

Notes on presentation about “The Seven” initiative:

Attendees: Susanne Watson Epting, Maureen Hagen, Rod Dugliss, John Struthers, Gen Grewell, Steve Kelsey, Sandy Reinke, Douglas Argue, Lauren Welch, Sharla Marks, Sally Carlson, Dutton Morehouse, Barb Bishop

Sandy asked if this only a NE project to start with? Susanne responded that no, BUT the NE has a geography that makes it easier, and a core group that will support this initiative. But this first year will be open to other provinces.

Susanne shared that AED doesn't have resources to financially underwrite the full cost of this program. So, they have chosen to put resources towards a small pilot (15 initially) in the hopes that dioceses will pick this up and adopt and sustain it OR replicate it. AED may do a second group if there are dioceses willing to put some money towards the program.

We noted early on how important it was to pick the right mentors for young people; indeed, the mentors for the first group could “make or break” this project. So, how would we pick mentors? Rod noted that we need a set of criteria for choosing mentors, one that is recorded and available.

- Maureen suggested that the person must have a **passion for their ministry** and has **the time** to do this work and would have **the commitment to work with young people** on a sustained, on-going basis.
- Sharla noted that **age is not a major consideration** in choosing a mentor; young people can gravitate to older people with the passion.
- Susanne noted that one of the dangers is that we might be tempted to replicate what we currently have (turn them into us). Sharla commented that we need to get “out of the way” and let young people gravitate to the ministry that they are drawn to.
- Susanne noted that we should look for “**good interpreters**” of the needs of the world to the church. Interpretation is a weakness of current deacons that needs addressing.
- Lauren suggested **creativity and flexibility** as criteria to add.
- Susanne and Sharla discussed the challenges of connecting older people and younger people—bridging the gap about how to speak to young people as peers, not as elder to child. This suggests we should add a **communication component**, the comfort/ease of communicating across generational gaps. Sally noted that today's young people are “wired very differently” from their elders. It's as if the generations come from “different planets.” Kids are used to technology and many elders don't want to engage in that which results in elders speaking down to young people. She also noted that we might **look for deacons who currently mentor** young people.
- Sandy added that the mentor needs to be able to **role model the work-life balance**.

Steve added that we might want to consider a way to “mentor the mentors” since we all know that growth comes more naturally and easily in community. Susanne noted that this has been built into the proposed program. AED encourages the culture of “life-long learners” vs. CEUs and racking up hours in coursework.

Susanne noted that there has been no firm decision about the academic component of the program. The idea would be to look at the incoming group, assess needs, then design a course to support/respond to those needs. This will foster an understanding of the diaconate, but will NOT replace/supplement the discernment process. The current vision is to start in September with a core group, mentors. October-

Thanksgiving will be academic work/orientation, followed by launching into the community service. Sally wanted to know if the application was available yet; Susanne indicated not yet. It will cost \$300 per application (one application for both the mentee, the mentor, and the sponsor). The diocese can choose to be sponsor OR the parish OR a local agency, but it MUST be someone committed to the mentee's growth and development.

Susanne noted that one of the most exciting things about this initiative is the possibility of injecting more energy into the church, pushing it outside its "comfort zone" into a new vision of what the church could be out "in the world."

Gen asked about doing this program in different languages. Susanne responded that AED had not considered this at this point, but noted that it probably should be added in future. Steve noted that this current generation of young people is more bilingual than previous generations, so this should be a path that we taken in future.

Douglas asked about the specifics about how the first 15 would be chosen. Susanne said that the specifics should be available within the next month or so. If there are more than 15, then difficult choices will have to be made to select a good pilot group. There will be another round the following year. For the first round, the coursework will be paid for. So, in subsequent years, it is likely that the cost will go to somewhere around \$600. Sally asked about those not selected—would their fee, application, etc. roll over automatically to the next round. Susanne indicated that this had not yet been decided.

Rod noted that we will have a lot to learn from this round. Sandy asked about how that information will be captured and shared. Susanne noted that the first full, complete report will be coming out in fall of 2012 with some sort of interim coming out at next year's archdeacons/formation directors conference. In addition, Susanne hopes that this program can also be presented at the 2012 general convention.

Maureen offered to do her masters' thesis on this project, tracing its development, performance, etc. over its first year of operations. Susanne responded positively and was open to further conversation to "make that happen."

Several people discussed the possibility of regionally working between dioceses to create core groups to go through this program. Susanne said AED was certainly open to that sort of process, and that it would facilitate developing groups large enough for the program but still close enough to facilitate contact.

Steve and Dutton asked whether non-deacons could be mentors. Susanne said "no," this is an open, unabashed attempt to recruit new, younger deacons. Therefore, all mentors must be deacons.

Sally noted that this may lead to changes in formation processes to accommodate younger people and their schedules/concerns.

Steve suggested a question in the application process, "How will this work you are engaged in matter to persons who are not and never will be members of the church?" Susanne noted that she hopes this does lead to the church "reinventing itself."