

The "WHOLE CHURCH" DIMENSION OF DEACONS In The LCMS

The Missouri Synod authorized districts to train and license deacons for Word (preaching) and Sacrament ministry beginning in 1989. A synodical task force (TF) produced a report in 2015 recommending that synod in convention revoke this and terminate the position of deacon.

One TF argues that deacons are only "locally" certified and so are not valid because the "wider church" does not certify them (p.12). The TF's FAQs article added that while clergy ordination is for the "whole church," deacon licensing belongs just to a district. Since deacon licensing is not "transparochial," it should be eliminated everywhere. It asserts that seminaries are institutions of the "church at large" because its Regents are chosen by national election, while district presidents who license deacons are elected merely by their districts and so don't represent the wider church. Since deacons do not have "transparochial recognition," they are illegitimate.

ARE DEACONS A MINISTRY Of The 'WIDER CHURCH?'

Question Assumptions. The TF assumes that a position has to be practiced and recognized widely in order to be valid. When asked "how wide," it arbitrary answers, "district-wide is not wide enough." The Apostle Paul noted that his apostleship was not recognized by a lot of people, yet was valid. The TF never proves its assumption that a synodical official has to be overseen by a nationally-elected body in order to issue a license to preach that is valid. Furthermore, synod designed the Special Ministry Pastor (SMP) ordination to *not* be "transparochial," and is considered valid only in one congregation (not even in the rest of his district). Yet, people don't consider it to be illegitimate.

DEACONS ARE RECOGNIZED By The WIDER CHURCH

Actually there is a lot of evidence that deacons are very widely recognized by the church at large. In fact, deacons are more widely accepted than many other "official" synodical positions which no one questions. Here are 14 facts that show that deacons are recognized by the wider church:

1. the whole synod in convention authorized licensing deacons in 1989

The 1989 convention approved: districts may train, certify, license and oversee deacons to preach, baptize and consecrate. In this way, the church at large recognized deacons. Although most convention resolutions are relatively brief and vague, Res. 3-05B includes 5 pages of detailed recommendations based on the Lay Worker Study Committee Report. Districts which decided to license deacons followed this synodical blueprint. Synod delegated examination and certification to districts, just as it delegates examination of clergy to seminaries.

2. Preaching deacons are used by 77% of the Districts.

On the surface, the fact that only ten of the 35 districts of synod have leadership training programs suggests that deacons are recognized by a minority. But what is important is not how many districts have training programs, but how many *use* deacons.

The TF reports amazing statistics: although ten districts train deacons, deacons preach in 27 districts, and Word and sacrament deacons serve in 20 districts. Plus, some "confessional" churches which oppose training have preaching deacons. *While 30% of districts train deacons, 77% of districts use preaching deacons, and their district presidents approve them.*

3. The wider church has commissioned deacons in much greater numbers than auxiliary offices.

The 525 licensed deacons (331 who preach) rival the number of DCEs (617) and outnumber all other auxiliary offices combined (total 448 SMP, Deaconess, DPM, DFLM, DCO, PA). This means that church members are more likely to be served by a deacon than by most any auxiliary office.

4. "Local" training programs serve the church at large

Training programs such as the Concordia Lay Deacon Program (CLDP, at Concordia New York) and the Mission Training Center (MTC, at Concordia University Portland) train deacons across synod via online courses. District staffs often refer deacon candidates to them.

5. Deacon is a Biblical office

The synodical constitution asserts that Scripture is our guide for doctrine and practice. Qualifications for both Deacons and bishops are noted side by side in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Philippians 1:1, which are the scriptural foundation for deacons. If bishop is considered an office, deacon should be also, and synod is bound to use Scripture as its benchmark for establishing ministry positions.

6. districts informally recognize each other's deacons and training

As noted before, 17 districts have deacons which trained or served previously in other districts.

7. The three parts of deacon licensing are the same three parts of the "proper call" mentioned in Augsburg Confession XIV- examination by synod appointees, call by a congregation, and ordination by representatives of synod.

Districts of synod apply the same careful approach to certifying deacons that they do to certifying pastors. The wider church is invited when deacons are commissioned, and pastors and deacons from other churches or districts often participate in recognition that it is a biblical office.

8. Deacon programs all have a unified approach

Districts' guidelines are very similar because they all follow the specific recommendations of the 1989 resolution. They further unified their programs in order to meet the requirements of the (now defunct) DELTO program. Two more districts decided in 2015 to begin deacon training based on synodical guidelines. This indicates that district programs universally follow synodical instructions.

9. Deacon-like offices exist in most church bodies

Most church bodies have a deacon-like office in which men preach, usually administer sacraments, and provide pastoral care under supervision of clergy. This shows acceptance by the much-wider church. For example, the Lutheran church in Kenya has the office of evangelist. The title is misleading, because the evangelist preaches, leads worship and provides pastoral care in a single congregation under supervision of a pastor (there are far more churches than pastors), just as LCMS deacons do.

10. Synod has already defined what deacons are

The TF states that we do not have a definition of what deacons are and cannot do so because the New Testament and Lutheran Confessions do not give many details. Actually, synod *already has* defined in detail what deacons are and what they do. We needn't feel it's impossible or necessary to do what Res. 3-05B has already done for us.

The TF FAQs assert that deacon licenses are not recognized and should not be considered valid by the wider church because they are "under the aegis of only one man," namely the district president, who is elected only by a district and not by the whole synod. The next few points answer this argument.

11. If you consider the actions of "one man" to be invalid for the whole church, then you need to entirely revamp the office of District President (DP)

The DP removes clergy and commissioned ministers from office, authorizes installations, and identifies ministers as ineligible for calls. These roster actions do not need to be ratified by any synodical official or body, and are recognized by the whole synod. For example, the synodical president cannot continue to consider a clergy to be in good standing if a DP has removed him from the roster for cause. The wider church designates "one man" (any DP) to take these actions and recognizes these decisions as valid, and so should recognize licenses by the same principle.

12. The "one man" only applies policies made by the synod in convention or the Council of Presidents (COP)

No DP can license deacons, make roster changes or take other actions unless they meet requirements set by synodical bylaws and policy. He doesn't independently make policy, he only applies what the whole church has already decided.

13. The DP does not work alone.

Our district in convention approved guidelines for licensing deacons based on the synodical resolution which the DP follows. Various officers and members of synod teach classes, examine candidates, call deacons, participate in commissioning and supervise their ministries. Two Concordia Universities offer training, and they have their own "wider church" oversight.

14. Would a nationally-elected official do a better job of examining and licensing deacons?

Would the wider church have more confidence if the synodical president, not DPs, placed and removed all 6,000 clergy and 600 deacons across the whole country? Recently synod changed vice presidential elections to increase the regional aspect, and didn't think the wider church would recognize their ministry less as a result. DPs use their knowledge of local communities and ministers to do the work of Christ and synod.

Does the TF's article even inadvertently foster suspicion of DPs?

DEACON NUMBERS

The wider Church is so responsive to the office of deacon that in just 26 years their numbers are rapidly gaining on or exceeding the number in auxiliary offices:

- Deacons (licensed) 525
- Deacons who preach 331
- Parish Assistant 11
- Dir. Christian Outreach 21
- Dir. Family Life Ministry 25
- Dir. Parish Music 61
- Deaconess 161
- Specific Ministry Pastor 169
- Dir. Christian Education (DCE) 617

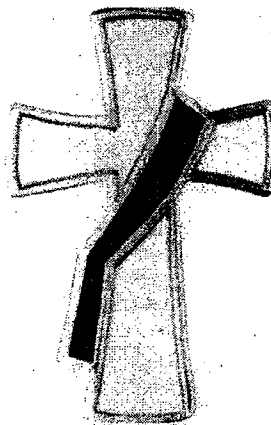
THINGS TO CONSIDER

Would eliminating 525 licensed deacons who serve in 77% of districts create harmony? The TF repeatedly states that the goal is to end discord by eliminating deacons (especially preaching deacons). Churches are almost universally pleased with their deacons, and deacons believe they are called to that Biblical ministry. Pres. Harrison was elected at the 2010 convention by a 54-45% vote. If deacons were terminated by a similar margin, does anyone really think that harmony would result?

If the "local" license is such a hindrance to some people recognizing ministries, there is a simple solution. Synod could vote to officially consider both SMP and deacon licenses to be national rather than district or local (in practice they both already are to a great extent).

Make the Biblical office of deacon an office or auxiliary office to confirm the Biblical ministry of deacons. Deacons have a legitimate part in teaching God's Word under supervising pastors. This would be a step beyond current practice of certifying deacons and may not be necessary.

The 1989 Wichita Convention Res. 3-05B



is maligned by opponents and cited by supporters, but seldom read. Its 5 pages of detailed directives can be found in the *Convention Proceedings* or Appendix A of *Policies of the Commission on Deacon Qualifications* by the Michigan District (p12, www.michgiandistrict.org).

More Information: *this paper*, "The Ministry of Deacons in the Lutheran Church" and "Controversy on Deacons in the LCMS" are available in print (messiah7@empirenet.com) and video on DVD or YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VtP0gGrQgo> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5mr9F6tbeg>

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