



November 2021

SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT, LCMS
LAY DEACON PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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I. The Diaconate in Scripture and Lutheran History

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

In historical Lutheranism, deaconesses have long served as the chief model of the diaconate serving in ministerial mercy work. Within The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod (“LCMS” in subsequent references), Wilhelm Loehe was the earliest 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 as 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

Welcome to the Deacon Training initiative here in the Southeastern District! (“SED” in subsequent references) We are excited that you have taken the time to prayerfully consider participating in this new training. 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 beyond as everyday missionaries in love and service to their neighborhood and community.

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

Members of the SED Lay Deacon 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 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.

IV. Service

Works of mercy, Word and Witness that support our life together are at the heart of the work of SED Lay Deacons. The actual tasks undertaken will vary according to the gifts and skills of the Lay Deacon and the needs of his or her congregation and its surrounding community. All aspects of SED Lay Deacon work 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; catechesis of youth and adults; caregiving works of mercy like 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. 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 family and shall be of sound moral character and mature faith, as demonstrated especially within the letter of recommendation from the supervising pastor.
- B. Application Process and Letters of Support

- C. The Lay Deacon Application, a letter of support from the Supervising Pastor, and the Background Check form must be completed prior to admission to the training.
- D. The application and background check can be filled in on the SED Website (Resources- SED Lay Deacon Program)
- E. The letter from the Supervising Pastor should be emailed to ldcoordinator@se.lcms.org.

VI. Training

- A. As a minimum, applicants for the SED Lay Deacon Program shall have a high school diploma or its equivalent, based on local requirements. Other educational background or experience, including academic, business, etc., will be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis.
- B. The SED Lay Deacon shall have completed the course of theological education through the Mission Training Center (“MTC” in subsequent references) in Irvine, California’s custom MTC/SED curriculum. 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 candidate in establishing goals and expectations for the internship;
2. meet with the applicant no less than twice monthly to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns; and
3. certify that the SED Lay Deacon Intern has successfully completed the required hours.
4. provide accountability over internship, especially in relation to the integrity of Lutheran doctrine and practice.

IX. Compensation

- A. 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.
- B. 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 to the SED's Lay Deacon Advisory Board prior to the final interview.
 2. The interview shall be conducted after the course work has been completed. This shall be conducted through a face-to-face meeting of the
 - a. SED Lay Deacon Intern,

- b. Supervising Pastor,
- c. SED Lay Deacon Coordinator (or his representative),
- d. Members of the Advisory Board.

In support of the acceptance process, a letter from the congregation accepting the applicant as a Lay Deacon is required. Once a candidate has successfully completed this interview his/her name will be forwarded to the SED President for final approval. 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.

X. Congregational Accountability

The SED Lay Deacon is always under the supervision of a Pastor appointed 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, as outlined in the following section. This accountability shall include a triennial report of the SED Lay Deacon's work (Addendum I), filed with the congregation and the SED Office. It is to be completed jointly by the supervising pastor and SED Lay Deacon.

The SED Lay Deacon shall comply with the requirements for continuing education, as described in the section of the same title.

XI. Recertification Requirements

- A. SED Lay Deacons are certified for a three-year period. They may be recertified on a three-year basis without limitation, congruent with the regular Conventions of the SED. Recertification is undertaken after the second year through application for continued service as received through the SED Lay Deacon's congregation and Supervising Pastor. Such application shall include:
 - 1 - Attendance at an SED Lay Deacon retreat, unless excused for service or hardship reasons by the Lay Deacon Advisory Board or the SED President.

2 - Participation in continuing education, a minimum of one completed opportunity per year (see below: Continuing Education), SED Lay Deacon Training Program courses, or other opportunities approved by the Supervising Pastor; and
3 - Submission of a triennial report (Addendum I).

- B. 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 complete the steps for re-certification 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 Opportunities

SED Lay Deacons shall attend a minimum of one continuing education course on a yearly basis. 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
- 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 approved by the supervising pastor.

XIII. Diaconal Transition

- A. An SED Lay Deacon transferring from one congregation to another must inform the SED Lay Deacon Coordinator within 30 days.
- B. An SED Lay Deacon leaving the denomination is removed from the membership list of SED Lay Deacons.
- C. As SED Lay Deacons are attached to the congregation with which they hold membership, when an SED Lay Deacon transfers to another congregation in the SED, the SED Lay Deacon is placed on "transitional status" for no less than six months. "transitional status," which is a period of supervision by the new congregational pastor, remains for a maximum of three years. 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 transitional status SED Lay Deacon to determine the role of the transferring SED Lay Deacon, if any. If the congregation and pastor desire the transitional status SED Lay Deacon to

serve as an SED Lay Deacon, a letter of request by the SED 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.

- D. In addition to these guidelines, SED Lay Deacons serve under parameters set by the SED. It is incumbent upon all congregations where SED Lay Deacons serve to understand that SED 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 SED Lay Deacons serve in accordance with 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 SED Lay Deacons should always follow the local custom of the congregation where the SED Lay Deacon serves, and be in agreement with Lutheran historical doctrine and practice, careful to avoid confusion. To prevent confusion with the Pastoral Office, SED 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. District Accountability

- A. The SED Lay Deacon Advisory Board reports to the SED President and consists of a chairman, and five other members, made up of both LCMS ordained and lay members. The SED Lay Deacon Advisory Board is directly appointed by the SED President and supervised by the SED Board of Directors. Other Members serve with the approval of the SED President, renewable every SED convention year.
- B. The responsibilities of the Lay Deacon Advisory Board include:
 - 1. gathering district-wide, as the Lay Deacon Advisory Board, at least annually;
 - 2. supervising the SED Lay Deacon Interns in matters pertaining to fulfilling the SED Lay Deacon guidelines;
 - 3. conducting interviews with potential SED Lay Deacons and SED Lay Deacon Interns as prescribed in other sections of this document;
 - 4. providing SED Lay Deacon Interns with the guidelines and expectations of the members of the SED Lay Deacon Program;
 - 5. providing updates to the SED Board of Directors;
 - 6. through the office of SED District President, providing encouragement and counsel to Pastors and congregations concerning the role, limitation and expectations of an SED Lay Deacon in the parish, 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 Program, as the supervisor of the SED Lay Deacon program, will serve as the final arbiter of any issues not covered by this document in consultation with the SED Board of Directors . All changes to this document will proceed through the SED Board of Directors.

Commitment of SED Lay Deacon Program Applicant

I have read and agree to follow the guidelines as presented in this document.

SED Lay Deacon Program Applicant

Date

Supervising Pastor

Date



**Triennial Report of
SED Lay Deacon**

(From the SED Lay Deacon Guidelines)

This form is part of the triennial report that the certified Lay Deacon is to complete every 3 years just prior to the SED Convention. It shall be submitted to the Supervising Pastor and the SED Lay Deacon Program Office

Print or Type.

Personal Information

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Employer (Name and Address): _____

Contact Information

Cell: _____ Home: _____

Email: _____

Congregational Information

Congregation (Name and Address): _____

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Addendum 2– Application for SED Lay Deacon Blessing

SED Lay Deacon Program Application

*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.
My Father will honor the one who serves me. John 12:26*

The SED Lay Deacon Program is a group of people committed to service in and for the Church, a group which has its roots in the New Testament and has a history of development and usage in the Church catholic from its beginnings to the present. SED Lay Deacons are trained laity that work under the local Pastor in service to the local church through works of mercy and witness, thus supplementing the work of the local Pastor.

What follows is the application for admission to the SED Lay Deacon Program after completion of the academic courses and leading to blessing as an SED Lay Deacon.

Please note completion of the academic program does not automatically qualify an individual for blessing as an SED Lay Deacon.

Completed applications should be given to the individual’s local pastor, who in turn will forward them, with additional required materials, to the SED Lay Deacon Program Office.

May the Lord of the Church bless your study and your service in His name, and to His glory.

Soli Deo Gloria

Personal Information

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Cell: _____ Home: _____

Email: _____

Congregation (Name and Address): _____
