

The Story of The Seven

The story of the calling of the seven 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 to have people who could help maintain unity between different cultures in that community. The widows mentioned in the story 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 so that the church would be addressing the needs of those who were being overlooked, both physically and culturally.

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 vocations, 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.

They 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 are companions as participants select meaningful work. They accompany them through a 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 more level playing field or equal opportunities) requires different skills. These are skills that move us from the top-down exercise of authority to on-the-ground, grass-roots engagement in our neighborhoods. This strengthens local leaders and communities while building interconnected networks of people committed to human flourishing, and 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 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, and many already are. This immersion experience is designed build on 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.

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.

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.

For more information contact the
Association for Episcopal Deacons
PO Box 160
Bettendorf, IA 52722-0003
563-359-0541
episcopaldeacons@aol.com

Find us on the web at
<http://diakonoi.org>



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*