

# **Diaconal Ministry at LSTC**

*"Diaconal Ministry is a form of rostered leadership ministry that helps enable the ELCA to effectively fulfill its mission of service in the world. Diaconal Ministers are called by this 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." (ELCA Candidacy Manual, p. 68)*

LSTC is a partner in students' preparation for this lay rostered ministry in consultation with the student, her/his congregation and candidacy committee, and the ELCA Division for ministry. This preparation process has three components: theological education, Diaconal Ministry formation, and field studies.

## **I. Theological Education**

Students must receive a positive entrance decision from her/his candidacy committee in order to enter seminary as candidates for Diaconal Ministry in the theological education program best suited for their ministry goals. Generally, Diaconal Ministry candidates are enrolled in the Master of Arts degree program which includes a special track for Diaconal Ministry. Students meet the Candidacy requirement of theological study by completing the core courses of the MA degree. The elective courses are used to strengthen the students' skills in their chosen area of ministry. Students in other degree programs need to meet the requirements of that degree. Whatever degree program is chosen, all Diaconal Ministry candidates work with the LSTC Director of M.A. Programs to assure that they have met the requirements of the program.

## **II. Formation**

The formation component of the Diaconal Ministry preparation process has two components: the Diaconal Ministry Formation Event and spiritual direction.

1. The Diaconal Ministry Formation Event is held annually in January at the Center for Diaconal Ministry Preparation on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. This is a two-week event and we strongly recommend that students attend as soon as possible after receiving a positive Entrance Decision

from their candidacy committee. Past experience shows that this event has a profoundly positive effect in helping students to clarify and articulate their sense of call to Diaconal Ministry. A student must attend this event prior to being endorsed by their synodical candidacy committee or beginning their Diaconal Ministry project portion of their field studies. The expense of this event is borne by the student. Some scholarships and travel equalization money is available. Contact both the Diaconal Ministry Center at Gettysburg and the Financial Aid Office at LSTC for further information.

2. The other component of formation for Diaconal Ministry candidates is entering into a relationship with a spiritual director for spiritual direction and/or reflection. This is a minimum commitment of forty hours, at least ten of which are direct contact hours. Contact the LSTC Director for Spiritual Life Formation for information about our Spiritual Friends Program and for a referral.

Some often asked questions include:

1. *Can I receive academic credit for attending the Diaconal Ministry Formation Event?*  
Students in the MA program may use attendance at the Formation Event to partially fulfill the requirements of M 324. For M. Div Diaconal students, attendance at the Formation Event serves as partial fulfillment of the M. Div. internship requirement.
2. *What are the other components of M 324?*  
The other two components of M 324 are completing the forty hours of spiritual direction/reflection and a positive Endorsement Decision for Diaconal Ministry from your candidacy committee.
3. *How do I claim credit for M 324?*  
To claim credit for M 324, the student submits to the Field Education Office a copy of the Certificate of Attendance at the Formation Event, a completed Spiritual Direction Report form ([www.elca.org/en/Resources/Candidacy](http://www.elca.org/en/Resources/Candidacy) under "Candidates") and a hard copy of her/his positive Endorsement Decision. Once these papers are submitted to the Field Education Office, the student can then register for course credit. The Field Education Office will certify successful completion with the Registrar's Office. This credit is billed at regular tuition rates.
4. *Do I need to claim a credit for M 324 to graduate?*  
No. Although students must complete these requirements to be approved as a Diaconal Minister, the student does not need to apply for academic credit in this area. However, in either case, the student needs to hand in documentation to the Field Education Office showing that he/she has completed this work.

### **III. Field Studies**

Field studies play a vital role in the preparation and formation of Diaconal Ministry Candidates. It has two components: field experience and a project. Since Diaconal Ministry takes place within the boundaries where church and society interface, Diaconal Ministers need to understand and be able to articulate the dynamics between congregational and societal systems. Therefore, the processes of field studies include work in the areas of contextualization, reflection, integration and evaluation. All field studies need to be negotiated through the Field Education Office, even if the student is not requesting academic credit.

The field experience requirements are planned to give the candidate supervised experience in three integral areas of preparation for Diaconal Ministry: understanding and working with the church in relationship to the larger community; gaining expertise in her/his area of specialization; and theological and spiritual reflection about the relationship between these two areas.

At LSTC, field studies require a total of 800 hours with 200 of those hours being specifically devoted to the Project (see Diaconal Ministry Project section below). Up to three sites and field experiences may be arranged serially and cumulatively. The student initiates the field studies process by making an appointment for consultation with the Field Education Office and, if available, the academic advisor. This must be done a minimum of one term before the student plans to begin her/his field studies. The student submits to the Field Education Office and to her/his advisor, twenty-four hours in advance of the meeting, the completed Registrar form “Master of Arts: Summative Evaluation, Vocational Theological Reflection” with attached proposal. At this meeting, initial proposals for the field studies work and credit requests are negotiated. As a working principle, LSTC attempts to design the field experience to assist the student in meeting any certification or licensure requirements within their specialized field.

Some often asked questions include:

1. *How does CPE fit in?*

MA students may claim 300 hours toward the field studies requirement or one course credit for their first unit of CPE. A second unit of CPE may count either towards field studies hours or as one elective credit. For M.Div. Diaconal Ministry students, the first unit of CPE is a curricular requirement. A second unit of CPE may count as one elective credit.

2. *What about doing Ministry in Context?*

For MA students, the Ministerial Leadership II course may count for either 200 hours of fields studies or be taken for course credit. For M.Div Diaconal

Ministry students, Ministry in Context is a curricular requirement.

3. *Will I get paid for my field work?*  
Hopefully. Although we would like to find paying sites for all Diaconal Ministry field work, this is not always possible.
4. *Will the Field Education Office find a site related to my main area of expertise?*  
Not automatically. However, the Field Education Office works with the student to find a mutually agreeable site.
5. *Do I need to stay in Chicago for my field studies work?*  
No, the Field Education Office works to place students at learning sites wherever she/he may be geographically located.

The Diaconal Ministry Project is the student's opportunity to engage a congregation(s) at the interface of societal need and Christian service. Therefore, it includes both a congregational component and work in the area of declared expertise. At LSTC, the Diaconal Ministry Project requires at least 200 hours of the 800 field work hours. The first step in planning a Diaconal Ministry Project is collaboration with the Field Education Office around the type and possible locations for the project. The proposed project must also be approved by your advisor, the director of M.A. Programs and the Director of Field Education (see Registrar form "Master of Arts: Summative Evaluation, Vocational Theological Reflection"). A congregational site's obligations include a willingness to negotiate the project's goals, provide pastoral and lay feedback, theological reflection and evaluation. The specific details of the project are negotiated between the student, the pastor, and a parish project lay committee.

People involved in the project are:

1. The student.
2. The Director of Field Education.
3. The project supervisor. Generally this is the pastor at the parish where the project is completed. The supervisor agrees to do theological reflection and feedback for a minimum of one hour per week. She/he also signs off on the intern's project paper and provides a final evaluation. If the supervisor is not a member of an ELCA roster, the student must then also work with a mentor who is rostered.
4. The mentor. This person, who needs to be an ELCA rostered individual, provides at least four sessions of theological reflection including a discussion

of the project's impact on ELCA constituencies. The mentor provides a two-page letter of final evaluation.

5. The lay committee. A four to six member committee made up of parishioners from the project site that meets with the student monthly to provide feedback, direction, support and ongoing evaluation of the project and its impact on the congregation. They also sign-off on the intern's project paper and provide a final evaluation.

Upon completion of the project, the student provides to the Field Education Office and his/her synod candidacy committee a project portfolio of no more than 30 pages plus accompanying documentation which includes:

1. an analysis of the congregational context
2. an analysis of the project's purpose and goals
3. a reflection on the theological, biblical, historical, and missional underpinnings of the project's goals
4. a detailed description of the project and plans for implementation
5. a description of the project's development of congregational participation
6. evaluation and critique of the project and its implementation
7. reflection on the relationship of the project and the candidate's spiritual development
8. reflection on the integration of the learnings of the project and seminary training, vocational identity and expectations
9. Diaconal Ministry Final Evaluation forms from student, supervisor and lay committee.

Some often asked questions include:

1. *How are hours validated?*  
Students provide a log that includes dates, hours and tasks.
2. *Do I have to do this all in one term?*  
No. The timing should be planned in consultation with the Field Education Office.

3. *When is the best time to do my project?*  
Although there is not a "best" time to do the project, students are encouraged to do it while working in field studies or taking classes. This provides the best integrated learning opportunities.
4. *Can I do it in my home parish?*  
Because we want students to experience a wide variety of ministry settings and leadership opportunities, we generally discourage doing the Project in one's home parish.
5. *How does this relate to the MA Summative Evaluation requirement?*  
MAM students use the experience and write-up of the Diaconal Ministry Project to fulfill the work for the MA Summative Evaluation requirement. MAM students should note that they must register for the MA Summative Evaluation both fall and spring of the second year of their degree (this class should coincide with your field hours and DM Project.) For M.Div. Diaconal Ministry students, a year-long internship must be completed (a year-long CPE Residency fulfills this requirement) and the Project is done during this same time. Please note that the student must debrief the completed project with the Director of Field Education and their advisor to receive credit for the MA Summative Evaluation.

### **Candidacy**

Following the completion of the field studies portion of Diaconal Ministry preparation, the student will work with the Field Education Office to debrief all of their field work and completed Project. This meeting should include the student's academic advisor and one other faculty person of the student's choice. From this meeting and using the information from the supervisor's and the lay committee's reports, the Field Education Office and the Candidacy Office complete an ELCA Form D for the student. The Candidacy Office then presents the student's Form D to the faculty for approval. After faculty approval, the Form D will be forwarded to the student's candidacy committee for inclusion in their approval process.

After a positive approval from the student's synodical candidacy committee, the student's name is forwarded to the ELCA Churchwide Assignment Consultation. The student is assigned to a synod based on their Forms A, B and Rostered Leader Profile. The student works with the assigned synod to receive a call and to be consecrated as a Diaconal Minister.

Some often asked questions include:

1. *Do Diaconal Ministers really need to write the entire Approval Essay?*  
Yes, however there are specific questions designed for the lay rosters.
2. *Where do I get the Approval Essay?*  
The Approval Essay can be downloaded from the ELCA website ([www.elca.org/en/Resources/Candidacy](http://www.elca.org/en/Resources/Candidacy) under “Essays”).
3. *When should I enter the assignment process?*  
This decision should be made in consultation with the LSTC Candidacy Office and take into account the timing of your academic program.

LSTC, along with the ELCA, 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.

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