

A PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

for

THE SEVEN

An initiative sponsored by the



**ASSOCIATION FOR
EPISCOPAL DEACONS**

ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

THE SEVEN

a mentored experience in diaconal ministry for young adults

*Choose seven from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom.
Acts 6:3*

*Interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.
Book of Common Prayer*



Have you ever wondered...

...how to link your concern for social issues that our communities face with your faith and understanding of the story of God?

... about being a peacemaker in your community by building bridges between different people, groups, ideas, resources

...how to connect different faith communities with each other and with businesses and non-profits using social entrepreneurial skills

...about moving beyond charitable giving and episodic mission trips or service projects so that you and those who share your faith can find new ways to be neighbors with those who are poor, sick, lonely and isolated, with those who are strangers, and with the rest of creation

...how to integrate your everyday experiences in the world around you with your daily commitment to a life of faith

...how to deepen connections and make a difference in the place where you live

...what it's like to be filled with spirit and wisdom, and translate that faith into action

Are you one of The Seven?

The Story of The Seven

The story of the first seven deacons as told in Acts 6 tells of a rapidly expanding, mixed community of Christians and of the complaints that widows were being overlooked and not being cared for. The twelve apostles were concerned that they couldn't take care of this work and still pray and serve the Word. The young Christian community was also responding so rapidly that it was important that individuals be appointed who could help maintain unity between different cultures in the community at that time. The widows that the story mentions are Greek, and the disciples are, by and large, from the Hebrew community. So they chose from among the community seven people who were wise and full of the spirit to that the church would be addressing the needs of those who were being overlooked, both physical and cultural needs.

This foundational story from Acts 6 conveys qualities and characteristics of the ministry of deacons and also points to a profound shared responsibility for identifying deacons in our own community.

So what is The Seven?

The Seven is a part-time, 10-month hands-on spiritual and educational experience for young adults (18-30 years old) who want to engage in meaningful work and reflection in their communities while discerning their own vocational calls, in mentored relationships with Episcopal deacons.

- Participants serve where they live and engage in work and reflection that connects head, hands and heart to gain a deeper understanding of the needs, hopes and concerns of the world. Participants gain experience and understanding in a variety of expressions of diaconal ministry and a certificate of completion from the Association for Episcopal Deacons.
- Deacon mentors serve as companions as participants select meaningful work. They then accompany them through an process of reflection, education and spiritual growth. Mentors will also gain continuing education experience and documented credit from the Association for Episcopal Deacons.
- Online education and other interactive communication tools connect participants and their deacon mentors for group learning and conversation.

Background

Often we hear of programs in the church for individuals going to seminary, preparing primarily to be priests and pastors. We know in our changing world that missional leadership for a flattened world (one in which we see a level playing field or equal opportunities) requires different skills. These are skills that move us away from the top-down exercise of authority to on-the-ground, grass-roots engagement in our neighborhoods to strengthen local leaders and communities while building interconnected networks of people committed to human flourishing, to building the kingdom (kin-dom) of God. Deacons are charged by the church not only to show Christ's people that in serving those who are helpless that they are serving Christ himself, but also "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world."

The Episcopal Church has a tradition of calling, from her midst, living reminders of our shared call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. These living reminders are called deacons.

We know that young adults want to make a difference. This immersion experience is designed to do just that. It is not a simple mission experience or service project, but a way to act and reflect. **The Seven** is a way to engage with one's sleeves rolled up, while considering the place of systems and barriers in places where life's challenges seem insurmountable.

We know that young adults are at a point in their lives in which they are exploring and experimenting with a variety of commitments (relationships, education, work, faith) while learning and acquiring new skills, abilities and insights. During this period of exploration, they may observe more fluid or permeable boundaries between different groups, different social and political expressions, and different religious or cultural practices. They may be filled with a spirit that gives them a unique agility when it comes to engaging the intermediary and interpretive space between the world and the church.

The Seven proposes that some young adults may be deacons in our midst that we may gain new perspectives from them about the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. The program does not assume that all participants will become deacons, as this experience could certainly lead to equipping young people for service throughout their lives in very unique ways.

Core Areas & Approach

The Seven uses Action/Reflection, Service Learning, Peer Learning Circles and a Rule of Life to address the following Core Areas:

Identity

- Who am I?
 - How did I get here?
 - What gifts and experiences have brought me to this place in my life?
- Why am I here?
 - What joys and challenges have I faced in my faith journey?
- What is my community?
 - Where in my community do I see those who are poor, sick, weak or lonely?
 - What are the hopes, needs and concerns of my community? The resources and assets?
- What is a deacon, who is a servant?
 - Deacons as servants, bridge-builders, interpreters, door-keepers
 - Deacons in worship
- Diakonia of all believers.
 - History of Diaconate
 - Deacons as Icons

Core Stories

- What is the story (or Dream) of God? (Verna Dozier)
- What is my story? (Public Narrative)
- What is the story of us? (Public Narrative)
- What is the story of now? (Public Narrative)

Making Connections

- Community Organizing
- Community Building/Community Development/Community Assets
- Cultivating Deep Roots of Love in a Place
- Did someone say evangelism?
- Ecumenical and Interfaith Relationships
- Developing an authentic, grounded and humble presence among those who are disenfranchised or marginalized: street cred

Attitude

- What kind of servant? (Servant leader?)
- How do we seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God?
- The relationship of Justice and Mercy.
- How do we move beyond charity?

Who can be involved?

- **Participants:** Young adults ages 18-30 years old who want to get more involved in their communities and can demonstrate a commitment to working with people who are poor, sick, weak, lonely, socially marginalized, vulnerable or at-risk, or discriminated against. Participants may come from all different racial, ethnic, educational and socio-economic backgrounds and may have differing sexual orientation. They should be interested in and able to complete reading and writing assignments. They may work or go to school; have a spouse, partner or family; and live with family, at school, by themselves or with friends.
- **Mentors:** Deacons who demonstrate a commitment to accompanying and mentoring a young adult through a process of immersion and ministry experiences and subsequent reflection on their experiences. Like participants, they may come from all different racial, ethnic, educational and socio-economic backgrounds and may have differing sexual orientation. They may have a spouse, partner or family; live with family, by themselves, with friends or in a mixed household. While deacon mentors will take a leadership role, it is also expected that they will learn and grow as they accompany participants in their experiences. We will identify mentors who:
 - Have the time and will honor their commitment.
 - Have a love/hate relationship with the church. That is, mentors aren't intending to make deacons in their own image or ones that serve the church as we know it. Mentors are willing to be transformed and are willing for the church to be transformed as we engaged more fully in mission and reflection.
 - Are skilled interpreters and unafraid to exercise prophetic voice.
 - Are lifelong learners.
 - Are flexible and creative
 - Are committed to young adults
 - Are able to communicate across generations and facilitate intergenerational learning.
 - Are good at balance (of the demands of life)
- **Sponsoring Community:** Parishes, dioceses, campus ministries, seminaries and other ministries and communities that support young adults and that are committed to deacons and/or to a variety of expressions of diaconal ministry or service in the community.

A sponsoring community would be expected to write a statement about the ways in which they understand diaconal ministry, the ways in which they would expect to support the participant and mentor, and how they would expect this learning experience to make a difference to their own community.

How to get involved?

- Each participant, deacon mentor, and sponsoring agency or group should submit an application together. There is a section for each, but the application should be submitted as an integrated piece. An application form is included at the end of this program description.
- In this first year of the program, we will be able to accommodate 15 young adults along with their mentor-companions. We realize that we may have more applications than spaces available. However, for dioceses or regions that may be able to pay more than the suggested cost below, we may be able to develop a parallel process. In any case, we anticipate that the program will be repeated as soon as possible.

Costs

- Suggested: \$300 per application. As mentioned above there is one application for each participant and mentor and the \$300 is inclusive of both. This cost might be shared among participant, sponsoring community, and dioceses. For example, perhaps a diocesan budget line item for young adult ministry along with a line item for clergy continuing education could be used to help fund the experience
- This will cover teleconference and other electronic communication and some materials. It will not cover the cost of any suggested materials or resources and will not cover costs needed to execute and complete the ministry project.
- We do not expect that participants will need any more than \$300 to complete the program and we will work with individual participants and deacon mentors to help them identify available financial resources. We are able to keep the cost to a minimum in this first year, as we have a \$3000 seed grant for the cost of the online course.

Components/Commitments

All program activities will be coordinated by the Program Director in consultation with the Executive Director of AED and with the following groupings in mind:

- PARTICIPANT/DEACON MENTOR pairs
- Core Groups (consisting of a group of PARTICIPANT/DEACON MENTOR pairs)
- DEACON MENTOR Groups

PARTICIPANTS and DEACON MENTORS can expect the following components and commitments:

- PARTICIPANT involved in ongoing service learning immersion experience, determined in coordination with mentor, 3-5 hours/week
- PARTICIPANT & DEACON MENTOR meet in monthly face to face meetings for guided theological reflection
- PARTICIPANT & DEACON MENTOR engage in weekly contact by phone, email, and/or face/face
- PARTICIPANT writes a monthly letter to DEACON MENTOR reflecting on service experience; DEACON MENTOR provides written response
- PARTICIPANTS post weekly reflection online: may include writing, video, slide show, or audio
- PARTICIPANT will submit project proposal in early December
- PARTICIPANTS enrolled in 7 consecutive weeks of on-line theological education: 1) to support the selection and development of a ministry project; 2) to develop competency in establishing lifelong learning goals/plans; and 3) to learn about and reflect on servant ministry
- DEACON MENTORS participate as a group in periodic conference calls facilitated by the Program Director and/or the Executive Director of AED for all DM (4 calls). These calls will provide opportunities for resource and story sharing and a “mentoring of mentors.”
- Core Groups of PARTICIPANTS and DEACON MENTORS participate in periodic conference calls facilitated by the Program Director (6 calls)
- PARTICIPANT and DEACON MENTOR prepare and submit mid-year and final report
- PARTICIPANT presents project to Core Group (conference call)

Optional components (subject to available resources) might be a concluding service of recognition and celebration and periodic gatherings of all participants and deacon mentors.

Schedule

September

- Initial Conference Call for Core Groups
- Initial Conference call for Deacon Mentors

October Online education begins

November

- Online education ends
- 2nd Conference Call for Core Groups
- 2nd Conference Call for Deacon Mentors

December Project Proposals due

January

- 3rd Conference Call for Core Groups
- Mid-year report due

February 3rd Conference Call for Deacon Mentors

March 4th Conference Call for Core Groups

April 5th Conference Call for Core Groups

May Final Projects Due (conference call presentation)

June

- Final (6th) Conference Call for Core Groups
- Final (4th) Conference Call for Deacon Mentors
- Final report due

Resources

This list is not exhaustive, nor is it complete. It is anticipated that additional media will be incorporated and that some of these resources will be required, others suggested. For the purposes of this project description, the following resources will provide an orientation to the subject matter included in the program.

The Dream of God, Verna Dozier
God Has a Dream, Desmond Tutu
Many Servants, Ormonde Plater
The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order, James Barnett
Making Room, Christine Pohl
Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission, Christopher Heurtz & Christine Pohl
Abundant Community, Peter Block and John McKnight
The Wisdom of Stability, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
Missional Map-Making, Alan Roxburgh
Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood, Alan Roxburgh
New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of the Church, Ian Mosby
Holy Conversations: Talking About God in Everyday Life, Richard Peace
Missional Church readings edited by Craig VanGelder
Public Narrative readings by Marshall Ganz
NAAD Monographs, TBD
Journal Articles, TBD

Staff

The Seven is being offered by the Association for Episcopal Deacons with the following staff:

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