



ASSOCIATION FOR  
EPISCOPAL DEACONS  
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

## 2021 Archdeacon & Deacon Directors Conference

### Open Space Report: Deacon Retirement

Leader: Nancy Ford

Attendees:

Ochristine j, ottawa	Janet Tidwell-Dio ATL
Anita Miner Utah	Jeanie Beyer
Judith Crossett, Iowa	Kyn Barker-Toronto
Nancy Ford she/her	Marti Holmes
Betsy Bennett	Patti Sells
✓ Chris Ross - Canada, Kootenay	Rebecca Barger Dio. MO
Dennis Taylor	Rose Bogal-Allbritten
Gerri Endicott	Roxy MT
Jan Pearson	Sarah Getts - Arizona

Concept or word “retirement” not applicable in all cultures.  
Some other terms : elders, those who hold the stories

[Herbert O’Driscoll](#) -

Assessing wisdom of the role of the elder, for mentoring/ support, and other descriptions

### Retirement age aspirants/postulants/ordinands

Issue of ageism in discernment. Does age conclude active vocation?

Some dioceses, the application does not ask for age, and COM do not know that information. In Canada, it’s not an allowable question.

Nancy, Sarah - experience working with aspirants beginning discernment at age 80

### Ageism and Ableism

Intersection here, lot of work to do

Providing recognition and place even if adapting the function or role

Adaptions for someone who can hear but not speak and has no computer? - Write a card, arrange for a friend to be present when a call is made?

Nancy - Designate someone to keep connection with someone who has a disability

## Comments

Sarah (AZ) - deacon fills out a form, writes to the Bishop to talk about what they've noticed about their abilities, etc. Try to acknowledge ways to adapt in ministry.

Roxy (MT) - Consider taking the canon on mandatory retirement at age 72 to court. Justice issue. Can be used abusively to force people. Very hurtful. Losing church community. Pastoral approach - one example, talk with the deacon, one who was older, put on medical leave but not asked to retire. Think we're missing out on people with gifts, putting people 'out to pasture' when they still have a lot to offer.

Chris Ross (Kootenay) - Example of someone retiring and then immediately going back to work. Developed a specific policy / procedure for the process of retiring. Formal and public rescinding of covenant, and component of pastoral care involving Bishop and Archdeacon.

Marti Holmes (Alabama) - people serve until they want to stop

Judith Crossett (Iowa) - importance of contacting retired deacons regularly, including those retired, to remember them & continue being a pastoral touch point. Find ways to include people, support them to make it possible for them to do what they can.

Sarah (Arizona) - invited connecting active to inactive deacons as 'buddies' - great response to that invitation. Great stories coming out of that partnering, inviting elders to attend renewal of vows, deacon gatherings, to affirm the ministry they have. Their ministries are beyond what we see/know of, in their own contexts. Holy Spirit working in that.

[Rosemary Trei](#) (Dallas) - Some with no computer access, hard to help them stay connected with the group. Suggestions?

[Janet Tidwell](#) (Atlanta) - These things need to be said. We have a supposed 72-year retirement for deacons, but we write a letter that we're retiring but wish to continue (every year). Formally we're supposed to do this. We have a deacon in charge of staying in touch with retired deacons. Not too successful. Anyone have a formal statement or procedure? This is our first experience of having an aspirant over 72.

Kyn Barker (Toronto) - Issue of "Clergy" sometimes not being considered to apply to deacons, so that retired deacons not being included in pastoral care, etc. to 'retired clergy.'

Nancy and others - language changes to reflect that all ordained people are clergy. (Not 'clergy' and 'deacons') Deacons are full and equal order

## Discernment about when to retire

Chris Ross (Kootenay) - When I started to feel that it was a chore and I was too tired to enjoy it anymore

Anita Miner (UT) - I still have a lot of energy; I haven't thought about it, but who knows if others have thought it about me?

Christine (Ottawa) - Looking around to perceive whether I'm preventing someone else from stepping into it

Marti Holmes (AL) - When it's no longer a joy to serve, maybe time to pass it on

Roxy (MT) - important to have conversation / consultation / pastoral care around this decision. To have no discussion, that's not right.

Nancy Ford (ADC) - Conversation with Spiritual Director - so much cultural baggage around the topic

Judith - as teaching physician, for example, I wanted to retire before becoming an embarrassment to my learners

## Documents/Policies that relate to this issue:

Ministering post-pandemic around grief.

Nancy - Ojibwe example: each member of the family would go into the forest and wound a tree, and that tree and they would begin a journey of healing together. As the tree healed, an opportunity for the person to heal.

## Documents/Policies that relate to this issue:

- "Permission to officiate" or "License" - required documents in addition to ordination
- Current training in various areas (safe church, bullying, ...)
- Letter of Resignation - sometimes they are just filed and ignored, and deacons are encouraged to keep serving if they want to
- Annual Letter of Agreement to negotiate service after 72