

Proposal for Exchangeability of the Diaconate:
The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Endorsed by the Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee
January 11, 2023

Proposal: An interpretation of *Called to Common Mission* (2000),¹ hereafter “CCM,” in light of the ELCA’s institution of an ordained diaconate (ELCA Churchwide Assembly action, August 2019):

- 1) Based on CCM ¶15 and ¶21, The Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) mutually recognize each other’s order of deacons as authentic.
- 2) Based on CCM ¶14, the ELCA continues to acknowledge the authenticity of deacons in TEC. Based on CCM ¶15, TEC now acknowledges the authenticity of deacons/rostered ministers of Word and Service of the ELCA and its predecessor bodies.
- 3) Based on CCM ¶22, TEC and the ELCA acknowledge that each other’s deacons may validly serve in each other’s liturgies. TEC and the ELCA mutually recognize each other’s deacons as interchangeable for occasional ministry or extended service in counterpart ministries and joint ministry settings, subject to the approval of their respective bishops. We propose that the full communion *Orderly Exchange* guidelines for pastors and priests² be amended to include exchangeability of deacons.
- 4) Based on CCM ¶9, TEC and the ELCA renew their pledge to jointly undertake “continuing exploration, renewal, and reform”³ for the purpose of deepening the opportunities for diaconal word and service in both communions and in our full communion relationship.

Commentary:

Historical Background

In 2001, TEC and the ELCA acknowledged the authenticity of each other’s episcopal and presbyteral orders through their full communion agreement, *Called to Common Mission*.⁴ An impediment remained to full exchangeability for one group: Episcopal deacons and their Lutheran diaconal counterparts as then rostered. The Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee addressed the exchangeability of TEC deacons and the ELCA rosters of Word and Service several times after the adoption of CCM but was unable to reach a solution. Since one group (TEC) was viewed as ordained and the other (ELCA) as consecrated or commissioned lay ministers, the gap was too great to bridge.

The ELCA 2016 Churchwide Assembly changed the church’s polity and ecclesiology by unifying its three rostered ministries of word and service⁵ into one roster of deacons, and the ELCA 2019

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Episcopal Church USA, *Called to Common Mission* (2000), download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Called_To_Common_Mission.pdf.

² *The Orderly Exchange of Pastors and Priests Under Called to Common Mission: Principles and Guidelines*, http://lutheran-episcopal.org/documents/orderly_exchange.pdf

³ CCM ¶9.

⁴ CCM ¶14, 15, 21.

⁵ Deaconesses, Associates in Ministry and Diaconal Ministers.

Churchwide Assembly confirmed that the entrance rite for this unified order would be ordination. Many ELCA deacons received from the former rosters of Word and Service were consecrated or commissioned with a laying-on of hands by a bishop; some were not, under former liturgical practices. Recognizing the diaconal character of all the former rosters of Word and Service in the ELCA and its predecessor bodies, the ELCA received them into the ELCA's roster of ordained deacons. The ELCA's ordination rite for deacons now includes a laying-on of hands by a bishop. The ELCA's actions have now brought the ELCA's diaconate into congruence with TEC's diaconate. The theological impediments to full exchangeability of TEC and ELCA deacons have now been removed.

Under our full communion partnership, TEC is now invited to recognize the authenticity of all these ELCA deacons in the future. There is historical precedent in the broader Anglican Communion and in TEC for this reception: both the recommendations of the Lambeth Conference in 1968⁶ and the canonical resolutions of the Episcopal Church General Convention in 1970⁷ provided for the reception of (consecrated) deaconesses into the order of deacons. Neither implemented additional requirements for deaconesses to be made deacons or distinguished between those consecrated deaconesses who were "grandmothered in" as deacons and those ordained after the new canon's passage.

Bringing the Diaconate Into Full Communion

Building upon the full communion agreement and over 20 years of living into common mission together, this proposal recognizes and celebrates that our two churches now hold a common theology and ecclesiology for recognition and exchangeability of ELCA and TEC deacons.

TEC and the ELCA now hold a common vision of the diaconate. Both envision their deacons as equipping the *diakonia* (service rooted in the word of God) of the church as a whole; this *diakonia* of all believers⁸ is one of the primary goals of CCM. TEC and the ELCA jointly affirmed in CCM that "all members of Christ's church are commissioned for ministry through baptism."⁹ Both churches' theology of the diaconate is grounded in the sacrament of baptism. The diaconate is the order to which the church confers responsibility for reminding the people of God that a call to active *diakonia* constitutes a Christian baptismal identity. "The deacon symbolizes the service of Jesus Christ to which we are all called in baptism," declares a paper presented in 2017 to the ELCA Entrance Rite Discernment Group.¹⁰ Deacons and laypeople together serve roles of worship leadership, providing yet another opportunity to highlight the

⁶ *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (SPCK and Seabury Press, 1968), 39, 105-106.

⁷ *Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Otherwise Known as the Episcopal Church, Held in Houston, Texas, From October Eleventh to Twenty-Second, Inclusive, in the Year of Our Lord 1970, With Constitution and Canons* (New York: 1970), 249, 270-71, 769-70.

⁸ See Craig L. Nesson, "A Lutheran Theology for *Diakonia* in North American Contexts," in Godwin Ampony, et al., *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2021), 283-4.

⁹ CCM ¶16.

¹⁰ Gordon Lathrop, "Diaconal Ministry: The Entrance Rite Question, Reflections From a Consideration of Symbolic Meaning and Ritual Practice," bit.ly/3GDZm5x

intersections of the church and the world. Both groups have experienced a maturing of diaconal identity and an increase in diaconal vocations.

The ELCA and TEC have together come to a place where they were called to be over two decades ago, when they entered into full communion. Each church has evolved in its understanding and practice of the diaconate, and now we have come to convergence in this ministry. In Canada the Waterloo Declaration of 2001, which established full communion relations between the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), similarly commits those two churches “to work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry.”¹¹ With the final action in 2022 affirming the “Memorandum of Mutual Recognition of Relations of Full Communion” among the ACC, the ELCIC, the ELCA and TEC,¹² these four churches have further committed themselves to “establish policies and procedures to facilitate exchange of ministry” across the continental border of Canada and the U.S., including the possibility of the exchange of deacons.¹³

Under the U.S. full communion agreement, *Called to Common Mission*, we hereby propose that TEC and ELCA approve each other’s deacons to serve liturgically and to serve under call in each other’s parishes and other ministry contexts under the same principles of *Orderly Exchange* that govern pastors/priests:

This orderly exchange of [deacons] is for the sake of participation in the mission of God and can be an important sign of our unity in Christ. Exchangeability, as part of common ecumenical commitment to collaborate as members of the one body of Christ, can enhance shared ministry and mission by encouraging more flexible, responsive and effective placement of [deacons]. Thus, orderly exchange encourages those in our churches responsible for ministerial placement to invite the service of [deacons] available in other churches and make use of their gifts; it encourages [deacons] in each church to respond to such invitations or, where appropriate, to express their openness to serve in another church.¹⁴

“As our churches live in full communion,” states *Called to Common Mission*, “our ordained ministries will still be regulated by the constitutional framework of each church.”¹⁵ Nothing in this proposal would require any change in the two churches’ differing polities around the ordination of priests/pastors. EC may continue the practice of ordination to the transitional

¹¹ Anglican Church of Canada, “Called to Full Communion (The Waterloo Declaration),” 2001, www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102184/waterloo_declaration.pdf

¹² The Episcopal Church, “Memorandum of Mutual Recognition of Relations of Full Communion,” April 1, 2022, www.episcopalchurch.org/eir/memorandum-of-mutual-recognition-of-relations-of-full-communion/

¹³ A process for enabling the transferability of deacons between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has not yet been formally pursued.

¹⁴ This quote is from the 2021 proposed revision of *Principles for the Orderly Exchange of Pastors and Priests*.

¹⁵ CCM ¶18.

diaconate prior to ordination to the priesthood, whereas the ELCA may continue its practice of direct ordination of pastors into the office of Word and Sacrament.

Called to Common Mission states, “both churches acknowledge that the diaconate, including its place within the threefold ministerial office and its relationship with all other ministries, is in need of continuing exploration, renewal, and reform, which they pledge themselves to undertake in consultation with one another.”¹⁶ Exchangeability of calls will deepen the theology and practice of *diakonia* in both churches and may facilitate a deepening dialogue on *diakonia* with other ecumenical partners’ expressions of diaconate as well.

This recognition and declaration of exchangeability will provide the following opportunities:

- a) The preparation of TEC and ELCA deacons will be enhanced by mutual sharing of competencies, educational resources and processes for formation. Well-established educational institutions in both traditions offer excellent programs and certifications specifically designed for diaconal ministry.
- b) The ELCA and TEC will want to coordinate their respective guidelines for call and deployment. Diaconal exchangeability under this agreement will be enhanced by careful attention to:
 - Assessment of equivalencies in areas of specialization, where applicable.
 - Training in the liturgical practices of the hosting church.
 - Addressing divergent policies and practices regarding compensation.
- c) Given that TEC and the ELCA have different liturgical roles for deacons, “a spirit of graciousness and commonality,”¹⁷ pastoral sensitivity and clarity of expectation are encouraged, especially in planning ecumenical events.
- d) The deacon should be rooted in the community of worship in order to live into the fullness of their diaconal identity as those ordained to ensure that the people of God fulfill their own diaconal responsibilities.

Our churches are called to common mission, to work together to reveal our unity in Christ,¹⁸ linking the church and the world. We are part of a global and ecumenical movement of the Spirit that is opening the ears of the church to the desperate cries of the world and pushing us beyond our Sunday-morning gatherings back out into the world in cross-shaped *diakonia*. As an order rooted in mission, a shared diaconate will advance CCM’s witness. Coordinating our expressions of *diakonia* will be a gift to the whole church and will offer a more coherent witness to the world. Collaborative diaconal ministries focused on the world’s needs will serve both churches’ outreach in the post-pandemic evangelism environment.

As our shared understanding of the diaconate continues to evolve, the role of deacons is becoming more clearly focused not only on service among the poor, the weak, the sick and the

¹⁶ CCM ¶9.

¹⁷ *Guidelines & Worship Resources for the Celebration of Full Communion: Lutheran – Episcopal* (2001), bit.ly/3ivvDUE

¹⁸ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), Eucharistic Prayer D, p. 375.

lonely but also on justice and advocacy on their behalf; not only on interpreting the needs, concerns and hopes of the world but also on teaching and equipping others for ministry; and not only working under the authority of the bishop but also providing leadership within the councils of church and society alike. This is our common diaconal mission: for the Spirit to use us as participants in and means for God's mission of hope, healing and reconciliation in God's beloved world.

Roster of the Diaconate Implementation Team (2021-2022)

Deacon Mitzi Budde, Chair (ELCA deacon, member of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee)

The Rev. Deacon Maylanne Maybee (Anglican Church of Canada deacon, Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission representative)

The Rev. Deacon Lori Mills-Curran (Episcopal deacon, former executive director of the Association for Episcopal Deacons)

Deacon John Weit (ELCA deacon, ELCA executive for worship)

The Rev. William Gafkjen (ELCA bishop, Indiana-Kentucky Synod; chair of the ELCA Word and Service task force)

The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey D. Lee (Episcopal bishop, Diocese of Milwaukee) (until Oct. 31, 2022)