

Atlantic District of the LC-MS Diaconate Guidelines



1. The Diaconate

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The diaconate has had a variety of definitions over time and has included a broad range of people, privileges, and responsibilities. Sometimes it has included mostly people who were taking a step toward the office of pastor or priest. At other times it has been 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 baptized. This latter sense defines the district diaconate.

2. Purpose of the District Diaconate

- 2.1 The purpose of the district diaconate is to coordinate and support the efforts 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.
- 2.2 The district diaconate also serves to coordinate and facilitate the oversight and leadership to be exercised by the praesidium over the various diaconal ministries of the district, whether in congregations or agencies or in special deployed mission assignments.
- 2.3 The district diaconate functions as a support ministry and standardization tool for the ministries of deacons under the authority and care of the Atlantic District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. At present there is no official transferability from the Atlantic District, Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod Diaconate to any other Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod judicatory or ministerial category.

3. Members of the District Diaconate

- 3.1 Members of the district diaconate are men and women who have been selected by the Church to serve after the example of our Lord Jesus. They are Christian people in their usual employment and life who 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.

- 3.2 While some may be working in and for the larger Church, most serve in local congregations and their surrounding communities. They will be known by the title of “Commissioned District Deacon.”
- 3.3 Members of the diaconate of the Atlantic District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, are those people who have applied for and have been accepted into membership. The deacons have met the requirements for membership, which are set by the district, and they subscribe to the guidelines for service and supervision as set forth in this document and any which follow it.

4. The Ministry of the District Diaconate

- 4.1 At the heart of the ministry of deacons are 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. Deacons so gifted will engage in various ministries of teaching within the congregation/agency, including baptismal and communion preparation, catechesis of youth and adults, and small group Bible study leadership or supervision. All aspects of diaconal ministry are under the supervision of the supervising pastor.

Examples: 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.

- 4.2 Members of the diaconate assume a leadership role in worship, but this is never to be their primary task. Rather, the serving function of deacons in the Church’s liturgy is to be a reflection of their tangible, actual servant hood in the world.
- 4.3 Members of the district diaconate shall neither preside at the Holy Eucharist nor exercise the Office of the Keys. In the absence of an ordained pastor and with approval of the pastor and congregation, the deacon may serve at the divine service including the communion liturgy using reserved sacrament. This practice should be used sparingly so as to not confuse the “Office of Deacon” and the “Office of Pastor.” The deacon may officiate at funerals under the direction of a supervising pastor. The deacon may proclaim the Gospel in formal and informal settings after he/she has received training in homiletics and while remaining under the supervision of an ordained pastor.
- 4.4 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. 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.

5. Qualifications for the District Diaconate

- 5.1 Deacons shall be active members of a congregation of the Atlantic District, accept and adhere to the confession of faith of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and be 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 support of their spouse and family.
- 5.2 Members of the district diaconate shall be of sound moral character and mature faith. The deacon will have demonstrated faithfulness in worship and service and have shown eagerness for continued spiritual formation.
- 5.3 The deacon will have completed an approved course of theological education: tract 1 of the District Diaconate Program, which includes biblical exegesis, systematics, symbolics, church history, and the practice of ministry (see section 6.)
- 5.4 The Deacon will have completed 200 hours of internship service, tract 2 of the District Diaconate Program, which includes: Visitation, Teaching, Administration, Evangelism, and Worship Leadership. A minimum of twenty hours of active experience are required in each of the five areas. The fulfillment of hours must be certified in writing by the supervising pastor.
 - A deacon candidate making application to enter into tract 2 of the District Diaconate Program will fill out Part 2 of the "Application for Admission to the Diaconate of the Atlantic District, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod." This application will also include all required letters of recommendation and a completed questionnaire. This is then sent to the Atlantic District office and reviewed by the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry. The Board will schedule an initial interview with the candidate and the candidate's supervising pastor. Notification to the candidate will follow the interview as to the candidate's acceptance or denial to the program. The candidate's internship begins only after they are accepted to the program.
- 5.5 It is expected that most members of the district diaconate will continue to hold regular employment and therefore would be involved in diaconal service on a part-time, non-stipendiary basis. There may be instances however, when a deacon serves a ministry for a stipend. Whenever possible, congregations and other agencies in which deacons are serving should meet expenses incurred during such service as well as offer support for continuing education.

6. Educational Requirements

- 6.1 As a minimum, applicants for the district 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 applicants proposed areas of diaconal service.
- 6.2 In addition, the deacon will complete a program of ministry training and theological formation. The two-year program offered by the Atlantic District 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.
- 6.3 The Atlantic District Board for Diaconal Ministry, in conjunction with the Atlantic District will offer a complement of continuing education opportunities. Commissioned District Deacons are expected to participate in these activities. The Continuing Education Committee of the Atlantic District Board for Diaconal Ministry will set the requirements of participation. (See section 12)

7. Service Requirements

- 7.1 All applicants for tract 2 of the District Diaconate Program will apply for acceptance into the program after they have completed their first year of classes in our Practical Training and Theological Program (tract 1 of the District Diaconate Program). They will fill out the appropriate application and send it to the Atlantic District office where it will be reviewed by the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry. An interview will be scheduled by the Admissions Committee with the candidate and the supervising pastor. Upon acceptance of the candidate by the Board for Diaconal Ministry, the candidate will then begin the deacon-in-training (internship), tract 2 of the District Diaconal Program.

This internship will be comprised of 200 hours of service broken out as follows:

- Fifty (50) hours of prior service will be accepted if approved by the supervising pastor.
- One hundred (100) hours comprised of twenty (20) hours of intensive experience in each of the following five areas:

- o Visitation: nursing homes, hospitals, shut-ins, etc.
- o Teaching: Bible studies, VBS, Sunday school, etc.
- o Administration: organize a newly instituted program; be responsible for an area of ministry in a staff position.
- o Evangelism: follow up on visitors to church; teach an evangelism course.
- o Worship Leadership: assist in Sunday worship, nursing home devotions, etc.
- o All hours are to be approved by the supervising pastor.

- The remaining fifty (50) hours can be spread over any one of the above areas or any other area of parish life and ministry. All hours and appropriate areas of ministry are to be approved by the supervising pastor.
- The internship must be completed within twenty-four (24) months from the day of acceptance into the deacon-in-training, tract 2 of the District Diaconate Program. The purpose of these requirements are 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.

- 7.2 It is expected that each applicant's internship supervisor will be a rostered pastor, who is directly connected to the ministry being undertaken during the intern period. This supervisor will assist the applicant in establishing goals and expectations for the internship; who will meet with the applicant no less than twice monthly to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns; and will submit a written evaluation of the applicant and the service rendered to the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry.
- 7.3 It is also expected that all applicants upon completion of their internship will submit a written report of their service, describing the nature of the experience as well as personal reflections on the experience. This is to be submitted to the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry.
- 7.4 A candidate must make application into tract 2 of the District Diaconate Program within six months of completing tract 1 in the program.

8. Leadership of the District Diaconate

- 8.1 The Atlantic District Praesidium, in conjunction with the Atlantic District Convention, appoints the Atlantic District Board for Diaconal Ministry every three years. The Board will select a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary. The board is responsible to the praesidium of the Atlantic District. A member of the praesidium or a designee will be an ex-officio member of the Board.
- 8.2 The Board for Diaconal Ministry is to organize and oversee the conduct of business and activity of the district diaconate. The board is to make regular reports to the praesidium, and also a report to the district convention.
- 8.3 The Board is authorized to form subcommittees to assist in the work and ministry of the diaconate.

9. Acceptance into the District Diaconate

- 9.1 Persons who desire to be members of the district diaconate must have obtained the support of their pastors and congregations (church councils). In pastoral vacancies, the circuit counselor/district official is the supervising pastor unless he otherwise delegates. Applicants will make their intentions known to the district president and to the Admissions Committee through the filing of a completed "Application for Admission to the Diaconate of the Atlantic District, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod" (see Appendix B).
- 9.2 The regular application process will involve:
 - 9.2.1 An initial meeting between the applicant, supervising pastor and the District Board for Diaconal Ministry, at which time the application process, requirements, internship (hours of service), and any special needs will be addressed.
 - 9.2.2 A Background check must be performed by the home congregation (and the candidate pass this check) upon completion of the initial interview and before beginning the Deacon Internship leading to certification.
 - 9.2.3 Internship review will be conducted through a face-to-face meeting of the deacon intern, the supervising pastor, and the Review Subcommittee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry. Deacon candidates will be informed of the decision of the subcommittee. If approved by the subcommittee, the entire Board for Diaconal Ministry must approve the candidate. The Board for Diaconal Ministry then forwards their recommendation for final approval to the praesidium and the Board of Directors of the Atlantic District.
- 9.3 Approved applicants will be received into membership in the district diaconate along with their ordering for the diaconal service by a commissioning rite, a service of prayer and the laying on of hands, as set forth in the district service rite for the commissioning of a deacon.

10. Accountability

- 10.1 The deacon is an integral part of a congregation's ministry team and is accountable to the pastor and the congregation. It is important that the role, duties, and position of the deacon be clearly defined. For many congregations, having a deacon on staff is new and unfamiliar. The supervising pastor has the primary responsibility for educating the congregation and for integrating the deacon into parish ministry.
- 10.2 The deacon is under the supervision of an ordained Pastor, normally the pastor of the deacon's home congregation. While the pastor is the supervisor, the pastor-deacon relationship should be collegial in nature, and not one of "boss to employee." The deacon and pastor are to work as a team in serving God at their congregation. The deacon is also

responsible to the congregation through the oversight of the lay leadership (president, board of elders, etc.) as appropriate.

- 10.3 The development of goals and tasks for the deacon is a task done jointly by the deacon and the supervising pastor. The deacon and pastor should meet on a regular basis (at the minimum once a month,) to discuss progress and assignments. The lay leadership will provide the deacon with an annual evaluation.
- 10.4 The deacon is a member of a congregation's pastoral staff. By virtue of the diaconal order, the deacon is not just another lay person who has been given special training. The deacon serves under the pastoral office, assisting and expanding the congregation's ministry. The pastor and deacon should work together to clarify and explain the deacon's position in the congregation.
- 10.5 As a pastoral staff member, the deacon will not usually serve in any church office (president, secretary, etc.) and will usually not serve as a lay member of standing church committees. In cases where the deacon will also serve in an official congregation office, the deacon will take great care in serving the congregation appropriately.
- 10.6 Deacons will also be accountable to the president of the Atlantic District, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod as they will be considered part of the ministry of the Atlantic District, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. The district president may exercise this oversight through the praesidium and/or the Board for Diaconal Ministry.
- 10.7 Such accountability will include an annual report of ministry, filed with the congregation, the president's office, and the diaconate board.
- 10.8 The deacon is expected to comply with the requirements for continuing education as outlined in 12.4.

11. Rostering expectations for Non-Commissioned Deacons serving in the Atlantic District

- 11.1 There are a number of non-commissioned deacons serving congregations and agencies in the district. For these men and women who desire full rostering in the Atlantic District, they are invited to participate in a careful process of evaluation through interviews and conversations with the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry. The candidate and their supervising pastor will participate in this process.

12. Participation in the District Diaconate

- 12.1 The general requirements for participation will include the following:

1. Deacons are certified for a three-year period, renewable on a three-year basis

without limitation, congruent with the Atlantic District Convention.

2. Renewal is undertaken after the second year through application for continued service as received through the deacon's congregation and pastor supervisor.

3. Description of diaconal service and continuing education.

4. Deacons leaving the Atlantic District or transferring from one Atlantic District congregation to another must inform the Board for Diaconal Ministry in a timely manner (30 days).

5. A deacon transferring to a congregation in another LCMS district or leaving the denomination is placed on inactive deacon status. The Atlantic District bears no further ecclesiastical supervision responsibility.

6. A deacon transferring to another Atlantic District congregation is placed on candidate status until a letter of acceptance by the new congregation and supervising pastor is received. Candidate status remains for a three-year maximum period of time, renewable annually during those three years.

7. Upon receipt of the letter of acceptance, the candidate status is removed and the deacon continues in the new diaconal location.

8. Deacons who are rostered in other districts or denominations who desire to serve in Atlantic District congregations under pastoral supervision must submit an application to the Board for Diaconal Ministry with accompanying letters from the Atlantic District congregation and supervising pastor, must be interviewed by the Admissions Committee of the Board for Diaconal Ministry, may be asked to receive additional training as deemed necessary by the Admissions Committee prior to the acceptance as an Atlantic District Deacon, and are subject to the same rubrics as other deacons once accepted.

12.1.1 Ongoing prayer for diaconate members and their ministries

12.1.2 Attendance at spiritual retreat

12.1.3 Participation in continuing education

12.1.4 Participation as needed in building of district diaconate structure

12.1.5 Maintaining the integrity of local ministerial service

12.1.6 Submission of annual report

12.2 Deacons who do not complete the steps for re-certification will no longer be active. If concern relating to the service has been identified, the Board for Diaconal Ministry will contact the deacon and the supervising pastor to ascertain the issues and work toward a solution. If a deacon becomes inactive and does not respond to the Board for Diaconal Ministry communications, the Board for Diaconal Ministry will make a recommendation of removal from the Atlantic District diaconate to the praesidium.

12.3 Deacons may be removed from the Atlantic District diaconate roster for three reasons:

12.3.1 Adherence to false doctrine

12.3.2 Neglect of duties/incompetence

12.3.3 Immoral lifestyle

12.4 Deacons must attend 50 % of the continuing education programs offered through the Diaconate on a yearly basis. Continuing education for the district diaconate will comprise the following:

12.4.1 Participation in annual retreat and the training workshop each year.

12.4.2 Participation in four deacon gatherings each year.

13. Additional Items

13.1 The Atlantic District diaconate Guidelines cannot cover every issue or concern. Those issues not covered in this document will be handled in a Christ-like manner, calling upon the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for proper discernment.

13.2 All changes to this document will proceed through the Board for Diaconal Ministry to the praesidium, with final approval from the Atlantic District Board of Directors.

14. Distinctive Ministerial Garb

14.1 A question regarding the diaconate has been how to affirm its ministerial character without confusing it with the office of pastor. Since appearance and style of dress may indeed contribute to the message, care must be taken to establish the distinctive office of the district deacon without confusing it with the pastoral office.

14.2 Liturgical garb for the district diaconate follows the church's historic usage as regards deacons. Deacons are to wear the diaconal stole as a mark of their office, and they may also wear the dalmatic, which has also been a historic mark of the diaconate. To clarify their membership in the Atlantic District diaconate, they will also wear a distinctive pectoral cross.

14.3 A diaconal cross from the Atlantic District and the photo identification card provided by the deacon's congregation are ministry-distinctive items for Atlantic District Deacons, sufficing for visitation and involvement in a variety of settings. Clerical shirts and collars are not to be worn by deacons.