

Who We Are

The ELCA director for candidacy, a rostered lay minister herself, examines what these leaders do, how they are meeting needs, their rationale for a call, and ongoing issues which need attention.

Editor: We are presenting a special section on our ELCA rostered lay ministries. These include associate in ministry, deaconess, and diaconal minister. ELCA Director for Candidacy, Carol L. Schickel, in the following article, presents an overview of rostered lay ministry, followed by articles from one representative from each roster. Each of these rostered persons responded to similar questions about their role in the life of the ELCA.

Significant ministries are being carried out on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the service of almost 900 active leaders who are called to serve as associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers (there are approximately 300 retired workers).

The men and women who serve on these three lay rosters of the ELCA are commissioned or consecrated for a public ministry. They are called by a congregation, a synod, or the churchwide expression for an intentional ministry on behalf of the church to proclaim the gospel and exemplify a servant life for all the baptized people of God. These officially recognized forms of ministry, along with ordained ministry, give support and specific leadership through the ELCA.

From the time of the early Christian church, people have been set apart for varieties of service. The ELCA Deaconess Community has its roots in 19th century Germany and prepares and supports women who are committed to a life of service to church and society. (The Lutheran Deaconess Association, of Valparaiso, Indiana, includes deaconesses from both the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the ELCA. The ELCA-related deaconesses, both active and retired, number 160.)¹

The associate in ministry roster

represents a range of specializations and occupations, including those who served in lay ministry in predecessor church bodies as deacons, teachers, professional lay leaders, church staff, and deaconesses.

The diaconal ministry roster, a recent addition yet rooted in biblical and church heritage, was established in 1993, recommended as an expanded understanding of ministry by the Division for Ministry.

What Do We Do?

We serve as leaders in a church that seeks to be relevant to the needs of the world and effective in its witness of Christ. We represent the church in settings and positions other than the traditional pastor's role. We proclaim the gospel and serve faithfully as educators, chaplains, ministry coordinators, and administrators. We are spiritual directors, youth and family ministers, and musicians. We serve as synod and churchwide staff, as well as faculty and staff at colleges and seminaries.

Seventy-four percent serve in congregational calls (77% of associates in ministry and 43% of deaconesses and diaconal ministers). Thirty-two individuals serve in synod positions and 29 serve as ELCA churchwide staff.

Rostered lay leaders in the ELCA serve in called positions in each of the nine regions in similar proportion to clergy. There are currently 867 people serving on these rosters—77 percent female, 99 percent Caucasian. Almost half of those currently rostered (373) have joined one of the lay rosters since the beginning of the ELCA in 1988, with an average of 31 newly consecrated or commissioned each year.

As of late summer 2000, the diaconal ministry roster has 33 men and women serving in congregational and specialized ministry settings. The dea-

coness community has 49 women, and there are 783 associates in ministry serving in all synods of the church

What are the needs of the church and the world?

The church needs leaders who understand the significance of serving as partners in ministry. Many people on our lay rosters serve in a team ministry—on a congregational staff, a synod staff, a seminary or university faculty, or a hospital or social service agency staff. We understand the benefits and dynamics of shared ministry, the concepts of teamwork, partnership, and cooperation.

The church needs theologically trained servants to carry its mission into the world, both through equipping congregation members as well as by serving in various locations where ministry is needed outside the church.

Lutherans extend a gospel message to the world through the ministry of these leaders. We are called to exemplify the servant life and to attend to the needs of those who live in our world. We prepare, nurture, and equip the people of God for their ministry in daily life, and we provide leadership to deepen the church's commitment to the ministry which is the responsibility of all the baptized people of God.

We partner with pastors to connect the faith community with our culture's needs for healing and care. We are lay people but are set apart by the church, acknowledged as theologically prepared. We are lay people who bring a perspective to ministry not provided by others (we are sometimes seen as more accessible than our clergy sisters and brothers), valued by those who fear religious authority, or who feel alienated by the church of their past. The church needs us to be the bridge for those people.

What rationale leads people to discern a call to rostered lay ministry?

All leaders in the church bring their own unique gifts to ministry. This route to public ministry is the uncommon path—yet it is one that makes sense for many as we discern where God is calling us. We discern that we are called to be something other than pastors. We are called to serve faithfully in a “different” way that seems to fit for us.

Some people emerge as lay leaders in a congregation or synod and come to discern a call to intentional public ministry as they respond to a desire for theological insight and spiritual formation.

Some know God is calling and welcome the choices provided by the ELCA for different rosters, with a variety of functions and areas of focus.

The ELCA has established three lay rosters since its formation in 1988 and recognizes the diversity of gifts and variety of personalities and gifts that people bring to service on behalf of the church. The complexity of needs in the church and world provide many opportunities for service, and those who are called as deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and associates in ministry exemplify the ways in which church and world can be connected.

While a wide range of positions and responsibilities is held on the three rosters, each seems to attract a particular kind of person and invites mutual support rather than competition.

Associates in ministry frequently focus on shared ministry, often with a team focus. Deaconesses are focused on service and community. The diaconal ministers are emerging as more varied yet are rooted in the diaconate, with a desire to lead the church in renewal and to seek wholeness in the world and a focus on the connection of church and world.

Rather than provide one particular definition or function for each roster, the church describes common characteristics of those who serve and provides these rosters for leaders who are evaluated and approved (through a candidacy process) as suitable for service in the ELCA.

All who are rostered in the ELCA are accountable to the church and are expected to live a lifestyle in keeping with the vision and expectations of the

church. A roster acknowledges an individual as one who speaks on behalf of the church and represents the ELCA.

That means that rostered lay ministers must be informed about the issues and priorities of the church, be involved in ministry through the wider church, and seek to discern and encourage those who might be called by God for future public ministry.

We are all expected, along with those on the roster of clergy, to attend conference and synod meetings, to report yearly to our synod bishop, to honor the call that is extended to us, and to serve where needed.

What concerns are there for rostered lay leaders?

The people who serve on the lay rosters of the ELCA bring vision and leadership as diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, and deaconesses. According to a 1999 survey of lay rostered leaders, those who serve on these rosters consider their rostered status to be an important expression of their calling as a Christian. This survey was distributed to 770 active rostered lay leaders by the Division for Ministry, in cooperation with the Department for Research and Evaluation. Seventy-six percent of those who received the survey responded.

One message that came through clearly is the desire for the entire church to be educated about rostered lay ministries, especially lay members and parish clergy. The following priorities were also identified by rostered lay leaders:

1. *To educate all members of the church about who rostered lay leaders are, what they do, and how they can serve the church.* Increased awareness can be achieved through intentionally providing information and stories through congregational settings, seminars, and synod events.

We desire to be acknowledged appropriately for our ministry and valued and supported as partners in ministry, with full utilization of our gifts.

2. *To provide increased communication and opportunities for rostered lay leaders to gather and meet.* While the deaconess community is grounded in regular gathering of community, and diaconal ministers have established an e-mail listserve to stay connected with others, many rostered lay leaders frequently feel isolated. Communication

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and networking among those on these rosters can address needs for support, connection, growth, and identity to combat marginalization and an underclass status.

3. *To standardize appropriate aspects of all rostered ministries.* Recognition of this important relationship of church and called servant through signs and symbols of the office, equal benefits for all rostered leaders, lifelong learning opportunities, and attention to mobility, compensation, and status issues are essential. Clear expectations and common understanding across the church of responsibilities will assist those serving, as well as those who might consider a church vocation.

4. *To develop effective partnerships and encourage shared ministry.* The church will benefit from attention to how rostered lay leaders work with each other and in relation to each other as well as to the ordained ministry roster and all the baptized people of God.

5. *To give ongoing attention to questions raised by The Study of Ministry about how we order and define our ministry, as well as a commitment to empower and prepare strong and competent leaders of all ethnic backgrounds for public ministry.*

Finally, we continue to pray that our ministries will be blessed and that as leaders, we can support and equip other leaders, moving strongly together for the glory of God.

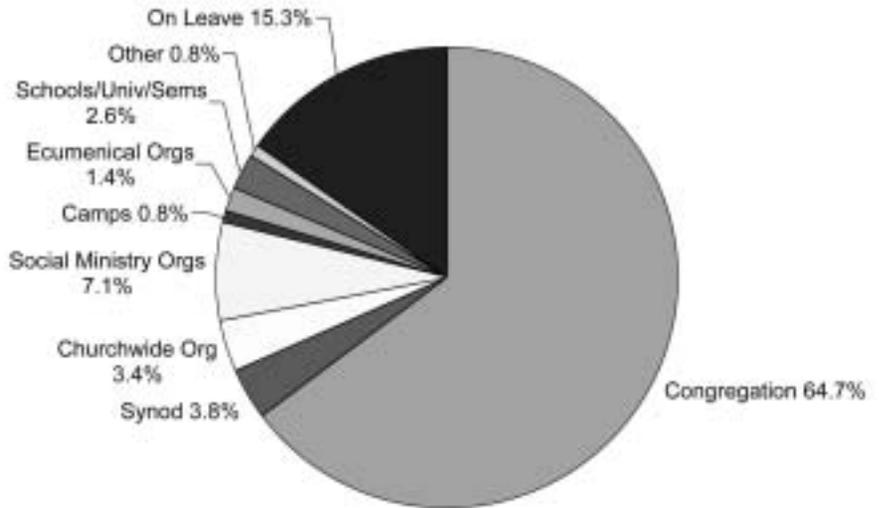
There are many reasons to celebrate and be thankful for these gifted people of God who serve as diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and associates in ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Carol L. Schickel is the ELCA director for Candidacy, Chicago, Illinois. She is a rostered associate in ministry.

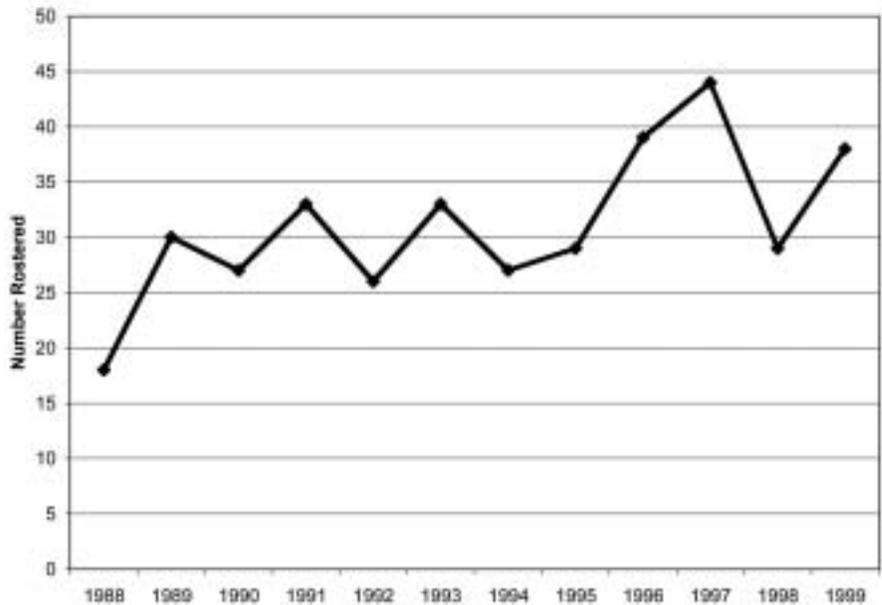
Endnote

1. In the Lutheran Deaconess Association, members may be rostered as associates in ministry, pastors, or diaconal ministers. Of the 160 deaconesses who are members of the ELCA, 36 are rostered as associates in ministry, 17 as pastors, and 1 as a diaconal minister. There are 18 deaconesses who are members of the LDA but are not rostered in the ELCA. The remainder are not working for pay or are retired.

ELCA Active Lay Rostered Leaders by Type of Position



ELCA Active Lay Rostered Leaders by Year Rostered



Resources for Discernment

Called By God—Responding With a Life of Service. This booklet describes the rosters of the ELCA and the candidacy process. Augsburg Fortress Order No. 69-1330. Call 800-328-4648.

Called To Serve (brochure) Augsburg Order No. 68-0103. Call 800-328-4648.

What Shall I Say? Discerning God's Call to Ministry (Augsburg Order No. 34-1-2106). Call 800-328-4648.

Information Packet from Division for Ministry. Call 800-638-3522, ext. 2870.

ELCA Deaconess Community, 801 Marion Square Rd., Gladwyne, PA 19035-1599. Call 610-642-8838.

For candidacy information, contact your synod office.

Visit the Division for Ministry website at www.elca.org/dm/invite.

Active and Retired Rostered Lay Ministers

(Source: ELCA Office of Secretary, effective: 8/1/2000)

Associates in Ministry	1106
Deaconess	77
Diaconal Ministers	33

Sister Carol Burk

Deaconess

What do you do?

My letter of call says that I am director of learning ministry at Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Columbia, South Carolina. Quite simply, I am a Christian educator. I am responsible for all of the educational activities in the congregation.

Some of the verbs that describe my work are supervise, recruit, train, recommend, provide, maintain, administer (programs and budget), advocate, represent, and lead.

Because I believe in lifelong learning, I relate to the entire congregation; most frequently, I relate to families with children. I spend a great deal of time working with the Sunday school and vacation Bible school programs.

However, I also enjoy creating new programs and new learning opportunities. I especially enjoy reviewing, adapting, and writing curriculum.

How do you see what you do as serving in response to the needs of the church and the world?

In 1976, John Westerhoff asked the important question *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Seabury Press, 1976). As a Christian educator I respond daily to one of the greatest needs of the church today, that of helping the whole congregation assure that the faith will be passed on from generation to generation.

Christian education undergirds everything else that we do in the church. It is essential that we equip our children and youth to survive in a world that is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity.

As a lifelong Lutheran, I grew up in Sunday school. My years in Sunday school, as a child, youth, and adult, have helped me to form my own "Christian survival kit," a memory book that includes favorite passages of Scripture that I can recite from memory, Christian hymns and songs, and the story of salvation as written in the pages of Scripture.

All of these sustain me as I move about my daily activities. They are espe-

cially helpful when I am under stress or suffering from pain or grief.

My personal experience, as well as my seminary training and work experience, have set the stage to help me support the congregation through direct teaching and by recommending resources useful for personal growth in the Christian faith.

What is your rationale for taking the route of deaconess to serve the ELCA?

My personal sense of call led me to the Deaconess community. As I explored the possibility of pursuing a church vocation, I knew that I wanted to serve the church as an educator. My synod's Professional Leadership Committee (now known as the Candidacy Committee) provided me with resources describing the variety of opportunities for service in the church.

As I studied these materials, I gravitated toward the description of the Deaconess community. I was particularly interested in the concept of community.

As a deaconess (with the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, Gladwyne, Pennsylvania), I am part of a community of women who serve the church. This is much more than a professional organization. It is a true community. We support one another through daily prayer. There is not a concern that does not get the attention of the community. Our monthly newsletter keeps us informed of "family news."

Indeed, we are a family. Friends and acquaintances who are not famil-

iar with the community often comment when I talk about my sisters. They know that I have only one blood sister. But they seem surprised when I talk about my 81 sisters in the Deaconess community.

Another reason for choosing the Deaconess community (or, better yet, for the Deaconess community choosing me) is that as a member of the community I am joined to all of those who have gone before, both in my present community and in the various communities of deaconesses all over the world.

Our community is part of Diakonia and Diakonia of the Americas and Caribbean, two organizations of deaconess groups throughout the world and a smaller group of deaconess groups in the Western Hemisphere.

These groups come from a variety of churches, not only Lutheran. It is humbling to me when I think of myself as a part of a worldwide movement. It gives me hope that the world truly can become a global village.

What concerns about rostered lay ministries in the ELCA do you want to share with the readers of *Lutheran Partners*?

My answer to this question comes in the form of three C's: communication, clarification, and celebration.

By *communication*, I am referring to simply getting the word out about the ministry of rostered lay persons in the ELCA. The ELCA candidacy process rightly makes the congregation the first point of contact for any candidate for ministry. It is the congregation that nurtures the sense of call in the individual. It is the congregation that must offer the first line of support for the candidate.

What many congregations do not understand is that it is the congregation that is in the business of recruiting and nurturing qualified candidates for all forms of ministry in the church.

In the Deaconess community of which I am a member (Gladwyne, Pennsylvania), I have served on the

As a deaconess, I am part of a community of women who serve the church. This is much more than a professional organization. It is a true community.

Committee on Promotion and Interpretation. I know the costs and the difficulties of finding creative ways to tell persons in congregations about our ministries.

In a denomination the size of the ELCA with nearly 11,000 congregations and 5 million members, the costs of reaching individuals is staggering. We have relied on synods and the synodical units of Women of the ELCA to help us. Our organization known as The Friends of the Deaconess Community regularly makes efforts to recruit individuals in congregations who will tell our story.

Other efforts by the Division for Ministry and our eight seminaries also attempt to reach people and let them know what avenues of ministry are available in the ELCA.

Even our best efforts have not been enough, however, to reach everyone in the ELCA. We need to find a way to reach individuals and instill in them a sense of responsibility for assuring that the church will have the best leadership—both clergy and lay—as we seek to minister to the church and the world in this new millennium.

Second, *clarification* refers to a need to interpret the rationale for rostered ministry to those who do not understand or see a need for paid lay staff in congregations, institutions, and

agencies of the ELCA.

Those of us in rostered lay ministries see ourselves as serving in special areas of the church's ministries. Our ministries are not intended to replace or supercede those of the laity as a whole. We are all called through our baptism to serve Christ and his church.

Rostered lay persons provide support for the overall ministry of the congregation or agency or institution. For example, Christian educators are called to pay full time attention to the educational ministry of the congregation and work alongside many lay volunteers. The professional Christian educator can offer needed support for these volunteers through providing resources and clarification of vision.

In terms of shepherding imagery, the rostered lay church worker can be seen as the sheep dog who keeps the sheep together.

Finally, *celebration*. Rostered lay ministries are quite possibly one of the ELCA's best kept secrets. We need to celebrate the fact that the ELCA cares enough about the ministries of its congregations to train a variety of church professionals to support the ministry of the whole people of God.

It might be tempting for some of us who have been in rostered lay ministry for many years to say that we are underappreciated, but that would not be

either completely fair or accurate. I prefer to say that perhaps we do not celebrate these ministries often enough.

In the history of the Lutheran church, persons in a variety of rostered lay positions have left their mark in every area of the church's life. I consider myself fortunate to be part of the Deaconess community, especially when I consider its history of training lay workers, especially in the School for Lay Workers that was run by the Baltimore Motherhouse for so many years. Some of the graduates of the Baltimore school have been my personal mentors.

I also celebrate the many hospitals, nursing care facilities, and schools that were created through the vision of deaconesses and other lay workers. It is critical that we not lose the memory of such great moments in Lutheran history. Indeed, we should celebrate the contributions of the many faithful workers who have served along with clergy and laity to proclaim God's Word through tireless service to the church.

Sister Carol Burk is director of learning ministry at Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Columbia, South Carolina. She is a member of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, based in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. Her e-mail address is carolb@ebenezerlutheran.org

FEATURE: ELCA ROSTERED LAY MINISTRIES

Phyllis Castens Wiederhoeft

Associate in Ministry

What do you do?

I am an associate in ministry and currently serve as an assistant to the Bishop in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. I have served in this position since August 1988.

The position has changed greatly since I began. When I first began, I was only part-time and served within that limited time frame in the areas of congregational ministries: worship, education, evangelism, and stewardship being the primary areas.

In 1991, when Bishop Enslin was first elected, he asked me to move into full-time ministry, continuing the congregational ministries portfolio but

also taking on the administrative tasks of the synod. As administrator, I work with assembly planning, the finance committee, and the synod council and oversee the administrative staff of the office.

We have moved away from a heavy emphasis on programmatic ministries in the last five years. That means that I now concentrate in the areas of evangelism and stewardship, including other staff as requested. I also carry out responsibilities involving the congregational call process and mobility for rostered leaders, as well as issues involving conflict and misconduct situations; again, I request assistance from

other staff as needed.

We have worked on a synodical staff vision and continuing education plan that affects the way we work together. Sometimes that means less distinction between staff portfolios, but it provides a cohesiveness to our intent to seek "teachable" moments in the lives of our rostered leaders and congregations.

How do you see what you do as serving in response to the needs of the church and the world?

Most clearly, I see working with congregations in the area of evangelism as serving the world. Sharing Jesus

with others who have yet to come to know and love him is a focus for all of us, wherever we live, work, and play. I love helping congregations see how they can encourage, inspire, and nurture one another to invite and welcome those who are new to Jesus.

I also delight in meeting God's gifted people as they serve through their congregations. Many times I work with call committees who are seeking a leader for their congregation who will equip them to do ministry in their daily lives. I still encounter people who seek a pastor or an associate in ministry to take care of them, but most people know that it is not the rostered leaders alone who can do ministry.

When I do face call committees or other committees who are inwardly focussed, I call upon them to think of others beyond their church doors. That takes a different kind of leader these days than they may be used to. So rethinking the nature of leadership is something that I help people do.

Much of my administrative work has to do with leadership. Many of the same leadership issues encountered in a congregation are the same for our synod—synod council members who want to micro-manage rather than lead and be visionary, finding people to serve, and rearranging a committee structure to a more responsive task force team approach.

This involves taking many of the concepts in current thinking in the business world and adapting them to a ministry format. I enjoy thinking "outside the box" and trying to find new and challenging ways to do ministry.

What is your rationale for taking the route of associate in ministry to serve the ELCA?

I have a family history of serving God through the church. My father was a pastor; my three older brothers went to Missouri Synod Lutheran high schools and colleges; and I knew that I also wanted to serve in a congregation.

I chose to go the route of a director of Christian education, youth, and music in the Missouri Synod system. People serving in that position are rostered just as the pastors and teachers are.

For a variety of reasons, I moved out of the Missouri Synod after serving eight years in a congregation. I pursued a master's and doctorate in adult edu-

cation and sought a position in which I could use my knowledge and skills.

I was offered the position of an assistant to the bishop as a lay person. Shortly after beginning, I entered the candidacy process for rostering as an associate in ministry.

I knew that my calling is to serve God through the church as an educator. My brother, an ELCA pastor, and my husband suggest occasionally that I return to seminary and become ordained. But I have no desire to seek ordination. I believe strongly that my witness is to serve as an associate in ministry so that others can see that we are all gifted in different ways and can serve God effectively in a variety of positions in the church.

Word and sacrament ministry is not my calling, but Word and service is. I do a lot of preaching in this position, so it is not as though I have no opportunity to proclaim God's message.

Ultimately, flexibility for all the rosters in determining and applying criteria for rostered leadership in the future is needed.

As the ELCA, and other denominations, face a shortage of ordained clergy, I believe I can be a witness to a model of ministry that can be acknowledged more, celebrated more, and encouraged more. Associates in ministry can provide leadership and service in ways that will free pastors to do the ministry to which they are called. Pastors and associates in ministry can team together in a congregation, moving strongly together rather than in competition with one another.

What concerns about rostered lay ministries in the ELCA do you want to share with the readers of *Lutheran Partners*?

Recognition, validation, and acceptance of the gifts of all the baptized is something that we strive towards. I don't think that we are there, and we may not reach that point until the end

of time. That affects the lay rostered ministries because they are a part of the "not ordained," which sometimes means that their gifts are not quite as good as those who serve on the ordained roster.

Too often, the phrase "going into the ministry" still means getting ordained. But because of our baptism, all of us "go into the ministry." So watching our language so that we confirm and affirm all of our ministries, including the lay rosters, is an issue we will continue to face.

Another major concern is funding positions for lay rostered people. A congregation seeks additional staffing, and thinks first of adding a second pastor just because that's who does ministry, right? But they discover that they can't afford a second pastor.

They then look at finding part-time help that won't cost as much. There are many gifted, skilled people in our congregations who have the excitement and passion for doing ministry. So congregations turn to them, but do not offer much financial support or training. The expectations are low: just get the job done; bring in the kids; have a marvelous music program; but don't expect to get paid much or receive any benefits.

Congregations certainly struggle at times to finance their vision, but often it is at the expense of lay staff members. When congregations express concern that they find qualified and trained lay staff, they may come to the synod office, hoping that we will be able to present candidates for their staffing needs.

But rarely is a lay rostered person able to consider moving because of low compensation packages. Mobility is an even greater issue for the lay rosters because of this.

Related to poor compensation is the issue of educating lay staff who want to serve in a congregation competently. They know that they do not have as much of an in-depth preparation for their positions as pastors do if they did not take theological or biblical studies as part of their college work.

Many of the laity bring the specializations of music, education, youth ministry, and others to their positions. So they seek ways to learn Lutheran theology and biblical studies so that they are well equipped to lead others in the congregations and to teach the faith.

But sources for those courses are limited. Traveling to a seminary is out of the question for many simply due to distance, much less, time away from the job and family. Congregations that cannot afford to pay well may not be able to support the cost of such coursework.

Development of online courses is providing hope that this issue will be changed. Lay schools that some synods provide is another means of equipping people to serve on the lay rosters.

Ultimately, flexibility for all the rosters in determining and applying criteria for rostered leadership in the future is needed. Changes are impacting the church in so many ways that the issues I have identified do not apply only to the lay rosters, but also to the ordained.

Our congregations, our synods, and the churchwide office face the challenge of preparing and equipping leaders for a church that is very different from today. What we offer for, and what

we expect of, our leaders cannot remain static.

I return to the belief of responding with all the gifts of all the baptized. Together we will find ways to minister to God's people.

Phyllis Castens Wiederhoeft is an associate in ministry who serves as an assistant to the bishop in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

FEATURE: ELCA ROSTERED LAY MINISTRIES

Phillip R. Deming

Diaconal Minister

There is a soft, quiet, but resolute click in the sound of a steel door closing firmly in the locked unit of a psychiatric facility. The sound of a door shutting. Metallic echoes of the rejection felt by many struggling with mental illness who have been shut out from the faith practices of their youth. Individuals who are forgotten when shifts change, and those with the keys of access go home.

There is a particular, wordless, and unspeakable agony in the eyes of parents who hold the lifeless body of a two-year old child. An oldest son, just now taken off life support, the most recent casualty of a slate of pool-side accidents. Radiating from the parents, the degree of pain not lessened a single measure by the most carefully crafted sermon.

These are a small but representative sample of the many places where the church is not often experienced, places not contained within the familiar four walls of a sanctuary. Nor are these times comfortable moments of casual encounter that conveniently occur within the shielded morning hours of Sunday.

These places and times are unconventional and uncomfortable, and they are where Christ calls us to be: people serving individually as members of his flock, and collectively as his body, the church; people active and present in service to others through diakonia.

What do you do?

Just as the secular work environment

has changed significantly over the last few decades, so has the work environment of those called to service by the church. Some of us now work in a variety of settings, often simultaneously in part-time capacities. In this combination of jobs, one becomes a "portfolio worker."

As a diaconal minister, I have responded to my call to ministry in a similar fashion and I might be aptly labeled as a "portfolio of tentmaker." I concurrently serve as a chaplain in a retirement community, a hospital emergency room, and in a psychiatric unit. I am also a therapist and serve as the "deacon" of a parish. In my "spare" time, I am an educator.

While the duties in each setting may be different, my experience reflects more similarities than differences. I preach, teach, counsel, lead worship, facilitate small groups, provide the ministry of presence, help in bereavement, administrate, and write policy at times.

I occasionally help to feed and wash individuals who are unable to do so for themselves. As I reflect on this last duty, I cannot help but feel it resonate with the historic understanding of diakonia.

Until the recent expansion of the ministry rosters, individuals who were called into the ordained ministry filled many of these positions. I believe, however, that the ELCA has chosen to embrace and expand our understanding of ministry. This understanding suggests that ministry is sometimes more

effectively provided in non-congregational settings.

The Ministry of Word and sacrament is an essential, ongoing expression of the church's ministry to the world. Providing such ministry within the context of a parish or congregational setting is one crucial way in which the world experiences God's grace.

An equally important function for the church is having the ability to recognize the need for ministry outside of the congregation and providing that ministry. The ELCA's perception of ministry flows from its historic experience and perspective.

This historic understanding of ministry is being increasingly challenged. Our complex world has need of a variety of ministries. I believe that the evolving sense of *diakonia* within the ELCA, particularly in the form of diaconal ministry, helps address this challenge. Diaconal ministry can serve as an important bridge between the organized structure of the ELCA and the varied cultural contexts in which we now live.

How do I see what I do as serving in response to the needs of the church and the world?

As envisioned by the ELCA, I understand diaconal ministry to be an intentional intervention to more clearly recognize the inherent connection between the "world" and the "church." An essential distinction for those called into diaconal ministry is dually

rooted in an understanding of this connection and in a desire for the church to be relevant.

Diaconal ministers are called to grapple with the brokenness in the world and to assess the manner in which the resources of the church may be applied to this brokenness. Diaconal ministers help others to see the possibilities for ministry and seek to empower them to do that ministry. The empowerment may flow from a diaconal minister doing the ministry as an example, or in providing training, mentoring, and encouragement. I am blessed with opportunities to both act and to empower others as a teacher and mentor.

Many who are called to serve the church on other rosters express their ministry flowing from a parish or congregation. As a diaconal minister, the primary focus of my ministry is essentially external to the traditional parish setting.

Whenever I encounter someone in a ministry situation, I represent that part of the body of Christ expressed by the ELCA. These encounters are based on intent rather than circumstance. They are intentional in that in my ministry I am actively seeking these interactions outside of the congregational setting.

In the minds of many, the world is a place that is both real and gritty, while the church is often seen as an innocuous place with stale hymns and a coffee hour. There is a significant discrepancy that is perceived to exist between the “church” and “world.” Diaconal ministry is an intentional statement that the church desires to be both relevant and vibrant in the world.

What was my rationale for taking the route of diaconal minister to serve the ELCA?

Several core issues have evolved, as I pondered my response to this question. The first concern was in the wording “serve the ELCA.” I see myself first as serving the body of Christ present in the world, rather than serving the ELCA as an institution.

Diaconal ministry is an intentional statement that the church desires to be both relevant and vibrant in the world.

While I firmly understand myself to be one who offers ministry under the authority and “license” of the ELCA, I see the institution as the vehicle for ministry rather than being the focal point. A significant element of my rationale for pursuing diaconal ministry was a desire to help clarify what our purpose as church was to be.

We live in a social environment that often perceives the institutional church as being both irrelevant and self-serving: irrelevant, in that the precepts preached on Sunday are often not lived out in meaningful ways Monday through Saturday; self-serving, in that the institutional church is frequently perceived to be more interested in how individuals are serving it, rather than how the church can be in service to individuals.

I understand that a fundamental precept of diaconal ministry is a focus on bridging the gap between the insulated institutional church and the needs of the external world. In order to be faithful to this calling, I understand that I have a responsibility at times to be a squeaky wheel and a nagging voice. In performing this responsibility, there may be times when I may be able to offer perspectives not easily seen within the traditional church structure.

What concerns about rostered lay ministry in the ELCA do you want to share with the readers of *Lutheran Partners*?

In both my training and experience I have become increasingly aware of

how powerful resistance to change is. This dynamic is present in all systems, including families, congregations, and even the ELCA. This resistance to change is pervasive and largely unconscious.

My first concern is that as diaconal ministry emerges, it experiences a premature death in its infancy—perishing either from neglect, or due to an inherent suspicion of all things different.

A second concern stems from a related issue that often follows a system’s attempt to correct a problem or to address an important issue. This is the desire to do “more of the same.”

It appears that the ELCA has perceived the need for more flexible expression in its forms of ministry—forms of ministry that allow the church to be more vibrant and involved in daily lives. In attempting such a change, the first and most powerful response of the church will be to do what it is already doing, but just do more of it, and somehow do it better.

There is a danger that the potential vitality of diaconal ministry may be leached out by forcing it to mirror what we are already doing, rather than to truly embrace a vision of a new, more engaged ministry. This new vision requires differences in perspective, training, praxis, perhaps even in priorities and in goals.

These differences may cause more discomfort than ease within the ELCA. The powerful desire to maintain a homeostasis may eliminate these vital differences, resulting in our providing new words for our ministry efforts, but dispelling any actual difference in function.

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