

**Notes from the Consultation on Vocation and Service
February 5-8, 2007**

No official minutes were taken of this gathering. What follows are notes assembled from individuals' notes. Though accurate to the best of our ability, the notes are only a sampling and highlights, and they have no official status. All those present understood that though they participated as part of one of the four rosters, they did not speak on behalf of their roster. This was a consultation to foster conversation. The notes are circulated for the same purpose.

On the final morning, the group agreed on a consensus statement which is included in the notes below on pages 10-11.

The consultation was convened by the ELCA Vocation and Education Unit, and these notes have been gathered and edited by unit staff.

I encourage all readers to find ways to engage this conversation about public leadership for mission in and through the ELCA.

Stan Olson, Executive Director, Vocation and Education

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More than 60 Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers, Deaconesses, seminary and college faculty members, agency leaders, churchwide staff and synodical bishops gathered at the Duncan Conference and Retreat Center, Delray Beach, Florida. The stated purpose of this consultation was:

To bring together representatives of the three lay rosters to articulate how the theology and experience of vocation and service should define their role as publicly called leaders in the ELCA in the 21st century.

Participants gathered on Monday evening and began by introducing themselves and telling their own baptismal stories. Much of the evening was spent in the "Home Groups" which served as the primary small discussion groups throughout the consultation.

Tuesday began with morning prayer followed by the ***First Panel Presentation***. (The following notes were taken from the presentations but have not been reviewed by the presenters.)

Professor Susan McArver, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary:

One of the primary roles of diaconate is that of a messenger, a "go-between." Specific roles:

- Service to the poor and marginalized
- Liturgical functions
- Assistance to the pastor or bishop
- Administrative oversight

The roots of the contemporary diaconate are in 19th century Germany and the deaconess movements/communities there.

General points:

- Ministry throughout the church's history has been a fluid concept
- Fluidity has been more descriptive of lay ministry than of ordained ministry
- The gift of this fluidity is that lay ministry has been able to be more flexible and responsive to the changing needs of church and society
- The challenge of this variety and flexibility is that lay ministry has been more difficult to define than ordained ministry
- Gender issues have been a sub-text of the lay roster conversation

President Duane Larson, Wartburg Seminary:

There is much going back and forth in a world that is chaotic and confusing so that making sense to the people we serve may even be more difficult. However, we see meaning there.

1. Theology of the cross: this is particularly important for those who are moving between the poor/marginalized and the power centers of the church and world. Theology of the cross reminds us that God desires to be domestic with us without being domesticated. It is about seeing and experiencing God in the counter-intuitive places. God shows up in the least godly ways. The theology of the cross helps us recognize that God is always on the side of those who don't get to define the sides. God compromises the ways in which we want to set the agenda (in our favor), which always risks compromising the agenda.

2. Jesus is bi-representational. Jesus presents those who don't get to define the sides. Jesus presents the world back to God. Jesus presents God to the world.

3. We have to be realistic about sin/original sin and specifically our involvement in sin.

4. To love my neighbor as my self is bad news for my neighbor since often my love for myself is so compromised.

We are called to do ministry out of Word and sacrament, called to do ministry out of the love we have experienced.

Professor Kathryn Kleinhans, Wartburg College:

The role of gender in the church is still being reflected in the lay rosters.

Since "lay" means non-professional in common parlance, it is inherently problematic that we have set up a group of recognized non-professionals.

"Lay" is rooted in *laos* which is used to describe all the people of God.

Why does ritual define who we are? The labels are getting in the way. We need the structures of the church. However, the ministry comes first and the structure comes second.

Lutherans have not done well with Luther's concept of the "priesthood of all believers" that often becomes the "priesthood of each believer." It is not about private pipelines to God. It is about service to the neighbor.

The deacon is often the "waiter," the one who delivers the goods. All are called to service ministry (diaconal ministry). So how do we organize ourselves in order to live out this vocation/these vocations?

Timeline

Sister Anne Keffer led the group in the development of a timeline on which significant events in the world, the Lutheran Church and the development of rostered ministries in the Lutheran bodies were noted.

Reflections from Small Groups - a selection of the comments made in the small groups

Pain is present in many people's stories; The use of "lay" is confusing; Tax status differences are an impediment; Lack of discernment processes that are ongoing; "We/they" talk ...separation issues; Congregations are not understanding of the roles of those in the lay rosters; Candidacy committees thinking of "ordained" as norm; Mobility and lack thereof; Professionalism as an impediment to healthy ministry; Status issues...we are treated as if we are less than...; Naming our own truth without hurting others is problematic; 20 years of conversation...not much progress; Structure IS needed...but structure needs to allow and encourage growth; That we will have a common starting point (baptism); Accountability through letter of call; Fluidity, changes for changing times, flexibility...creative imagination for ministry; What would REAL fluidity look like?; Candidacy committees seem to be doing better at discernment; Critical mass is present to talk about ministry, challenges, problems, etc. for future; Move into new visions...less pastor centric; To focus on needs of world rather than our own pain; Hearing the joys and struggles with others; Rely on Holy Spirit to help us move into the future.

Second Panel Presentation

Dr. McArver

Fluidity is both bane and blessing. What does fluidity look like that takes us more deeply into mission? What would be needed?

There is a fine line between professionalism/structures/accountability and suffocating of the Spirit. And how can we develop even more of a sense of mutual accountability between the individuals/rosters and the churchwide structure and synods?

There is a sense of hopefulness that we are continuing to talk. This is both painful and hopeful. We need to continue to talk without inflicting pain on others.

If we take the “go-between” nature of diakonia seriously together with “service”, what are the implications?
Two of the rosters have been very intentional about forming community. What might community look like specifically for associates in ministry?

Dr. Kleinhans

God is ambidextrous. God is working simultaneously with both hands. The church is called and established by the Holy Spirit through the Word and sacraments. And the church is also more than that, being also the structures. Determine when and in what ways we need to change the structures.

Clarity is useful in mirrors and in windows. Understanding ourselves may be important. But clarity about God’s world is even more important.

We’ve come up with clear but unhelpful ways of talking about the different rosters. Eg., work we do, educational requirements, entrance rites.

Do we need to distinguish the issue of identity from the issue of rostering? Surely not just who can be sued or tax status?

Is “public ministry” a better word for us to use to describe those who have tax status, who can be sued, etc?
It is important to be community together. How are we church together?

The unity of the church is constituted of word and sacrament. The external structures don’t have to be the same and don’t have to remain the same.

In a day of rampant consumerism, the consumers aren’t buying our rosters but are yearning for our ministry.

“If the world is not being turned upside down, then the Gospel is not being preached.” - Martin Luther
“Sin boldly; and repent and rejoice in Christ more boldly still.” -Luther

We like to be right. To change might mean acknowledging that we’ve been wrong. And we can be—and then change. This is the positive nature of evolution.

Dr. Larson

We want everyone to be involved in “public ministry,” so let’s talk about “leadership in public ministry.”

Theologians of the cross call things what they are. When you lean into the pain, you are being a theologian of the cross because then there is the deep connection between hope and pain.

We have a difference of our ecclesiologies, many inherited from predecessor church bodies. He heard “office” language from diaconal ministers and deaconesses and an effective, functional language from associates in ministry. These tend to be complementary. We need both. How can we marshal this into leadership in public ministry?

Two of the rosters have a distinct story; one is “simply there.”

Many on the lay rosters have claimed a marginalized status. Those who know they are marginalized and that they are justified can go and do anything!

Differentiation between critical mass (which comes from nuclear physics, and is a description of what will explode) vs. density (which is ready to move or already moving).

Who has authority and who doesn’t? “You do” both because of density and constitutional authority. Authority equals self-rule. Why/how have we given authority away to another? Authority equals writing one’s own story.

We are all here brought into the life of the Trinity. The more we build each other up in the life of the Trinity, the more we will be differentiated *and* the closer we will be. In doing this we are building up a world that is “other” than us.

“What are your words going to be? What is that going to look like?”

There is similar “what are we about/what do we look like” conversation going on around ordained clergy. We have an emerging expertise here that should contribute to the discussion about ordained ministry.

The structures we presently have are not adequate to the changing ground on which we are standing.

The most crucial characteristic of a leader is anger in the biblical sense: Grief either over what has been and what has become or over what is and what ought to be.

Remember the actions and the reactions. If we want things to change, there will also be a reaction to the change. This requires thinking and acting strategically.

Vision questions: For the life/sake of the world and the church:

What is God calling us to do?

What is God calling us to be?

What are the forms, expressions and vocabulary of ministry that will assist us in doing that?

These are window questions, not a mirror questions.

Pastor David P. Nelson, Facilitator, Muhlenberg Lutheran Church, Harisonburg, VA

Feedback from afternoon small groups

We're called to be children of God. We're re-stating what was already identified in the Study of Ministry. What are the obstacles? Lack of vision/imagination. Practical issues. Our own vested interests. A theological underpinning/rationale for associates in ministry.

If we'd take diakonia seriously, we'd want as many people doing it as possible! Does that, however, threaten some? "Leaders in public ministry" seemed like a good definition.

The question is "What is life-giving and what is life-draining?" We need communities that help us discern our daily callings. We're doing that discerning with all the baptized. Importance of supporting the theological underpinnings of the associate in ministry roster. Find ways to be reconciled with our complicated past because it is in our past.

Be contextual in post-Christendom. Be bold. To share the good news with the world especially when we don't share the same language of faith. Ordination to Word & Service or Word & Sacrament. Alternative theological education programs for Associates in Ministry. Mobility handled similar to that of ordained. Embrace and be patient with the fact that ELCA is still an adolescent denomination.

Responding to the urgent needs of the world by equipping all the baptized for ministries in the world. Affirm the gifts of each person on each of the rosters. Community building among the members of all the rosters. Report of purpose and outcomes of this consultation should be shared with all four of the rosters.

Called to be people who show the church and the world what it means to live out diakonia. Network with all of the rosters. Regular gatherings of rostered persons (churchwide?). Open up People and Places so everyone could see all of the positions available.

To find a better definition of what an Associate in Ministry is and what to call us. Pain and broken promises. Problems with mobility. Tension between those seeking calls (jobs?) and those within a congregation who are being lifted up.

God is calling us to be in the world where ever there is need. In the 21st century some of what that means is uses of technology, "browning and graying." Need to exercise imagination. Form follows function; begin with the needs and opportunities. One Word and Service roster with a number of specializations as a part of it. "Get over ourselves and create the future!" Together, we need to find the answers (citing the history of Delray Beach politics).

What is the dis-ease? In some places there is not a problem and in others there is much dis-ease about the lay rosters. In some places there is respect and partnership and in others marginalization. What would lead to greater sense of partnership? Need for better discernment, candidacy committees assisting with discernment, theological grounding. Affirm greater variety of gifts and service that we render. Maybe the needs of the world and the church require an even greater variety! Called to be well grounded, theologically reflective, spiritually mature.

What we do grows out of who we are. We need to know what the church and world needs before we know what the rosters look like. Attention to the practical issues. Language needs to be clarified enough to get to one roster with different functions, each of which is equally legitimate. Professional role seems to preclude the "regular" lay persons. Push authentic understanding of vocation from inside us to "out there."

What needs to be named, forgiven, redeemed and reconciled? Don't let tradition get in the way of progress. Perception that we are separate...we have the same purpose and mission. Issues of status and equality – both real and perceived. How can we "let go" if we have not got an apology for past hurts?

Wednesday

Facilitator's Reflections

The planners desire that this time together be worthy of us and our ministries, that it will help us move forward. People who have gathered for this consultation are in very different places, and at the same time we *are* still here. There is longing for clarity of language about the various ministries. There is passion about the ministries and its impact in the world. There is interest in the diaconal concept of the "go-between," the

transporter of the good news. There is still some anger/grief over the distance between what was promised and what has become, what is and what should be. There is a sense that associates in ministry got the “short end of the stick.” The overriding impression is that this is a gathering of genuine women and men of the church.
Question for small groups:

Can we come to consensus in the small group on which directions we want to take on which specific issues?

Thoughts from small groups (Wednesday morning)

One or two rosters with same entrance rite; Serious assessment of leadership needs of the future church
Conversation among all rosters; Determine how to equip leaders for the world; For the sake of God’s mission in the world and to empower the whole people of the ministry in the world; Word and Sacrament pastors; Deacons to do diakonia, to equip the whole people of God, to serve as living icons of diakonia; Don’t like “lay rosters;” Want to be a process of “what’s next,” so we need additional meetings; Education of candidacy committees and congregations; One roster of word and service ministries; Request churchwide office to empower transitional team that would help us move in this direction by dealing with structural changes, vision, recognizing history; Invitation to all on word and service rosters to a decade of study/reconciliation; Move toward a shared voice by meeting at churchwide assemblies, name the issues, work with decision makers to determine what is possible; Stand together in claiming the vocation of diakonia that we all share; Call all rosters “public ministry leaders;” Standardize associate in ministry training with seminary oversight; Have two rosters: word and sacrament, word and service (with three ‘communities’). Address the economic issues, one rite of entrance; Want more time for conversation because they were moving toward consensus on overall best practices of ministry in ELCA, looking at how to order ministry in order to get mission done, call to re-examine associate in ministry category and how it came to be, serious look at “ordained” at what that means, invite the Conference of Bishops to look at theologically trained people to fill jobs; Increased and enhanced discernment of vocation for all candidates. Cooperate with regional coordinators for purpose of education and resourcing candidacy committees with regard to lay rosters; offering to serve candidacy committees as consultants and/or members.

Responses to small group summaries: What have we heard?

Noticed that about half the group suggest either one roster, or one roster of word and service ministries/diaconal with multiple access points and/or multiple expressions.

We feel the need to be together again.

Suggestion to hear from Randy Lee re. ecumenical implications

Request to hear from Drs. McArver, Larson and Kleinhans

Request to hear from churchwide staff and bishops

Work on preparation and discernment

Speaking to the church about the role of candidacy committees in discernment

Questions about the kinds of ministry leadership we need BEFORE talking about rosters.

For the time being, helping our rosters work most effectively; revisiting the questions of how we organize those who are called to public ministries—not a combined roster but actually something new. Moving forward into a new structure

Strong affirmation of the ministry of all the baptized.

Two spirits in the room: one saying that it’s time to decide on a new form/structure of public ministry; another that says we’re not ready to do that yet, that structure of the public ministries is the issue, but that we’re still laying the groundwork for action.

Panel of responders, at the request of the group

Pastor Nelson:

We are clearly building toward consensus, and this consultation is also clearly a pen-ultimate step in building that consensus.

Dr. Kleinhans:

There’s been a good deal of attention paid to pain, but less to fear and what will potentially be lost. There is likely to be loss for every one of us here.

Levels of the conversation:

- Issue of language. How do we talk about the ministry we are doing?
- Issue of structure. How do we organize ourselves?
- Issue of person identity
- Issue of communal identity (must attend both to MY identity and YOUR identity. Can't say "I'm OK. Why aren't you OK?")
- Issues of mission. If it's about mission, maybe it's more about training/competency than

Dr. McArver:

- Issue of fluidity. We are open to the movements of the Spirit
- Issue of mutual accountability. As we're talking about mutual accountability, there must be continuing mutual accountability on the part of rostered leaders and the Churchwide office.
- Issue of community. Models allow for continuation of communities separate from the roster question

Dr. Larson:

- Concern that the identity of rosters be more easily and clearly communicable to others
- Mutual accountability is not only making each of us stronger; it is also raising the importance of the training
- The strengthening of word and service ministries is also strengthening word and sacrament ministries. This can lead to a new sense of collaboration among those who are leaders of public ministries.
- In naming pain and acknowledging fear, we are serving as theologians of the cross. This will help us be even better at naming the pain and fear of others.

Bishop Murray Finck:

- Mission is emerging as a primary theme. This will require us to keep the missional themes in front of us as we continue to present this to the whole church. We are doing this to strengthen the rostered leaders, and this will strengthen the congregations for mission.

Bishop Allan Bjornberg:

- We need to (continue to) work on our family of origin issues
- Most of us don't live in a place; we live in a *description* of a place.
- Forgiveness is giving up hope of reconstructing the past and taking responsibility for shaping the future.
- All we can do in our own brokenness is come to the table where the model of a diversity servers is lived out.
- We are still living in a culture that wants others to do ministry on our behalf. Word and service leaders are an icon of ministry as our common work.

Dr. Randy Lee, Executive for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations:

- Exchangeability of other public leaders is on the table now that we've settled question of exchangeability of clergy.
- ELCA will offer a unique perspective because of our history and the time we have spent talking about mission leading to structure.

Dr. Stan Olson, Executive Director for Vocation and Education:

- We do all of this for the sake of the mission of the church of Christ. We are servants of Christ.
- How do we invite the church to use the gifts and willingness that typify Word and service ministers?
- How do we invite people into these leadership roles with an appropriate level of clarity regarding the ministries?
- There is an evangelizing purpose to this conversation.
- At the heart is the question of equipping all the baptized for ministry and the flexibility of meeting the new needs.
- The Vocation and Education unit is committed to continuing the conversation.
- On behalf of the church I apologize for the ways in which this institution has failed to appreciate and respect the calls of members of these three rosters and the rosters themselves. And I invite you to forgive past hurts so that you can be free to move into God's future unencumbered.

Deaconess E. Louise Williams, Associate in Ministry, Executive Director of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, and President of DIAKONIA World Federation:

- This conversation is happening all over the world where the worldwide deaconate is present. We are not in this alone.

Affinity groups reports

Diaconal Ministers:

- Quoted from the LWF document developed at the Brazil consultation: Theological parameters from which diaconal ministry can be located: informed by the scriptures, grounded in the Lutheran Reformation, responsive to church and world.
- Called upon churches to re-order structures in a way that gives adequate expression to the diaconal ministry.
- Encouraged use of this document and others throughout the various expressions of the ELCA.

ELCA Deaconess Community:

- Drop the word “lay.”
- We need two rosters but we need more information and to be involved in the construction. Two offices:
 - Word and sacrament
 - Word and service with three expressions
- Empowerment (and a transitional team) to come from the ELCA Church Council.
- Vocation and Education unit to coordinate this work
- The deaconesses present offer themselves as resources to candidacy committees
- Invite Conference of Bishops to appoint a liaison to each of the three present word and service rosters

Associates in Ministry:

- Strong affirmation among those here to move toward word and sacrament & word and service
- One, common formation event
- Uphold the standardization while maintaining flexibility.
- Candidacy maintain standardization with flexibility for those who live far from seminaries
- Different forms of ministry enhance the ministry of the whole church.
- Means for communication among Associates in Ministry

Ordained

- Discussed a variety of aspects of the relationship between the clergy roster and the other three rosters.
- In what sense are we necessary? Do *you* (those engaged in Word and service ministries) think we’re necessary?

Work Groups Established for Next Discussions

- Blueprint of proposal for 2 rosters
- Entrance Standards/avenues into rosters; formation contexts
- Candidacy Committees/Synod Vocation Committees, Congregations, Bishops: increasing the level of awareness of discernment, placement
- Mobility Issues
- Language (no one volunteered, so it did not meet)
- Entrance Rite

Thursday morning

The group edited a draft statement and then agreed by unanimous consensus that this three part statement represents the consultation they attended:

In response to God’s call for the sake of the world and to empower the church, this consultation group desires to speak to the church with one voice. It recommends that a conversation be furthered among the four rostered ministries that assures participation by all and moves at a careful and deliberate pace.

This conversation would attempt to develop a consensus understanding of and proposal regarding the public ministry of Word and Service.

Some key issues/work groups have been established and should be supported with additional resources. Other groups should be developed as needed.

The planning team for the consultation will assume the initial responsibility to shepherd this process.

It was agreed that the planning team was the appropriate group to continue for now because it has history, is representative, and has the capacity to take the next steps.

Work Groups Reports (each group kept its own fuller notes that can guide further conversations)

Blueprint group: The 2005 LWF report was lifted up as the blueprint. Requested the ELCA Church Council to establish a transitional group. Keep in mind also 2002 LWF consultation on diakonia. See www.lutheranworld.org . Request to post links to the pertinent documents on a website.

Entrance Standards/avenues into rosters; formation contexts

Candidacy Committees/Synod Vocation Committees, Congregations, Bishops: increasing the level of awareness of discernment, placement. Intentionality about conversation with synod staffs, candidacy committees, candidates, to congregations.

Mobility Issues: How do we relocate, move, find positions? Synods don't often look at lay rostered folks to fill parish positions as Synodically Authorized Ministers. Feel like hands are slapped if they do too much looking. Let the ministry positions determine who is best for a position. Informed people about the testing of www.elca.org/call

Entrance Rite: Evaluate current rites to be sure they assure affirmation of ministry of all baptized as well as naming the role of the public leader.

Throughout the consultation, the worship team led us in reflective, inspiring, insightful times of worship

In concluding, sincere thanks were expressed to the ELCA Deaconess Community for funding the consultation, to the planners, keynote speakers, facilitator, worship leaders, and all participants.

The pre-reading suggestions for conference participants are available at www.elca.org/leadership/events/consultation

The ELCA news release on the consultation is at www.elca.org/ScriptLib/CO/ELCA_News/encArticleList.asp?article=3542