

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND NETWORK OF DISTINCTIVE DEACONS (CENDD) September 2023- August 2024

Introduction

2023-2024 has been the second year since the Church of England Network of Distinctive Deacons (CENDD) was legally constituted on 1st August 2022.

Looking Back

Steering Group changes

There have been further changes in the membership of the Steering Group this year: Deacon Abi Davison confirmed that she would not be continuing as part of the Steering Group; Deacon Alison Handcock, a 'founder' member of CENDD also stepped down this year. Deacon David Bean who has been our Treasurer and was responsible for drawing up CENDD's constitution has given notice that he will be stepping down following the AGM. We are extremely grateful for all that Abi, Alison and David have contributed to CENDD.

Deacon Angelika Bocchetti is currently on maternity leave and we are very grateful to Deacon Gill Kimber for temporarily taking over the administration of the website in her absence.

In November, we were delighted to welcome a new member to the Steering Group: Deacon Chris Sheehan. However, the Steering Group is still currently low in numbers and would benefit from further new members.

Finances

Thanks to our treasurer Deacon David Bean, CENDD finally achieved its own bank account this year and is now able to receive and pay out funds independently. All remaining funds which were previously being handled by the Diocese of London were successfully transferred to the new account.

A New CENDD Patron

Another significant change for CENDD this year has been the appointment of Bishop Pete Wilcox, Diocesan Bishop of Sheffield, as our new patron and champion in the House of Bishops. Bishop Pete takes over the reins from Bishop James Newcome who retired at the end of July 2023.

In a very encouraging initial online meeting with the Steering Group in June 2024, Bishop Pete told us he has always wanted to see a 'flourishing diaconate'. He stated his intention to be a vocal advocate of the Diaconate in the House of Bishops, to be accessible to the

Steering Group meeting with us at least once a year, and to enrich his own knowledge about the Diaconate through his summer reading. He believes that the development of a National DD Strategy would be entirely plausible and, to that end, encouraged the Steering Group to think about and clarify its understanding of what a 'flourishing diaconate' in the Church of England would look like.

Meeting with Rev Canon Nick McKee

In January 2024, the Steering Group had an online meeting with Rev Canon Nick McKee the new Head of the National Ministry Team whose remit is to encourage the development of both lay and ordained vocations. The Steering Group brought a number of issues of current concern for DDs to Revd. Nick's attention. These included the lack of possibility of stipends for DDs, the inconsistency that exists across Dioceses regarding awareness of and approach to the Diaconate, and the need for more appropriate DD training at both IME1 and 2. Revd Nick expressed his own support for those called to the vocation of Distinctive Deacon and supports the possibility of CENDD having a voice on the new National Vocations Working Group.

National Conference

In October 2023, the CENDD National Conference was held at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham under the title, 'Breaking New Ground: Creativity, Innovation and the Role of the Deacon.' The conference was almost de-railed by Hurricane Babette which brought severe flooding to many parts of the UK that weekend. Sadly, many people who had bought tickets were unable to get to Birmingham due to travel disruption. Fortunately, some were able to attend online along with other Zoom delegates.

In the morning, Richard Tiplady, Director of Mixed Mode Training at the Scottish Episcopal Institute was our keynote speaker. Positioning Distinctive Deacons as entrepreneurs, he delivered an inspiring session about the qualities exhibited by entrepreneurs, the challenges they often face and how an entrepreneurial culture is enabled. Many of his points resonated with DD delegates.

In the afternoon, four DDs spoke passionately about their own entrepreneurial work. Claire Robinson from Winchester Diocese spoke about her work in a large housing estate; Lindsay Smith from Bath & Wells Diocese spoke about being a pioneer deacon; Alice Smith from Chelmsford Diocese spoke about the development of 'Rooted Community; and Paul Hollingworth from Winchester Diocese spoke about his work as town centre chaplain. The session was very well received and post-conference evaluation showed that DD's particularly value hearing about the work and experiences of other DDs around the country.

Ecumenical Links

Ecumenical zoom meetings with Deacons in the Swedish Lutheran church had taken place regularly throughout 2023, largely due to the commitment and vision of permanent deacon, Pekka Mustikka. Sadly, we heard in August 2023 that Pekka had died very suddenly in June to the shock of all who knew him. One further planned zoom meeting took place in October 2023 but unfortunately Deacon Gill Newman was the only CENDD representative. No further joint meetings have since taken place.

Deacon Gill Newman also had the privilege of representing CENDD at the national conference of RC deacons in November 2023 at Hinsley Hall in Leeds which took 'Synodality' as its theme, following a recent report by Pope Francis. From the many conversations that took place it became clear that, despite fundamental differences, RC and CofE deacons also share many of the same convictions and challenges.

No CENDD Steering Group representative was able to attend Methodist Conference this year.

Training

Steering Group members Deacon Jonathan Halliwell and Deacon Gill Newman have both this year attended sessions of an online Training course called *Mission, Theology and Ministry for the Margins* provided by the Leeds School of Theology in partnership with Lighthouse West Yorkshire. Modules may be of interest and benefit for many DD's working with people whose life circumstances situate them on the margins of society and the course is recommended.

Deacon Jonathan has also been working with Lighthouse to provide a placement for interested DD's.

Social Media

The WhatsApp group, 'GoDeacons,' currently has 76 members and continues to be an important source of support for individual deacons and a valued forum for sharing experiences, information and inspiration. Thanks are due to Deacon Rachel Fielding who continues to monitor and develop our Facebook page.

Looking Ahead

We thank God for all that has been achieved in the past year, for the success of our national conference, for the appointment of Bishop Pete our new patron and especially for all new DD vocations in the Church of England. As we look ahead, we are conscious much remains to be done in the year 2024-5.

Steering Group We are currently few in number and pray that God will provide new members to share the work of the Steering Group.

CENDD Diocesan Representatives Following a reassessment of our 'Regional Coordinators' system, the Steering Group decided to begin establishing 'link' DDs in each Diocese. This remains to be developed.

IME 2 Training: The Steering Group is aware of the challenges experienced by some DDs in their curacies and is committed to developing guidelines that would be useful both for curates and TI's.

Conference 2024 An online conference is being planned to take place in November 2024 which will include a conversation about 'incumbent-level' status for DD's.

Developing a National Strategy for DDs in the CofE: in response to Bishop Pete's challenge, there is work to be done on developing a clear vision for what a 'flourishing diaconate' in the Cof E might look like.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank each member of the Steering group this year for their support, wisdom and encouragement which I have valued hugely.

I conclude with the words of Revd Nick McKee who encouraged us all in saying: *"There are about 30 million people in England who do not know God. If we are to reach out to them we will need all kinds of Deacons and Priests working alongside all types of lay people. DDs have a key role - being on the margins and fringes, if we inhabit those roles well, others will follow"*.

Gill Newman

Chair, CENDD Steering Group

12.07.2024