

# Guidelines for Atlantic District Lay Deacons

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Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod  
Atlantic District Lay Deacon Guidelines

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## The Diaconate in the Holy Scriptures

The diaconate is a group of people committed to service in and for the Church, a group which has its roots in the New Testament [see Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6]. As the Church catholic has grown, so too, the diaconate has had a history of development and usage.

The diaconate has had a variety of definitions over time and has included a broad range of people, privileges, and responsibilities all dealing with sharing the Word of God and service in the Lord’s kingdom.

## Purpose of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate

The Atlantic District Lay Deacons are trained laity who are granted the opportunity to work under the Office of the Public Ministry in service to the local church, her members and to the world through works of mercy and witness as directed.

The purpose of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate is to provide some basic and uniform standards for preparation, education, and accountability; to offer opportunities for continuing education, collegiality, and support; to encourage excellence in service; and to be a forum for mutual concerns and needs.

The Atlantic District Lay Diaconate is standardized and exists exclusively within the Atlantic District. There is no official transferability from the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate to any other LCMS judicatory or ministerial category.

## Members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate

Members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate are men and women selected and nominated by the local congregation and its pastor and approved by the Atlantic District Board of Directors to serve after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ by sharing the Word and doing acts of service.

Members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate are those individuals who apply for membership, meet the requirements as set by the Atlantic District, and subscribe to these guidelines for service and supervision. The title each member has is “*Atlantic District Lay Deacon.*”

An Atlantic District Lay Deacon’s focus of work is in the local congregation and in the surrounding community through those congregations.

## The Work of Atlantic District Lay Deacons

At the heart of the work of Atlantic District Lay Deacons are works of mercy and witness that support our life together. The actual tasks undertaken by members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate will vary according to the gifts and skills of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon and the needs of his or her congregation in the surrounding community through those congregations. All aspects of Atlantic District Lay Diaconal work are under the supervision of the Supervising Pastor.

Atlantic District Lay Deacons may engage in various types of service, including but not limited to teaching within the congregation; catechesis of youth and adults; caregiving works of mercy like shut-in and hospital visitation, hospitality and integration of members, small group Bible study leadership, and various outreach and evangelism.

Care should be taken to prevent any confusion between an Atlantic District Lay Deacon and the Office of the Public Ministry.

## Qualifications for Atlantic District Lay Deacons

### *Personal Considerations*

An Atlantic District Lay Deacon shall be a confirmed member in good standing of a congregation of the Atlantic District and be involved in parish life. Members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate shall have the support of his/her family. Members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate shall be of sound moral character and mature faith.

### *Application and Letters of Support*

Part I of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Application and a letter of support from the individual’s Pastor must be completed prior to admission to the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Training Program.

To be certified as an Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern, Part II of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Application must be completed, a letter from the Supervising Pastor and congregational president

expressing the support of the parish's governing body, and two (2) letters attesting to the moral and spiritual character of the individuals are required.

Those individuals not seeking application for the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate need not fulfill the requirements of Part II of the application.

### *Training for Atlantic District Lay Deacons*

As a minimum, applicants for the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate shall have a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED Certificate). Other educational background or experience, including academic, business, etc., will be taken into consideration in relation to the applicant's proposed areas of lay diaconal service.

The Atlantic District Lay Deacon shall have completed an approved two-year course of theological education of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Program, which includes:

1. Christian Doctrine
2. Old Testament
3. New Testament
4. Theology and Practice of Worship
5. Christian Service and Care
6. Interpreting Scripture
7. Teaching the Faith
8. Sharing the Faith
9. Evangelism
10. History of the Church.

Addendum II contains course schedules.

Atlantic District Lay Diaconal Training is offered under the auspices of the Lay Training Program.

### *Service Hour Requirement*

In addition to the educational component offered through the Atlantic District Lay Training Program, there is an Atlantic District Lay Deacon Internship. The purpose of the internship is to enable the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern to experience the kind of service that may be expected of him/her as a member of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate. The Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern's skills, interests, and commitment are used as a measure for acceptance to become a member of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate and to help the candidate continue in training and formation under the Supervising Pastor.

The Supervising Pastor is the direct supervisor of the internship. The Supervising Pastor must certify in writing that all hours have been completed.

A total of two hundred (200) hours of practical training are required in the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Program. Within the two hundred hours (200), at least twenty (20) hours of experience must be completed in each of the following five areas:

- Visitation – nursing homes, hospitals, shut-ins, etc.
- Teaching – Bible studies, VBS, Sunday School, etc.
- Administration – organize a newly instituted program; be responsible for an area of service in a staff position.
- Evangelism – follow up on guests to church; teach an evangelism course.

- Liturgical Service – assist in Sunday worship, nursing home devotions, etc.

Fifty (50) hours of practical training may be accepted prior to completion of all coursework. The Supervising Pastor and Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern develop a plan for the remaining one hundred fifty (150) hours of practical experience. These hours may include any one of the above five areas or any other area of parish life.

The Atlantic District Lay Deacon Internship service hour requirement is to be completed no sooner than six (6) months after the candidate's completion of Atlantic District Lay Diaconal coursework and no longer than eighteen (18) months after that date.

## Internship Supervision

Each applicant's internship supervisor will be a rostered Pastor of the Atlantic District who is directly connected to the ministry being undertaken during the internship period. This supervisor shall:

- assist the candidate in establishing goals and expectations for the internship;
- meet with the applicant no less than twice monthly to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns; and
- certify that the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern has successfully completed the required hours.

All applicants, upon completion of the internship, shall submit a written report of his/her service, describing the nature of and personal reflections on the experience. This shall be submitted to the Atlantic District Office prior to the final interview.

## Compensation and Atlantic District Lay Deacons

Normally, an Atlantic District Lay Deacon receives no compensation for service. An Atlantic District Lay Deacon's service is a gift to God and the Church.

It is expected that most members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate will continue to hold regular employment and therefore would be involved in Atlantic District Lay Diaconal service on a part-time, nonstipendiary basis. There may be instances, however, when an Atlantic District Lay Deacon will serve on staff and receive compensation.

Whenever possible, congregations and other agencies in which Atlantic District Lay Deacons are serving shall meet expenses incurred during such service. It is further encouraged that churches offer support for continuing education. In service to congregations outside of their own, such service shall be approved by the Supervising Pastor and the Pastor of the congregation where service is to be rendered in consultation with the Atlantic District Praesidium. This shall be done prior to service. Atlantic District Lay Deacons shall normally receive honoraria for such service.

## Interview Process and Acceptance for Atlantic District Lay Deacons

Upon receipt of an application, the Regional Vice President shall contact the individual in order to answer any questions on the part of the candidate and the Supervising Pastor.

An interview shall take place prior to the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern's second year of study should he/she desire to be recognized as an Atlantic District Lay Deacon. The purpose of this interview is to best gauge the areas of strength and growth of the individual for Atlantic District Lay Diaconal service. It also develops a plan for the Supervising Pastor and other Atlantic District Lay Deacons to support the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern.

A final interview shall be conducted once the educational and practical components have been completed. This shall be conducted through a face-to-face meeting of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern, Supervising Pastor, Regional Vice President, and members of the Advisory Committee. The names of those candidates who successfully pass this interview are forwarded to the Atlantic District Board of Directors, through the Atlantic District Praesidium, for final approval. Only after said interview has been conducted may a date be set for the blessing of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Intern into service.

Approved applicants shall be received into membership in the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate along with their blessing for Atlantic District Diaconal service by a liturgical rite which may consist of a service of prayer, as set forth in the Atlantic District's Rite for the Blessing of an Atlantic District Lay Deacon.

## Accountability of Atlantic District Lay Deacons

The Atlantic District Lay Deacon is always under the supervision of an ordained Pastor, normally the Pastor of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon's home congregation, and serves at that Pastor's behest. The development of the goals and tasks for the Atlantic District Lay Deacon is a task done jointly by the Atlantic District Lay Deacon and the Supervising Pastor. The Atlantic District Lay Deacon and Pastor shall meet on a regular basis to discuss progress and assignments. The lay leadership of the congregation, when appropriate, may voice its perspective and vision for the Atlantic District Lay Deacon through the Pastor who is the Atlantic District Lay Deacon's direct supervisor. The Pastor and Atlantic District Lay Deacon should work together to clarify and explain the Atlantic District Lay Deacon's position in the congregation. In the absence of a Supervising Pastor, the Atlantic District President shall appoint a supervisor.

The Atlantic District Lay Deacon shall not normally serve in an elected position of a parish.

Atlantic District Lay Deacons shall also be accountable to the President of the Atlantic District, LCMS. The Atlantic District President normally exercises this oversight through the Atlantic District Praesidium. This is recognizable chiefly through the recertification process and triennial review. Such accountability and review shall include a triennial report of the Atlantic District Lay Deacon's work [Addendum III], filed with the congregation and the Atlantic District Office. The report is to be completed jointly by the Supervising Pastor and Atlantic District Lay Deacon.

The Atlantic District Lay Deacon shall comply with the requirements for continuing education.

## Recertification Requirements

Atlantic District Lay Deacons are certified for a three-year period. They may be recertified on a three-year basis without limitation, congruent with the regular Conventions of the Atlantic District. Recertification is undertaken after the second year through application for continued service as received through the Atlantic District Lay Deacon's congregation and Supervising Pastor. Such application shall include:

- attendance at the Atlantic District Lay Deacon annual spiritual retreat, unless excused by the Supervising Pastor for service or hardship reasons;
- participation in continuing education, a minimum of one completed opportunity per year (see below: *Continuing Education*), Lay Training Program courses, or other opportunities approved by the Supervising Pastor; and
- submission of a triennial report.

Atlantic District Lay Deacons who do not complete the steps for re-certification shall no longer be considered active. If concern relating to the service has been identified, the Regional Vice President shall contact the Atlantic District Lay Deacon and the Supervising Pastor to ascertain the issues and work toward a solution. If a Atlantic District Lay Deacon becomes inactive and does not respond to these communications, a recommendation of removal from the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate shall be considered by the Praesidium. Lay Deacons may also be removed from the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate roster for three reasons: adherence to false doctrine, neglect of duties/incompetence, and/or an immoral lifestyle. Such removal will be done through the District Praesidium and District President following the Church's usual order.

### *Continuing Education Opportunities*

Atlantic District Lay Deacons shall attend a minimum of one continuing education course offered through the Atlantic District Lay Leadership Training Program on a yearly basis. Continuing education for the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate comprises the following:

Auditing of Atlantic District Lay Training course.

Seminars specific to the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate as offered by the Atlantic District

Attendance at the Atlantic District Festival of Workshops

Outside seminars approved by the Supervising Pastor as beneficial for the Lay Deacon's particular service. Credit will be given upon a written report by the Atlantic District Lay Deacon approved by the Supervising Pastor.

## Atlantic District Lay Deacons Transferring from One Congregation to Another

An Atlantic District Lay Deacon leaving the Atlantic District or transferring from one Atlantic District congregation to another must inform his/her Regional Vice President in a timely manner (30 days).

An Atlantic District Lay Deacon transferring to a congregation in another LCMS District or leaving the denomination is removed from the membership list of Atlantic District Lay Deacons. The Atlantic District bears no further ecclesiastical supervision responsibility.

As Atlantic District Lay Deacons are attached to the congregation with which they hold membership, when an Atlantic District Lay Deacon transfers to another Atlantic District congregation, the Atlantic District Lay Deacon is placed on “transitional status” for no less than six months. “Transitional status,” which is a period of supervision by the new congregational pastor, remains for a maximum of three years. Each year the status must be renewed by a simple formal request to the Regional Vice President. It is up to the congregation, local Pastor, and transitional status Atlantic District Lay Deacon to determine the role of the transferring Atlantic District Lay Deacon, if any.

If the congregation and Pastor desire the transitional status Lay Deacon to serve as an Atlantic District Lay Deacon, a letter of request by the Atlantic District Lay Deacon and a letter of support from the new Supervising Pastor must be submitted to the Regional Vice President. Upon receipt of the letter of request, a determination will be made by the Atlantic District Praesidium.

## Garb for Atlantic District Lay Deacons

Liturgical attire for the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate follows the local custom of the congregation where the Atlantic District Lay Deacon serves. A diaconal cross from the Atlantic District and a photo identification card are distinctive items for Atlantic District Lay Deacons. Atlantic District Lay Deacons are not to wear clerical shirts.

## Leadership of Atlantic District Lay Deacons

The Atlantic District Praesidium provides oversight of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate program. The Atlantic District Praesidium reports to the Atlantic District Board of Directors and the Atlantic District Convention.

Each Region of the Atlantic District may have a Regional Diaconate Advisory Council consisting of the Regional Vice President as Chair, and, as Associate Members, one (1) additional ordained Pastor, and two Atlantic District Lay Deacons who have served their congregations for a minimum of two years. The Regional Diaconate Advisory Councils are directly appointed and supervised by the Praesidium through the Regional Vice Presidents. Associate Members serve with the approval of the Praesidium, renewable every Atlantic District regular convention year.

The responsibilities of the Regional Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Advisory Council may include:

- gathering District-wide, as Regional Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Advisory Council on a yearly basis;
- supervising the Region’s Atlantic District Lay Deacon Interns in matters pertaining to fulfilling the Atlantic District Lay Deacon guidelines;
- conducting interviews with potential Atlantic District Lay Deacons and Atlantic District Lay Deacon Interns as prescribed in other sections of this document;

- providing Regional instruction of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconal courses, as well as acquainting the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Interns with the guidelines and expectations of the members of the Atlantic District Lay Diaconate;
- providing opportunity for monthly Bible study and fellowship; and,
- through the office of Regional Vice President, providing encouragement and counsel to Pastors and congregations concerning the role, limitation and expectations of an Atlantic District Lay Deacon in the parish.

## Additional Items

The Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Guidelines cannot cover every issue or concern. Those issues not covered in this document will be handled in a Christ-like manner, calling upon the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for proper discernment. The Praesidium of the Atlantic District, as the supervisor of the Atlantic District Lay Deaconate program, will serve as the final arbiter of any issues not covered by this document. All changes to this document will proceed through the Praesidium, with final approval from the Atlantic District Board of Directors.

### Commitment of Atlantic District Lay Diaconate Applicant

I have read and agree to follow the guidelines as presented in this document.

\_\_\_\_\_ Atlantic District Lay  
 Diaconate Applicant    Pastor