

2020 Diocesan Convention Report
Archdeacon's and the Community of Deacons report
Submitted by The Venerable Rebecca Barger

It's been a little over one year since my appointment to service as Archdeacon in the Diocese of Missouri. All in all, it really has been a very good but busy year—aside from the chaos and disruption of Coronavirus.

In December of 2019, I set out with a plan to visit each deacon in their parish settings one Sunday a month. That initial schedule would have taken me a year to complete. I got to three visits before the pandemic hit. However, it is my sincerest hope to resume those visits again once we are back worshipping in our buildings.

In January, the Community of Deacons gathered for a day of bonding and education. We invited Spiritual Director Mary Taylor, to be our guest speaker on the benefits of Spiritual Direction for deacons in the context of their life and ministry. Our plan at the start of 2020 was to hold these gatherings quarterly. We will return to this plan or one very similar, once we can safely return to holding large group meetings.

In early March, I attended the Archdeacons and Deacon Directors Conference in Jacksonville, FL. This conference was sponsored by the Association of Episcopal Deacons, a national organization for deacons. At this conference, I gleaned information and insight as to how I could best define my role as Archdeacon in the diocese in cooperation with our new Bishop. Many of the sessions were designed for participants to share common ministry aspirations and goals, in which we discussed successes and failures at length, as well as possible solutions for effectiveness and efficiency. It was also an opportunity to build relationships with other deacons throughout our country. It was both a very productive and beneficial conference.

As Archdeacon, I had the privilege of participating in the Ordination and Consecration service of Bishop Deon Johnson in June. With tears of joy on my face, I was a tangle of mixed emotions in the awareness of the multitude who were unable to be physically present at this landmark event. I did my best to bring those individuals to mind, as my small way of bringing them spiritually into that joyous and sacred space.

In this past year, I had the pleasure to serve with Bishop Smith and Bishop Deon in various “special” services, including Ordinations, Celebrations of New Ministry, and Renewal of Vows. One of the goals Bishop Deon and I are working together on, is to increase the “visibility” of the deacons throughout the diocese in worship and in ministry. Our goal is to have at least one deacon present with the Bishop (and his staff) for his parish visitations, as well as deacons participating in the Celebration of New Ministry and other services.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Community of Deacons have been gathering via Zoom. In the early months, we met weekly on Fridays, in addition to the weekly Wednesday Clergy Calls. These gatherings were vital as it provided us with a venue for support and sharing of joys and concerns as we worked through the challenges of COVID-19 in our ministry areas and parish families. We also incorporated into this time the opportunity to highlight each other's various ministries or activities. We had a Community Zoom-session with Bishop Deon in August, and then in September, we enjoyed a Quiet Day of reflection and rest via Zoom with the Bishop. It proved to be helpful in recharging or boosting our drained “ministry batteries during the era of COVID-19.” Currently, we are Zoom-gathering on a monthly basis on a weekday evening to accommodate those deacons who also work outside the church (a.k.a. secular employment).

Each month, I meet with Bishop Deon as well as participating in weekly meetings with other members of Bishop Deon's staff, all via Zoom. Under the guidance of Bishop Deon, a "Deacon's Customary" has been created specifically for the Diocese of Missouri. This document allows for some creative flexibility in preserving various "local customs," while still providing guidelines that offer continuity and a standard of order in compliance with the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. Additionally, since deacons work directly under the authority of the diocesan bishop, an overhauled template was prepared for Covenant of Call letters (formerly known as Letters of Agreement.) These letters are a three-party agreement between the bishop, deacon, and parish priest, that outline the work and ministry that the deacon will do.

As for the Community of Deacons, most of us have had to rethink how we were to do our ministries during this past year. But generally speaking, we have found creative ways that allowed us to continue our vital ministries to those whom we serve. I am deeply honored to be counted among my fellow deacons and cherish their love, support, and encouragement this past year. The Diocese of Missouri is very blessed with a gifted, mighty, and tenacious community of deacons who are dedicated to building up all members of God's wonderful and beautiful creation. Please join me in extending an expression of heartfelt gratitude for the dedication and work to the following:

The Rev. Jerre Birdsong	St. Mark's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Betty Bowen (retired)	Trinity Episcopal Church, St. Charles
The Rev. Barbi Click	Christ Church Cathedral
The Rev. Dr. Deb Goldfeder	Episcopal Church of the Advent
The Rev. Dr. Paula Hartsfield	Grace Episcopal Church, Jefferson City
The Rev. Chester Hines	Holy Communion Episcopal Church
The Rev. Dayna Jewson	St. Luke's, Manchester, & Good Shepherd, T&C
The Rev. Harry Leip	Trinity Episcopal Church, CWE
The Rev. Kevin McGrane	St. John's Episcopal Church, Tower Grove
The Rev. Susan Naylor	Christ Church Cathedral
The Rev. Patricia Peets	Trinity Episcopal Church, St. James
The Rev. Schelly Reid-Levy	Christ Episcopal Church, Rolla
The Rev. Janet Schisser	Calvary Episcopal Church, Columbia
The Rev. Jan O'Neil (retired)	

Faithfully submitted,
The Ven. Rebecca Barger