



# DIACONATE GUIDELINES

The diaconate is a group of people committed to service in and for the Church, a group which has its roots in the New Testament, and has a history of development and usage in the Church catholic from its beginnings to the present time.

The diaconate has had a variety of definitions in times past and present, and has included a broad range of people, privileges and responsibilities throughout its history. Sometimes it has included in large part people who were taking a step toward the Office of Pastor or Priest. At other times it has been seen and thought of as an order of people who represented the Church in service to her members and to the world through works of mercy and witness, thus supplementing the Office of Pastor, as well as amplifying and supporting the ministry of all the baptized. It is in this latter sense that we define the Synodical Diaconate.

## **1. Purpose of the Metropolitan NY Synod Diaconate**

- 1.1 The purpose of this Synodical Diaconate is for the coordination and support of those engaged in diaconal ministry: to provide some basic and uniform standards for preparation, education, and accountability; to offer opportunities for continuing education, collegiality and support; to encourage excellence in ministry; and to be a forum for mutual concerns and needs.
- 1.2 The Synodical Diaconate also serves to coordinate and facilitate the oversight and leadership to be exercised by the Bishop over the various diaconal ministries of the synod, whether in congregations or agencies, or on special deployed mission assignments.
- 1.3 The Synodical Diaconate is not an official ministerial roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the same sense as the ELCA Associate in Ministry or ELCA Diaconal Minister. However, the 1995 ELCA Churchwide Assembly amended the ELCA bylaws to read,

*“When needed to provide for diaconal ministry as part of a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not possible for such ministry to be provided by appropriately rostered lay ministry, the synodical bishop -- acting with the consent of the congregation or ministry, in consultation with the synod council, and in accord with standards and qualifications developed by the Division of Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council -- may authorize a non-rostered person who is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to offer such non-sacramental ministry. Such an individual shall be supervised by an ordained minister appointed by the synodical bishop and shall be*

*trained and authorized to fulfill a particular ministry for a specific period of time in a given location only. Authorization, remuneration, direct supervision, and accountability are to be determined by the appropriate synodical leadership according to churchwide standards and qualifications for this type of ministry. Authorization for such service shall be renewed annually and renewed only when a demonstrated need remains for its continuation.” (ELCA bylaws 7.61.02.)*

The synod diaconate functions as a support ministry and standardization tool for the ministries of deacons under the authority and care of the Metropolitan New York Synod. At present there is no official transferability from MNY synod diaconate to any other ELCA judicatory or ministerial category, though a number of synods are developing their own synodically authorized ministries, and may indeed seek common standards and processes in the future.

## **2. Members of the Synodical Diaconate**

- 2.1 Members of the Synodical Diaconate are men and women who have been called by the Church to serve publicly after the example of our Lord Jesus. They are first and foremost Christian people in their usual employment and life, and are trained and formed by additional study and prayer for a special ministry to the Church and to the world on the Church’s behalf.
- 2.2 While some may be working in and for the wider church, most serve in local congregations and their surrounding parish communities. They may be known by a variety of titles, and in a variety of roles -- deacon, teacher, catechist, evangelist, youth worker, advocate, communicator, parish administrator, etc. -- or may have no title at all.
- 2.3 Members of the Diaconate of the Metropolitan New York Synod are those people who have applied for and been accepted into membership, who meet those requirements for membership set by the synod, and who subscribe to the guidelines for ongoing service and supervision as set forth in this document and any which may follow it.

## **3. The Ministry of Synod Deacons**

- 3.1 At the heart of the ministry of deacons are public works of mercy, witness and worship, in solidarity with the poor and needy. The actual tasks undertaken by members of the diaconate will vary according to the gifts and skills of the deacon, and the needs of the church and its surrounding community.
- 3.2 For example: in our neighborhoods there are sick and shut-in people to be visited; people in need of helpful conversation, as well as physical and spiritual assistance; children and adults to be nurtured and taught; unconverted people to be served and evangelized; the homeless, hungry, addicted, isolated and imprisoned to be befriended and served; and so many among whom the worship of Almighty God ought to be extended.
- 3.3 Members of the diaconate assume a leadership role in worship, but this is not to be their primary responsibility. Rather, the serving function of deacons in the Church’s liturgy is to be a reflection of their tangible, actual servanthood in parish and world.

- 3.4 Members of the Synodical Diaconate shall neither preside at the Holy Eucharist nor exercise the Office of the Keys. They shall not administer Holy Baptism nor officiate at funerals, except at the direction of a supervising pastor, though they are encouraged to assist at both. They shall not regularly preach, yet will on occasion preach in cases where an ordained pastor is unavailable, where they have received special training in homiletics, and have prepared to preach under the supervision of a pastor.
- 3.5 However, members of the diaconate are urged to lead the congregation in such historically diaconal roles as the Kyrie, the Prayers of the Church, preparation of the altar for the Lord's Supper, and receiving the offerings of the people, and distribution of the Holy Sacrament. These tasks are not to be undertaken to usurp the privilege of other congregation members to serve as assisting ministers, but rather to serve, wherever possible, as a living example and reminder to the congregation of our common baptismal calling to priestly service in the world.
- 3.6 Liturgical garb for the Synodical Diaconate follows the church's historic usage as regards deacons. Deacons may wear the diaconal stole as a mark of their office, and they may wear the dalmatic, which also has historic precedence. Ordinarily clerical collars are to be worn only by pastors. A distinctive pectoral cross and official photo identification card help identify deacons as synodically authorized ministers of the Gospel.

## **4. Qualifications for the Synodical Diaconate**

- 4.1 Members of the Synodical Diaconate must be of sound moral character and mature faith. They will have demonstrated faithfulness in worship and service, and have shown an eagerness for further spiritual formation.
- 4.2 They are to be active members of a congregation of the Metropolitan New York Synod, accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and they are to have been involved in parish life and leadership. They will have stability in their employment record and family life. If married, members of the diaconate will have the whole-hearted support of spouse and family.

## **5. Educational Requirements**

- 5.1 As a minimum, applicants for the Synodical Diaconate will have a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED Certificate). Other educational background or experience, whether academic, business or other, will be taken into consideration in relation to the applicant's proposed areas of diaconal service.
- 5.2 In addition, they will have completed a program of special ministry training and theological formation, such as diakonia®. The two-year program offered by diakonia will be used as the baseline standard for determining the theological preparedness of applicants. Other forms of theological and ministerial preparation will be evaluated during the application process, and additional preparation will be recommended as needed.

5.3 Members of the Synodical Diaconate will be expected to engage in ongoing continuing education, to develop ministerial skills and expertise, and to remain connected to the vision of the diaconate as a community of theological reflection.

## **6. Internship Requirements**

### **1. Application**

1. Completion and submission of Application
2. Attendance with Pastor/Supervisor at scheduled orientation meeting
3. Initial interview with Synod Diaconate Council (SDC)
4. Completion of candidacy pre-work
  - a. submission of relevant education materials
  - b. other pre-work as recommended by SDC
  - c. Confirmation of approval by the candidate's congregation council.
5. Completion and submission of Internship Learning Agreement
6. Endorsement of application and internship by SDC
7. Assignment of SDC members to mentor candidate

### **2. Internship**

1. Theological essay as assigned by the SDC
2. Congregation support group formed
3. Internship begins (10 to 12 months)
4. Testing and evaluation by the Lutheran Counseling Center
5. Interim evaluations by candidate, supervisor, support group
6. Interim progress conference with SDC; adjustments made as needed to the internship proposal
7. Final evaluations by candidate, supervisor, support group – submitted to the SDC prior to final interview

### **3. Approval**

1. Approval interview by SDC
2. Approval of candidate by SDC; recommendation forwarded to bishop.
3. Bishop endorses SDC recommendation.

### **4. Call Process**

1. Congregation council makes call recommendation
2. Letter of Call and call description presented to congregation at properly called meeting; vote
3. Call by congregation forwarded to SDC

### **5. Rostering**

1. Rite of setting apart (synod-wide event)
2. Installation at calling congregation/agency

6.1 All applicants for the Synodical Diaconate are expected to complete a supervised internship of ten to twelve months in duration. This internship may begin after the conclusion of a program of study and formation, official approval of the applicant's application, and acceptance as a candidate for rostering. The purpose of the internship is: to enable the applicant to experience the kind of service that would be expected and undertaken as a member of the diaconate; to test the person's skills, interests, commitment, and acceptance as a member of the diaconate; and to

help the applicant continue in training and formation under the supervision of an experienced pastor.

- 6.2 The first step in the internship process is the completion of an application, agreement of the congregation (through its congregational council) and pastor to host and sponsor such an internship, and acceptance of the internship learning agreement by the Synod Diaconate Council (SDC).

The congregation council will receive from the applicant an internship learning agreement, approved by the pastor-supervisor, specifying tasks to be completed and hours to be spent.

Only upon congregation council approval, attendance by the candidate and the pastor/supervisor at a SDC presented orientation, acceptance by the SDC and formation of the support committee, will the internship officially begin.

- 6.2a Internships based in congregational ministries normally would not begin in the absence of a regularly called pastor. A stated interim pastor may supervise a candidate if the interim appointment exceeds the length of the internship process.

Internships based in specialized ministries, such as prison, healthcare or chaplaincy may be supervised by a rostered pastor, who is directly related to the ministry being undertaken by the intern.

It is not recommended that an internship begin under the supervision of a pastor who has been ordained less than 1 year.

- 6.3 The supervisor will assist the intern in establishing goals and expectations for the internship, will meet with the intern no less than twice monthly, to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns and will submit written evaluations of the intern and the internship to the SDC.
- 6.4 It is also expected that all applicants will submit written evaluations of their internship as requested by the SDC, describing the nature of the experience, as well as personal reflections on that experience.
- 6.5 To provide a third voice in the evaluation process, the applicant will also relate regularly to a 3-5 person support committee comprised of members of the candidate's congregation and appointed by the candidate's pastor/supervisor and church council (chosen in consultation between the Pastor and the candidate). (In some cases the deacon-candidate may be serving an internship in a setting other than the home congregation. Then the members should be drawn from the agency or institution which the candidate is serving, and should be chosen in consultation with the candidate's pastor and onsite supervisor). The support committee will provide the SDC with written evaluations of the candidate's internship at the midpoint and end of the internship.
- 6.6 A final approval interview by the SDC and recommendation by that body to the Bishop that the candidate be approved for setting apart is the final step in the approval process. (The Bishop always has the option of also interviewing the candidate and may accept or reject the SDC's

recommendation.) No candidate may be approved to be set apart as a Synodical Deacon without the Bishop's endorsement.

- 6.7 In order to assure the highest standards for the Synodical Diaconate, the general policies and procedures of the ELCA Associates in Ministry candidacy process will be used by the Metropolitan NY Diaconal Council as the basis for diaconal internships.

## **7. The Call Process for the Synodical Diaconate**

- 7.1 The regular application process will be conducted as previously stated in this document. A Call is necessary for the candidate to be approved for admission to the Synodical Diaconate. A Letter of Call from a congregation, signed by the president of that congregation and accepted by the candidate, must include an overview of the candidate's areas of service, along with estimates of hours to be served in each area. The Letter of Call should also include a statement of intent from the pastor-supervisor to guide, support, and encourage the work of the deacon candidate. The Letter of Call must be renewed annually, by action of the congregation through its voting membership, in accordance with ELCA by-laws.
- 7.2 When a candidate's internship has been completed in a satisfactory manner and specific gifts and needs for ministry exist, the call may be issued by the Metro New York Synod Council or a synodically approved calling agency.
- 7.3 Approved applicants will be received into membership in the Synodical Diaconate along with their ordering for diaconal service by a service of prayer and the laying on of hands, as currently found in the ELW Occasional Services rite for the setting apart of a deacon(ess). This liturgy shall ordinarily take place during a special synod service specifically for that purpose. Individual installation services may be held in deacons' local parishes, but will not usually take place until after the Synodical Setting Apart.

### **Additional Procedures**

- 7.4 When a deacon leaves a congregation or other ministry site:  
If after discernment a deacon decides to leave a congregation, he/she must send a letter of notification to the pastor and the Congregation Council. The deacon must then complete the "On Leave from Call" application which may be found on the Synod web site and send copies to the Chair of the Synod Diaconate Council and the office of the Bishop. The leave may last for a maximum period of three years. An annual report must be submitted to the Bishop's office at the beginning of the each calendar year while on leave from call
- 7.5 When a deacon goes to a new congregation or other ministry sites;  
There must be an extended period of time during which the deacon and the congregation get to know each other. The deacon should begin to become involved in the life of the congregation and meet with the pastor to discuss the gifts of the deacon and to determine whether those gifts could serve the congregation's ministry. A new support group should be formed. The deacon must work with their new pastor/supervisor for a period of not less than 6 months. At the end of that time, they must submit an evaluation completed by the pastor/sponsor, the deacon and

the support group to the SDC. and a new “Letter of Call” to the Bishops office and the SDC. The new call and description of their ministry must be filed with the SDC and with the Bishop

## **8. Leadership of the Synodical Diaconate**

- 8.1 Seven members of the Synodical Diaconate, plus two clergy and two lay members of the synod who are not members of the diaconate, will be appointed by the Bishop to serve as a Synod Diaconate Council (SDC), to organize and conduct the business and activities of the diaconate. Officers of the SDC will be a chairperson and secretary, to be elected from within the council to serve 2 year terms. Officers may serve two consecutive terms. Terms will be limited to six consecutive years on the SDC and four years as an officer. The SDC will maintain contact and communication with other leadership activities of the synod.
- 8.2 The SDC will serve as the Application Committee for the Synodical Diaconate, performing those functions described elsewhere in this document. Other individuals may be invited by the SDC to serve on the Application Committee, to assist them in their work.
- 8.3 The SDC will be responsible for making a report on the life and activities of the Synodical Diaconate to every Synod Assembly, as well as regular reports to the Bishop and Synod Council.
- 8.4 A Synod staff member, appointed by the Bishop, will be an ex-officio member of the Council.

## **9. Accountability**

- 9.1 Members of the Synodical Diaconate will be accountable immediately to their pastor-supervisors and to the congregations through which they receive their Call, except where working in the wider church, where they would be accountable to the leaders of organizations or agencies within which they are serving.
- 9.2 They will also be accountable to the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, as they will be considered part of the ministry of the Metropolitan New York Synod. Further, they will be accountable to the leadership and membership of the Synodical Diaconate itself.
- 9.3 Such accountability will include an annual report of ministry, filed with the congregation, the Bishop’s office, and the SDC.
- 9.4 An annual renewal of Call must be submitted to the Bishop’s office and the SDC.(7.1)

## **10. Participation in the Synodical Diaconate**

- 10.1 The SDC is responsible for the preparation of a detailed set of expectations and requirements for members of the Synodical Diaconate. The general expectations will include:
  - ongoing prayer for diaconate members and their ministries
  - attendance at annual spiritual retreat

- participation in continuing education
- participation as needed in building of Synodical Diaconate structure
- maintaining the integrity of local ministerial call
- completion of the synod boundary workshop
- continue to meet regularly with their support committee

10.2 Members of the Synodical Diaconate cannot at this time enjoy the same mobility as other ministers within the wider church, due to the provisions noted in article 1.3. General rules for mobility within the Metropolitan New York Synod, leaves, etc. will follow the guidelines for ELCA Associates in Ministry. In all cases a valid letter of call will be required to maintain membership in the synodical diaconate, unless one is on leave from call, or some other acceptable status, according to the decision of the Synod Council.

10.3 Since a rostered deacon serves concurrently with the pastor, when a pastor leaves the congregation, the deacon must submit “Leave from Call “ paperwork to the Synod office. During the time the congregation does not have a called pastor, they should work closely with the leadership of the congregation and any assigned pastor to maintain the programs in place. After a new pastor is called or a long term interim pastor is in place, the deacon must work with their new pastor/supervisor for a period of not less than 6 months. At the end of that time, they must submit an evaluation completed by the pastor/sponsor, the deacon and the support committee and a new Letter of Call to the SDC. The new call and description of their ministry must be filed with the SDC and with the Bishop.(7.5)

10.4 Members who seek a leave from call must complete the appropriate paperwork and file it with the Council and the Bishop. Annual reports must be filed with both the council and the Bishop.

- Normative Pattern: Upon endorsement by the SDC and the Bishop, they may be retained on the roster of the synod for a maximum of three years beginning at the completion of the active call.
- Study Leave: Upon endorsement by the SDC and the Bishop, a member engaged in graduate study appropriate for service in this church may be retained on the roster of the synod diaconate for a maximum of six years.
- Family Leave: Upon endorsement by the SDC and the Bishop, a member who has been in active service under call for at least three years may request leave for family responsibilities. Therefore such a rostered deacon who requests leave for the birth or care of a child or children of the deacon or the care of an immediate family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health condition may be retained on the roster of the Synod Diaconate for a maximum of six years.
- Exception to these limits for the purpose of serving the needs of this church may be granted by the endorsement of the SDC and the approval of the Bishop.

10.5 Because Synodical Deacons maintain status as lay voting members of the congregations under which they are called even as they participate in a ministerial staff team, care must be exercised to maintain a balance between staff collegiality and appropriate conduct as congregational members. Therefore Synodical Deacons shall not serve on congregational call committees. As with any ELCA layperson, deacons, can serve as an elected lay member of congregation or synod councils, committees or boards.



Synodical Deacons are encouraged to attend congregation council meetings with voice but no vote. This restriction is intended to encourage other non-rostered church members to become involved in leadership, to reinforce the deacon's appropriate role as members of the ministerial staff, and to minimize the perception of wielding inappropriate power in the day to day workings of the congregation.

The Bishop reserves the option of requesting that a deacon not serve in lay elected office, where the Bishop feels such participation may adversely affect the parish or its ministry. In all such exercise of congregation participation, Synodical Deacons are expected to behave in a manner which adorns the Gospel, seeks peace and harmony, and preserves the integrity of ministerial and supervisory relationships.

## **11. Future Issues**

11.1 There are certain to be issues these initial articles have not been able to address. A consensual process for conversation and decision making will insure an ongoing sense of the diaconate as a responsible partner in the church's continued mission.

11.2 All proposed additions or alterations to these articles will be reviewed by the SDC, in consultation with the staff liaison and the Bishop and submitted for ratification by the Synod Council.