

The Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey School for Ministry

This second report from the NJ School for Ministry to Convention marks the beginning of our transition from a pilot/beta-tested program of formation to a true ministry of the Diocese of New Jersey. This report will present

- general background,
- our statement regarding our transition to a recognized ministry of the diocese,
- an update on program elements,
- our “report by the numbers,” and
- 2023 priorities.

General Background

The NJ School for Ministry strives to form students for lay and ordained ministry as faithful Episcopal servant leaders and shepherds of God’s people in this post-Christendom, ever-changing world.

We are not (and do not intend or pretend to be) “seminary on a small scale” or even “seminary on a lower budget.” We do not award the Master of Divinity degree and our students do not have the opportunity to share meals, communal living, and physical worship space daily. Even so, we seek to prepare leaders for lay and ordained Episcopal Church ministry who:

- Engage seriously with God’s living and active Word as set forth in both the testaments, including learning to read and hear scripture “from the underside”, and who are prepared to help others do the same. To that end, the School for Ministry requires students to successfully complete at least 7 courses in the study of scripture; School for Ministry scripture courses incorporate the perspectives of diverse scholars, including James Cone, Willie James Jennings, Rosemary Reuther, Frank Yamada, Katie Cannon, etc.
- Demonstrate critical knowledge of and communicate effectively about significant Christian texts, traditions, theologies and practices.
- Engage critically and creatively with a diverse church and world, with particular attention to ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, theological and gender differences.
- Articulate an understanding of their religious identity and cultivate ongoing practices of spiritual growth that promote health and well-being.
- Reflect upon, reimagine and exercise practices of parish leadership and ministry to address pressing issues in the post-Christendom church and world.
- Develop the spiritual practices and practical skills that support and sustain communities of learning, mutual support, and collaboration across differences.

The NJ School for Ministry is a hybrid program of formation, with online synchronous classes, practical and supervised ministry experiences, and in-person intensive “Gathering Weekends.” Three-and-a-half-years young, we have a program that is strong and that satisfies canonical requirements for ordination. We continue to grow in our prayerful, Spirit-guided understanding of the task before us. Though we are on a well-lit pathway, we do not view our work as fixed for all time. No formation program will be perfect forever. We need always to be attentive and ready to adapt, even while holding firm to these guiding principles:

1. The School for Ministry, in its substance and structure will be guided by the needs and experiences of the People of God in the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey and diocesan leadership.
2. Students, faculty, those who supervise practical ministry experiences, and advisors to the School for Ministry should reflect the diversity of the people of God in New Jersey.
3. All leaders (lay and ordained) in the post-Christendom Church must be prepared by academic study and a strong life of prayer, and must have ready opportunities for supervised experiences that prepare them for faithful ministry.
4. Scripture must occupy a place of priority in the formation process for all leaders in ministry.
5. Lay and ordained leaders should be formed side-by-side. Nothing about the spiritual or missional life of the church should be reserved for ordained leaders.
6. Academic courses and practical ministry experiences must have clearly articulated demonstrable objectives. In academic courses, students journeying toward ordained ministry must demonstrate satisfactory attainment of those objectives by the completion of an instructor-designed and program-approved final project.
7. Academic courses should be taught by academics who share the formative mission and pedagogical approach of the School for Ministry. Courses in “the practice of ministry” must be taught by persons currently engaged in ministry.
8. Practical Ministry experiences should be supervised by skilled lay and ordained ministers who are committed to the ongoing process of developing in themselves and in others the skills needed for servant leadership in a post-Christendom world.

The School for Ministry leadership is accountable to the Bishop. We are also attentive to our duties to the students, the Commission on Ministry, the Committees on the Priesthood and on the Diaconate, the Standing Committee, and to the People of God. To each of these, we must confirm that those presented for ordination are prepared in accord with the canons of the Church and that they have demonstrated readiness to satisfy the responsibilities set forth for each order in the catechism and in the rites of ordination. We are also mindful of our duty to confirm that those presented for certification under Title III Canon 4 as Lay Pastoral Leaders, Lay Catechists, Lay Worship Leaders, Lay Preachers, and Lay Evangelists have been prepared in accord with the expectations of our Bishop.

It should be noted that the establishment of our diocesan school of formation for lay and ordained ministry has taken place alongside notable changes in the lives of our Episcopal seminaries. Theological education and formation for ministry intersect in significant ways, but the two works are not identical. The NJ School for Ministry strives to respect those intersections while remaining attuned to the breadth of formative experiences needed for ministry in a post-Christendom world.

The NJ School for Ministry received definite benefits by opening as a pilot program. This allowed us to “open the doors” two years after a very broadly conceived proposal for the School for Ministry was first presented in August 2017. In August 2019, a contingent of 14 ready and eager students accepted the invitation to embark upon a beta-test program that incorporated a reasonably well-developed but still evolving array of formative experiences, each with required demonstrable competencies suited to ministry in a post-Christendom world. The pilot program approach also allowed us to strengthen each element of preparation for ministry as we listened to the feedback from students and internship supervisors, and as we learned from other diocesan programs of local formation as they expanded or declined. This approach also allowed us to clearly define the space in which we exist. We are not – and do not intend to be – a seminary; we are a school solely focused on preparing lay and ordained leaders for ministry as Episcopal servant leaders.

The NJ School for Ministry also experienced certain disadvantages by opening as a pilot program. We were so caught up in doing the work that we could not pay sufficient attention to spelling out for our clergy and laity the breadth of what we were doing. Consequently, we have been unable to garner broad recognition as an actual ministry of the Diocese of New Jersey and are still too often viewed as the experiment or ministry of one individual or small group.

From the beginning, we understood the NJ School for Ministry to represent Bishop Stokes’ commitment to assuring competent and well-equipped servant leaders for our beloved Diocese of NJ for the foreseeable future. The world, the realities of our post-Christendom existence, and the challenges faced by residential seminaries necessitate new pathways of formation, and the NJ School for Ministry was always intended as one of those new pathways.

The present realities of the Diocese of NJ are that (1) we have a great need for more priests committed to serving the People of God in NJ; (2) we need more deacons committed to the breadth of diaconal ministry in NJ, including the critical work of interpreting for the church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world outside the local church, as well as walking with the local church as it discerns how God calls it to respond to those needs, concerns, and hopes; and (3) we also need many well-formed lay leaders prepared to take up the ministries authorized under Title III. The NJ School for Ministry is Spirit-guided ministry of the diocese addressing those needs, and it must be recognized as such.

There are very practical reasons the NJ School for Ministry must be recognized as a diocesan ministry. We cannot recruit a steady stream of students from across the diocese unless clergy understand the place of the program. We cannot retain a competent and diverse faculty, mentors, and internship supervisors without a steady stream of students. Though the School for Ministry program is strong, the School is not presently adequately staffed. Current staffing includes only a part time Director. Proper staffing should include a full time Director, reporting to the Bishop; a part time Assistant Director and a part time Administrative Assistant. The responsibilities of each position are set forth here:

- The Director provides long-term vision and everyday management of the school’s programs, including supervising School for Ministry staff; establishes the requirements and demonstrable competencies of each element of School programs (including academic courses, internship placements, Gathering Weekends, spiritual living, and practical ministry experiences) in accord with the canons and other established standards; continually assesses and addresses the quality of school’s programs; recruits, prepares, and retains a stable faculty reflective of the diversity of our diocese; monitors student progress through the program; improves the accessibility of the School’s

formative programs, with particular regard for students whose primary language is other than English; works with and provides recommendations to the Commission on Ministry, the Committee on the Priesthood, the Committee on the Diaconate, and the Standing Committee to support discernment of each student's call to ministry. The Director must be deeply attuned to the changing needs and plans of the diocese and capable of envisioning and implementing those improvements to the School for Ministry program that assure formation of lay and ordained servant leaders for the future.

- The responsibilities of the part-time Assistant Director include student recruitment, which begins with scheduling and managing the Episcopal Servant Ministries seminar offerings; the development and ongoing management of a communications program so that clergy and laity alike understand the place of the School for Ministry in our diocesan future; coordination with diocesan finance to facilitate proper invoicing of student and crediting of tuition and scholarship receipts; and oversight of the technology platform used for student recruitment, submission of Applications for Admission, course registrations, presentation of course materials and submission of course assignments, and maintenance of all student records.
- The responsibilities of the part time Administrative Assistant include daily management of the Populi technology to facilitate efficient delivery and tracking of School for Ministry programs, and online student record maintenance and accessibility, and for all the usual administrative services of the program (e.g., managing email and phone messages, publishing Episcopal Servant Ministries seminar schedule and program schedules, managing the details of Gathering Weekends and orientation session, maintaining records, creating preliminary drafts of standard Letters of Agreement for instructors and for internships, etc.).

We cannot hope that the School for Ministry will find adequate funding for these positions unless the NJ School for Ministry is recognized as a true ministry of the diocese. The time is now.

Update on Program Elements

In our report to the 238th diocesan convention, we provided descriptions of the core elements of the School for Ministry's program: spiritual formation, academic study, practical preparation for ministry, Clinical Pastoral Education, and the experience of strong Christian community. These essential program elements have remained constant. Even so, we expanded delivery of three of these formative elements: (1) the academic course scheduling; (2) academic course offerings; and (3) Clinical Pastoral Training. Information on these three programmatic updates is provided below, as is information regarding the School for Ministry's efforts to address the need to offer formation for ordained ministry to persons whose primary language is other than English.

Expanded academic course offerings: In 1949, Howard Thurman wrote this: "How different might have been the story of the last two thousand years on this planet grown old from suffering if the link between Jesus and Israel had never been severed." Over the last year, we have all seen growing evidence of antisemitism. As antisemitism may be the oldest hatred at work in today's world, we were inspired this year to add the course "Jews and Judaism in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)" to the School for Ministry course catalogue. The RCL exposes us to about twenty per cent of the Bible, including selections inevitably deal with Judaism and Jews. This course is intended to help students avoid preaching that unintentionally supports antisemitism. This course was offered during the recently concluded winter session of the School for Ministry, and was taught by Professor Ellen Charry, formerly of Princeton Theological Seminary. This will now be a required course for all students. It is also our hope to open a session of this course for those outside of the School for Ministry who see this as valuable to their

ministry.

During the spring session that will begin on Wednesday March 15th of this year, the School for Ministry is offering another new course, taught by Rabbi Joel Shaiman. In "Jewish Approaches to Reading the Pentateuch and the Prophets," students will seek to understand the traditional Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Bible – and to thereby come closer to that of Jesus and his first century followers. Jewish and Christian understandings of these texts and interpretations will be compared and contrasted.

Expanded delivery of academic courses: From the beginning, the School for Ministry hoped to attract a broader array of the faithful to formation for the vocational diaconate. As we worked our way through the beta-test years, we recognized that the scheduling of academic courses on Saturdays presented an obstacle for parents of young children, even when they experience the call to the vocational diaconate. To address that problem and related issues, we explored two additional options for course delivery in recent months. The first offered classes (in addition to Saturday classes) on a "weekday/weeknight" schedule (Monday evenings and Wednesday mornings). The second offered classes on an "extended year" schedule, offering five classes in 10 session 2-hours blocks of time over 6 months. These Monday and Wednesday course offerings have been well received by the small number of student participants. As these modifications are still ongoing, we are not yet positioned to evaluate the long-term viability of these non-Saturday course offerings.

Expansion of Clinical Pastoral Training to include Clinical Pastoral Formation offering: We are certain of the importance of a formal program in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) for those moving toward ordained ministries. However, formal CPE has traditionally been required only of those to be ordained to the priesthood. In order to offer clinical pastoral training to those who might be either ordained as vocational deacons or licensed as lay pastoral leaders, we are presently offering an extended year program called Clinical Pastoral Formation. This program has also been well-received, but again we hesitate to assess the long-term viability of the program while the program is still underway.

Diaconal Formation for persons whose first language is not English: From the beginning, the School for Ministry hoped to facilitate formation for ministry among those whose primary language is other than English. Though we struggled to advance this important objective in our first 3 ½ years, we finally have plans to begin to move forward.

First, with the Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries, we are planning a Spanish-language Episcopal Servant Ministries seminar for those who experience a call to the vocational diaconate. Seminar materials are being translated and we hope to soon identify seminar presenters and scheduling details.

Second, we know that even bi-lingual speakers might struggle when the required course readings are only available in English. To address this challenge, the upcoming spring session of the School for Ministry will utilize texts that are already available in both Spanish and English. With this decision, bi-lingual speakers can begin formation through the School for Ministry. We acknowledge that we have a long way to go and we will continue to partner with the Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries in these endeavors.

The School for Ministry by the Numbers

Sessions:

- We recently concluded the 14th academic session of the DNJ School for Ministry Saturday Program, and the second session of the Weekday/Weeknight program.
- The first session of the Extended Year program is presently underway with 6 courses scheduled to conclude by the end of April 2023.

Courses:

- In total, 44 courses have been offered between August 2019 and Feb. 2023.
- Parish Internship Seminars are required of all students in parish internships.
- In addition, seminars on individual topics are offered when possible (e.g., Transformational Preaching, Preparing and Leading Online Worship, etc.)

Intensive Gathering Weekends:

- Gathering Weekends further spiritual formation and formation for practical ministry.
- Ten Gathering Weekends (two full days each) have been held. Five were in-person; four were fully online during covid; one was in-person one day and hybrid the second day to avoid an overnight stay. Our next Gathering Weekend will take place March 11th and 12th.
- 3 Orientation/Re-orientation days were held, one each year.

Students: Forty-six (46) students have received some formation through the School for Ministry. Of those:

- 10 students have completed the 3-year School for Ministry program and are currently awaiting the scheduling of a graduation service; 3 of those are currently candidates for ordination, 2 are postulants, 5 others are eligible for lay licensing as authorized by Title III (of these, 2 hope to move toward ordination and 3 believe they are called to lay servant ministry);
- 9 have been ordained (6 to the diaconate, all of whom completed the first half of their formation under the School for Deacons; 3 to the priesthood, each of whom was serving as a deacon in our diocese)
- 24 students took courses during the 2023 Winter session or Extended Year session; of those:
 - 1 will be ordained to the priesthood on May 6th;
 - 1 is a candidate to the priesthood;
 - 3 are candidates for ordination to the diaconate;
 - 1 is a postulant to the priesthood preparing for the 1st parish internship;
 - 1 is a postulant to the diaconate in a 1st parish placement;
 - 1 is a postulant working with the COM;
 - 2 are deacons pursuing additional formation;
 - 1 is a deacon working with the COM;
 - 1 has been referred to the COP and is awaiting an interview;
 - 5 have submitted Applications toward Holy Orders and are working with the COM
 - 7 others are lay leaders, some of whom may yet submit an Application toward Holy Orders

Faculty: The Director and fourteen other faculty have served as instructors in the School for Ministry. Clergy and Lay members of the diocese are invited as presenters at seminar sessions. All faculty except the Director receive a stipend for each course of instruction. Seminar presenters are usually compensated in accord with the time and demands of the presentations. Instructors and seminar presenters (other than the Director) have included:

- Doctoral Students: Erin Zoutendam (Duke), Mary Berry (Duke), Leslie Virnelson (Princeton), Ransom Portis (Princeton), Patrick Haley (Princeton)
- Acquired PhD: The Reverend Dr. Kara Slade, The Reverend Dr. Luke Zerra, The Reverend Dr. William Noble, Dr. Kaitlyn Dugan, Dr. James Neumann, Dr. Liza Anderson, Dr. Ellen Charry
- Other instructors: The Reverend Justin Falciani, the Reverend Philip Zoutendam, the Reverend Dr. Maria Sanzo, and Margaret Sanzo (MDiv and MA, Pastoral Counseling/Bereavement Counseling)
- Seminar presenters: The Reverend Jayne Oasin, William P. Fenimore, The Venerable Lynn Johnson, The Venerable Carol Pepe, The Reverend Keith McCoy, the Reverend Dr. Caroline Carson, and the Reverend Dr. Maria Sanzo.

Episcopal Servant Ministries Seminars (ESM): The Episcopal Servant Ministries seminar is a 3-session seminar sponsored by the School for Ministry at least 6 times each year. The seminar welcomes those who feel drawn to new lay ministries as well. In three 2 ½ hour sessions, the seminar explores (1) the mission of the Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer and the avenues open to each of the four orders of ministry for contributing to the mission of the Church; (2) the gifts that support God's call in each order, including an assessment of the spiritual gifts of the seminar participants; and (3) the avenues open to the participants in taking up their calls in accord with their gifts.

Parish Placements: 15 students have been placed in parish internships, for a total of 24 parish internships. All placements have been made in consultation with the Archdeacon for Diaconal Placement. Eighteen clergy have served as Internship Supervisors.

Clinical Pastoral Education: Seven students have completed at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education while in the School for Ministry.

The NJ School for Ministry 2023 Priorities

The work plan of the School for Ministry includes these objectives in 2023:

1. Re-convene a School for Ministry Advisory Board with time to commit to this ministry.
2. Assist with efforts to secure sufficient funding to properly staff the School for Ministry.
3. Develop a strategic communications program to promote understanding and support of the School for Ministry among clergy and laity across the diocese.
4. In the first half of 2023, work with the Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries to offer an Episcopal Servant Ministries seminar for Spanish speakers and to offer at least 1 course each session in which texts utilized are available in both Spanish and English.
5. Resolve the challenges of more seamlessly integrating the flow of financial information between diocesan, the School for Ministry, and the Populi platform.
6. Define and publicize the programs that prepare laity for ministry as licensed lay worship leaders, preachers, pastoral leaders, catechists, and evangelists under Title III Canon 4.
7. Define and schedule the program elements that would complete an Anglican Studies year; market to neighboring dioceses.
8. Begin to recruit a regular faculty cohort reflective as diverse as the population of our diocese, committed to the highest quality formation of lay and ordained servant leaders for the future of our diocese.

Closing Remarks

It is a privilege to serve our diocese as Director of the NJ School for Ministry, to envision and implement programs that address local needs, that satisfy canonical requirements for ordination, and that prepare lay and ordained ministers in a post-Christendom world.

By preparing canonically licensed lay leaders well for ministry, the NJ School for Ministry can offer the diocese an efficient way forward even as any clergy shortage continues. First, canonically licensed lay pastoral and worship leaders, preachers, and catechists can help support affiliated parishes and parishes in transition in a way that minimizes the need to draw deacons away from their important diaconal roles. Further, by preparing deacons and priests through a School and that intentionally roots them in our diocese, we hope to develop a body of ordained leaders with deep commitments to serving God's people in NJ. Finally, by preparing lay and ordained ministers side by side, we can model shared lay/ordained ministry partnerships and can perhaps move past clergy centered parish communities.

We have reached a critical juncture. It is time to transition from a pilot program, time to recognize the NJ School for Ministry as an essential ministry of the diocese, and time to properly fund and staff this ministry. I remain very grateful for the support through of Bishop Stokes through these years. I remain committed to the mission he entrusted to a small team in 2017 and I am certain the Spirit of God continues to lead us forward.

Genevieve R. Bishop, Director
NJ School for Ministry