Diaconal Ministry at Luther Seminary

Diaconal ministers are consecrated to ministry of Word and Service, at the intersection of church and world. Diaconal ministers work to seek wholeness in the world, sharing the hope of Christ and equipping others for healing and justice in the world. Diaconal ministers serve through agencies, institutions, and traditional church programs as they build bridges between the church and the world.

Luther Seminary works in partnership with the ELCA and student candidacy committees to prepare individuals for rostered diaconal ministry. The role of the Contextual Learning office is to assist candidates in documenting their diaconal field experience and projects.

This document provides information and guidelines on the following topics:

- Characteristics of Diaconal Ministers
- Candidacy process
- Standards for Rostered Laypersons
- Diaconal Ministry community
- Formation Event (DMFE)
- ELCA Diaconal Ministry Manual
- Field Experience
- Supervision of Field Experience and Project
- Field Experience and Project Forms
- Ministry Project
- Project Paper
Characteristics of Diaconal Ministers

Diaconal Ministry is a form of rostered leadership ministry designed to enable the ELCA to more effectively fulfill its mission. Diaconal Ministers are called by the church to positions that exemplify the servant life and seek to equip and motivate others to live it. Diaconal ministers shall seek in a variety of ways to empower, equip, and support the baptized people of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the mission of God in the world. Diaconal ministers are marked by these characteristics and shall:

1. Be rooted in the word of God

Diaconal ministers are ministers of the Word of God, committed to Christ, and called to be spokespersons for the Gospel, the apostolic faith, and the theological emphasis of this church to God's world.

2. Be trained to carry out a particular service

Diaconal ministers carry out a public ministry of service and witness. With demonstrated competence and expertise in a particular discipline, diaconal ministers may serve both within and outside of congregational settings, in each case bearing responsibility for making the linkages between church and world. Programmatic ministries within congregational settings should be marked by extension of the witness and service of the church into the wider community.

3. Be committed and prepared to equip the baptized for ministry in the world and in the church

Diaconal ministers along with pastors are called to lead and equip the baptized for ministry. Diaconal ministers support the ministry of the baptized through appropriate programmatic ministries and by working with the laity in discerning and encouraging their gifts for ministry.

4. Give particular attention to ministries at the boundaries between the church and world

Diaconal ministers carry public responsibility to speak for the needs of God's world to the church as well as taking God's saving Gospel to the needs of the world through the actions of God's people both individually and collectively.

5. Exemplify the life of Christ-like service addressing all forms of human need

The call to diaconal ministry is a lifelong commitment which supports and complements the ministry of Word and sacrament, focusing on ministry to the whole person. This "diaconal bias" provides the lens and vision for developing the diaconal mission of the church carried out among and through its members.

6. Be grounded in community

Diaconal ministers need the support and shared vision of a community of leaders committed to a common calling. This grounding in a diaconal community serves as the reminder to seek to build community in all ministry settings.
Candidacy Process [TOP]

The candidacy process is the shared responsibility of the student and the synod candidacy committee. It is a process that occurs in conjunction with theological study. Persons seeking consecration as diaconal ministers in the ELCA must apply, be accepted, and proceed through both the candidacy process and master’s-level theological study.

An application to become a diaconal candidate should be made through an ELCA synod candidacy committee. Persons seeking consecration as diaconal ministers in the ELCA are expected to fully participate in all steps of the candidacy process—Entrance, Endorsement, Approval—as outlined below. (Read more about Candidacy from the ELCA website)

A separate application for graduate study should be made to the seminary where theological education will occur. Diaconal candidates who are attending non-ELCA seminaries may apply for admission as an affiliated student to Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

Entrance

Entrance begins a journey of discernment that explores an individual's potential for rostered ministry and readiness to begin the process of theological study and candidacy in the ELCA. One year of active membership in an ELCA congregation is required prior to entrance. Entrance includes a Candidacy Application, Congregational Registration, Initial Interview, Psychological Evaluation, and Career Consultation through the synod candidacy committee. The synod candidacy committee must make a positive entrance decision before an applicant continues in the process of formation and preparation. A positive entrance decision is required to attend the Diaconal Ministry Formation Event and to begin field experience.

Endorsement

Endorsement encourages and affirms those who clearly demonstrate gifts and qualities for a specific form of ministry in the ELCA, as well as identifies areas for growth and development. Prior to endorsement, the candidate must have completed at least one full semester/quarter of graduate theological study and participated in the formation event. The process for endorsement is as follows: the candidate submits his or her Endorsement Essay and Ministry Project Proposal to the synod candidacy committee and the seminary; the candidacy committee arranges for the endorsement interview with the candidate and a seminary faculty representative; and then the candidacy committee makes an endorsement decision. Once endorsed, the candidate may begin work on his or her diaconal ministry project.

Approval

The Approval stage of the candidacy process relates to the candidate’s articulated call to ministry and demonstrated readiness to assume a leadership role as a rostered minister in the ELCA. The Approval stage marks satisfactory completion of all academic and practical requirements, as well as the candidacy committee’s affirmation of the candidate’s call to public ministry. The process for Approval is as follows: the candidate prepares and submits his or her Approval Essay to the candidacy committee; a faculty recommendation is submitted to the candidacy committee; the candidacy committee arranges for the
Approval Interview; and then the committee reaches a decision about approval. A positive approval decision must be made in order for the candidate to be available for assignment, consecration and first call.

**Standards for the Official Rosters of Laypersons**

Persons approved, consecrated and rostered as diaconal ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall satisfactorily meet and maintain the following Basic Standards established in the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions (Section 7.52.10) of the ELCA.

1. Commitment to Christ  
2. Acceptance of and adherence to the Confession of Faith of this church  
3. Willingness and ability to serve in response to the needs of this church  
4. Academic and practical qualifications for ministry; including leadership abilities and competence in interpersonal relationships  
5. Commitment to lead a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ and in so doing to be an example in faithful service and holy living  
6. Receipt and acceptance of a letter of call  
7. Membership in a congregation of this church

**Diaconal Ministry community**

Diaconal Ministry information on the ELCA website:  

DiacoNews - The Newsletter of the Diaconal Ministry Community:  
Diaconal Ministry Formation Event

A Diaconal Ministry Formation Event is offered each year at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. The event is jointly sponsored by the ELCA’s Division for Ministry and the ELCA’s Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation. A positive Entrance decision from the synod candidacy committee is required prior to participation in the formation event. (Read more about the Diaconal Ministry Formation Event on the ELCA website.)

Purpose

Often the formation event precedes or comes early in one’s course of seminary study. It helps provide a diaconal perspective for shaping a course of study and field experience. At the formation event, candidates will:

- Explore the biblical, theological, historical and ecumenical roots and expressions of diaconal ministry
- Examine current diaconal models for ministry in a variety of settings through study and field trips
- Gain deeper understanding of Lutheran theology as it relates to ministry, call and ecclesiology
- Develop insights and disciplines for active ministry through worship, prayer and activities designed for spiritual formation, development of community and mutual vision for diaconal ministry
- Explore areas for specialization
- Become orientated to standards requirements and procedures for ecclesiastical endorsements and professional certification or licensure

Requirements

Prior to the Ministry Formation Event, diaconal candidates must:

- Complete the candidacy application process
- Receive a positive entrance decision
- Submit a formation event application and essay
- Submit registration fee
- Complete all assigned readings

The formation event is two weeks in length; diaconal candidates are expected to be in residence through the entire formation event

Academic credit may be requested by the student upon completion of the formation event and other requirements established by the seminary.
The Contextual Learning office of Luther Seminary is excited about and committed to the Diaconal Ministry training process and the expanded ministries Diaconal Ministers will bring to the church. We look forward to the opportunity to partner with you in this endeavor.

The Candidacy Manual of the ELCA describes in detail the requirements and expectations for Diaconal Ministry candidates throughout the process. Please visit the Candidacy Manual page of the ELCA website and download the manual for your reference. The pages that specifically address the Diaconal Minister process are found in section E of the manual.

Below is an excerpt taken from the manual, at Section E, part 5, as it pertains specifically to the Field Experience requirements:

**Section E - 5: Field Experience**

Field work plays a vital role in the preparation and formation of diaconal ministry candidates. Diaconal ministry takes place at the boundaries where church and society interface. Regardless of the particular ministry setting in which they serve, diaconal ministers will be expected to understand the dynamic relationships within and between congregational and societal systems and to provide leadership in connecting these systems. The placements for field work will reflect the range of diaconal purpose and should be appropriate and specific to its unique characteristics as a ministry of Word and service.

**A. Standards for field experience**

1. 700 hours of supervised training at the church-societal interface. (Particular areas of specialization may require additional supervised clinical training in accredited programs.) A minimum of 200 hours must be a diaconal ministry project in a field experience congregation.
2. Ability to articulate and demonstrate a vision and understanding of a particular ministry of Word and service as rooted in the Word of God and as a witness to the gospel.
3. Demonstrated skills in analyzing systemic relationships within and between congregations, societal structures, and institutions, and developing strategies or providing ministry at the interface of church and world.
4. Demonstrated competence in planning and implementation of a diaconal ministry project designed to engage with a congregation regarding its ministry in the world. This project will demonstrate an understanding of Lutheran theology and Christian vocation.

**B. Field experience placement**

The field experience requirements should be planned to give the candidate supervised experience in three integral areas of preparation for diaconal ministry: understanding and working with a congregation in relationship to the larger community, gaining expertise in an area of specialization, and reflecting theologically and spiritually on the relationship between these two areas. Various work and field experiences may be arranged sequentially and cumulatively to achieve the required 700 hours. A minimum of 200 hours will be devoted to the diaconal ministry project in a congregation. Candidates completing the project concurrent with seminary study may wish to explore the possibility of an independent study in relationship to their project.
Candidates work with the seminary's office of contextual education so that appropriate field experiences can be arranged. The ELCA seminary granting a candidate's degree is responsible for supervision of the field experience. Supervision of the field experience for students at non-ELCA seminaries is provided through the ELCA seminary of affiliation.

C. Candidates who are enrolled in academic degree programs

Seminaries may structure the diaconal ministry field experience in a variety of ways and include more than one setting. The determination of how the field work is structured will be based on such factors as age, previous work experience, the field work/teaching parish/ministry in context opportunities of the particular seminary, etc. For example, the field work component may include:

1. A full-time (30-40 hours per week) field experience in a congregation or other setting (4-6 months)
2. A part-time position (10-20 hours per week) during the academic year completed over a one- to two-year period
3. Part-time work during the school year combined with full-time summer position
4. A combination CPE and field work arrangement (a unit of CPE may count for up to 300 hours).

D. Candidates who have completed their academic degree program

The candidate seeks the guidance of the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation at the Lutheran School of Theology at Gettysburg, in consultation with the candidate's Candidacy Committee, to arrange an appropriate field experience.

If already employed in a diaconal ministry setting, the candidate may, with the guidance of the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation, in consultation with the candidate's Candidacy Committee, arrange to complete supervised field work in that place, once a positive Endorsement Decision has been made.

Candidates who hold a degree from an ELCA seminary may seek the guidance of that seminary’s contextual education office for field education placement and supervision, in consultation with the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation and the Candidacy Committee.

E. Diaconal ministry project

The purpose of the project is to provide the candidate an opportunity to develop a vision for engaging the field experience congregation in ministry at the interface of societal need and Christian service. Through the planning, execution, and evaluation of the project, the candidate will demonstrate competency in the areas of:

1. the candidate's specialization
2. an understanding of Lutheran theology and Christian vocation
3. the ability to translate these by engaging the field experience congregation in a particular ministry of the baptized in the world.
The project is to take place in consultation with the project director (appointed by the seminary) and a supervisor. Included in the 200 hours will be direct supervision, reflection, meetings with the congregational liaison committee, and planning and execution of the project.

**F. Guided reflection and supervision**

Several important roles and functions facilitate the goals for specialized field experiences. Specialized field experiences are those where the candidate is working in the area of specialization and concurrently assigned to work with a congregation.

1. **Project Director.** The project director, who is assigned by the seminary, will participate in the development of the field work learning agreement and project proposal. The project director will provide guided theological reflection on the candidate's field work experience. The project director will provide a written evaluation for the candidate, which is to be submitted to the seminary field education office and the synod Candidacy Committee. At the time of the candidate's approval, the project director's evaluation will be incorporated in the Seminary Recommendation Form (Form D).

2. **Supervisor at the specialized site/place of employment.** The on-site supervisor, who is assigned by the seminary, will provide administrative structure to the overall experience, including a written description of responsibilities, consultation for mutual reflection of supervisory issues, and periodic review and written final evaluation of the candidate's competence in the designated area of specialization. It is the candidate's responsibility to see that a copy of this evaluation is submitted to the seminary field education office and to the synod Candidacy Committee. In some cases, the on-site supervisor may serve as the project director.

3. **Congregational Component.** While field experience may take place in a variety of settings, the diaconal ministry project must include a congregational component. A pastor of the congregation designates a congregational liaison committee to assist the candidate in planning and implementing the diaconal ministry project. The committee is composed of three to five persons, including a rostered staff member and lay members with a particular interest in diaconal ministry and in the candidate's area of specialization. The committee will serve as a resource to the candidate for understanding the congregational system and its societal context. The committee will also provide assistance in identifying an appropriate project and participate with the candidate in reflection on and evaluation of the project. Before beginning a project, the candidate will submit a one-page project proposal to the pastor and congregational liaison committee for consideration and discussion. When the project itself has been carried out and the candidate has written his or her project paper, the liaison committee will review the project paper and prepare an evaluative commentary to be attached to the project director's evaluation.

4. **The Project Paper.** Upon completion of the project, a written paper is to be prepared, which includes the following:

   1. description/analysis of the assigned congregation context
   2. description/analysis of the project's purpose and goals
   3. reflection on the theological, biblical, historical, and mission underpinnings of the project's goals
4. a detailed description of the project and plans for implementation
5. description of how the candidate guided the congregation’s implementation of the project
6. evaluation of the project and its implementation, including strengths and weaknesses
7. reflection on the relationship of the project to the candidate’s spiritual development

Following a written evaluation and response to the paper by the project director, the project paper is to be submitted to the appropriate field education office. A copy of the paper should be sent to the Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation at Gettysburg and to the synod Candidacy Committee.

Field Experience

Field Experience is a vital component of the preparation and formation of diaconal ministry candidates. The ecclesial requirements for field experience for diaconal ministers exceed those typically required for an M.A. curriculum.

Diaconal ministry takes place in the boundaries where church and society interface. Regardless of the particular ministry setting in which they serve, diaconal ministers will be expected to understand the dynamic relationships within and between congregational and societal systems and to provide leadership in connecting these. Contextualization, reflection, integration and evaluation will therefore be given particular attention throughout the field work experience. Placements for field work will reflect the range of diaconal ministry and should be appropriate and specific to its unique identity as a ministry of Word and Service.

Standards for Field Experience

- 700 hours of supervised training at the church-societal interface. (Particular areas of specialization may require additional supervised clinical training in accredited programs.) A minimum of 200 hours must be a diaconal ministry project in a field experience congregation. (Candidates who elect to complete a standard 400-hour unit of CPE may apply 300 of those hours toward the 700 hour field experience requirement.)
- Ability to articulate and demonstrate a vision and understanding of a particular ministry of Word and Service as rooted in the Word of God and as a witness to the gospel.
- Demonstrated skills in analyzing systemic relationships within and between congregations, societal structures, and institutions and in developing strategies for providing ministry at the interface of church and world.
- Demonstrated competence in planning and implementation of a diaconal ministry project designed to engage a congregation about its ministry in the world. This project will demonstrate an understanding of Lutheran theology and Christian vocation.
Field Experience Placement  

The field experience requirements should be planned to give the candidate supervised experience in three integral areas of preparation for diaconal ministry:

- Understanding and working with a congregation in relationship to the larger community;
- Gaining expertise in an area of specialization;
- Theological and spiritual reflection on the relationship between these two arenas.

Various work and field experiences may be arranged sequentially and cumulatively to achieve the required 700 hours. A minimum of 200 hours will be devoted to the diaconal ministry project. Candidates completing the project concurrent with seminary study may wish to explore the possibility of an independent study in relationship to their project.

The ELCA seminary granting a candidate’s degree is responsible for supervision of the field experience. Supervision of the field experience for students at non-ELCA seminaries is part of the affiliation process at Luther Seminary. Candidates work with the seminary’s office of contextual learning so that the appropriate field experiences can be arranged. The ELCA’s Division for Ministry may also provide guidance in consultation with seminary faculty.

Candidates Who Are Enrolled in Academic Degree Programs

Students may structure the diaconal ministry field experience in a variety of ways, and this may include more than one setting. The determination of how the field work is structured will be based on such factors as age, previous work experience, the field work/teaching parish/ministry in context opportunities of the particular seminary, etc. For example, the field work component may include:

- A full-time (30-40 hours per week) field experience in a congregation or other setting;
- A part-time position (10-20 hours per week) during the academic year completed over a one to two year period;
- Part-time work during the school year combined with a full-time summer position;
- A combination CPE and field work arrangement (a unit of CPE may count for up to 300 hours).

Candidates Who Have Completed Their Academic Degree Program

Diaconal candidates who have already completed their academic degree program should consult with both the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation at the Lutheran School of Theology at Gettysburg and with their candidacy committee to arrange an appropriate field experience.

If already employed in a diaconal ministry setting, the candidate may (with the guidance of the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation and in consultation with the candidate’s candidacy committee) arrange to complete supervised field work in that place, once a positive endorsement decision has been made.

Candidates who hold a degree from an ELCA Seminary may seek the guidance of that seminary’s contextual learning office for field education placement and supervision, in consultation with the ELCA Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation and the candidacy committee.
Several important roles and functions facilitate the goals for specialized field experiences. Specialized field experiences are those where the candidate is working in the area of specialization and is concurrently assigned to work with a congregation.

**Project Director**

The project director, who is assigned by the student's seminary, will participate in the development of the field work learning agreement and project proposal. The project director will provide guided theological reflection on the candidate's field work experience. The project director will provide a written evaluation for the candidate, which is to be submitted to the Contextual Learning office and the synod candidacy committee for inclusion in the candidate's approval process.

**Supervisor**

The selected supervisor at the specialized site/place of employment, in consultation with the seminary, will provide administrative structure to the field experience. This supervision will include a written description of responsibilities, consultation for mutual reflection of supervisory issues, and periodic review and evaluation of the candidate's competence in the designated area of specialization. It is the candidate's responsibility to see a copy of the supervisor's written final evaluation is submitted to the Contextual Learning office and to the synod candidacy committee. In some cases, the on-site supervisor may serve as the project director.

**Congregation**

While field experience may take place in a variety of settings, the diaconal ministry project must include a congregational component. The pastor of the congregation designates a congregational liaison committee to assist the candidate in planning and implementing the diaconal ministry project. The committee is comprised of three to five persons, including a rostered staff member and lay members with a particular interest in diaconal ministry and in the candidate's area of specialization.

The congregational liaison committee will serve as a resource to the candidate for understanding the congregational system and its societal context. The committee will also assist in identifying an appropriate project and will engage in reflection and evaluation related to the candidate's project.

**Project**

Before beginning a project, the candidate will submit a one-page proposal to the pastor and congregational liaison committee for consideration and discussion. Upon completion of the project, the liaison committee will review the final project paper and prepare an evaluative commentary to be attached to the project director's evaluation.
Forms for Field Experience and Project

Diaconal Field Experience and Project forms are available to download from the Contextual Learning website. They are in MS Word document format, and can be edited and saved before printing. Students are responsible to send completed and signed forms to the Contextual Learning office, and to send copies to their candidacy committee.

Applications

Note that multiple participants need to complete forms:

- **Student/Diaconal Candidate Application**
  The candidate completes one form

- **Congregation/Agency Application**
  One form for each congregation/agency that serves as a field work site or a project site.

- **Supervisor, Project Director Application**
  One form from each person serving as either a field work supervisor or a project director.

Learning Agreement

- **Learning Agreement for Field Experience (A)**
  The candidate, in consultation with the project director, completes the learning agreement. This form is due to the Contextual Learning office within the first month of the Field Experience. The student must also submit a copy to the Candidacy Committee.

Evaluation forms

- **Field Experience Supervisor Evaluation (B)**
  One form for each person who serves as a field work supervisor.

- **Field Experience Congregational Evaluation (C)**
  One form from the support committee of each field work site.

- **Project Director's Evaluation (D)**
  One form from the Project Director

- **Field Experience Student's Evaluation (E)**
  One form from the student, following the completion of all field work.
Ministry Project

The purpose of the project is to engage ministry at the interface of societal need and Christian service. Through the planning, execution and evaluation of the project, the candidate will demonstrate competency in the areas of:

- Specialization
- An understanding of Lutheran theology and Christian vocation
- The ability to translate these by engaging the field experience congregation in a particular ministry of the baptized in the world

The student undertakes the project in consultation with the project director and supervisor. The project’s 200-hour requirement includes supervision and reflection, meetings with the congregational liaison committee, and planning and execution of the project.

Project Paper

Upon completion of the project, a written paper is to be prepared that includes the following:

- A description/analysis of the assigned congregation context
- A description/analysis of the project's purpose and goals
- A reflection on the theological, biblical, historical, and mission underpinnings of the project's goals
- A detailed description of the project and plans for implementation
- A description of the project's development of congregational participation
- Evaluation of the project and its implementation, including strengths and weaknesses
- Reflection on the relationship of the project to the candidate's spiritual development

The project director provides a written evaluation for the project and the paper. The final version of the project paper is to be submitted to the Contextual Learning office. A copy of the paper should be sent to the Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation at Gettysburg and to the synod candidacy committee.