**Diocese of Easton**

**Collaboration with the Iona Collaborative**

**A Program of Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest**

**Austin, TX**

The Rev. Dr. John Lewis, Director of the Iona Center & Lecturer was invited to Diocesan Convention on March 7, 2020. He gave a very informative and engaging presentation on the pioneering and seminal work of the Iona Center in training lay people in ministry formation and forming lay people for bi-vocational ordained ministry – deacon and priest.

Iona is a program that has been in existence for over 20 years; developed by the Diocese of Texas in order to augment a clergy shortage for rural and small congregations and offer second clergy in parishes that may need one but couldn’t afford the cost of financially funding a two-clergy staff. And, form lay people for effective lay ministry. The diocese insightfully developed the program to address the needs of a growing diocese; a recognition that it viewed as an imminent need but, in a different tract and model in order to effectively serve the church.

Several dioceses across the Episcopal Church has since noticed the quality of work it does in formation and transformation of lay people who discern a genuine call to serve the church in lay leadership or ordained leadership. In total 29 dioceses are currently enrolled in the program, allowing the formation and training of leaders who have a call to ordained ministry but, due to other life commitments such as family needs, financial obligations and committed employment situations, may not be able to fulfill a full-time academic study program at a 3-year residential seminary.

This program was designed to afford these gifted people the opportunity to fulfill their lifelong dream to serve Jesus as an ordained clergyperson. It is designed for individuals who would serve the church on a part-time basis while holding their substantive secular work.

* The ***cost of the training would be borne by the*** ***host diocese*** so seminarians in this model would not have to incur any burden. However, reading materials could be accessed by going to the free online seminary library. At the end of the training participants are not expected to incur any debt. If participants chose to own their personal books that is a cost they would have to borne and this could be augmented by seeking scholarship funding from various sources.
* The program is designed in two formats – a two-year commitment for those who may discern the diaconate (deacon) tract or a three-year commitment for those discerning the priest tract. Participants would be required to commit one weekend per month for 10 months each academic year. The semester is organized in a similar format to residential seminarians except that each year begins in June.
* The diocese is anticipating joining the program in **June 2021**. We are praying for the Holy Spirit to move in a powerful way in the hearts of God’s people calling them to vocational life as priest or deacon.

In light of the program being located at a recognized episcopal seminary and the quality of work is in a standard comparable to graduate level work, **the seminary requires a college degree. However, anyone who may not possess this requirement is encouraged to speak with the bishop. The most crucial consideration is the expression of call to serve Jesus in the ordained ministry.**

* Seeing that this program is designed as an adult learning initiative, anyone between the age of 35 – 65 should consider applying. This age limit doesn’t exclude a retired person from this process. In fact, this may the perfect time to offer yourself for ordained life. The upper limit is to accommodate persons to undergo the 2- or 3-year training and still have time to make meaningful contributions to the church as an ordained person. The lower limit is meant to encourage younger people to attend full-time residential seminary.
* Interested participants would be required to undergo all the canonical requirements and fulfil all necessary protocols for ordination to sacred orders. However, you wouldn’t be required to fulfill most of them in the early stages of the process. They will be attained at different phases of the formation. The Commission on Ministry will guide nominees when certain requirements will be needed to be fulfilled. The Commission on Ministry will be responsible for screening all participants in the program.
* The program is designed to be a virtual format program and all materials and teaching instructions done in the local diocese will come from the seminary. The nominees will work with the materials sent by the seminary guided by a local mentor or mentors alongside other cohort members in the group. In our diocese the program will form part of the Bishop’s Institute Formation Training (Parousia VI of the Diocesan Vision) and housed at the institute’s center, St. Paul’s Episcopal Center, Hebron.

***Interested individual are encourage to contact your parish clergy or the bishop’s office to begin a conversation and to fill out the attached application form.***

I am expecting priests trained through this program to be compensated at a level decided upon by Compensation and Personnel Committee of the diocese. This compensation will be borne by the parish to which he/she may be assigned following ordination. Compensation for deacons will be a decision of the bishop since deacons serve under the bishop.

The bishop is available for any further information or guidance should such be needed. Hopefully, this ***preliminary information*** will be helpful in your discernment.

The stated core values of the program are: Educational Excellence \* Local Adaptability \* Collaboration \* Visionary Leadership \* Community \* Transformation.

I am encouraging clergy and lay leaders to invite interested members and to commit to work with them in the initial discernment process, and even to approach anyone in your congregation you discern may have a call to consider engaging the process toward Bi-Vocational ordained ministry.

It is my prayer you will open your hearts to God, and allow the divine voice to trouble your soul in total submission, speak to hearts in love for Jesus and that peace and quiet hear the voice of God calling, “whom shall I send , and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6: 8). Don’t deny yourself the opportunity to be believe that you are a suitable person for Jesus’ servant ministry in fulfilment of God’s mission on earth.

Please join with me in offering these prayers to God on behalf of our diocese and our future leaders:

*For the choice of fit persons for the ministry*

O God, you led your holy apostles to ordain ministers in every  
place: Grant that your Church, under the guidance of the Holy  
Spirit, may choose suitable persons for the ministry of Word  
and Sacrament, and may uphold them in their work for the  
extension of your kingdom; through him who is the Shepherd  
and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and  
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and  
ever. *Amen.*

*For all Christians in their vocation*

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole  
body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified:  
Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before

you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation  
and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through  
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with  
you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
*Amen.*

Will all my love and encouragement and prayer. I await with eager longing to hear from you.

Bishop San