

The Upstate New York Synod
of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America

Congregational and Conference

Deacon

Handbook

Working Document

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PREFACE

Romans 12:4-8 states, "Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other. Our gifts differ according to the grace given us. If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching. Let the preachers deliver sermons, the almsgivers give freely, the officials be diligent, and those who do works of mercy do them cheerfully."

FORWARD

Congregational deacons and the congregations in which they have served have had a very positive experience within this synod of the ELCA and in its predecessor bodies.

There has been a growth in confidence by lay persons who have assumed leadership functions. This includes increased appreciation and understanding of the scriptures, Lutheran history and theology. Conscience levels have been raised in understanding one's self and one's relationship to others in small groups and in one to one visitation experiences.

The deacon committee lauds this development and hopes to foster it by issuing this handbook. We are aware that not all questions can be answered by consulting this document. In agreement with Dr. Martin Luther we believe that some questions need to be answered by one's conscience informed by God's Word and by the use of common sense. We also recognize the need for certain parameters within which congregational deacons serve. Not all practices are helpful; hence some are not acceptable.

We present this handbook for adoption as a working document of our synod with the prayer that the Holy Spirit work through those who use it for the strengthening of Christ's Church among us.

Mission Statement as approved by Synod Council 4/20/07

The mission of the Deacon Program of the Upstate New York Synod is to identify, train, authorize and supervise lay persons who assist the pastor(s) and other rostered leaders of their congregation in worship, educational ministries, and/or ministries of care and service. Further, for the sake of the mission of the church, the program intends to:

Assist Conference Deacons to provide ministerial services during short-term, intermittent absences of a specific congregation's called pastor in areas where ordained pastoral leadership is unavailable and Assist the Bishop to provide ministerial services in congregations where ordained pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time.

Further, the theological education and other training provided for deacons is also intended to be available to other adult lay leaders, to foster their growth in understanding and faith, whether or not they serve their congregations as deacons or in some other capacity.

CONGREGATIONAL AND CONFERENCE DEACON HANDBOOK

Table of Contents

I. DEFINITIONS AND FUNCTIONS	5-6
A. Introduction	5
B. Definition	5
C. Functions	5
D. Length of Terms	7
II. STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS	6-9
A. Qualifications / Standards for Candidates for the Office of Deacon of the Upstate New York Synod	6
B. Basic Expectations of All Deacons	8
C. Reciprocity in the Recognition of Deacons	9
III. GUIDELINES: CONGREGATIONAL DEACON	9-11
IV. TRAINING PROGRAM	11-12
A. Guidelines for Trainers	12-14
B. Minimum Educational Requirements For Congregational Deacons	
V. MODEL COVENANTS	15-18
VI. ORDER FOR COMMISSIONING CONGREGATIONAL DEACONS	19-24
VII. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DEACONS	25-26
VIII. DEACON COMMITTEE	26

I. DEFINITIONS AND FUNCTIONS

A. Introduction

Since its inception, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has intentionally labored to recapture the concept of "ministry of the baptized." Within the church, the laity are called by virtue of Baptism to a common ministry of servanthood that is expressed in a variety of vocations in their daily living. Among the many ways in which the laity contribute their God-given gifts within the church is through an intentional, called ministry as deacons.

B. Definitions

The Upstate New York Synod has identified three arenas of lay ministry under the name of Deacon. This handbook is for congregational deacons who serve only within their congregation, and for conference deacons who provide worship leadership beyond their own congregation.

Another handbook addresses the arena of synodical deacon.

Congregational Deacon: A congregational deacon is one who, after a designated period of training, is a recognized leader within an intentional ministry in a congregation under the supervision of the pastor.

Conference Deacon: Conference deacons are persons who have been identified by their congregation, parish, or conference for service beyond the local congregation or parish. Their service is an extension of the ministry of the Dean and Conference. They are accountable to the Bishop through their Dean. A conference deacon may also be a congregational deacon.

C. Functions

1. **Congregational deacons** shall establish with their pastor an understanding of their role in their particular context. They will develop a working relationship to be described in a written covenant signed by the deacon, the pastor and a congregational representative (see Section V).

Conference deacons shall establish with their Dean an understanding of their role in their particular context. They will develop a working relationship to be described in a written covenant signed by the dean, home pastor, deacon, and a congregational representative (see Section V). Pastors and deacons should meet regularly for mutual support, evaluation, and study.

2. **Congregational Deacons and Conference Deacons** shall have training and continuing education commensurate with the functions they will perform.

D. Length of Terms

1. **Congregational Deacons** shall serve for an initial term of three (3) years. Additional three-year terms may be served with the agreement of the pastor, deacon, and congregation.

2. When there is a pastoral vacancy, **congregational deacons** will continue to serve under the supervision of, and be accountable to, the vacancy pastor or intentional interim.

3. **Congregational Deacons** shall submit their resignations upon the arrival of the newly called pastor so that any service by a deacon can be clearly defined and understood by all parties involved.

4. **Conference deacons** shall serve for an initial term of three (3) years. Additional three-year terms may be served with the agreement of the dean, home pastor, and deacon.

5. When there is a pastoral vacancy, **conference deacons** will continue to serve and be accountable to the vacancy pastor or intentional interim and the dean or conference mentor.

6. **Conference deacons** shall submit their resignations upon the arrival of the newly called pastor or intentional interim pastor in their home congregation. This shall also hold true when there is a new dean. The new pastor or dean will have the freedom to form a new ministry team.

E. Service at Worship

1. Service- Normally a deacon shall serve as an assisting minister. At a time in any one worship service within his or her own congregation a deacon will either lead the liturgy or preach.

2. Presiding- **Congregational or Conference Deacons** shall not preside at the Eucharist unless they are authorized to do so by the Bishop, in writing, for a specific date(s) and place. In keeping with ELCA policy, such authorization will be limited to emergency situations (vacation is not an emergency-illness is) or for the sake of the mission of the church (pastoral vacancy, isolated or special situations). Every pastor and congregation should prepare ahead of time a plan of action for use in the unexpected circumstance when Holy Communion is scheduled and the pastor cannot be present because of an emergency.

3. Preaching – **Congregational Deacons** may publicly proclaim the Word by a sermon they have prepared in accordance with their training and under the supervision of the pastor, or read a sermon given them by the pastor.

Conference deacons may be called upon to preach in or beyond their own congregations. They shall have been trained and approved for this ministry.

II. STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

A. Qualifications / Standards for the Office of **Congregational and Conference Deacon** of the Upstate New York Synod

1. **Congregational and Conference** Deacon Candidates shall be baptized, confirmed or have been received into membership as adults, communing and contributing members of an ELCA congregation and seek to witness to and serve Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as they are guided by the Spirit.

2. **Congregational and Conference** Deacon Candidates must share the confession of Faith of this Synod as expressed in its Constitution:

S4.01. This synod confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

S4.02. This synod confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

- a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
- b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

S4.03. This synod accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

S4.04. This synod accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this synod.

S4.05. This synod accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

S4.06. This synod accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.

S4.07. This synod confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

3. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates must evidence and express their commitment to service through the Body of Christ as they glorify God.

4. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates must be of sound moral character and mature faith. They shall have demonstrated faithfulness in worship and service, and shown an eagerness for further spiritual formation.

5. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates shall be open to spiritual formation during their training programs with a pastor as mentor and with other deacons in their congregation/conference.

6. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates must be willing to share with others their faith story and experience.

7. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates will complete a recommended course of training commensurate with their responsibilities. (See Section VII.)

8. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates must be willing to work as part of a team with the pastor as the leader.

9. **Congregational Deacon** Candidates must recognize that service as deacons is on a part-time, non-stipendiary basis.

Conference Deacon Candidates must recognize that service as deacons is on an occasional basis.

10. **Congregational and Conference Deacon** Candidates must expect to engage in ongoing continuing education to develop their skills and expertise, and to engage in theological reflection under the supervision of an experienced pastor.

11. **Congregational Deacon** Candidates must have the endorsement of their pastor(s), in addition to congregation council, and/or congregation.

Conference Deacon Candidates must have the endorsement of their Dean, pastor(s), congregation council, and/or congregation.

B. Basic Expectations of **Congregational and Conference Deacons**

They shall have:

1. a basic knowledge of Biblical exegesis and Scriptural interpretation;
2. a basic knowledge of confessional Lutheran theology and church history;
3. an understanding of the church year and lectionary use;
4. an understanding of people and their spiritual, psychological and emotional needs;
5. an understanding of the importance of confidentiality in ministry;
6. an understanding of appropriate behavior and boundaries in relation to the pastor(s) and congregational members. (See, also, ELCA "Visions and Expectations," and relevant Synod and ELCA policies.)
7. a basic knowledge of communication styles, and the uses of language between men and women, among people of various generations and people who come from various cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds.

Deacons will be helped to meet these expectations by training programs. (See Section IV.)

C. Reciprocity in the Recognition of Deacons

Reciprocity is a mutual exchange of privileges or the recognition by one institution of the validity of licenses or privileges granted by another institution.

1. A determination will be made by the Synod Deacon Committee as to whether a person from another ELCA synod, or another denomination, will be given credit for previous training and service. In the case of deacons from other traditions, provisions shall be made for instruction in Lutheran Church history, confessional theology, and Lutheran liturgical practice.
2. When an active deacon transfers membership from one congregation to another, the new congregation may seek reciprocity for the deacon when he or she has been in the congregation long enough to be "known." Such reciprocity will allow a deacon from one congregation to assume the service as a deacon in a new congregation (after proper introduction, call and installation) without being required to go through the entire preparation and training process outlined in this Handbook..
3. "Any application for reciprocity as a congregational deacon ***shall originate*** with the pastor of the new congregation."
4. According to the Model Constitution for Congregations (C 12.04.d. and g.), the congregation council should take an active part in assessing the congregation's needs and the potential deacon's skills for a match in ministry. This policy is consistent with this Handbook.
5. The pastor and congregation council of the new congregation shall contact all parties having responsibility for the evaluation and authorization of the potential **congregational or conference deacon** according to their proposed area(s) of service as stated in this Handbook. They shall acquire certificates of training and letters of recommendation relating to preparation and performance of the congregational deacon for whom reciprocity is sought.
6. The conference deacon training team (or whatever group is responsible for deacon training in a specific conference) and the Synod Deacon Committee are available to act as resources in determining any additional preparation that might be necessary to comply with established Upstate New York Synod standards for deacons.

III. GUIDELINES:

A. CONGREGATIONAL DEACON

1. The pastor and the individual discuss that person's ministry within the congregational and community, and the individual's desire to expand and deepen his/her commitment to that ministry.
2. The pastor submits the person's name to the congregation council for approval for candidacy and/or funding. (Some congregations provide financial help.) In addition, we recommend that all Conferences and Congregations move toward conducting background screening for all Deacons, using the same screening as for any other congregational volunteer (Synod provides guidelines for this screening).
3. The congregational deacon training should be commensurate with service he or she will provide. The pastor and candidate determine the course of training. They may choose to follow the program of training offered by the synod or conference, or specific training may be done or recommended by the pastor. All the programs offered within the synod that meet minimum guidelines (see VII) shall be recognized by other conferences as acceptable for their deacons.

4. Whatever model for training is chosen, the programs should help the candidate meet the basic expectations as set forth in Section II of this Handbook.
5. Congregational deacons shall be called/elected by their congregation or parish and shall serve only in the congregation/parish which calls and authorizes their ministry.
6. It is not appropriate for congregational deacons to wear clerical collars or clerical stoles, including the use of a deacon's stole worn over the shoulder.
7. Congregational deacons will not offer counseling as part of their ministry.
8. The candidate for congregational deacon will be installed and or commissioned by the congregation or by the conference.
9. If an occasion arises when the pastor is not present and congregational deacons lead worship and proclaim the Word, the honorarium otherwise due to a supply pastor shall be earmarked for deacon training, unless waived as deemed appropriate by the Dean.
10. The term "Deacon" may be used in personal address of all categories. Written documents, announcements, and references shall designate the category of the deacon involved. The sign of office shall be a distinctive cross.

B. CONFERENCE DEACON

1. The pastor and the individual discuss the latter's ministry within the congregation and community, and the individual's desire to expand and deepen his/her commitment to that ministry by becoming a candidate for **Conference Deacon**. **Conference Deacons** are not self-selected.
2. **Conference Deacon** Candidates shall normally have prior experience in congregational leadership.
3. The pastor submits the person's name to the congregation council for approval as a **conference deacon**. Upon approval the name is then submitted to the Dean and an appropriate deacon training program is selected. (Some congregations may require congregational approval for candidacy and/or funding.)
4. The **conference deacon** candidate completes deacon training as established by the synod and its conference, using this handbook. This includes observation and evaluation of the candidate. The program is normally completed within a two-year period.
5. A conference deacon training team reports completion of the candidate's training and makes a recommendation to the pastor, dean and bishop.
6. Positive recommendations from the training team, pastor and congregation council are necessary for approval as a **conference deacon**. The pastor recommends the candidate to the bishop, dean and conference council for election as a **conference deacon**.
7. Persons authorized as **conference deacons** will not wear clerical collars or clerical stoles, including the use of a deacon's stole worn over the shoulder.

8. Candidates for **conference deacon** will be commissioned by the conference. Commissioning is a public rite which recognizes the dean's authorization of those who completed training as required in this handbook.

9. Congregations shall pay for deacon supply at the same rate as supply pastor, plus expenses. Such payment shall be made through the conference, which shall share the amount 65/35 between deacon and continuing deacon education respectively.

10. The term "Deacon" may be used in personal address for all categories. Written documents, announcements, and references shall designate the category of the deacon involved. The sign of office shall be a distinctive cross.

11. Appointment of **Conference Deacons**

a. Upon being commissioned as a **conference deacon**, the person is available for service through the dean.

b. Mission and ministry needs within the conference that cannot be met by rostered persons are identified by the dean, bishop and staff.

c. Where a specific longer-term ministry need exists, the bishop will recommend a Synodical Deacon to the congregation council or appropriate agency board. The Synodical Deacon's responsibilities of service shall be defined, and the term of service shall be for a specific period of time.

d. Authorization of a **conference deacon's** ministry may be revoked by the bishop or dean at any time; the reason does not need to be specified publicly.

e. Criteria for Public Ministry - **Conference Deacons** must meet the criteria for public ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (see IV. Standards and Expectations, p. 4 in this Handbook.)

f. Supervision and Accountability - Accountability and supervision for a **conference deacon** is the direct responsibility of the dean and/or the deacon's pastor. The deacon's pastor may seek the advice and counsel of the dean of the conference, the bishop, or an appropriate synod staff person.

IV. TRAINING PROGRAM – (Recommended) Educational Requirements for **Conference Deacons, Congregational Deacons Who Preach, Recommended for Other Congregational Deacons,** and Guidelines for Conference Trainers

A. The Conferences may establish deacon training programs in consultation with the Synod Lay Education Coordinator and the Deacon Committee.

B. Subject to guideline III, C the recommended training will include but not be limited to:

1. Old Testament Survey: 5 hours – An overview of the content, structure, history and theological paradigms of the Old Testament;

2. New Testament Survey: 5 hours – An overview of the content, structure, history and theological paradigms of the New Testament;
 3. Lutheran Identity: 5 hours – A presentation of the historical Reformation issues, the Lutheran movement, and some of our particular confessional and theological issues of today;
 4. Hermeneutics (Interpretation): 5 hours – Discussions of exegesis, the use of Scripture, teaching methodology and paradigm of Law/Gospel;
 5. Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation: 5 hours – Includes church year, worship, private devotions, spiritual formation;
 6. Deacon Skills: 5 hours – Orientation into answers of the questions of what, who, why, where a deacon is and how a deacon ministers; a review of this Handbook. Boundary Awareness and some basic ministry skills such as listening, telling and observation are covered. This area of training will normally be met by a yearly synodical, conference or multi-conference training event to provide consistency in the praxis of deacons throughout the synod, and to provide an opportunity for fellowship. Such an event would offer continuing education hours for all deacons.
- C. In addition, each deacon shall undergo at least 15 hours of instruction or study in the particular area of ministry in which the deacon will serve. This instruction is often very specific and may be provided by the Conference Dean, their pastor or others specifically designated.
- D. All of the above course work normally should be concluded within a two-year time frame.
- E. Requests for exemption from any of the above requirements on the basis of previous appropriate educational experience shall be made to the Deacon Committee.
- F. Ten (10) hours of continuing education shall be required of each deacon during every year of the deacon's service. These hours could be acquired through programs specifically established for deacons, in the general continuing education programs offered to clergy and laity, or by independent study with the deacon's pastor. These continuing education hours should address, in some way, the deacon's particular ministry. All training shall be undertaken by the deacon with the consultation and approval of his/her pastor(s) or supervising pastor. Information regarding other continuing education events will be shared by the Synod with all deacons, pastors and congregations.
- G. No single structure is recommended for teaching the courses listed in B.1—5, above. Various program structures (one week, several weekends, evening classes, etc.) are offered by different conferences to meet the needs of deacons seeking training. When possible, conferences are encouraged to collaborate as they establish training events. It is not necessary for each conference to have its own program.
- H. Each conference shall submit its training schedule to the Synod Deacon Committee annually, so that this information may be reviewed and shared.
- I. All training programs should be open to general participants, as well as various Deacon Candidates, and commissioned Deacons (already commissioned).

J. Guidelines for Trainers

1. Needs of deacons who intend to preach:

- a. an understanding of the Gospel and how it frees us to lead faithful lives;
- b. an ability to articulate and express publicly their experience and understanding of the Gospel;
- c. an appreciation of the distinction between Law and Gospel;
- d. knowledge of how to prepare a sermon, including further study in Scripture and theology, and an understanding of the use of exegetical and theological tools such as commentaries, concordances, professional journals, etc.;
- e. practice in writing and delivery of sermons, including how to identify and use appropriate illustrations.

2. Needs of deacons who intend to lead liturgy:

- a. an understanding of the history and meaning of the Church's liturgy;
- b. an understanding of Word and Sacrament, including familiarity with the ELCA's current statement in this area;
- c. an awareness of the importance of "body language," grooming and movement in leading worship;
- d. development of a disciplined preparation for worship;
- e. familiarity with worship resources, especially the Lutheran Book of Worship and its rubrics;
- f. practice opportunities in actual church settings, i.e., "dress rehearsals;"
- g. sensitivity to the context of worship settings outside the congregation's usual worship space (including homes, nursing homes, etc.) and practice/rehearsal for this kind of service with the pastor.

3. Needs of deacons who intend to be visitors:

- a. learn to "listen with the third ear";
- b. acquire the ability to differentiate between a neighborly visit and a visit by a deacon, and understand what is unique or different about a visit from a deacon;
- c. acquire an awareness of self and an ability to recognize one's own feelings and needs so as to avoid inappropriately bringing these into the visitation;
- d. have knowledge of pastoral care in a historical perspective and understand the place of deacons in that history;

- e. understand and have the ability to share the Grace of God in the midst of life's experiences;
- f. have a sense of the stages of psycho-social and spiritual development;
- g. understand appropriate behavior and boundaries in making diaconal visits and calls.
- h. understand the importance of confidentiality in ministry.

4. Needs of deacons who minister in other areas:

- a. Since ministry needs are different, some conferences may train deacons to work in social ministries, with youth in Christian education, evangelism, music or as a parish nurse, or in some other needed ministry. Preparation for these deacons should also include the expectations of all deacons in general, and deacons who do visitation.
- b. Depending upon the area of ministry, additional specific training may be necessary. This may be done best within each conference or congregation and codified by the synod at a later date.

V. MODEL COVENANTS

A. Model **Congregational Deacon's** Covenant

I, _____, having been made a member by Holy Baptism of the

Body of Christ and the Royal Priesthood that is the Church, and having been set apart according to Apostolic Usage for specific ministries within the congregation of _____, and having been duly commissioned as a Deacon by _____ of the Upstate New York Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a Deacon of _____, do hereby solemnly covenant before Almighty God and with this congregation. faithfully and regularly to:

- assist the pastor in a prescribed area or type of service;
- do my utmost to maintain peace and harmony within the congregation;
- exemplify, by a godly walk and conversation, the meaning of the fellowship in my congregation;
- support the ministry of the Church by regular use of the Means of Grace, by my intercessions, and by my offerings;
- respond to requests by the pastor and/or congregation council for service, especially in times of emergency;
- consult, as befits my pastor and congregational deacon colleagues, in the planning and carrying out of our ministries;
- attend, as appropriate, conferences, synod, ecumenical and other extracongregational meetings and events;
- provide for my personal growth in ministry through reading and study and by attendance at courses and continuing education events designed to facilitate such growth.
- And further, to perform with diligence the duties specified as follows: The deacon's duties, as appropriate to training received and assigned by the pastor, are described here, clearly and simply.

I promise that I will support and build up my colleagues, speak the truth in love and be receptive when that truth is spoken to me, and to forbear and forgive as God in Christ has forgiven me. I understand that my service as a deacon is accountable to the pastor, my deacon colleagues and:

List the authorizing body and the date of commissioning, including the length of term and any conditions assigned to service as a deacon.

Asking Almighty God to help and guide me, I make this covenant in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Signature and date follow.)

_____ Signature

_____ Date

B. A Model Covenant by Pastor and Congregation with **Congregational Deacon**

As Christians, we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It is our privilege to recognize and support those who are engaged in the work of this congregation in the lay ministry of **Congregational Deacons**.

This congregation, name of congregation, pledges its support to name of **congregational deacon/candidate**, with prayer, counsel and financial means. Financial support is pledged throughout the recommended preparation for service as long as acceptable progress is demonstrated and the above named individual remains faithful to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, its creeds, and its confessions.

We ask God's help in making us willing supporters and thankful recipients of this mutual ministry, so that the name of the Lord may always be glorified, and that we, as God's people, may all live in peace.

We, therefore, sign our names in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Signatures of Pastor, Council President, Congregation Secretary or other appropriate parties are suggested to follow, along with the name and address of the congregation.

_____ Pastor

_____ Council President

_____ Congregation Secretary

C. Model **Conference Deacon's** Covenant

I, _____, having been made a member by Holy Baptism of the Body of Christ and the Royal Priesthood that is the Church, and having been set apart according to Apostolic Usage for specific ministries within the congregation of _____, and having been duly commissioned as a Deacon by _____ of the Upstate New York Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a Deacon of _____, do hereby solemnly covenant before Almighty God and with this congregation. faithfully and regularly to:

- assist the pastor in a prescribed area or type of service;
- do my utmost to maintain peace and harmony within the congregation;
- exemplify, by a godly walk and conversation, the meaning of the fellowship in my congregation;
- support the ministry of the Church by regular use of the Means of Grace, by my intercessions, and by my offerings;
- respond to requests by the pastor and/or congregation council for service, especially in times of emergency;
- consult, as befits my pastor and congregational deacon colleagues, in the planning and carrying out of our ministries;
- attend, as appropriate, conferences, synod, ecumenical and other extra-congregational meetings and events;
- provide for my personal growth in ministry through reading and study and by attendance at courses and continuing education events designed to facilitate such growth.
- And further, to perform with diligence the duties specified as follows: The deacon's duties, as appropriate to training received and assigned by the pastor, are described here, clearly and simply.

I promise that I will support and build up my colleagues, speak the truth in love and be receptive when that truth is spoken to me, and to forbear and forgive as God in Christ has forgiven me.

I understand that my service as a deacon is accountable to the pastor, my deacon colleagues and:

List the authorizing body and the date of commissioning, including the length of term and any conditions assigned to service as a deacon.

Asking Almighty God to help and guide me, I make this covenant in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Signature and date follow.)

_____ Signature

_____ Date

D. Home Congregation's Promise and **Conference Deacon** Promise

As Christians, we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It is our privilege to recognize and support those who are engaged in the work of this congregation in the lay ministry of **Conference Deacons**.

This congregation, name of congregation, and this conference, name of conference, pledges its support to name of **conference deacon/candidate**, with prayer, counsel and financial means. Financial support is pledged throughout the recommended preparation for service as long as acceptable progress is demonstrated and the above named individual remains faithful to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, its creeds, and its confessions. We ask God's help in making us willing supporters and thankful recipients of this mutual ministry, so that the name of the Lord may always be glorified, and that we, as God's people, may all live in peace. We, therefore, sign our names in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Signatures of Pastor, Council President, Dean or other appropriate parties are suggested to follow, along with the name and address of the congregation.

_____ Pastor

_____ Council President

_____ Dean

VI. ORDER FOR COMMISSIONING and INSTALLING

CONGREGATIONAL DEACONS

A. This order may be used for the commissioning of **Congregational Deacons** in a congregation or by a conference.

B. When celebrated in the congregation's worship service, this order shall also function as the installation.

C. When celebrated in a conference setting, this order may be followed by an installation service within each deacon's congregation. An appropriately modified form of the "Installation of Elected Parish Officers" (Occasional Services, 1982) may be used.

This order shall follow the Sermon and Hymn of the Day.

Notes: P (pastor), R (congregation representative), D (Deacon candidate), C (congregation);

P Dear Christian Friends: Baptized into the priesthood of Christ, we are all called to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. In days gone by, God set apart Miriam and Deborah, Stephen and Philip, Phoebe and Priscilla, through the Holy Spirit for unique partnerships in ministry with all of God's people. It is our privilege this day to celebrate God's continued call to service in the ministry of Deacon.

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8 and I Peter 4:8-11

A representative of the Congregation Council/Conference presents the Deacon Candidate(s) before the assembly saying:

R I present name(s) to be commissioned as Deacon(s) in this congregation/conference.

P Have/has they/she/he been properly prepared for this ministry?

R Name(s) have been properly nominated and trained in accordance with the Guidelines for **Congregational Deacon** service in the Upstate New York Synod to serve a term of office in their congregation(s).

P Our Lord, who came among us as a servant, calls us to faith and a life of loving service to our neighbor. Those who have been chosen for deacon service assist the pastor and the congregation in the church's mission to proclaim the Gospel in word and action. They serve the needy, care for the sick, comfort the distressed, and through words and actions bring God's love to all people. (A general description of the Deacon's service in ministry may follow.) Will you accept this ministry, and as (a) servant(s) of God perform the work of Deacon in this congregation?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you carry out this ministry in accordance with the teaching and practice of the Lutheran church?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you serve in accordance with the guidelines of this synod and your covenant with your congregation and its pastor?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you be diligent in the study of the Holy Scriptures and faithful in the means of grace and in prayer?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you witness in word and deed, and by your own example encourage God's people in faithful service and holy living?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

The candidate(s) may kneel.

P Let us pray: Holy, mighty and gracious God, we thank you for sending your Son, Jesus the Christ, who took on himself the form of a servant. He showed that whoever would be great must be servant of all. We praise you for the many ministries in your Church, and for the Deacon Ministry into which your servant(s), name(s), now enter.

Laying a hand on the head of each candidate the Pastor says:

P Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in name the gift of your Holy Spirit for service as Deacon in your Church.

After this prayer has been offered for each, the Pastor continues:

P Bless them in their serving, that your name may be glorified, the mission of each/this congregation be strengthened, and your love made known in greater measure.

D AMEN

P People of God: Will you receive name(s) as Deacons in your midst and honor them for Jesus' sake?

C WE WILL

P Will you pray for them and otherwise support their service as deacons?

C WE WILL

P I now declare you commissioned (and/or installed) as Deacons in your congregation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C AMEN

The Prayer of the Church follows including a petition for Deacons and the Ministry of Deacons.

Lord of all, on this day of thanksgiving and celebration of the Ministry of Deacons, we pray that you would look favorably on your whole Church and work your saving power through its ministry. Let the whole world see and know that things that were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by Him through whom all things were made. Lord in your mercy.... HEAR OUR PRAYER.

For all who offer themselves in your name, we give thanks, O God. Give them the joy of service, and constant guidance. Help us all to be both willing servants and thankful recipients of ministry, that your name may be glorified, your people live in peace, and your will be done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

The service continues with the sharing of the peace.

VI. ORDER FOR COMMISSIONING and INSTALLING **CONFERENCE DEACONS**

A. This order may be used for the commissioning of **Conference Deacons** in a congregation or by a conference.

B. When celebrated in the congregation's worship service, this order shall also function as the installation.

C. When celebrated in a conference setting, this order may be followed by an installation service within each deacon's congregation. An appropriately modified form of the "Installation of Elected Parish Officers" (Occasional Services, 1982) may be used.

This order shall follow the Sermon and Hymn of the Day.

Notes: P (pastor), R (congregation representative), D (Deacon candidate), C (congregation);

P Dear Christian Friends: Baptized into the priesthood of Christ, we are all called to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. In days gone by, God set apart Miriam and Deborah, Stephen and Philip, Phoebe and Priscilla, through the Holy Spirit for unique partnerships in ministry with all of God's people. It is our privilege this day to celebrate God's continued call to service in the ministry of Deacon.

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8 and I Peter 4:8-11

A representative of the Congregation Council/Conference presents the Deacon Candidate(s) before the assembly saying:

R I present name(s) to be commissioned as Deacon(s) in this congregation/conference.

P Have/has they/she/he been properly prepared for this ministry?

R Name(s) have been properly nominated and trained in accordance with the Guidelines for **Conference Deacon** service in the Upstate New York Synod to serve a term of office in their congregation(s).

P Our Lord, who came among us as a servant, calls us to faith and a life of loving service to our neighbor. Those who have been chosen for deacon service assist the pastor and the congregation in the church's mission to proclaim the Gospel in word and action. They serve the needy, care for the sick, comfort the distressed, and through words and actions bring God's love to all people. (A general description of the Deacon's service in ministry may follow.) Will you accept this ministry, and as (a) servant(s) of God perform the work of Deacon in this congregation?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you carry out this ministry in accordance with the teaching and practice of the Lutheran church?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you serve in accordance with the guidelines of this synod and your covenant with your congregation and its pastor?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you be diligent in the study of the Holy Scriptures and faithful in the means of grace and in prayer?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

P Will you witness in word and deed, and by your own example encourage God's people in faithful service and holy living?

D I WILL, AND I ASK GOD TO HELP ME.

The candidate(s) may kneel.

P Let us pray: Holy, mighty and gracious God, we thank you for sending your Son, Jesus the Christ, who took on himself the form of a servant. He showed that whoever would be great must be servant of all. We praise you for the many ministries in your Church, and for the Deacon Ministry into which your servant(s), name(s), now enter.

Laying a hand on the head of each candidate the Pastor says:

P Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in (name) the gift of your Holy Spirit for service as Deacon in your Church.

After this prayer has been offered for each, the Pastor continues:

P Bless them in their serving, that your name may be glorified, the mission of each/this congregation be strengthened, and your love made known in greater measure.

D AMEN

P People of God: Will you receive name(s) as Deacons in your midst and honor them for Jesus' sake?

C WE WILL

P Will you pray for them and otherwise support their service as deacons?

C WE WILL

P I now declare you commissioned (and/or installed) as Deacons in your congregation/conference, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C AMEN

The Prayer of the Church follows including a petition for Deacons and the Ministry of Deacons.

Lord of all, on this day of thanksgiving and celebration of the Ministry of Deacons, we pray that you would look favorably on your whole Church and work your saving power through its ministry. Let the whole world see and know that things that were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by Him through whom all things were made. Lord in your mercy.... HEAR OUR PRAYER.

For all who offer themselves in your name, we give thanks, O God. Give them the joy of service, and constant guidance. Help us all to be both willing servants and thankful recipients of ministry, that your name may be glorified, your people live in peace, and your will be done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

The service continues with the sharing of the peace.

Appendix:

VII. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DEACONS – Biblical and Confessional Background

The office of deacon stems most clearly from Acts 6, where seven men are appointed to a ministry of service as distinct from a ministry of Word and Sacrament. The term "deacon" stems from the Greek word "to serve" and so contains the idea of doing something for another. Not much is said in scripture about the actual duty of deacons. Both Stephen and Philip are described as proclaiming the Word.

In the writings of the early church, the office of deacon indicates some involvement in the liturgy, often as an assistant to the bishop. As bishops became the leader of groups of congregations, some deacons remained attached to a single congregation under the presbyter (i.e., pastor/priest). With the rise of clergy as distinct from the laity, the position of deacon gradually evolved into a stage on the way to priesthood in the Western Church. With that development and the rise of monasticism, the office of deacon declined. In the Middle Ages, the responsibilities of service were taken over by trade guilds run by the rising middle class. In the Eastern Church the office of deacon remained distinct but was limited for the most part to liturgical duties in the divine liturgy. Severe restrictions were placed on the diaconal ministry by the rise of Islam and later by communism.

The reformers used the biblical term deacon in a variety of ways. In the Anglican and Scandinavian traditions, deacons remained a stage on the way to becoming a priest or pastor. It was not until the 19th century that deacons were seen as lay persons appointed to care for the sick and needy. They often received some compensation in church/state social agencies. It was at this time that the deaconess movement also had its beginning in Lutheranism. Some deacons also held worship services where there was a scarcity of clergy. Often such persons were influenced by the polity of other Protestants. In the end, deacons were church council persons who greeted, ushered, etc., but did little more. The latter half of the 20th century saw a re-awakened interest in the office of deacon. A changing culture with new needs was met by emphasis on the people of God as having a servant role. This understanding also was reflected in liturgical texts which gave place to Assisting Ministers and lectors. The Roman Catholic Church re-established an order of permanent deacons to assist, but not become priests. In the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), ministry was redefined as the "calling of all the baptized" as a 1970 report expressed it. By 1980, there were over 900 "deacons" in the LCA.

In 1971 work began on the Upper New York Synod (LCA) Deacon Program. By 1974 the first training events were scheduled. Two hundred candidates were nominated. Of these, 68 liturgical and 43 preaching deacons were certified. The defeat of a proposal brought to the 1976 Chicago Convention of the LCA curtailed further development at the Synodical level. Training was left to districts (conferences) to arrange and implement. This program, with modifications, was brought into the ELCA.

The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), in January 1982, approved a document which formally established an office of deacon.

It was defined as "a permanent office representing the church in service to her members and to the world in works of mercy and witness, thus supplementing the ministry of Word and Sacrament." Three deacons were consecrated by the bishop of the church on May 30, 1983. Restrictions to the office included prohibition from presiding at the Eucharist; baptisms could be performed only under

the supervision of a pastor, and deacons were not permitted to preach unless they had been previously trained and authorized to do so by the church. At this writing there are about 12 active deacons from this tradition who were grandparented into the ELCA.

The American Lutheran Church (ALC), as a predecessor church, had no deacon program.

In order to bring some regulation to a deacon program which was approved in principle after study and surveys, a Deacon Task Force reported to the 1994 Upstate New York Synod Assembly. Their report was adopted, resulting in the creation of the present Deacon Committee (cf. 15D ff. of 1994 minutes). This Handbook on Deacons has been prepared by the Committee, shared with congregations and conferences for discussion, revised further, and given to Synod Council for approval.

VIII. DEACON COMMITTEE

A. Function

SC/R.6.02d.

This synod shall provide a program for training lay persons to serve in the office of deacon within the congregations of the synod. This office will include persons who have been nominated, trained and approved to work in a variety of areas of deacon ministry such as Liturgical Deacons, Preaching Deacons, Visitation Deacons, Christian Education, Parish Nurse, Administrative Roles, Youth Ministry and other diaconal offices called forth by specific need and supported by conference training programs.

SC/R.11.01.04.

A standing committee shall be established to oversee the ongoing work of Deacons in this synod. This committee shall consist of at least one pastor and one deacon from each conference participating in this program. Committee members representing conferences shall be elected or appointed in a manner determined by each conference. This committee shall:

1. Produce, evaluate and continually revise a "Handbook on Deacons" which shall include standards and expectations for those serving in the office of Deacon as well as suggested procedures for the election of deacons and a process for discipline of deacons. This Handbook and all subsequent revisions shall be subject to approval by the Synod Council.
2. Plan and provide for synod-wide continuing education events for deacons.
3. Occasionally gather persons who serve as deacon trainers to share ideas, improve programs and revise minimum training expectations.
4. Create and maintain a contact list of Deacon currently serving in this synod.
5. Provide for a newsletter or other forms of communication to support and sustain the work of deacons.