



Frequently Asked Questions Word and Service Entrance Rite Discernment Group September, 2016

1. What is the Word and Service Entrance Rite Discernment Group?

In 2016, the Churchwide Assembly created the Word and Service roster out of the three former lay rosters of the ELCA: Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers. In anticipation of a possible unification of these rosters, the ELCA Church Council created and appointed the Word and Service Entrance Rite Discernment Group in 2014 to help determine how future candidates who wish to serve as ministers of Word and Service on behalf of the church might become formally set apart for that ministry.

Previously, associates in ministry were commissioned, while deaconesses and diaconal ministers were consecrated. With the formation of a new, single roster of Word and Service, a single rite will need to be recommended to bring people onto this roster. The Entrance Rite Discernment Group will address this question. Consecration will be the interim rite until the final decision is made by the Churchwide Assembly in 2019.

2. What is an entrance rite and what entrance rites are being considered for the ministers of Word and Service?

An entrance rite is the liturgical rite by which individuals are initiated into the public office of ministry to which they have been called. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are “entranced” by the rite of ordination. The Churchwide Assembly accepted the recommendation from Church Council that until further study is completed by the Entrance Rite Discernment Group, ministers of Word and Service will be “entranced” by the rite of consecration. The Entrance Rite Discernment Group will study this issue and consider whether the most appropriate entrance rite for ministers of Word and Service should continue to be consecration or whether another rite, such as ordination, is more appropriate.

3. Why was the decision about an entrance rite separated from the decision about creating a unified roster of Word and Service ministry?

The ELCA Church Council accepted the Conference of Bishop’s recommendation that the church would benefit from further study on the entrance rite question before

making a decision. The Entrance Rite Discernment Group will engage in further study and will invite the church into further conversation on this issue between now and the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

4. By what process will the Word and Service Entrance Rite Discernment Group formulate its recommendation?

Associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and deaconesses have studied, considered, prayed, and been in discernment over issues related to public ministry in the church for many years. The Entrance Rite Discernment Group will build on this rich work and the work of scholars and others who have examined Scripture, Lutheran tradition, and the changing context of ministry in the world since the formation of the ELCA in 1988. They will address questions such as:

What does the word “consecration” mean? What does it mean in the ELCA?

What does the word “ordination” mean? What does it mean in the ELCA?

What does it mean to be ordained or consecrated?

What would be different if we were to ordain deacons?

What responsibilities, obligations and opportunities does the rite of ordination convey to public ministries of the church?

How does the ministry of the Word and Service roster connect with the ministry of all the baptized?

What language do our ecumenical and global Lutheran partners use for setting apart of public ministry leaders?

5. If this church chooses to ordain deacons, does that mean we are planning to adopt a three-fold pattern of ministry including the ordination of bishops?

No. Bishops are ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. When bishops leave office they are no longer bishops but are still ordained as a ministers of Word and Sacrament. Ordaining deacons would not change our understanding of bishops or change the ministry of Word and Sacrament as it is currently understood in the ELCA.

6. What is the difference between deacons on the new roster of Word and Service and existing synodical deacons?

Deacons on the roster of Word and Service are rostered ministers of the ELCA. They have been trained, educated, formed, and shaped through the ELCA’s candidacy process. They are open for call throughout the ELCA and are publicly and mutually accountable to the whole church.

Synodical deacons have been trained, educated, formed, and shaped through their synods. They serve in and are accountable to their synod with the approval of their bishop.

7. What is the timeline for making a recommendation?

The Entrance Rite Discernment Group's recommendation regarding an appropriate entrance rite will be presented to the Conference of Bishops at its October 2018 meeting and to the Church Council at its November 2018 meeting. The Church Council will make a final recommendation to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

8. Will the ELCA be bound by either the Entrance Rite Discernment Group's or the Church Council's recommendation?

No. The final decision will be made by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

9. What other material and contacts can you expect on this topic from the Entrance Rite Discernment Group?

Additional materials coming from the Entrance Rite Discernment Group might include such items as Bible studies, historical and theological studies, an examination of how the Lutheran Confessions speak to this issue, and additional "frequently asked questions."

10. Additional matters to be considered by the Entrance Rite Discernment Group and others:

Recommendations related to the representational principle, signs and symbols of the office, preparation and formation of candidates, and issues related to the interim rite of consecration are some of the matters that will be considered.