

The Synodical Diaconate

(Synod Deacons)



Approved by Synod Council on November 14, 1998

Both pastoral and lay ministry are basic to the life of the Church. We propose a synodical diaconal ministry that affirms both pastoral and lay ministries. From our earliest traditions diaconal ministry has had an integrity of its own. Acts 6:1-6 has been used as a scriptural basis for diaconal ministry based on a functional need.

The Reformers recognized that the office of Word and Sacrament was a divine office instituted by God "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." [Ephesians 4:12]. In different times and different places, the office is ordered as seems best to the Church and the Holy Spirit. A Synodical Diaconate is a ministry of Word and Service that flows from Word and Sacrament and is accountable to it. A synodical deacon is one who is inwardly compelled and outwardly affirmed for service in both the congregation and the world. The diaconate serves to affirm both the pastoral and the lay ministries of the congregation. We understand a deacon as a particular minister with gifts and a calling for providing vision and practical leadership for the congregation's ministries. Through their common calling and theological training deacons, exercising their teaching responsibility, would assist the pastoral ministry in underpinning the particular ministries of their calling to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The Ministry of the Baptized: Service and Witness

The work of the Church in the world is one of mission [Matthew 28:19ff] which, by our witness to Jesus Christ and invitation to the means of grace, opens the possibility of faith and eternal life [Romans 10:14]. The priesthood of the baptized is a divine ministry ordered according to the will of God [Acts 5:29]

In response of faith [Romans 4:3] the service of the baptized is rendered to the neighbor in the form of love and loving deeds [Ephesians 5:21] for Christ's sake. The ministry of the baptized leads to an explicit confession of the Church's faith as our witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is our life [Colossians 3:4] and in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of our sins [Colossians 1:14]. The fulfillment of the ministry of the baptized comes as we invite others to the gathering where God restores and fulfills his people in their life in Christ. Within this gathering the Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace, works the miracle of faith [Augsburg Confession, Articles 5 & 7].

The Ministry of the Pastor: Word and Sacrament

The pastoral ministry is a service to the Word with responsibilities both within the life of the congregation as well as outside the congregation in God's world. This service is carried out by those called to the Office of Word and Sacrament. As the Word is preached and the Sacraments administered according to the Gospel, the Church is called into being through the power of the Holy Spirit. As servant of the Word, the work of the Pastor within the congregation is to "...equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ," [Ephesians 4:12] outside of the congregation. Through proclamation

and works of justice, the pastor witnesses to the kingdom in community, nation, and the world. [ELCA Constitution 7.31.12; Synod, S14.02; Congregation C9.03]

The pastor shepherds the many and various ministries of the congregation to ensure their grounding in Word and Sacrament. Care for the particular ministries of the congregation requires that the baptized are continually educated and confirmed in the common life of Word and Sacrament. It is appropriate that the pastor delegate responsibility of caring for one or more of these particular ministries to properly train lay persons. Such delegation may be appropriately fulfilled through the issuing of a call by the congregation to a deacon.

The Ministry of the Deacon: Word and Service

Historically, there is a particular ministry carried out by those filling an Office of Word and Service. This ministry has been called the Diaconate. The deacon serves in one or more particular ministries in the congregation. These include ministries such as social ministry, youth ministry, stewardship, outreach, visitation, evangelism, and outdoor ministry. Through the ministry of Word and Service, the deacon ministers to the baptized by nurturing the life of Christ within them, grounding them and their ministries in the gospel and common sacramental life of the community, thereby assisting the pastor in equipping the saints for their ministry to the world.

The thing that distinguishes the diaconal from the pastoral ministry is the area of responsibility or jurisdiction. Pastors are given the responsibility for the general life of the whole congregation. Pastors may delegate to deacons the responsibility for particular ministries within a congregation. In addition to jurisdiction, presiding at the sacramental ministries of the church distinguishes the pastoral from the diaconal office. While it is an appropriate liturgical expression of the diaconal office for the deacon to assist the pastor at the Lord's table as an Assisting Minister, the service of deacons within the liturgy should not preclude other lay persons serving as worship assistants.

Distinguishing the diaconal ministry from the common ministry of the baptized is vocation and accountability. Diaconal ministry is an ordered ministry of teaching and shepherding the life of the gospel among the baptized. The deacon is held accountable to the constitutions, doctrines and disciplines of the Church in ways that volunteers are not. The deacon's ministry is to be in accord with and accountable to the Word and Sacrament ministry of the local congregation and under the direction of the pastor.

THE PROPOSAL

We propose an order of consecrated deacons for ministries of Word and Service within the Florida-Bahamas Synod.

A person recommended by the pastor from the local congregation to the Bishop becomes a diaconal nominee. Granted the Bishop's approval, a diaconal nominee becomes a diaconal candidate. After completion of the required synodical training, a diaconal candidate approved by the Bishop is affirmed for service to a Florida-Bahamas congregation. The trained candidate is consecrated by the Bishop and installed in that congregation as a synodical deacon accountable to the pastor.

This Proposal is prayerfully and respectfully submitted to Bishop William Trexler and the Florida-Bahamas Synod Council by the Bishop's Task Force on a Synodical Diaconate.

Members of the Task Force (1998)

Chair:

The Reverend Jon N. Keiser D. Min., The Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Tampa

Tampa Task Force Members:

Mr. Leroy (Chris) Gardner, Deacon, Gethsemane, Gainesville

Mr. James Burke, Deacon, King of Glory, New Port Richey

Mrs. Shari O'Brien, ELCA Deacon, University Church, Gainesville

The Reverend Eugene Fernsler, Atonement, Sebring

Mr. Jim Dunn, Deacon, Atonement, Sebring

The Reverend Jeffrey Bornemann, Lord of Life, Plant City

Pr. David Webb, Synod liaison

The work of the Church in the world is one of mission which opens to the world the possibility of faith and eternal life.

A Synodical Diaconate is a ministry of Word and Service that flows from Word and Sacrament and is accountable to it.

A deacon is inwardly compelled and outwardly called for service in both the congregation and the world.

Upon receiving a congregation's call, the trained candidate is consecrated by the Bishop, installed in that congregation as a synodical deacon accountable to the pastor.

Through the ministry of word and Service, the deacon ministers to the baptized by nurturing the life of Christ within them and grounding them and their ministries in the gospel and common sacramental life of the community.

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Addendum to the Program for a Synod Diaconate

Recommendations by the task force:

1. **Pre-Qualification:** Minimum education: Our goal to make this ministry as accessible as possible will be met by asking that candidates have a high school diploma or its equivalent.
2. **Discernment:** This process begins with the person's relationship with the pastor. One or the other might speak of this ministry as a possibility for a further expression of a lay person's faith. With the pastor's encouragement and approval, the person will make application. During the application process the applicant is encouraged to read the ELCA publication, "What Shall I Say", as an aid in the discernment process. Nominees are required to attend a Deacon's table talk and to help at the Synod House periodically.

3. **Application:** The application form for candidacy for rostered ministry will serve as a model for the synod diaconate application.

Florida-Bahamas Synod Diaconal Ministry Course Requirements

- Survey courses in the old and new testaments
- Lutheran Confessions
- Worship basics
- Ongoing practicum and supervision by the local pastor in areas of preaching and spirituality

4. **Collegiality:** The Synod Diaconate may wish to hold a yearly Diaconal Retreat.

5. **Expectations, Accountability and Term of Service:** The expectations of the bishop for rostered ministers would serve as the standard for the synodical diaconate.^[i] Note: Congregations are requested to check their insurance to cover diaconal ministries.

The bishop maintains the synod's list of ordered deacons. Deacons removed from the list would not be recommended for service within the Florida-Bahamas Synod. As a synod order deacons are not automatically transferable to other Synods.^[ii]

The Synodical Deacon, as attendant to the pastor, serves at the discretion of the pastor and is accountable to the pastor. Therefore, the deacon does not report to the congregation council. The pastor may terminate the service of the deacon at any time. If the pastor resigns, the deacon's term of service officially ends pending invitation from the new pastor.

During a pastoral vacancy the deacon may continue to serve the interim pastor, if that pastor so desires.

Existing Diaconal Ministries and Associates in Ministry: It is recognized that there exists in the synod various "orders" and/or congregational diaconal ministries. Present deacons will be given special consideration with regard to listing in the Synodical Diaconate and educational requirements on a case by case basis. ELCA Diaconal Ministers will be presumed to have met all requirements and may apply for listing as a Synodical Deacon.^[iii] Associates in Ministry are presumed to have met the requirements for the Synodical Deacon and may apply, with the recommendation of their pastor, for listing and consecration as a Synodical Deacon.

^[i] Expectations of the Bishop's Office for Pastors of the Florida-Bahamas Synod." Also "Visions and Expectations" (ELCA)

^[ii] See ELCA "Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministers."

^[iii] The term, "Diaconal Minister": is the recognized term for the ELCA rostered Diaconal Ministers. This ministry involves official call and stipend. It should not be confused with the "Synodical Deacon" which is primarily non-stipendiary.

^[iv] AIM's are also ELCA rostered while Synodical Deacons are not. AIM's also receive stipends while Synodical Deacons may or may not receive stipends.