



Recommendation: Roster of Ministry of Word and Service

Background

The former Vocation and Education unit convened a consultation on the ministries of deaconesses, diaconal ministers and associates in ministry in January 2007 with funding from the ELCA Deaconess Community. From that consultation, a Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team worked for three years, fostering similar gatherings in eight regions of the ELCA and developing a DVD resource. The planning team submitted a report in 2010 that included nine recommendations.

The first six recommendations were specifically related to the rosters for deaconesses, diaconal ministers and associates in ministry:

1. Address the ELCA constitution and other governing documents to remove the word “lay” to describe all three of these rosters in public ministry.
2. Articulate a common theological foundation for ministry, reclaiming “diakonia” as the foundation for all three rosters.
3. While recognizing and valuing the differences in tradition and history of these three rosters, we recommend that they become one roster with three expressions.
4. Require basic theological preparation for all three rosters while maintaining flexibility toward goals of effective and diverse mission and ministry.
5. For the sake of good order, examine the titles, symbols and visible signs of each of the three rosters.
6. Vigorously encourage synods, bishops and churchwide staff to communicate more effectively the value of and variety of gifts of these three rosters (e.g., advocate with congregations and agencies as they consider staffing).

The final three recommendations related to all four of the current rosters, including those ordained to Word and Sacrament ministry:

7. Develop standards that are fair and consistent for procedures for call, salary guidelines, and related issues.
8. Develop unified ongoing formation and discernment tools and events.
9. Continue the momentum of the work of this consultation so that dialogue may continue among rosters. The next step in this dialogue needs to include all four rosters.

In November 2010, the Church Council voted [CC10.11.64]:

To express appreciation for the work of the Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team, acknowledging that its work has assisted the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to deepen its understanding both of the diaconal work shared by all members and of the public ministries of Word and Service;

To call upon this church to name these Word and Service ministries, to affirm their vital roles, to recruit individuals to explore these callings, and to assist people in preparing for and being called to specific ministries in the ELCA and in the world we serve;

To request that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, with the appropriate committee of the Conference of Bishops, constitute a small task force on ministries of service (diakonia), including at least one teaching theologian, one bishop, and one member from each of the four rosters, with this mandate:

1. To suggest ways that the leaders and expressions of the ELCA can continue to undergird the ministries of members of the three Word and Service rosters and their communities and to facilitate the use of their gifts and called service in ELCA congregations and other ministries, including non-profit, government, and public entities;
2. To articulate for the ELCA a fuller theology of Word and Service ministry that builds upon:
 - a. This church’s diaconal tradition and its complementarity to the theology of Word and Sacrament ministry, grounding both in the baptismal call to all God’s people to serve within the institutional church and in the world;

- b. The ELCA's "Together for Ministry" report (1993), the Lutheran World Federation report "Diakonia in Context" (2009), the report and recommendations of Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team (2010) and other Lutheran and ecumenical studies;
3. To consider whether this Word and Service ministry would be better expressed and the present ELCA mission and ecumenical mission better served by the formation of one new ELCA Word and Service roster that incorporates the members and heritage of the three present rosters into a diversified whole with a common entrance rite; and
To request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2012 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

In April 2012, the Church Council affirmed [CC12.04.19j] the ongoing work of the Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team and granted an extension for the team's report until the council's November 2012 meeting.

In November 2012, the Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team provided the Church Council with this background.

In response to Church Council action [CC10.11.64], staff from the Leadership for Mission team in the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary, convened a table of representatives from the three Word and Service rosters October 26–27, 2011, to receive their input about how to move forward with the task assigned. The group recommended that representatives from each of the diaconal rosters name two people identified by their executive committees, two representatives from the associates in ministry roster, and two ordained clergy identified by staff, be invited to participate as members of the task force. In addition to the representatives from the rosters, one teaching theologian, and a synodical bishop named by the Conference of Bishops were invited to the table. The first meeting of the task force was held May 14–15, 2012.

Staff transitions in the Leadership for Mission team have slowed progress, but the task force is back on track and the work of the task force continues to move forward. One obstacle that the task force faces is the absence of funds for this work. The task force has had two face-to-face meetings at the Lutheran Center and has scheduled monthly conference call meetings to move the work forward.

Summary of the conversations to date:

1. The members of task force reviewed the ELCA's "Together for Ministry" report (1993), the Lutheran World Federation report "Diakonia in Context" (2009), and the report and recommendations from the Public Ministry Consultations Planning Team (2010) prior to their first meeting.
2. Each member of the task force expressed a commitment to the important work that has been assigned to the group.
3. The work began by identifying what is distinctive and what is held in common in the current Word and Service rosters. After considerable conversation and theological reflection, the task force reached the decision that there are many similarities in the mission work of all of the Word and Service rosters. It was also agreed that now is an appropriate time to review what is needed to face the current mission challenges and opportunities in today's context for mission.
4. The task force believes that the more challenging conversation that must take place will be to clarify the roles and interdependence of the leaders on the Word and Service rosters, leaders on the ordained Word and Sacrament roster and the leadership of all of the Baptized.
5. Discussion led the task force to recommend that the ELCA will be better served by a distinctively diaconal thrust with focused preparation and service on one new roster. This would not only serve the church's mission, but relieve confusion and provide clarification and leadership for the church's call to diakonia.
6. The members of the task force agree that the possibility for further in-depth conversation about the pros and cons regarding the ordination of people into the diaconate may be helpful as we move forward.

The Church Council voted [CC12.11.38]:

To receive with gratitude and thanks the interim report of the Word and Service Task Force, convened in response to Church Council action [CC10.11.64] taken in November 2010;

To offer profound appreciation and thanks to persons who serve as associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers on the lay rosters of this church;

To affirm the preliminary conclusion of the Word and Service Task Force that this church should move toward creation of a single, unified lay roster of Word and Service ministry, subject to further review and recommendation by the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council and approval by the Churchwide Assembly;

To authorize the Word and Service Task Force to continue its work in order to facilitate the creation of such a unified roster, to develop a process outlining how the existing lay rosters would be closed, and to provide a process for transition of existing associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses into such a new roster, and, in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary, to consider and propose possible amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* to accomplish its recommendations ...

During deliberations of the Word and Service Task Force, the question of whether those on the unified roster should be ordained arose. The task force determined that the question was beyond the scope of its responsibilities and, at the request of the task force, the Church Council appointed an Entrance Rite Discernment Working Group to deal specifically with the matter of ordination and its implications and to bring recommendations to the Churchwide Assembly.

The Church Council and Conference of Bishops received periodic reports from the task force and working group.

In March 2015, the Conference of Bishops adopted [CB15.03.10] a recommendation to the Church Council. The action supported “moving forward the work of unifying the Word and Service rosters at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly while at the same time asking that a decision on the appropriate entrance rite and related issues be delayed to a future date.” The conference had also reviewed the work of the Theological Education Advisory Committee, and it suggested that the Church Council and the ELCA use the additional time to “facilitate broad-based discussion and discernment around leadership within this church.”

In April 2015, the council voted [CC15.04.05]:

To receive with gratitude the recommendation from the Conference of Bishops regarding the Word and Service roster;

To recommend continuing the work of developing a proposal to unify the three existing lay rosters into one Word and Service roster and to bring this proposal to the November 2015 meeting of the Church Council;

To affirm the recommendation to delay a proposal on the appropriate entrance rite and related issues until the November 2018 meeting of the Church Council;

To ask the Entrance Rite Discernment Working Group to continue its work and to develop for use beginning at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly a process to engage conversation around the appropriate entrance rite for the unified Word and Service roster and to address the related issues;

To work together as a church to define issues of leadership and refine recommendations about rosters and entrance rites through a process of intentional, open conversation seeking God’s guidance for the sake of the world; and

To continue to seek ways to facilitate broad-based discussion and discernment around leadership within this church;

To work together as a church to define issues of leadership and refine recommendations about rosters and entrance rites through a process of intentional, open conversation seeking God’s guidance for the sake of the world; and

To continue to seek ways to facilitate broad-based discussion and discernment around leadership within this church.

The Word and Service Task force prepared its final report and recommendations and presented it to the Church Council for consideration in November 2015. (See Section VI of the *Pre-Assembly Report*.) The Office of the Secretary prepared constitutional amendments necessary to unify the three existing lay rosters into one roster of ministry of Word and Service. The council has recommended that the Churchwide Assembly adopt the amendments, if it takes the following action.

**Recommended for
Assembly Action**

To thank the Word and Service Task Force members and all who contributed to its work to develop a proposal to establish a single, unified roster of Word and Service;

To unify the three existing Official Rosters of Laypersons (Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Diaconal Ministers) into a roster of Ministry of Word and Service;

To ensure that individuals on the three existing rosters of Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Diaconal Ministers be automatically transferred to the roster of Ministry of Word and Service, unless a person on an existing roster declines, and that the existing rosters be eliminated with the establishment of the new roster on January 1, 2017;

To endorse the other recommendations of the task force regarding this new roster; and

To give thanks to God for the ministry of all who have served and are serving on the present lay rosters and to express confidence that God is leading this church into God's future.