



Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

MNYS SYNODICAL DIACONATE

The Synodical Diaconate is a ministry of people committed to service in and for the church, a ministry of Word and Service that 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. The Synodical Diaconate

- 1.1. The Synodical Diaconate are people 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 ministry to the Church and to the world on the Church's behalf.
- 1.2. While some may be working in and for the wider church, most serve in local congregations and their surrounding parish community.
- 1.3. The Synodical Diaconate of the Metropolitan New York Synod are those people who have submitted an application, been accepted into an internship, and who meet the requirements and subscribe to the guidelines for ongoing service and supervision as set forth in this document, and have been set apart as a Synod Deacon.

2. The Ministry of Synod Deacons

- 2.1. At the heart of the ministry of Synod Deacons are public works of mercy, witness, and worship in solidarity with those needing to be served. The actual tasks undertaken by members of the Synodical Diaconate will vary according to the gifts and skills of the Synod Deacon, and the needs of the church and its surrounding community. 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; the people of the community who are not members of the congregation 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. Synod Deacons also serve in word and deed as advocates for those whose voices must be heard.
- 2.2. Synod Deacons assume a leadership role in worship, but this is not to be their primary responsibility.

Rather, the serving function of synod deacons in the Church's liturgy is to be a reflection of their tangible servanthood in parish and world.

2.3. Synod Deacons shall neither preside at the Holy Eucharist nor *pronounce absolution in worship*.

They shall not administer Holy Baptism, except in an emergency, nor officiate at funerals, except at the direction of a supervising pastor, though they are encouraged to assist at both. They shall not

officiate at weddings but are encouraged to participate when invited to do so in consultation with their pastor/supervisor. 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, or have prepared to preach under the supervision of a pastor.

2.4.Members of the Synodical 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, 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.

2.5.Liturgical garb for the Synodical Diaconate follows the church's historic usage as regards deacons. Synod deacons may wear the diaconal stole as a mark of their office, and they may wear the dalmatic, which also has historical precedence. 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.

3. Qualifications for Applying to the Synodical Diaconate

3.1.Those in 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.

3.2.Applicants to the Synodal Diaconate must 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 in America (ELCA Constitution, Chapter 2), and are to have been involved in parish life and leadership. Ideally, applicants to the Synodical Diaconate will have stability in their employment record and the support of family and partner (where applicable).

4. Educational Requirements

4.1.As a minimum, applicants to 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.

4.2.In addition, they will have completed a program of special ministry training and theological formation, such as Growing in Faith **\$** (formally known as Diakonia). The two-year program offered by Growing in Faith **\$** will be used as a 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.

4.3.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 Synodical Diaconate as a community of theological reflection.

5. Formation Process

The process of applying to, and being accepted as a member of the Synodical Diaconate is a lengthy one which can take close to two years. This process is divided into three steps: Application, Internship, and Call. The process is facilitated and administered by the Synod Diaconate Council (SDC).

5.1.Application. Each candidate must completely fill out the application which can be found on the Synod's web site. The deadline for filing an application is June 30. In the months following application there are numerous tasks that must be completed prior to an internship beginning.

- Assigning of SDC member as coordinator for the candidate.
- Preparing a written Vision for Ministry Statement.
- Beginning the process of having a psychological evaluation by Lutheran Counseling Center (LCC). This includes writing a letter to the LCC, receiving from them a packet that needs to be filled out, and, scheduling a counseling session. A report of the session will be provided to the candidate and to the Synod Diaconate Council (SDC). The cost of this evaluation (currently \$325) must be paid by the candidate to the Metropolitan New York Synod prior to the beginning of the internship.
- Attending an orientation session along with the candidate's pastor/supervisor prior to the beginning of the internship.
- Participating in an interview with the candidates assigned SDC coordinator.
- Submitting relevant education materials (Growing in Faith® certificate, Diakonia certificate or other transcripts from courses taken).
- Confirming of endorsement by the candidate's congregation council.
- Submitting the Internship Learning Agreement which outlines the ministry and work to be done during the internship, signed by the pastor/supervisor and the diaconal intern.
- Selection by the candidate of a support group from the members of the congregation and submitting the names to the SDC (support group consists of at least three persons).
- Meeting of the SDC to approve candidate for internship.

5.2.Internship. With the approval of the SDC, a candidate will begin their internship (as outlined in the Internship Learning Agreement) on January 1. 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 Synodical Diaconate; to test the person's skills, interests, commitment, and acceptance as a member of the Synodical Diaconate; and to help the applicant continue in training and formation under the supervision of an experienced pastor/supervisor. During the internship the following will take place:

- Two Synod Deacon classes that must be attended. Part 1 consists of the historical and scriptural basis of the diaconate. Part 2 deals with some of the practical aspects of being a Synod Deacon.
- Three separate interim evaluations will be written by May 31 and submitted to the SDC: one by the candidate, one by the pastor/supervisor, and one by the support group.
- SDC coordinator will conduct an interim interview with the candidate.
- Three separate final evaluations will be written by October 31 and submitted to the SDC: one by the candidate, one by the pastor/supervisor, and one by the support group.
- A theological essay must be written.

- Vision for ministry statement must be re-visited to note any changes.
- SDC coordinator will conduct an interim interview with the candidate.

5.3.Termination of Internship. The SDC has the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the formation process for becoming a Synod Deacon and will terminate an internship if it feels it is in the best interests of not only the Synodical Diaconate, but the candidate and the congregation or ministry site as well. Some of the reasons an internship could be terminated are:

- At the request of the candidate.
- False statements on application.
- Required work not submitted (either at all, incomplete, or unsatisfactory).
- Actual work/ministry outlined in Learning Agreement is not taking place.
- Candidate is not abiding by the terms of these guidelines.

If a candidate's SDC coordinator (or any member of the SDC) feels there are reasons to question whether an internship should be terminated, the SDC coordinator will have a conversation with the candidate and their pastor/supervisor. If the coordinator feels there is reason to believe the internship should not continue, a meeting will take place between the candidate, SDC coordinator, and the chair of the SDC. After this meeting the chair and coordinator will discuss their findings with the SDC. The SDC will then decide what course of action is appropriate, including whether the internship should be terminated. A decision to terminate the internship is final and not subject to appeal. A candidate whose internship was terminated is welcome to re-apply in the future. However, the new application may be subject to additional scrutiny based on the reason for the initial termination of internship.

5.4.Call. Upon completion of the final interview, the SDC will meet to determine if they will recommend to the Bishop that the candidate be set apart as a Synod Deacon. If the SDC recommends and the Bishop approves, the following will happen:

- The Bishop will send a letter to the candidate notifying them they will be set apart.
- The candidate and pastor/supervisor will draft a Letter of Call outlining the responsibilities of the candidate, pastor/supervisor, and congregation.
- The Letter of Call will be presented to the congregation Council for approval.
- A congregation meeting must be held to vote on the Call. This can be done at the normal annual congregation meeting. However, if that meeting has already taken place, a special meeting for this vote must be held in accordance with congregation constitution.
- If congregation votes in favor of the Call, three signed copies of the Letter of Call must be sent to the Bishop. The candidate cannot be set apart unless the Call is approved by the congregation.
- A liturgy of Holy Communion with the Rite of Setting Apart is held on the second Saturday following Easter (site to be determined). The candidate needs to be present with their pastor/supervisor.
- At some point after the Setting Apart, the Synod Deacon is installed in their congregation.

6. Other Information Regarding the Formation

6.1.In the absence of a pastor. Historically, internships based in congregational ministries normally would not begin in the absence of a regularly called pastor. However, understanding the frequency of pastoral vacancies in our synod and the burden of having to interrupt an internship until the congregation calls a pastor, an internship may take place in a congregation without a called pastor if the interim/coverage pastor and/or the conference dean is willing to act as supervisor.

6.2.Ministries outside congregations. 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.

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

6.4.Supervision of Internship. The supervisor will assist the intern in establishing goals and expectations for the internship, will meet with the intern no less than once a month to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns and will submit written evaluations of the intern and the internship to the SDC as outlined above.

6.5.Support Group. To provide a third voice in the evaluation process, the applicant will also relate regularly to a 3 person support committee comprised of members of the candidate's congregation who will be able to witness and evaluate the internship. This group should not include the pastor/supervisor, but be chosen in consultation with the pastor/supervisor and congregation council. In cases where the internship is based outside the congregation, the members of the support group 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 as outlined above.

6.6.Bishop's approval. 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 set apart as a Synod Deacon without the Bishop's approval.

7. Additional Information

7.1.Letter of Call. As stated above, 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 and secretary of that congregation and accepted by the candidate, must include an overview of the candidate's areas of service and responsibilities. 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.

7.2.Renewal of Call. A synod deacon's Call must be renewed annually by action of the congregation or agency issuing the Call. If the focus of the synod deacon's ministry changes or the situation in the congregation changes that the synod deacon's ministry is going to change, a new Letter of Call needs to be drafted and approved by the congregation. At the time of renewal, the Secretary of the congregation/agency must submit a letter to the SDC confirming the Call was renewed.

7.3.Calls Outside the Congregation. 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 Metropolitan New York Synod Council or a synodically approved calling agency.

8. Additional Procedures

8.1.Synod Deacon Leaves Congregation. When a Synod Deacon leaves a congregation or other ministry site:

If, after discernment, a Synod Deacon decides to leave a congregation, he/she must send a Letter of Notification to the Pastor and the Congregation Council. The Synod 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(s) of the SDC 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 each calendar year while on leave from call.

PLEASE NOTE: DO NOT resign your membership in the congregation. As this is a synodical roster, a Synod Deacon must be a member of a congregation in the synod. If you wish to remain on the roster you must transfer your membership once you are in a new congregation. Failure to be a member of a congregation in the synod will result in you being removed from the roster.

8.2.Synod Deacon Joins Congregation. When a Synod Deacon goes to a new congregation or other ministry site:

There must be an extended period of time during which the deacon, the congregation, and the pastor get to know each other (it is recommended that this ‘getting to know each other period’ lasts at least 6 months). The Synod Deacon should become involved in the life of the congregation and meet with the Pastor to discuss the gifts of the Synod Deacon and to determine whether those gifts could serve the congregation’s ministry. If the gifts of the Synod Deacon meet a ministry need of the congregation, it is recommended that there should be a period of 6 months working in this ministry with that Pastor. At the end of this 6 month period, if the Pastor and Synod Deacon agree to move forward, a Letter of Call should be drafted and approved by the congregation council and congregation (as in the normal approval process). If approved by the congregation, three copies of the Letter of Call must be sent to the Bishop for approval. After the Bishop’s approval, the Synod Deacon can be installed by the congregation.

8.3.Pastoral Vacancy. In the event of a pastoral vacancy for a congregation served by a Synod Deacon:

In the past it was required that a Synod Deacon must resign their Call during a pastoral vacancy and go On Leave from Call. Now, as long as the coverage or interim Pastor and/or the Dean of the Conference agree to step in as supervisor for the Synod Deacon, there is no need to resign the Call. However, if the congregation calls a new Pastor, at that time the Synod Deacon must resign their Call and submit an On Leave from Call application and begin the process outlined in 8.2 to get to know the new Pastor and work together to see how the gifts of the Synod Deacon will fit into the ministry of the congregation with the new Pastor.

In the event of a pastoral vacancy in the midst of an internship:

If the coverage or interim Pastor and/or the Dean of the Conference agree to step in as supervisor during the internship and continue as supervisor after setting apart, the internship can continue without interruption. However, if a supervisor cannot be obtained, the internship would come to an end and the candidate would have to wait until there is a pastor in the congregation. If, after a 6 month period of getting to know each other, the Pastor endorses the candidate and is willing to be the supervisor, the candidate would then be allowed to restart the internship.

9. Synod Diaconate Council (SDC)

9.1.The purpose of the Synod Diaconate Council (SDC) is to coordinate and support applicants, interns, and accepted members of the Metropolitan New York Synod Diaconate by providing some basic and uniform standards for preparation, education, and, accountability; offering opportunities for continuing education, collegiality and support; encouraging excellence in ministry; and being a forum for mutual concerns and needs. The SDC 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, agencies, or on special deployed mission assignments.

- 9.2.** Seven members of the Synodical Diaconate, two clergy, and two lay members of the Synod, who are not members of the Synodical Diaconate, will be appointed by the Bishop to serve as the SDC to organize and conduct the business and activities of the Synodical Diaconate. Members of the SDC will serve a 3-year term with a maximum of six consecutive years. Additional people may be appointed by the Bishop at the request of the SDC providing Synod Deacons comprise at least 60% of the membership of the SDC. Officers of the SDC will be a chairperson and secretary, to be elected from within the council to serve 1-year terms. Officers may serve two consecutive terms. The SDC will maintain contact and communication with other leadership activities of the synod.
- 9.3.** The SDC will serve as the Application/Formation Committee for the Synodical Diaconate, performing those functions described elsewhere in this document. Other individuals may be invited by the SDC to serve on sub-committees of the SDC to assist in the handling of applications, arranging education opportunities, and other tasks the SDC feels necessary.
- 9.4.** 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.
- 9.5.** A Synod staff member, appointed by the Bishop, will be an ex-officio member of the Council.

10.Accountability

10.1. Members of the Synodical Diaconate will be accountable immediately to their pastor/supervisor and to the congregation 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 through which they receive their Call. In either case, as stated above, the Call must be renewed annually.

10.2. 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.

10.3. As a member of a synodical roster, Synod Deacons are required to submit paperwork at the appropriate times. These include:

- Annual reports for Synod Deacons under Call and those on Leave from Call
- Submitting an On Leave from Call application when needed
- Making sure Call renewals are filed with the Bishop's office and SDC

These forms are necessary for maintaining the roster of synod deacons. Synod Deacons not submitting required paperwork will be subject to disciplinary action under 12.2.

10.4. An annual renewal of Call must be submitted to the Bishop's office and the SDC. (7.2)

11.Participation in the Synodical Diaconate

11.1. The SDC is responsible for maintaining expectations and requirements for members of the Synodical Diaconate. These expectations include:

- Ongoing prayer for Synodical Diaconate members and their ministries
- Participation in continuing education
- Participation as needed in building of Synodical Diaconate structure
- Maintaining the integrity of local ministerial call

- Completing of a boundary workshop (Safe Church) and Anti-racism training.
- Continuing to meet regularly with pastor/supervisor and congregation/agency leadership
- Conducting themselves in a manner appropriate to a member of a public ministry (e.g. social media posts).
- Encouraging others to use their gifts in the ministry of the Church and service to the world

11.2. Members of the Synodical Diaconate do not enjoy the same mobility as other ministers within the wider church as the roster of the Synodical Diaconate is not an official roster of the ELCA. General rules for mobility within the Metropolitan New York Synod (leaves, etc.) will follow the guidelines noted above. For situations not cited here, the guidelines for ELCA Ministers of Word and Service will be consulted. 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 Bishop and/or Synod Council.

11.3. During a pastoral vacancy the guideline cited in 8.3 will be followed. However, during these transitions it is not uncommon for the congregation to rely more on a Synod Deacon for leadership and support. The synod deacon must understand they are not a ‘temporary pastor’ and direct all pastoral situations to the Coverage or Interim Pastor and/or Dean of the Conference.

11.4. Members who seek a status of On Leave from Call must complete the appropriate paperwork and file it with the SDC and the Bishop. Annual reports must be filed with both the SDC and the Bishop (there is a special report for those On Leave from Call). This paperwork is mandatory and can result in disciplinary action if not filed.

Normative Pattern: Upon endorsement by the SDC and the Bishop, they may be retained on the roster of the synod for a maximum of 3-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 6-years.

Family Leave: Upon endorsement by the SDC and the Bishop, a member who has been in active service under call for at least 3-years may request leave for family responsibilities. A Synod Deacon who requests leave for the birth, adoption 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 Synodical Diaconate for a maximum of 6-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.

11.5. Because Synod 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 **may not** serve on congregational call committees. As with any ELCA layperson, Synod Deacons can serve as an elected lay member of congregation councils, committees, boards, or representatives to Synod Assembly. However, it is highly recommended that Synod Deacons not accept these positions and should only do so in consultation with their pastor/supervisor and only when there is a vital need due to lack of leadership within the congregation. However, Synod 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 synod 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, Synod Deacons are expected to behave in a manner that adorns the Gospel, seeks peace and harmony, and preserves the integrity of ministerial and supervisory relationships.

12.Discipline

- 12.1.** Created as flawed human beings we often find ourselves in positions and situations that are not reflective of our faith and call. As members of the Synodical Diaconate we must strive to act in a manner to which Jesus calls us. As members of a synodical roster, we also must be mindful that our behavior not only reflects on ourselves, but our congregations, our synod, the Synodical Diaconate, and the Church. As members of a public ministry, Synod Deacons must also be mindful of what they say publicly. Also, in this age of social media, it is important that anything posted be appropriate.
- 12.2.** In a situation that may require disciplinary action and/or termination of call, the Synodical Diaconate will mirror, as close as possible, the procedure in place for conflict with a Minister of Word and Sacrament as described in the Constitution of the Metropolitan New York Synod (S14.18). For this process, the Bishop, in his/her discretion, may use the SDC as the advisory committee unless the SDC is the initiating body for the complaint of a Synod Deacon not submitting the proper paperwork as described in 10.3.

13.Future Issues

- 13.1.** 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 Synodical Diaconate as a responsible partner in the church's continued mission.
- 13.2.** 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.

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