

DIACONAL MINISTRIES CANADA 2017 to 2020 Strategic Ministry Plan

The Foundation

While the roots of Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) can be traced to the late 1950s, its official start as a national organization came on May 25, 2001 when representatives from every Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Classis in Canada met as a Board of Directors and approved its original structure. The new DMC Board soon approved a vision and mission statement, and identified a number of strategic goals. This was followed by the hiring of its first National Director, Hans Kater. Over the next 15 years Hans, the DMC staff, and the DMC Board, worked hard to ensure that deacons from across Canada were united under one vision and understood the benefits of working together. Much time and effort was put into listening to deacons and developing a wide range of materials and events to help them fulfill their callings as leaders in the church.

By 2012, DMC had adopted the following as its Vision, Mission, Values and Key Focus areas (see <https://diaconalministries.com/> for full descriptions):

VISION: *Transforming communities in Christ*

MISSION: *To inspire, equip and encourage deacons, churches and their partners as they join in God's transforming work in communities.*

VALUES: *Prayer. Celebration. Collaboration. Servant leadership. Gift-based. Holistic. Justice.*

KEY FOCUS AREAS: *Engaging communities. Equipping deacons. Living justly.*

Structure

By 2015, the basic structure of DMC looked something like this:

Volunteer Board → full-time National Director → two (almost) full-time Regional Directors → and 15 to 20 part-time Diaconal Ministry Developers, all working with the support of a full-time Administrative Assistant, a part-time Communications Coordinator, and a part-time Justice Advocate.

The structure also grew to include strategic partnerships with relevant organizations including: The Christian Reformed Church in Canada, World Renew, Home Missions, Race Relations, Disability Concerns, the Centre for Public Dialogue, and the Office of Social Justice.

2016/17 Evaluation

In 2016, after 15 years of service, Hans Kater retired as the National Director and after 16 years with DMC, Madeline Wierenga retired as Administrative Assistant. Subsequently, Samantha Bondy was hired as the Administrative Coordinator, and Ron Vanden Brink began work as the National Director.

As a result of these leadership changes, as well as changes within society in general, changes made to the church order in response to the 2015 Report to Synod by the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon, and the amount of time which had passed since its last in-depth planning session (2011), it was decided that the time was right for some evaluation and strategic planning work. This was approved by the Board in August of 2016, and included various parts, all of which culminated at a special “Mapping Our Way Forward” meeting on February 16 & 17, 2017.

Discover Work ~ Overview

This process was all about LISTENING. Deacons, Ministry Partners, Operation Manna committee members, Diaconal Ministry Developers (DMDs), Staff, Board members and Stakeholders were solicited for input. Through personal conversations, phone interviews, online surveys, and facilitated in-person events, information was collected and collated. All perspectives and ideas were welcomed; and what we heard was mostly positive and encouraging.

Some of the most encouraging comments included:

“DMC does much with little; impressive.” “DMC is doing important work.” “DMC has a lot of good resources and programs.” “DMC is especially good at training and coaching deacons.” “The network of DMDs is a strength.” “Good staff and leadership.” “DMC does a great job of connecting/networking deacons from across Canada.” “DMC has been especially good at promoting areas of justice.” “DMC stewards its resources well.” “Resources actually meet a need – information on website is relevant.” “In some respects DMC is a model for other agencies.” “Good accountability.”

Of course not all the input was positive – but it was all helpful for understanding our past and setting direction for the future. Some of the more challenging comments included:

“There’s a lack of DMC name recognition.” DMC needs to “sharpen its focus” and work at “keeping the main thing the main thing.” “DMC should examine the way it’s funded” and “explore additional funding models.” “DMC needs to increase its use of social media.” “DMC needs to raise its profile.” “DMC has to find ways to link to younger people.” “DMDs are not equally capable (available and/or trained) and this has meant that some parts of the country are better served than others.” “DMC needs to connect more often and more intentionally with Deacons.” We were also encouraged to “remember our roots – by deacons for deacons.” And, we heard that it’s time to: “Help increase the visibility of Deacons at Classis and Synod,” and “Find new ways to communicate with Deacons and churches.”

2017 - 2020 Moving Forward

As a result of the above, and after much discussion, evaluation, and prayerful reflection, we present the following as our strategic plan for the next 3 years.

A. Deacons & deacons

Within our context, Deacons are church members who are officially ordained by CRC churches to administer mercy and Christian love to all people. They examine and understand a community's gifts and assets, assess needs, promote hospitality, collect and disburse resources for benevolence, and, develop programs of assistance. They also animate congregations to engage with their neighbours, stimulate stewardship and promote justice.

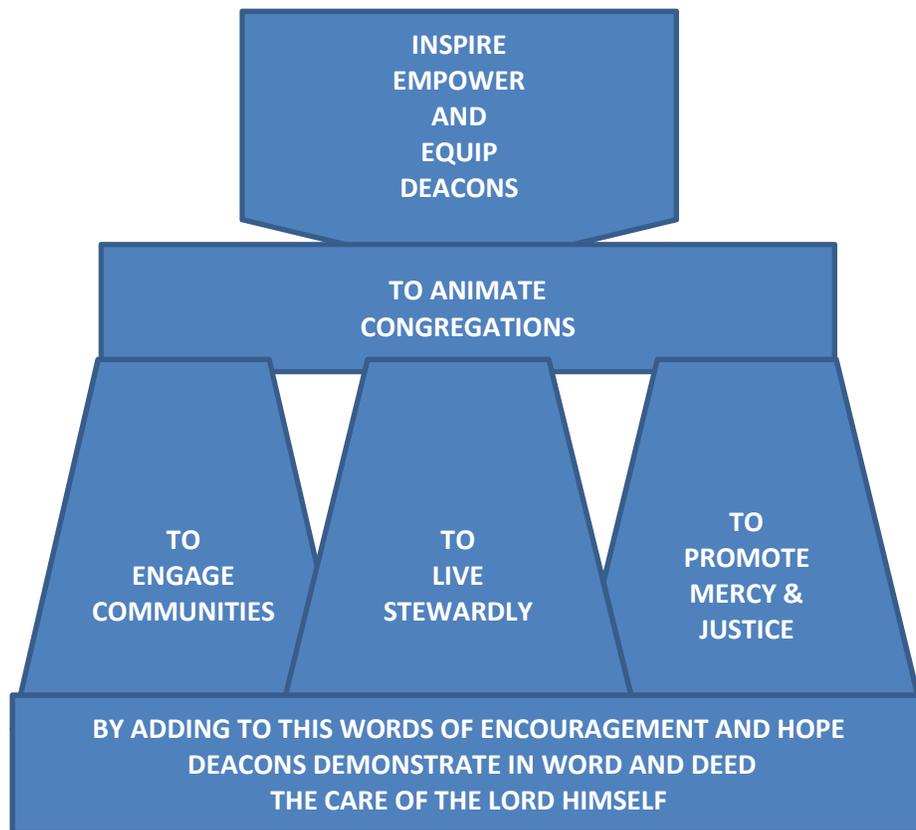
However, as stated in the study report to Synod 2013, “Diakonia Remixed” (III-1): *it is not simply the case that the church has [D]eacons, but rather it is the case that the whole church is itself called to **diakonia**, which we understand as God-glorifying service that is rendered to the world in obedience to Christ.*

Therefore, while DMC primarily positions itself to assist ordained **Deacons**; we also work hard at assisting non-ordained **deacons** (all those involved in *diakonia*).

B. Key Focus Areas

While the three Key Focus Areas of *Engaging Communities, Equipping Deacons and Living Justly* have served DMC well for many years, it was decided that a few revisions were needed. Our new Key Focus Areas flow from our discussions and look like this – *see below* (subject to artistic revision):

DIACONAL MINISTRIES CANADA HAS BEEN CALLED BY GOD TO:



Relying on the Holy Spirit, Diaconal Ministries Canada exists to Inspire, Empower and Equip Deacons, as they animate congregations to join in God’s transforming work in communities across Canada.

We believe that this reflects the input received from our listening exercises and the fact that DMC is primarily an organization created “by Deacons for Deacons”. It also provides a visual of DMC's primary focus which is to help Deacons fulfill their calling/mandate as spelled out in the *Church Order* (2016) and *The Charge to the Deacons* as articulated in the form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons (2016). (Note: DMC's primary focus is “within Canada” while Word Renew’s primary focus, except in cases of disaster relief, is “outside of Canada.”)

C. Objectives and Priorities

Flowing from the Key Focus Areas outlined above, our primary objectives and priorities for the next three years are as follows.

1. Diaconal Ministry Developers

Diaconal Ministry Developers (DMDs) animate, encourage, coach, and educate both ordained Deacons and others involved in diakonia. They help Deacons understand their roles and enliven their calling in the church and its community and are available to assist others involved in God-glorifying service. DMDs do their best to connect annually with every Christian Reformed Church across Canada. Since DMDs are a crucial part of the work that DMC does, we will continue to intentionally strengthen them in order to maximize their impact in churches.

Objective	By whom	By when
Diaconal Ministry Directors (DMDs)		
<p>Clarify the role of DMDs (sharpen their job description)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the “main thing the main thing” by narrowing the focus of their work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Define five primary focus areas ○ Provide annual training/upgrading in each area • Limit the number of churches per DMD and the size of their regions 		
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop modules (toolkits) in each primary focus area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ for training DMDs ○ for use by DMDs as they train deacons • Use modules to sharpen the focus of the annual DMD training event (more focus on desired outcomes) 		
<p>Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remuneration, including allowable expenses and mileage • How DMDs are “thanked” for their work (including intangibles) 		

<p>Improve accountability and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a system of annual work plans and personal goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standardize a simplified model for reporting ○ Introduce (workshop/visit/contact) <i>impact forms</i> 		
<p>Improve communication and mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile one DMD in every Equip newsletter • Implement regular (monthly?) video chat meetings • Establish a closed Facebook (or other social networking) group • Pair an experienced DMD with a less experienced one for mentoring and support <p><i>see also section on Communication</i></p>		
<p>Prioritize the recruitment of new DMDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore why the positions are not being filled • Never allow a vacancy to last more than six months but remain attentive to DMCs vision and values • Develop compelling recruitment material • Develop a clear orientation package 		
<p>Increase Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and distribute DMD promotional material • Make increasing use of social media and video • Include DMC and DMD promotion in DMDs work plans • Increase the visibility of DMDs on DMC website <p><i>see also section on Communication</i></p>		
<p>Financials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide DMDs with a yearly review of their financials 		

2. Key Focus Areas

As noted above, DMC will give primary attention to three key areas

a. Engaging Communities

We seek to inspire, empower and equip Deacons and churches to engage with their communities and neighbourhoods in such a way that they become conduits through which God's grace, mercy and justice flow. Our primary tools for doing this are: Community Opportunity Scans (COS), Operation Manna (OM), and Days of Encouragement (DOE).

*The **COS** is a comprehensive process of discovery. It not only helps a church identify needs, but it also (and primarily) affirms the unique gifts and assets in a community and the church. A COS helps deacons see where God is already working and helps them join Him!*

Objective	By whom	By when
Community Opportunity Scans		
Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare COS to Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) - Which is best for us to use? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluate the name – could it be simplified? 		
Increase awareness of community development tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update training tools for RDs, DMDs, Deacons and diakonia (toolkits) • Evaluate communication methods used to this point • Write and implement a clear communication strategy <i>see also section on Communication</i>		

The **OM** program is intended to help churches start and grow new ministries that reach into their neighbourhoods with the love of Christ. It provides both consulting services and grants.

Objective	By whom	By when
Operation Manna		
<p>Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to exist ○ Size (Is it necessary and cost effective to have representation from every classis?) ○ Number of meetings and timeline • Application process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Streamline and simplify ○ Should OMs fiscal timeline be brought in line with DMCs fiscal timeline? ○ Streamline grant review process • Name and branding • Effectiveness of OM promotional video • Effectiveness of OM print material 	<p><i>Board</i> <i>Board</i></p>	
<p>Clarify</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary reason OM exists (consulting, grants, or...?) • Connection of grant recipients to CRC • Connection of grant recipients to CRC Deacons • Connection to COS • Connection to community development/social justice • How funding decisions are made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create decision-tree ○ Multi-year funding (adjustable year-by-year?) • Parameters for consulting and coaching 		
<p>Grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways to encourage a younger demographic to apply for grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explore “Justice Contest” for those under 25 • Make increasing use of social media • Include OM promotion in DMDs work plans • Share at least one OM story per month • Cross-connect OM recipient websites with DMC website <p><i>see also section on Communication</i></p>		

<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore partnership with Ignite (CRCNA Ministry Innovation Fund) which provides 1 time grants (Canadian Director of Advancement) • Explore finding special sponsors for specific projects (e.g. “Justice Contest” for those under 25) <p><i>see also section on Financials</i></p>		
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DOEs are events held in various parts of Canada and are designed to encourage and equip everyone involved in the diakonia.

Objective	By whom	By when
Day(s) of Encouragement		
<p>Evaluate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ancaster DOE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ its effectiveness ○ the role of DMC ○ the roles of partners • The effectiveness of regional DOEs • The relationship between DMC and regional DOEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the possibility of a closer connections between DMC and regional DOEs • Why DOEs aren’t reaching deacons under 30? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What might work? 		

b. Living Stewardly

The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)

Christian stewardship begins with a solid understanding that [everything] we call our own is not ours at all, but God’s. We are managers, or stewards, of His property. We must, therefore, define our task and seek to understand how to “do stewardship” in a way that pleases God. (From the introduction to Stewardship: Keeping Faith with God’s Gifts by Mary VandenBerg.)

While stewardship in general is not new to the CRC or DMC, it is a new Key Focus Area for DMC. Therefore, we will spend a year building our capacity by gathering resources and discerning the best way to provide them to deacons. We will also explore partnerships with people and groups who have become “experts” in this area.

Objective	By whom	By when
Living Stewardly		
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather the best resources that have been developed on stewardship over the past decade Explore / develop partnerships with relevant organizations 		
Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a five year plan 		
Benevolence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the high number of requests in this area, prioritize the development of a toolkit which will help deacons “decide who to help” and “how best to help” Consider contracting an “expert” in this area to assist in design and implementation of this toolkit 		

c. Living Justly

Justice, at its core, is about relationships: our relationships with God, with each other, with ourselves, and with creation. God calls us all – and Deacons especially – to restore relationships through the pursuit of justice and to challenge lifestyles, choices, and systems so that all may have opportunity to participate fully in community as image-bearers of God. This work will continue until Shalom is restored.

Note: While our listening exercises did not garner much direct input in the area of justice, the overall sense was that this is an important area.

Objective	By whom	By when
Living Justly		
General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to review and update the justice area of our website Continue to deepen (and clarify) our partnerships with various Social Justice ministries of the CRC in Canada. We’ll focus especially on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> justice mobilization at the local church level ~ via CRC Justice Mobilizer, keeping deacons current on issues of Social Justice ~ via Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice Communications Team Coordinator 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ maintaining a presence on the “Do Justice” blog site ~ via Communications Team Coordinator 		
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3. Communications

Since communication is an integral part of almost every aspect of DMC, it warrants some special focus.

Objective	By whom	By when
DMC Communications		
<p>Social Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review, update and expand all aspects of DMCs social media program resulting in a greater awareness by deacons • Develop and implement a clear way of reporting on the effectiveness of using social media 		
<p>Branding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a “brand recognition” plan • Review all DMC material, print and electronic, to ensure that it’s “branded” in a consistent way 		
<p>Stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear ‘story telling’ strategy • Develop a network of writers/bloggers from across Canada (produce bi-weekly, ministry related, stories) • Write and share the DMC story • Write and share the OM story • Write and share DMD profiles • Use stories to raise awareness and finances <p><i>see also section on Financials</i></p>		
<p>Toolkits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update DMC training modules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In consultation with Faith Formation, look into developing “toolkits” for teaching and promotions • Explore the possibility of contracting a teacher/ developer/designer (experienced in creating lesson plans) to review and update our existing training modules, and assist in developing new modules 		

<p>Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the usefulness, effectiveness and cost of associating more closely with network.crcna.org (Note: the CRCNA would like to centralize information on the Network site) 		
<p>Communications Coordinator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform a cost/benefit analysis of developing the Communications Coordinator position into full-time (perhaps by enlarging the job description) 		

4. Financials

One of the things we heard repeatedly at our strategic planning events was that DMCs financial model is not sustainable and needs to be reviewed.

Objective	By whom	By when
DMC Financials		
<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the history of DMCs present financial model • Assess sustainability based on our history 		
<p>Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative models for generating revenue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advancement person ○ Private donations ○ Grants ○ Financial partnerships (with agencies?) ○ A “Charge for Services” model ○ Others...? 		
<p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a five year financial sustainability plan based on the above 		
<p>Grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways to finance “experiments” (e.g. a network gathering of social enterprise entrepreneurs, or a creating a “Dream Team”– doing future casting). <p><i>see also section on Other</i></p>		

<p>Stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently tell stories in ways that raise awareness and revenue 		
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5. DMC Board

The Board, which is responsible for directing, protecting and promoting DMC on behalf of diaconates, also realized that some areas for which it is directly responsible need examination.

Objective	By whom	By when
DMC Board		
<p>Review/Clarify</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and function of the Board as it relates to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the National Director and DMC staff ○ Classis • What “Carver Lite” actually means with regards to DMCs way of working, decision-making and meeting • The role of the Board on the OM committee • The connection between DMC and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CRC in Canada ○ CRCNA in general ○ its ministry partners; especially WR (Would we like to see these connections grow? lessen? stay the same?) • The responsibility board members carry with regards to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ promoting DMC ○ financing DMC ○ finding their own qualified replacements 		
<p>Recruitment of qualified Board members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop compelling recruitment material • Develop a clear orientation package 		

6. Other

Objective	By whom	By when
DMC Other		
<p>Deacons at Classis and Synod</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a workshop and resources (toolkit) to help Classis understand the role of Deacons at Classis (perhaps work with Al Postma, director of Classis Renewal) • Develop a workshop and resources (toolkit) to help Deacons understand their role at Classis & Synod 		
<p>Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role that Regional Directors (RDs) play and their capabilities and capacities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide an “in house” profile of the training RDs have and can provide • The RDs job descriptions – especially in light of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the five primary areas DMDs will work in ○ their individual capabilities and capacities ○ the changes being recommended to OM 		
<p>Input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a regular (every 3-5 years) survey of deacons to assess their perception of their assets and needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use this as a partial guide for future planning. 		
<p>New areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future casting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spend time each year looking ahead and asking questions about where diaconal ministry may be heading, and using the results for future planning. (For example: Is now the time to begin working on a “social enterprise” toolkit or a “What does it mean to be faithfully present in your community?” workshop.) ○ Look into creating a future casting, <i>Dream Team</i> 		