

Report from Open Space

AED Deacon Directors' Conference

New Orleans, LA March 17-20, 2011

Topic: [Combined] Issues in developing individualized diaconal formation based on competency in an alternative (to Anglo) language and cultural context: [Steve Kelsey, Navajoland] AND resources and strategies for formation for Latino [Spanish as first language] deacons. [Joanne Leslie, Los Angeles]

Steve gave an extended introduction. He has been called to serve in Navajoland and a specific charge is to provide guidance for the Commission on Ministry and the new bishop on all elements of a process for discerning, forming, and ordaining leaders in and for the Navaho people. He has stepped into confusion. No one knows or can remember who named who as prospective presbyter or deacon, or what promises were made, or what provisions were to be in place for formation.

He quoted extensively from the Title III canons, with particular note of those for the diaconate. He takes from the canons that the fundamental enterprise is come up with process and tools to support emerging leadership in, from, and for the whole community. Discernment and learning for all. Preparation for ordination for some.

Navajoland geography [and perhaps culture] is such that there simply can not be a "school" or set program. People bring widely divergent educational backgrounds and life experience. A history of ministry crises(?).

Key Question: How to hold the tension between "system and linear process" and a peoples' givenness to relationship?

Need to take new approach: ongoing learning, not up-front-loaded 'education,' noting that this is not moving "down" to a lower common denominator but that a "rising tide lifts all boats. Raising, not "lowering" standards for all.

What are the diaconal competencies? How are they defined? How measured?

How does Steve factor in the distance of the visiting "white guy" from the indigenous community?

Tina Campbell remembered from her sabbatical time at Ft. Defiance that there was an impressive total ministry model in place and working. Steve; not so much today.

Joanne Leslie named her Open Space interest [after the "AND" in the topic paragraph above] and noted a lot of similar issues and concerns.

We have to be aware/beware of selling dominant cultural models about language, identity, and language learning. We have to be aware of privilege as a factor in both the diagnosis and the "solution" in this area.

Judith told the story of Miguel House in Albuquerque. Began as basic food pantry.

Clients became involved in staffing and the serving of others. Then they developed mutual language learning and evolved into a community of service and faith. From this one could discern and call forth more formal leadership, but not with the rigid requirements in place in the diocese at the moment.

In Dallas, the strategy; first develop individual leaders who lead people in ministry in their own indigenous culture. Then discern and prepare leaders for all the church—lay, deacon, priest.

Ft. Worth. There is so little in place they have the freedom to build from the ground up without constraints of old systems and processes. Exciting. Very open ended and unclear at the moment.

Steve. We need to focus on discernment and growth in ministry for all (in which leaders rise to support it happening.)

Ft. Worth recommended the program “Day of Discovery” and its subsequent 12-18 week self-directed practice of prayer and study. Developed in Ft. Worth. Now used at the front end of the discernment process for the ordained in El Camino Real, California, San Diego, and probably will take root in San Joaquin. It is open to all, with strong basis in the Baptismal Covenant, but in dioceses named is [too?] closely allied with ordination. Steve named the work of David Skeats in the Diocese of Litchfield, CofE. He speaks of building “Christian confidence” for all.

Competency can be seen in community. More behaviorally focused. Where does discernment of “the deacon’s heart” occur and how? Leadership is recognized in community and ministry competence is demonstrated in the wider world.

Sally Carlson named the practice of “Field Commissions” for officers in WWII. No West Point required, rather needed leadership recognized and authorized in the midst of the doing of it. She made a passionate statement that we in the US/Canada have yet to live with disaster which breaks everything out of the old boxes. It is a terrible way to move forward, but for us, maybe the only way that a new and vital church, diaconate, critical ministry in the world can come about.\

This lead to a discussion of the constraints of past practice; “boxes” and “hoops” we have become attached to and which need to be blown apart.

Steve invoked the model of apprenticeship. This is the essence of “The Seven” for which we were all excited. Another discernment question. “who is it, because of their presence, that more *diakonia* is happening in the community?”

Lou Thibidoux spoke of engaging suffering as a key to formation. She told a story of how the Poverty Initiative icons drew her into identity and solidarity with the suffering of the other—the nexus being the shared suffering of Jesus.

Citing Anthony Guillon’s work at GC’09—Latino ministry is a moving cultural shift. We need to watch out not to fix on something that is passing.

Joanne raised the issue of placing those in formation in congregations not of their origin, when there are language, cultural [and un-named, but there, class] issues.

Joanne named paralysis as a possible outcome in the face of so many complex and unanswered and unanswerable questions.

Tina recalled the statement made in our time of remembering: start where you are, but start. There is always something on which to build.

It was noted the powerful and not helpful dominance of models and practices of academia in the Diocese of Virginia, where VTS is such a commanding presence for all things formational.

Lou T used the metaphor of the watch; all gears must move in concert [mesh] for the watch to tell us time. All the issues here are parts of systems which we can not ignore or escape.

Steve. Let people in their leading, meeting needs, etc. define proficiency and competence.

Jane Root offered her practical measure. A competence; How would I know it if I saw it? How would we know it if three other people could see it and name it?