



Southeastern District

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

LAY DEACON PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Contents

The Diaconate in Scripture and Lutheran History	2
Purpose of the SED Lay Deacon Program	2
Program Membership	3
Service	3
Qualifications	3
Training	4
Coaching	5
Internship Supervision	5
Compensation and Lay Deacons	5
Interview Process and Acceptance at Program Completion	5
Ongoing Service to the Congregation and Community	6
Continuing Education	7
Diaconal Transition	7
Garb and Vestments	8
The SED Lay Deacon Coordinator and Advisory Board	8
Additional Items	9

I. The Diaconate in Scripture and Lutheran History

The diaconate historically describes a group of lay people committed to service in and for the Church, a group which has its roots in the New Testament [see Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6]. As the needs of the Christian Church have grown, so too, the diaconate has had a history of development of service.

In historical Lutheranism, deaconesses have long served as the chief model of the diaconate by serving in ministerial mercy work. Within The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod (“LCMS” in subsequent references), Wilhelm Loehe was the founder of the diaconate establishing the Association of Deaconesses in 1854. This diaconal service has been described and embodied as those trained by the church in works of mercy, spiritual care, and teaching the faith. In this way, Lutherans have long seen the diaconate in service within the Kingdom of God, guiding people toward Word and Sacrament ministry provided by local pastors. Deacons in the Lutheran context, understanding, and history do not fill the role of a pastor, and yet care for people physically and spiritually serving within Lutheran congregations and institutions.

The diaconate within a Lutheran context has had a variety of definitions over time, and has included a broad range of people, privileges, and responsibilities all dealing with a focus on sharing the Word of God and service in the Lord’s kingdom.

II. Purpose of the SED Lay Deacon Program

The Lay Deacon training initiative here in the Southeastern District (“SED” in subsequent references) works in partnership with the Mission Training Center (“MTC” in subsequent references), it is designed to equip and empower men and women to walk in the footsteps of generations of Lutherans trained for Kingdom service within their congregation and communities as everyday missionaries.

The purpose of the SED Lay Deacon Program (“The Program” in subsequent section references) is to encourage lay leadership; 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 service; and to be a forum for mutual concerns and needs. The Program also seeks to continue or to bring Lutheran ministry to communities where pastoral leadership is wanting.

III. Program Membership

Members of the The Program are men and women selected and nominated by a local congregation of the SED through its pastor, and approved by the SED's Lay Deacon Advisory Board to serve out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ by sharing the Word, and doing acts of service.

Members of The Program are those individuals who apply for membership, meet the requirements as set by these guidelines, and subscribe to these guidelines for service and supervision. The title each member has is "SED Lay Deacon Intern" while doing course work and "SED Lay Deacon" after the academic requirements and acceptance process is complete.

An SED Lay Deacon's focus of work is in the local congregation and in the surrounding community through that congregation.

SED Lay Deacons are licensed to serve in the SED only. Service in other districts of the LCMS would require the approval of the new district president and/or board of directors. Likewise, Lay Deacons trained in LCMS districts outside of the SED, must receive recommendation from the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator, and approval from the SED President to resume service within the SED.

IV. Service

Works of mercy, Word and witness that support our life together are at the heart of the service provided by SED Lay Deacons. The actual tasks undertaken will vary according to the gifts and skills of the individual Lay Deacon, and the needs of his or her congregation and its surrounding community. All aspects of SED Lay Deacon service to both the congregation and community are under the supervision of the Supervising Pastor.

SED Lay Deacons may engage in various types of service, including but not limited to teaching within the congregation; instruction of youth and adults; caregiving works of mercy such as shut-in and hospital visitation, hospitality and integration of members, small group Bible study leadership, and outreach and evangelism.

Care should be taken to prevent any confusion between an SED Lay Deacon and The Office of the Public Ministry.

V. Qualifications

- A. As a minimum, applicants for The SED Lay Deacon Training Program shall have a high school diploma, or its equivalent. Other educational background or

experience, including academic, business, etc., will be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis.

- B. An SED Lay Deacon shall be a confirmed member in good standing of a congregation of the SED. SED Lay Deacons shall have the support of their congregation and shall be of sound moral character and mature faith, as demonstrated especially within the letter of recommendation from the supervising pastor.
- C. A completed online application, which can be filled in on the SED Website (Resources- SED Lay Deacon Program)
- D. Letter of Support from the Supervising Pastor emailed to ldcoordinator@se.lcms.org

VI. Training

The SED Lay Deacon shall have completed the custom SED course of theological education through the Mission Training Center (“MTC” in subsequent document references). These courses will include:

Year 1:

- Missio Dei in the Scripture (OT) 8 hrs.
- Missio Dei in the Scripture (NT) 8 hrs.
- The Christian Faith 16 hrs.
- Missional Church & Outreach 8 hrs.
- Lutheran Worship: Roots & Meaning 8 hrs.

Total 48 hrs.

Year 2:

- Defining & Engaging Your Community 8 hrs.
- Sharing the Faith 8 hrs.
- Spiritually Caring for Your Community 8 hrs.
- Leading & Creating Christ-Centered Lutheran Worship 8 hrs.
- Teaching the Faith 8 hrs.
- Starting New Ministries 8 hrs.

Total 48 hrs.

VII. Coaching

Coaching is an ongoing intentional conversation that empowers a person or group to deepen their awareness of their calling in Christ and live out that calling in their various stations of life.

In addition to the educational component of The SED Lay Deacon Training Program, students will participate in a 2-year concurrent coaching component. Each year participants will receive 24 hours of coaching (48 hours over the 2 years) which will take place on a semi-monthly schedule. The purpose of this coaching relationship is to help them grow in their spiritual formation both personally and as a deacon, and to disciple them to live out their calling in Christ in love and service to others.

The first year of coaching will focus first on vocational identity in Christ, and secondly on empowerment through a focus on holistic discipleship (heart, soul, mind and body). The second year of coaching will focus on Kingdom impact through evangelism and outreach by living out their holistic vocational calling in Christ.

VIII. Internship Supervision

Each applicant's internship supervisor must be a rostered LCMS Pastor. This supervisor shall:

1. assist the Lay Deacon Intern in establishing goals and expectations for the internship;
2. meet with the applicant regularly, and as needed, to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns; and
3. provide accountability over internship, especially in relation to the integrity of Lutheran doctrine and practice.

IX. Compensation

An SED Lay Deacon may receive compensation for service, but this is not expected nor required. An SED Lay Deacon's service is a gift to God and the Church.

X. Program Conclusion, Commissioning, and Installation

A. Interview Process and Acceptance at Program Completion

1. All applicants, upon completion of the internship, shall submit a written report of his/her service, describing the nature of and personal reflections on the

experience. This shall be submitted before the program concluding interview to the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator at ldcoordinator@se.lcms.org

2. The Supervising Pastor shall submit a letter on behalf of the congregation endorsing the candidate for service sponsored by the congregation. This shall be submitted ahead of the program concluding interview.

3. The program concluding interview shall be conducted after the course work has been completed, and reflection submitted. This shall be conducted through a face-to-face meeting (either in-person or online) of the:

- a. SED Lay Deacon Intern,
- b. Supervising Pastor,
- c. Assigned Coach/Mentor
- d. SED Lay Deacon Coordinator (or his representative),
- e. Members of the SED Lay Deacon Advisory Board.

Once a candidate has successfully completed this interview his/her name will be forwarded to the SED President for final approval by the SED Board of Directors. When the candidate has received SED Board of Directors' approval he/she shall be blessed for service as an SED Lay Deacon in a liturgical rite of commissioning and installation.

XI. Ongoing Service to the Congregation and Community

The fully installed SED Lay Deacon always must serve under the supervision of a rostered LCMS Pastor appointed or approved by the SED President. The SED Lay Deacon and the Supervising Pastor shall:

- 1 Develop goals and tasks for the SED Lay Deacon;
- 2 Discuss, develop, and implement congregational and community service that draws upon classwork and coaching, and is appropriate in terms of Lutheran doctrine and practice, in collaboration with congregational lay leadership;
- 3 Meet on a regular basis to discuss progress and assignments;
- 4 On an "as-needed" basis, clarify and explain the SED Lay Deacon's position in the congregation.
- 5 Ensure that all service is in accord with the congregation's own by-laws.

SED Lay Deacons shall always be accountable to the SED President, chiefly through the recertification process by reporting continuing education to the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator at ldcoordinator@se.lcms.org at least every three years.

In accord with the historic Lutheran understanding of the qualifications and expectations of those who hold positions in ministry, SED Lay Deacons who do not participate in continuing education for recertification after three years, shall no longer be considered active. SED Lay Deacons may also be removed for three reasons:

adherence to false doctrine, neglect of duties/incompetence, and/or an immoral lifestyle. Such removal will be done through the SED President following the Church's usual order.

XII. Continuing Education

Continuing education may comprise the following:

- A. Additional course work with the Mission Training Center;
- B. Seminars specific to the Lay Deacon Program, as offered by Mission Training Center or the SED;
- C. Attendance at an SED workshop;
- D. Outside seminars approved by the supervising pastor as beneficial for the SED Lay Deacon's particular service. Credit will be given upon a written report by the SED Lay Deacon in consultation with the supervising pastor.

XIII. Diaconal Transition

- A. An SED Lay Deacon ("Lay Deacon" in subsequent section references) transferring from one congregation to another must inform the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator within 30 days of concluding service as an SED congregation
- B. A Lay Deacon leaving the denomination is removed from the membership list of SED Lay Deacons.
- C. As Lay Deacons are attached to the congregation with which they hold membership, when a Lay Deacon transfers to another congregation within the SED, the Lay Deacon is placed on "transitional status". Each year the status must be renewed by a simple formal request to the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator. It is up to the congregation, local pastor, and Lay Deacon to determine the role of the transferring Lay Deacon, if any. If the congregation and pastor desire the transitional status Lay Deacon to serve as an Lay Deacon, a letter of request by the Lay Deacon and a letter of support from the new supervising pastor must be submitted to the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator, who will forward requests to the SED President. Requests and updates should be submitted by email to ldcoordinator@se.lcms.org
- D. Lay Deacons always serve under parameters set by the SED. It is incumbent upon all congregations where Lay Deacons serve to understand that Lay Deacons are trained for "Word and Service" related ministry. In extraordinary circumstances, if an SED Lay Deacon is called upon for service outside their training, written permission must be granted by the SED President, who alone may determine the appropriate nature and need of the situation on a case-by-case basis. Note: all Lay Deacons serve in accordance with LCMS Resolution 13-02A (2016):

Resolved, That nothing in this resolution shall be construed as impeding the training, recognition, credentialing or service of deacons who do not publicly preach or administer the sacraments, namely, those who serve in ministries of mercy, education, or visitation, and so forth, or in an outreach role, assisting in evangelism and church planting (but not in public preaching and administration of the sacraments); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents may continue to recruit, train, and credential new deacons for *general* varieties of service in the church that do not include public preaching and administration of the sacraments

XIV. Garb and Vestments

Congregations should always act in a spirit of love and unity, being respectful of the practices and norms of fellow congregations. It is incumbent upon the congregation to be clear when it comes to defining the vocation of “Deacon” as it differs from “The Office of Public Ministry” in order to avoid confusion and disunity. This clarity extends to the use of vestments, and liturgical garb.

Liturgical attire for Lay Deacons should always follow the local custom of the congregation where the Lay Deacon serves, and be in agreement with Lutheran historical doctrine and practice, careful to avoid confusion. To prevent confusion with the Pastoral Office, Lay Deacons are not to wear clerical shirts, or other vestments reserved as a symbol exclusively of the duties of the Pastoral Office (chasuble, pastoral stoles, etc.).

XV. The SED Lay Deacon Coordinator and Advisory Board

- A. The SED Lay Deacon Coordinator and the SED Lay Deacon Advisory Board (“The Board” in subsequent section references) report to the SED President and consists of a chairman, and a minimum of five other members, made up of both LCMS ordained and lay members, and ordinarily including at least one SED Lay Deacon.
- B. The SED President may appoint, at his own discretion, members of the SED staff as advisors to The Board. Such appointed individuals shall be included in all board meetings and correspondences, but may not serve as full voting members of the board.

- C. The Board is directly appointed by the SED President and the SED Board of Directors. Each member of The Board's term of service must be renewed every SED convention year by the SED Board of Directors.
- D. The chairman of the The Board serves as the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator.
- E. The SED Lay Deacon Coordinator may, in consultation with The Board, appoint members of The Board to fulfill additional duties to meet goals of the program. This may include, but is not limited to, a Vice-Chairman, a Provost, a Marketing Director, and a Secretary.
- F. The responsibilities of The Board include:
 - 1. calling district-wide gatherings of SED Lay Deacons, as needed, ordinarily online;
 - 2. Maintaining a roster of SED Lay Deacons, and supplying roster data to SED staff and leadership.
 - 3. supervising the SED Lay Deacon Interns in matters pertaining to fulfilling The Program guidelines;
 - 4. conducting interviews with SED Lay Deacon candidates, as prescribed in Section X of this document;
 - 5. providing SED Lay Deacon Interns, and their supervising pastors with the guidelines and expectations of The Program;
 - 6. providing program updates to the SED Board of Directors;
 - 7. in coordination with the office of SED District President, providing encouragement and counsel to supervising pastors and congregations concerning the role, limitation and expectations of an SED Lay Deacon in the congregation, to include Scriptural and doctrinal limitations of appropriate service.

XVI. Additional Items

The SED Lay Deacon Program 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. The SED Lay Deacon Coordinator, as the supervisor of The Program, will serve as the final arbiter of any issues not covered by this document in consultation with the SED President and the SED Board of Directors.

All changes to this document shall be approved by a recorded vote of the Lay Deacon Advisory Board and subsequently the SED Board of Directors, prior to implementation.

Current Edition Approved: September 2023