

Diaconal Standards and Expectations**

(Merged from the individual documents with the same title of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference and the Community of Lutheran Deacons)

Preamble

Theological Touchstone

It is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ the Servant that give impetus, shape, and content to our diaconal life. It is Jesus to whom we look—Jesus, who healed the sick, fed the hungry, touched the untouchable, washed feet; Jesus, who was served by others; Jesus, who did not disdain the cross and grave. Jesus' words and actions teach us the radical nature of service in Jesus' name; Jesus' own life and service is the model for our diaconal life; Jesus' death and resurrection empower us to join in God's redeeming, recreating task—thus reclaiming the role God entrusted to humanity in the beginning to be stewards and caretakers of the whole creation.

In baptism, the Holy Spirit calls every Christian to a life of diaconal service as part of that redeeming, recreating task. As Jesus was sent into the world for this task, so the whole church is sent into the world and all God's people are empowered by the Spirit for this work. Thus, the diaconal task belongs to all the baptized. In order to carry out that task more effectively, however, the church, from its first days until now, in different places and circumstances, has set apart people for public diaconal service. The diaconate not only serves as one way for the church to be about its task effectively; it is also a sign to the church, pointing the church to its own calling and reminding all the baptized that in the new reality ushered in by Christ, the greatest is the one who is servant of all.

The diaconate, then, grows out of the church's understanding of its own work. Deaconesses and deacons are set apart because the church desires to be a more faithful Christ-like servant in and to the world.

Deaconesses and deacons consecrated by the authority of the LDA/LDC/CLD are "deaconesses" and "deacons" by virtue of their membership in the diaconate rather than by the particular nature of their ministry setting. Therefore, it is vital to define the ethical standards and expectations of this community and the guidelines for practice in whatever setting deaconesses or deacons find themselves. A deaconess or deacon is called upon to maintain their own integrity, one which reflects the common commitments of the diaconate, and which can provide a vision for diakonia in the church and society.

To shape these diaconal standards and expectations, we have identified ways in which deaconesses and deacons might seek to live out the seven essentials (or hallmarks) for the diaconate established by the LDA/LDC in 1981.

1) Intentionality of Vocation *Members of the diaconate are people who, first of all, have heard the call of the servant Christ. They commit themselves to a life intentionally focused on responding to Christ's call to diaconal ministry. This ministry takes many shapes as an expression of their lifelong identity. Because diaconal ministry is not always defined by external definitions or roles, "intentionality of vocation" is not a one-time event, but an on-going process of discernment. Members of the diaconate are, therefore, asked to reflect deliberately and regularly as individuals and with one or more sisters or brothers to determine how their particular vocation and lifestyle are faithful responses to Christ's call. "Intentionality of vocation" is essential not only for each member of the diaconate but also for the diaconate corporately. Members of the diaconate, therefore, reflect together on their common calling and their corporate vocation, seeking to keep the LDA/LDC/CLD diaconate faithful to its servant task in this particular age.*

- A. A deaconess or deacon remains accountable to their calling by regularly evaluating their call and by knowing their strengths and limitations as they are expressed in their vocation and lifestyle.
- B. A deaconess or deacon recognizes their personal and professional needs and utilizes ongoing self-evaluation, community support, consultation, supervision, continuing education, spiritual direction and/or personal therapy to evaluate, maintain and improve their ministry with those among whom they serve.
- C. A deaconess or deacon respects and cares for his or herself as a whole person created in God's image and redeemed by God, and, to this end, seeks support from a variety of systems outside their ministry setting.
- D. A deaconess or deacon utilizes the standards of their particular faith body to assist them in the evaluation of their response to their calling.
- E. A deaconess or deacon adheres to the codes of ethics and the licensing, certification, and/or endorsement requirements consistent with their work and ministry, whatever the setting.

2) Formation/Education *People need to be equipped for diaconal ministry and prepared for membership in the diaconate. A good program of education and formation continues to be important for the diaconate. The education/formation required for entry in the LDA/LDC/CLD diaconate includes a thorough grounding in theology (Christocentric, Lutheran, and with emphasis on the theology of diakonia); is generally in the context of a liberal arts education; engages students in practical ministry experiences and helps them learn through an action/reflection process; fosters the development and deepening of a spiritual and devotional life; and invites students to grow into participation in the diaconal*

community. Because education and formation are on-going processes, continued theological education, learning through action/reflection, and spiritual growth are part of the life of the diaconate.

- A. A deaconess or deacon continues their education to best equip them for their calling.
- B. A deaconess or deacon seeks opportunity for personal, spiritual, and professional growth through worship, prayer, scriptural study, coursework, seminars, workshops, retreats, CPE, and so forth.
- C. A deaconess or deacon makes a concerted effort to participate in the diaconal community – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally – to foster their continued formation in diaconal ministry.
- D. A deaconess or deacon regularly evaluates their training and their theological understanding and keeps abreast of new developments in theology and practice as they relate to their ministry.
- E. A deaconess or deacon integrates their working theology within each life/ministry setting and acknowledges the limitations of their competencies.

3) Community *The diaconal task is done more effectively when people engaged in diakonia are part of a sustaining community. The diaconal community grows from the commitment to follow Christ's call to service. This is a commitment we share with other diaconates around the world. The LDA/LDC/CLD community gathers in large and small groups for worship, prayer, discernment and sharing mutual concerns. Within that community, members of the diaconate seek to nurture, support and challenge each other. They try to cultivate an atmosphere where sin can be confessed and forgiven, where healing can happen, where joys can be celebrated and burdens can be shared. The community seeks to be creative and to encourage people to take the risks necessary in faithfully following Christ in service to people. Finally, the community seeks to serve as a sign in a lonely and broken world that, in the midst of diversity and commonality, wholeness and brokenness, unity is truly a gift of God's Holy Spirit.*

- A. A deaconess or deacon strives to create a safe, forgiving and welcoming community:
 - by honoring confidences shared within the community;
 - by respecting the integrity and protecting the welfare of other members of the diaconate;
 - by holding other members of the diaconate in prayer;
 - by respecting the individual and theological differences of other members of the diaconate;
 - by refraining from disparagement; and
 - by avoiding emotional, sexual or any other form of exploitation.

- B. A deaconess or deacon seeks to share their vision of diaconal ministry with others in their own ministry setting and within the diaconal community.
- C. A deaconess or deacon is intentional in seeking opportunities for the meaningful expression of support for the diaconate through letters, phone calls, visits, financial support and/or attendance at area conferences, renewal events and regular annual meetings of the community.
- D. A deaconess or deacon notifies the Center for Diaconal Ministry of their change of ministry, their change of address/phone number, and any other major changes in their life situation so as to maintain current connection with the community.
- E. A deaconess or deacon is intentional about their commitment to the community to the extent that they will notify the LDA/LDC/CLD if they feel the need for a period of absence from the community for a time of discernment, or if they have made a decision to resign from the diaconal community altogether.

4) Flexibility/adaptability *Diaconal service may take a variety of forms because people in need are found in many different situations. So that many and varied people may be served appropriately, flexibility and adaptability continue to be essential to the LDA/LDC/CLD diaconate. Just as a towel is flexible and is shaped by the feet it washes and dries, so the members of the diaconate must be adaptable and their ministry shaped by the needs of those they seek to serve. Members of the diaconate must also be flexible in order to serve as a bridge between the church and the world. Furthermore, for the sake of faithful service, the diaconate corporately must remain flexible in order to be responsive to changing circumstances in each new era. This flexibility requires service both inside and outside institutional church structures.*

- A. A deaconess or deacon strives to remain on the cutting edge of ministry so as to be shaped by the changing needs of contemporary culture.
- B. A deaconess or deacon seeks multiple avenues for effecting needed change, calls into question unethical practices which keep people from being served, and challenges existing systems when they are corrupt or ineffective or demean those they are intended to serve.
- C. A deaconess or deacon utilizes education, advocacy, lobbying for legislative action or other appropriate activities to work for justice and change.

5) Mutuality *Members of the LDA/LDC/CLD diaconate do not have a monopoly on service. Diakonia is the calling of the whole people of God. While the diaconate does ministry and challenges, leads, and enables others in the diaconal task, it also shares ministry with and receives ministry from the whole family of God. But the mutuality which is essential to the diaconate goes even deeper than that. It is knowing that the posture from which we do our service is not as the superior giver condescending to the level of the recipient; rather, it is knowing that we stand in solidarity with the whole human family,*

that in our ministry we always receive more than we give, that our understanding of the truth is only part of the total picture and that we have much to learn, that we hear the voice of God teaching us in the voices of those whom we seek to serve and that Christ touches us as we reach out to "one of the least of these."

- A. A deaconess or deacon strives to remain spiritually grounded in the servant Christ in order to "stand in solidarity with the whole human family."
- B. A deaconess or deacon is open to receiving ministry and meeting Christ in those whom they serve.
- C. A deaconess or deacon intentionally joins with others who are doing diaconal ministry, through groups such as social ministry committees and non-profit service organizations.
- D. A deaconess or deacon seeks out other diaconal workers in their community to join with them in mutual support and ministry.
- E. A deaconess or deacon recognizes the need for a confidant and seeks such an individual for confession and counsel.

6) Diaconal Focus *Wherever there is brokenness in relationships, individuals, communities, or societies, the diaconate hears a call to serve. With diaconates throughout history, the LDA/LDC/CLD diaconate shares a commitment to stand with, serve among, and advocate for those who are affected by various forms of brokenness, whether it be physical, spiritual, emotional, economic, or sociological. Wherever members of the diaconate live and serve, they have a vision for God's desire for wholeness for all creation. They, therefore, have a special concern for those with the greatest need and for those whose voices are most easily ignored. This focus does not mean that all members of the diaconate must serve among those most easily identified as marginalized. It does mean that, wherever they live and serve, they are especially receptive and responsive to the voices of those who live with the most obvious effects of brokenness. Furthermore, they acknowledge ways in which they, the church, and society participate in the brokenness and then work for change.*

- A. A deaconess or deacon is called upon to examine, on a regular basis, ways they can best serve the broken and forsaken in their own local community and ministry setting.
- B. A deaconess or deacon respects the integrity and protects the welfare of those they serve.
- C. A deaconess or deacon respects diversity in people, recognizes their own personal biases, and does not discriminate against those served because of race, gender, age, faith group, national origin, sexual orientation, mental ability, physical ability, or economic status.

- D. A deaconess or deacon recognizes that they are often involved in relational ministry, and are also aware of the complexity and conflicting priorities within those relationships.
- E. A deaconess or deacon accepts responsibility for monitoring relationships and maintaining appropriate boundaries with those whom they serve and with those with whom they relate.
- F. A deaconess or deacon is aware of the power differential present in the ministry relationship.
- G. A deaconess or deacon does not engage in sexual intimacies nor any overtly or covertly sexualized behavior with those whom they serve or have served.
- H. A deaconess or deacon reports abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults to the appropriate authorities in a timely fashion.
- I. A deaconess or deacon protects the confidentiality of those they serve, except in cases of potential harm to self and/or others.
- J. A deaconess or deacon seeks other professionals for advice, consultation, and referral.

7) Prophetic Voice *Individually and as a community, the diaconate points to God's vision of shalom (peace, wholeness, and salvation) for the whole creation. Through action and word, the diaconate raises a prophetic voice, calling and recalling the church to its diaconal task, advocating with those whose voices have not yet been heard, exposing injustice and oppression and reminding all God's people that in God's realm the least is the greatest. Lest they lose sight of God's vision of shalom, members of the diaconate also remain open to the prophetic voice of others, especially those on the margins, who challenge them to remain faithful to their diaconal call.*

- A. A Deaconess/Deacon seeks and applies learning about the interconnectedness of creation, the love of neighbor, and the peace of God that incarnate God's shalom.
- B. A Deaconess/Deacon identifies personal power and cultural privilege, using these as opportunities to lift up those caught in cycles of powerlessness and oppression.
 - Makes personal choices that embody shalom and oppose institutional and cultural injustice and oppression.
 - Stands as a witness for shalom choices in their communities.
- C. A Deaconess/Deacon gives witness to God's shalom by manifesting that the least shall be greatest.
 - Choosing to learn from and honor those who live at the margins.
 - Recognizing that God's shalom enters among young and old, weak and powerful, privileged and under-privileged, and neighbors near and distant; in the interconnectedness of creation, in creation's diversity, and in the common longings of all for wholeness and for peace.

- D. A Deaconess/Deacon gives witness to God's shalom by speaking truth to power
- In ways that do not perpetuate overt or covert violence.
 - In ways that reconceptualize power as circular, spiral, mutual, and not hierarchical.
 - In ways that clearly identify and oppose the wrong, while also inviting all God's beloved to turn again towards God and shalom.
 - In ways aware of our own capability to be willing or unwilling co-conspirators against shalom, and to cultivate responsiveness to voices of prophetic truth speaking to us.
 - In ways that acknowledge that God's shalom is both in-breaking and incomplete until Jesus comes again.
- E. A Deaconess/Deacon gives witness to God's shalom by dedicating their whole self.
- Examines personal authenticity; reflects, re-imagines, and reconnects to the work of God's Spirit within, through personal and community reflection tools.
 - Follows Jesus in the way of the cross.
 - Participates in examining authenticity, listening for the Spirit, and following Jesus in the diaconal community and in the church.

**This document was created by combining the "Diaconal Standards" documents of both the LDC and the CLD for gender-language purposes. The actual LDC and CLD approved documents, as well as the history of them, are available upon request.