (“I can’t be what I cannot see.”) Would the Young Episcopal Deacons (YED) have materials they could share? Another person asked if there are any materials for Black deacons? (Someone then put on the screen pictures of deacons from the AED website showing diversity in age and people of color.)
- We need to encourage parishes to raise up deacons. It’s important to diversify the deacons’ faces in prominent positions. At convention, the deacons have worn buttons with AED logo that says, “Ask me about the Diaconate.” “Keep calm and call a Deacon”
- Others noted that some obstacles can be the diocese’s Commission on Ministry, which tend to be populated by priests and require grad level courses for diaconal formation.
- One diocese hired a diversity expert to look at its website (“deep dive”) to identify explicit and implicit biases that might discourage people from ordained ministry.
- One of the deacons from Canada asked the question, “Who is getting to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’?” They have a Diaconal Commission that spends time with its BOEC to clearly identify what a deacon is, i.e. not from seminary and what is their ministry.
- One deacon commented that they’ve observed priests stopping discernment to the diaconate. If that happens, the COM is reluctant to pick up the person. Also, priests may push the person to priesthood and not the diaconate.
- The discernment process for the diaconate needs to go deeper.