

Report from the General Council Liaison Cluster April 2007

As a new cluster, authorized by the DUCC biennial meeting in April 2005, our first task was to develop a mandate based on the direction set by the diaconal community gathered in Tatamagouche. The purpose of the cluster is to ensure diaconal representation on key General Council committees and task groups. Its goals are:

- to identify key committees on an ongoing basis and to keep DUCC apprised of vacancies, application procedures, and time lines through contact with the DUCC Co-ordinating Committee and the DUCC Communications Committee; and
- to provide a process for support and accountability of diaconal ministers on General Council committees and task groups.

Action since April 2005

September 2005:

- three members met to draft purpose and goals, a letter of introduction, and to develop a strategy for the work based on the pattern of vacancies being released from the General Council Office in October and February each year
- sent purpose and goals to Coordinating Committee for consideration

February 2006

- reviewed list of vacancies to identify critical positions for diaconal involvement
- circulated a letter of introduction, a list of the critical positions, along with application/nomination procedures and complete list of vacancies to membership, urging people to apply/nominate DUCC members and others who had demonstrated a commitment to diaconal ministry
- critical vacancies were frequently in committees and task groups related to MEPS (Ministry and Employment Policies and Services) and Faith Formation and Education
- requested folks to inform us if they were appointed and if there were critical issues for diaconal ministry or ways in which we might offer support
- reports came back from nominating process that no Diaconal Ministers had applied

October 2006

- continued pattern indicated above but added an intensive process of identifying and approaching specific people requesting them to consider applying for particular positions, again especially in the area of committees working with ministry personnel, ministry vocations, and theological education
- six people applied for positions, two were appointed

February 2007

- complete list of vacancies circulated by the Communications Cluster upon its release
- Liaison Cluster did not meet

Meeting with MEPS

In June 2006, one of our members (Betty Marlin) along with two other DUCC members met with PC-MEPS (Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services). See the Coordinating Committee report for a review of this meeting and the outstanding issues from it.

Note: The Coordinating Committee had hoped that the GC Liaison Cluster could take on responsibility for this meeting but we were unable, as a cluster, to do so because of the lack of flexibility in the timing of the meeting in Toronto. Clarification of the cluster's mandate is also needed. (See #4 below.)

Observations and Concerns

1. While we are grateful for the willingness of the people who applied for positions to serve in this way, and while we celebrate the appointments that were made, we are also aware that folks in diaconal ministry continue to be absent from, or under-represented in the areas identified as high priority - and in GC committee, generally.
2. Several people who were approached to consider applying for vacancies indicated that their involvements in the wider church through Presbytery and Conference responsibilities (since Diaconal Ministers are frequently asked in a representative capacity in these courts of the church too) prevented them from such consideration at that time. Since the current nomination process involves applying for positions to which one may or may not be appointed, it is hard to plan effectively to be available for serving on General Council Committees.
3. The application/nomination process itself is time consuming and, therefore, prohibitive.
4. Our cluster was insufficiently representative of the various Conferences to be really effective as a nominating group. Given that the “direct invitation to consider applying” function was not part of the original mandate, we believe a decision needs to be made about how we, as DUCC, might best approach the task of increasing representation on General Council Committees - e.g. change the structure of the Cluster, change the mandate, increase the membership, develop new strategies, etc. This is a concern we bring to the biennial meeting as part of the larger question of the scope of the work that needs to be done by DUCC in relation to the General Council and how this work can be done most effectively.
5. If we are to strengthen a “direct invitation to consider applying” function, we may need to develop a way to track who has offered to serve and who might be willing to be considered again if not appointed at a particular time, who has said "not now" but next year, etc. In addition to work that DUCC might do on this, it might be helpful if the General Council Nominating Committee could incorporate this into their work so they could develop a bank of people who have expressed interest in general areas of work rather than starting from the beginning each time and requiring that people apply each time for each committee that is of interest to them. At this point there is openness on the part of the GC staff person and the Chair of the Committee to working with DUCC in some way to increase diaconal representation. One of the blocks, however, is that diaconal representation is rarely, if ever, specified as part of the structure of any committee or task group.
6. There is currently a Diaconal Minister (Caryn Douglas) on the Executive of the General Council. It may be wise to consider an intentional connection between any diaconal folks serving on the GCE and the Liaison Cluster.

Members:

Nan Corrigan
Betty Marlin
Ann Naylor
Kathy Platt
Marg Scott