

A New Chapter in Lay Ministry: From Synod Parish Deacon to Parish Lay Minister

After a year of prayer, discernment, and careful work by the SPD Oversight Committee in consultation with the Office of the Bishop, we are ready to take the next step in supporting and strengthening lay leadership in the Florida-Bahamas Synod. The *Synod Parish Deacon (SPD)* program has now transitioned into the new *Parish Lay Minister (PLM)* program. This change was motivated by the realization that there is much confusion between the role of the ELCA Deacon and the Synod Parish Deacon. The SPD is a program that a small number of the synod opt into participating in. The ELCA Deacon is an ELCA-wide path to ordained ministry that now requires a seminary degree, going through the candidacy committee process, and other steps. The other motivator is realizing that the need for lay ministry is growing and changing in a post-COVID church and needs to be addressed.

This change honors the faithful service of those who completed the SPD program while opening doors for future ministry with broader flexibility and recognition. Current SPDs may choose to remain in their existing designation or transfer into the new PLM program, where they will find the same heart for ministry but an updated structure that better fits the church's mission today.

So, what's new?

- Parish Lay Ministers do the same types of ministries within the congregations as an SPD – there is no change in responsibilities that a congregation and PLM agree need to be done.

- A PLM can continue to serve a congregation after the pastor leaves as a PLM, with the pastor's permission.
- A PLM can serve on the congregation council if elected with the pastor's approval.
- A PLM may wear the vestments of the white alb, red cincture, and PLM Cross in any setting, not just in their home congregation, within the synod that is appropriate.
- A PLM may also use the title *Lay Minister* when appropriate and, with pastoral permission, participate more fully in congregational leadership.
- PLMs are now eligible, if called on by the Office of the Bishop, to become *Synod Authorized Ministers*, expanding the pathways for those who serve.

These changes reflect our Lutheran conviction that ministry belongs to all the baptized. As Martin Luther taught, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts across the body of Christ so that the gospel might reach every corner of the world. Parish Lay Ministers live out this calling through worship, care, and community service, showing that God works through ordinary people in extraordinary ways. Together, this renewed program celebrates our past, honors our present servants, and strengthens the church for the future. For more information, visit the synod website at <https://fbsynod.com/resources/PLM/>