
THE RESTORATION OF THE DIACONATE IN THE DIOCESE OF RUPERT'S LAND

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In 2002, the Diaconate Working Group (DWG) was formed by Bishop Donald D. Phillips as a response to Resolution C-6 of the 2000 meeting of the Diocesan Synod. The resolution, which was referred to the Diocesan Council and was carried at the January 2001 meeting of the Council, requested "the bishop to develop clear guidelines for the discernment, training and deployment of vocational deacons and to report back to the next regular session of Synod." Although there were, at the time, three individuals ordained as deacons under a rubric traditionally viewed as leading to the priesthood, steps to restore the historic diaconate as a distinctive and historic, but also contemporary "full and equal order" had not yet been worked out. The original members of the DWG were Rev. Dr. M. Louise Cornell (Chair), Rev. Rick Condo, Rev. Peter Flynn, Mrs. Linda Parsons, Bp. Don Phillips and Mrs. Shirley Smith). In 2008, DWG members are: The Rev. Deacon Valerie Christopherson, The Rev. Dr. M. Louise Cornell (Chair), The Rev. Canon Peter Flynn, Bp Donald Phillips, Mr. Ross Steer, Archdeacon Fletcher Stewart, and the Rev. Deacon Linda Stokes.

In 2003-2005, the DWG worked to produce a major report on its vision and mission as to the role, ministry, and place of deacons in our diocese; guidelines for diaconal selection, placement, and ordination; the ministry of deacons in the church and in the world; and the visible signs of the deacon (vestments, titles, etc.) According to the Ordo in the BAS (p. 655), the mandate of the deacon is "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world" and in particular, "to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely." The DWG also visualized deacons as icons of servanthood ministry in parish liturgy and ministry settings and in their work in the world outside the parish, and as servants who would encourage and call forth parish members to serve in "small-d" diaconal ministry as part of their baptismal ministry and/or to discern a call to seek to enter diaconal ministry themselves.

The DWG has since produced various documents to assist in the work of discernment of prospective deacons: The Diaconal Discernment and Formation Track [DDAFT] Chart which provides information on the steps towards discernment, selection, training, and ordination; the Competencies document, which discusses the skills needed by prospective deacons; the Diaconate and Baptism Covenant, which uses the baptismal covenant to provide guidelines for diaconal discernment; and a statement on Diaconal Capacities. The DWG has met once a year with the Diocesan Discernment Group on Ordained Ministry to discuss these documents and to make them available for that committee's work on diaconal calling, gifting, discernment, and selection. Over the past six years, members of the DWG have also produced a number of articles on the diaconate for the Rupert's Land News.

In 2002, DWG members attended the Diakonia Conference of the Americas, which provided a basis for the initial vision of the scope of its task. Since then, the DWG has produced a number of reports on its work to the Diocesan Council as well as reports to the 2004 and 2006 Synods; conducted three workshops on the diaconate at Faith Horizons 2003, 2005, and 2007, and a Parish Education Day on the diaconate in 2006; met with various national and international consultants and with the Executive of the Anglican Association of Deacons in Canada [AADC]; and developed the first diocesan ACPO for Deacons [ACPO/D], with one external assessor also present to provide “national” standing for the candidates’ discernment and selection.

In 2005-2006, the Bishop appointed the Rev. Peter Flynn as the Coordinator of Deacons’ Formation [CDF], to meet with prospective candidates for the diaconate and their parish priests, undertake an initial assessment of the candidates’ background preparation, and assist them in preparing to enter the process of discernment.

The DWG has also overseen the development of a diaconal preparatory course entitled “Interpreting the World,” offered in 2007-08 through St. John’s College Faculty of Theology. Subsequent to that course, in Spring 2008, the first of the six deacons under this rubric—Helen Hunter, Dayle Michaud, and Karen Terlinski—were ordained in the diocese at a service held at St. John’s Cathedral at which Deacon Maylanne Maybee of the Diocese of Toronto was invited to preach. Abraham Kuol, Eric Parsons, and Linda Stokes were ordained shortly afterward,

In Summer 2008, the six new deacons along with long-time deacon Valerie Christopherson met with Bishop Phillips to discuss the formation of a Network of Deacons [NoD] in the diocese; it is anticipated that a representative of this group will liaise with the DWG.

As of Summer 2008, the diocese has in diaconal ministry the Rev. Deacons Wes Barrett (Hodgson/Peguis Area), Valerie Christopherson (St. Barnabas, WPG), Helen Hunter (St. Bartholomew, WPG), Abraham Kuol Chuol (Emmanuel Mission, WPG), Ed Maddock (St. Thomas, Morden), Dayle Michaud (St. Mary Magdalene, WPG), Eric Parsons (St. Margaret’s, WPG), Linda Stokes (St. Aidan’s, WPG), and Karen Terlinski (St. Thomas, WPG).

Diaconal organizations with which the DWG is in contact include The Anglican Association of Deacons in Canada and the North American Association for the Diaconate [NAAD].