

Responses to *The Iona Report* (2016):
Reception, Critique, and Recommendations – a Report to General Synod 2019

The Iona Report on the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada was produced by a dedicated Task Force on the Diaconate under the auspices of the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee. The full text of *The Iona Report* can be found at <http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/iona-report.pdf>.

The General Synod of 2016 received *The Iona Report* with the following resolution A144-R1:

Be it resolved that this General Synod:

1. receive *The Iona Report*, including the *Competencies for the Diaconate*, and commend it to the dioceses for study and for use in review of their existing guidelines and practices with respect to the diaconate, sending their feedback to Faith, Worship and Ministry Coordinating Committee no later than October 2018;
2. request that the Primate convene a study of *The Iona Report* within the House of Bishops and report to the Faith, Worship and Ministry Coordinating Committee;
3. request that the Faith, Worship and Ministry Coordinating Committee review the Ordinal, in light of current scholarship and best practices, and present to the General Synod of 2019 a revision of the liturgical text for the Ordination of a Deacon.

The aim of this present Report on *Responses to The Iona Report* is several-fold. It will:

1. account for actions in response to the directives of the 2016 Resolution;
2. describe the uptake of Iona by dioceses and by the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada;
3. summarize key insights, critique, questions, and recommendations contained in written reports received from dioceses; and
4. outline possible avenues for further work, to be referred to the next Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee for their consideration.

1. Actions directed by Resolution A144-R1

The resolution, cited above, contains three directives, only one of which was able to be fulfilled in this triennium. *The Iona Report* was sent to all dioceses after General Synod 2016, with a request for feedback. Later that year it received graphic and layout treatment and was released in small booklet form. There have been two print runs of 500 each over these years, and these have all been distributed.

Of the dioceses from whom feedback was received, 7 were substantial in the form of: official written reports from the diocese reflecting conversations that took place within their college or community of deacons (4), purpose-created task force (1) or other diocesan leadership (bishop, executive officer) (2). Information was also received in the form of a “survey monkey” form answered by 5 individuals designated either by their college/community of deacons or bishop to do so.

With respect to the second clause of the resolution, it was not possible to convene such a conversation within the House of Bishops in this triennium, due to the busy agenda already in place for them.

Early conversations about the Service of Ordination of a Deacon came to play in FWM’s discernment of which liturgical projects would be the priorities for work in this triennium. It quickly became apparent

that a review of the whole Ordinal is necessary, and that all that could be accomplished on that front in this triennium might be the beginnings of some preparatory research. Therefore, there is no revised service of Ordination of a Deacon being presented to this General Synod 2019.

2. Activities in Conferences, and in the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada

In 2015, the Board of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada (AADC) established an 'ex-officio' position on the Board for appropriate General Synod staff, thereby creating a happy link between their work and that of Faith, Worship, and Ministry. The AADC Board has been helpful in disseminating *The Iona Report* and in stimulating study of and conversation about *The Iona Report*. At the 2017 Conference of the Association, in Victoria, British Columbia, time was provided on the agenda for discussion of the Report.

A conference on the Diaconate from Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Ukrainian Catholic perspectives, hosted by the Diocese of Qu'Appelle, also provided opportunities for engagement with participants. Informal conversations helped to correct some bibliographical errors and to offer suggestions toward expanding the scope of next phase developments.

3. What we heard from Dioceses

It is clear that the overwhelming majority of those responding to *The Iona Report* at this time are themselves deacons. A wider engagement is necessary, and, in its absence, the following remarks can only be seen as a thin 'slice' of experiences, reflections, and questions. This is not to downplay the content of the feedback, but to note the leadership of deacons in caring for their own vocational lives. Their feedback serves as a very helpful beginning, and points to the challenges inherent in trying to engage a wider conversation.

a. Appreciation and Insights

The responses open with expressions of appreciation and gratitude for the work of the Task Force on the Diaconate. The value of *The Iona Report* is cited for its contribution to a vision of the diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada, for treating the diaconate with "the attention it deserves." Feedback to the question, "How would you describe *The Iona Report's* theology of ministry as described in the Preface" is highly positive.

Most of the positive comments are directed towards the introductory materials and to most parts of the competency 'grids,' and, though not without critique (addressed in the next section) of particular areas within the competencies, there is a sense in which simply having something with which to engage and on the basis of which to have conversations and to engage in order to develop formation and educational initiatives, is itself a long-awaited high value.

- "It is one of the best pieces of work that we have on the Diaconate, thank you to all involved."

- On *Diakonia and the Diaconate* (within the competencies): “It’s absolutely essential that candidates for diaconal ministry are able to articulate a clear calling to *diaconal* ministry and show that they are called to it”
- On *Human Awareness and Understanding*: “clerics who are not self aware can cause great harm to the church, to others, and to themselves. It is probably one of the most important attributes that we try to screen for”
- “As an aspirational document it has much to offer. It holds out a vision of a diaconate that is engaged at all levels of the church and society.”

b. Critique

An observation expressed by all with respect to *The Iona Report* is that it sets the bar high. Some expressed gratitude for this. For others the bar is set too high and is too demanding, especially, as it is felt by some, in the absence of any national scheme for training, education, and formation. Some reported that they would not have been ordained if they had had to ‘qualify’ according to the competencies. Others indicated that without access to educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas, where even mentoring is a sometimes-insurmountable challenge, there is little point in using a competency grid. Still others noted that they understood the competencies to be aspirational and, in this respect, they are helpful, but need to be interpreted in particular contexts. A few asked what the actual mandate of the task force was, and what is its continuing scope, with a cautionary note that they would not welcome the imposition of a uniform program or set of expectations across the country (with respect to the competency grid).

While some appreciated greatly the emphasis on Indigenous self-determination and the work of the church in justice, healing and reconciliation, one group submission argued that this justice context and set of issues was privileged above others, and they would wish to see more social justice contexts referred to explicitly. At the same time, another group submission suggested that Indigenous self-determination, justice, healing and right relationship work is so important that it deserves its own category of competency.

Very helpful questions were heard with respect to the use of a particular ‘competencies’ framework. The observations point to something with which the Task Force wrestled – there exist different models of ‘competencies’ for use in different contexts. The Task Force opted for one way of thinking about a competency, which now seems to have been employed to the detriment of others.

“We would suggest that competency not only includes knowledge and skill, but also attitude, i.e. the ‘right’ attitude. Knowledge and skill can be applied devoid of good values without which, the application of good skills and expert knowledge can be disastrous. The right attitude is informed and formed through adopting and acting in congruence with Christ centred values such as love, compassion, respect, et al.”

This particular citation is suggestive of critiques of the 2013 document on Competencies for Priestly Ministry. In that context, however, it could be said that the competencies presumed to be only one part of a much bigger process, and of critical importance amongst the other elements, for example, are the Advisory Committees on Postulants for Ordination, which assess for “call, character, and charism.” The

lack of such an obvious counterpoint may leave the impression of *The Iona Report* reflecting a more cerebral process of knowledge and skill acquisition.

One diocesan response cautioned that the vision of the diaconate in *The Iona Report* is not truly a theological vision, but is, rather, a 'national vision', and that better and bolder work needs to be done to provide a theological leadership for the diaconate. "We need a concise theological vision statement of the diaconate precisely *because* there is so much diversity in practice." Similarly, it was felt by some that not enough attention was paid to the liturgical role of the deacon, including diaconal preaching.

One diocese made helpful mention of existing additional resources (bibliographies and the like) that could be incorporated into this work.

These points of critique speak to a need both to review the competencies and to continue to develop this whole area of work with more and better resources to assist in theological thinking as well as in the local development of discernment and formation-and-education programs.

Over half of the submissions contained very helpful requests for re-organizing the categories in the Competencies sections, to emphasize one or more aspects, or to reflect what they view as more accurate descriptions of what is actually possible 'at selection', 'at ordination', 'for lifelong learning.' Specific suggestions for reframing questions or particular competency descriptions are highly valuable. This is the most dense of the feedback, containing very helpful particular points, and cannot be easily summarized here, but all details will be forwarded to whatever next working group or task force picks up the work.

One diocese offered, as its 'response,' a full and extremely detailed learning framework based on measurable outcomes, along with a curriculum for training – essentially a large diaconal educational manual. It may be desirable to share these diocesan resources more widely, so to have diocesan leaders in matters diaconal learn from each other.

A few samples from the comments:

- More could be done to emphasize that "a deacon's ministry is often completely outside the normal reach of the faith community."
- There is a need to "place greater emphasis upon the relationship of the deacon in the ministry of Word and Sacrament.... The ministry of the deacon is threefold: Word, Sacrament, and Service.... It could be made more explicit that 'word' and 'service' function most profoundly as foundational theological diaconal principles only because they are grounded in liturgical expression and that deacons, as a rule, should be active in liturgical leadership."
- "special attention should be paid to the preaching function of the deacon."
- "How do we deal with inquirers? We need a pre-selection process."
- "Priests have education funds, deacons do not. How can we cover the costs for education?"

c. Questions and Recommendations

- "It is well done and only needs *to be kept up to date* as further thinking and the work of the Holy Spirit continues to revive and form the shape of diakonia"

- “The competencies are done well; however, we would like to see material on how assessment of those competencies might be carried out. Who ought to be doing those assessments and how can they be done in a way that will provide feedback for growth? How do assessments begin for wide ranges of abilities and wide ranges of understandings of the diaconate?”
- It is difficult for a document such as this which is a national endeavour to integrate diocesan input and engage the HOB in a meaningful and expeditious manner. However COGS may be the place for intentional work on it. The crafting of updated/new ordination service for a Deacon need to be done much sooner than later. Plus the question of direct ordination has become critical. In this time of various shifts/changes within the church it is important to demonstrate clarity on vocations and orders. Confusion around the diaconate as "transitional deacons" who are not called to the different ministry of a "Distinctive" Deacons is both insulting and demeaning to both orders.
- “Common standards for education and formation are required for ordination, while still allowing flexibility to take into account local needs and individual life experiences. This will be necessary to allow for the full restoration of the Order across the country, and to enhance the credibility of the Order.”
- We need “a theological training program that is accessible by distance and of a high quality as well as clearly defined resources for formation.”
- “We are looking forward to the development of a study guide and the supportive resources to accompany the competencies. However, we have concerns about how the information in the report and in the study guide will be educationally presented and by whom.”
- “The flexible approach outlined in the introductory section needs to be made more obvious.”

Above all of these particular recommendations, and expressions of desire for what the next phase of work ought to be, is a call for the whole church leadership – particularly bishops and priests – to learn about the diaconate. “Many priests, and even bishops, do not fully understand the differences in roles between deacons, priests, and lay readers. Additional conversations need to take place so to build trust and clarity between the vocations, and relationships so to know how to serve the community both within and outside of the church.”

Though not in the form of a concrete recommendation, the call for this broad education-of-the-whole-church resonated in most of the responses. How to engage such a process is something to be pondered, both by the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee as well as for diocesan leadership, particularly bishops who bear these responsibilities.

4. Possible Further Work

“We like Section 6, “Lively Questions.” We think it is important to continue to ask thought provoking questions about all ordered and lay ministry and to be willing to adapt all ministry to the broad spectrum of needs in contemporary culture. We have a few lively questions of our own. What is the intent of the Task Force, regarding the use of this report, going forward? Is the report, and particularly the competencies, intended to be used as the basis of formation in diaconal programmes across Canada? If what is what is intended, how does the Task Force see that being implemented on a National scale?”

This general comment points to the need for better expression of clarity in purpose and objective, which, going forward, will be something that can be built upon for an evolving project.

This summary, as well as the actual feedback reports, will be presented to the FWM committee early in the next triennium, with the express purpose of feeding a next phase of work. The following elements should be considered:

- A textual review of *The Iona Report's* Competencies, with critical re-writing
- The development of additional resources and collection of existing resources into a resource tool kit on the diaconate and the ministry of deacons
- Review of the Ordinal will take place informed by input from the Iona process as one set of inputs along with other resources from research and consultation
- The question of how to engage a wider conversation about the diakonia of the whole people of God, the ministry of deacons, and diaconal vocation and theology, should be considered
- Ongoing consultation with the Board of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada is presumed and highly valued

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