

# **VISION AND EXPECTATIONS**

**Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses,  
and Diaconal Ministers in the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
America**



## Office of the Presiding Bishop Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Easter 2010

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is called and privileged to participate in God's mission to the world, in proclamation and in service. We offer God's salvation to the world through a ministry of Word and Sacrament. Worshiping in the Spirit, we baptize people in the name of the Triune God, proclaim the Word of God as Law and Gospel, and nourish the baptized with Christ's own body and blood partaken in holy communion. Repenting and confessing our sin, we receive God's forgiveness. Thus, we live in the world as justified sinners who have been reconciled to God through Christ and who witness to the gospel of Christ through word and deed. The Word leads us to service.

For the sake of this mission and the world that God dearly loves, the Holy Spirit sustains those who are called to ministries of Word and service so that they remain faithful to the one who calls the church into this work. "Vision and Expectations—Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" expresses the church's vision for these commissioned and consecrated ministers and the high expectations it places on those who serve in this way. The document outlines the importance of the commissioned or consecrated minister's faithfulness to the church's confession, leadership through faithful service and holy living, and faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It expresses the ELCA's expectation that its commissioned and consecrated ministers serve all people in the name of Christ, with a passion for the good news, ability to see the world's needs and the will and capacity to respond. These capacities and this passion must be refined and developed through theological and contextual learning, giving attention to the nurture of personal character and integrity worthy of the calling. This document also makes clear that commissioned or consecrated ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church rather than an individual right. Finally, it sets forth the marks of healthy leadership that are essential to being a vital church in mission in a pluralistic context.

"Vision and Expectations—Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" is offered to rostered leaders, candidates, seminaries, congregations and candidacy committees to inform their lives of service, their discernment and deliberation. With it we also offer our prayers and our promise to live and serve together in the peace and unity of Christ.

Bishop Mark S. Hanson

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

# Vision and Expectations<sup>1</sup>

## **Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

*This church affirms the universal priesthood of all its baptized members. In its function and its structure this church commits itself to the equipping and supporting of all its members for their ministries in the world and in this church. It is within this context of ministry that this church calls some of its baptized members for specific ministries in this church.*

*This church shall maintain a lay roster of associates in ministry of those commissioned—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for such service within the life of this church in positions of Word and service on behalf of all God’s people. Associates in ministry are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to needs in a changing world as they serve in congregations and other ministry settings.*

*This church shall maintain a lay roster of the deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of those consecrated—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for such service within the life of this church in positions of Word and service on behalf of all God’s people. Deaconesses are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to needs in a changing world. They are to be theologically trained to serve in congregations and other ministry settings.*

*This church shall establish and maintain a lay roster of diaconal ministers of those consecrated—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for service on behalf of this church in positions of Word and service that exemplify the servant life and that seek to equip and motivate others to live it. Diaconal ministers are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to needs in a changing world. Such diaconal ministers shall seek in a great variety of ways to empower, equip, and support all the baptized people of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the mission of God in the world.*

Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Provisions 7.10-11; 7.53.01; 7.51.04; 7.51.05

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, consecrated deaconesses, consecrated diaconal ministers, and commissioned associates in ministry are called to public ministries of Word and

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<sup>1</sup> The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its April 2010 meeting, adopted *Vision and Expectations: Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as a statement of this church and authorized its distribution to the congregations, pastors, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, candidacy committees, and seminaries of this church. This document replaces *Vision and Expectations: Commissioned Associates in Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* which was accepted by the Church Council in its December 1993 meeting.

service.<sup>2</sup> Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized. They work collegially with one another, with ordained ministers, and with all the baptized for the sake of the church and the world. These commissioned and consecrated ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to the needs of a changing world. They are called to give leadership and service in congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to facilitate and support the people of the church in their serving, and to serve in the world on behalf of Christ's church.

In this document the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to state its vision and expectations for commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church. This document should not be understood as a juridical standard.<sup>3</sup> Nor is "Vision and Expectations" intended to suggest unrealistic or impossible expectations for those who serve on the rosters of commissioned and consecrated ministers. Instead, it seeks to express the high value and importance that public ministries of Word and service have in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is offered for those who are already on the rosters of associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers of this church as a statement of expectations and hopes for the shape of commissioned and consecrated ministry as well as an invitation for reflection and consideration to those who seek to serve in these ministries of Word and service in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The four questions that are addressed to candidates in the Rite of Consecration of Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers and the Rite of Commissioning of Associates in Ministry (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2009, pp. 200-212, 213-223) serve as the framework here. The liturgical rites themselves are not the basis for this document but are the setting in which this church's understanding of its expectations for associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers are described.

## **I. THE CALL TO COMMISSIONED OR CONSECRATED MINISTRY**

*Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this assembly, I ask: Will you accept this ministry, believing that you are called by God to faithful service as an associate in ministry / as a diaconal minister / as a deaconess?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Small Catechism, Article 3). It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> In this document, the phrases "commissioned and consecrated ministers" and "associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers" are used interchangeably to refer to those on the three Word and service rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

<sup>3</sup> The juridical function is fulfilled by the document "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline."

In baptism God calls all people to serve the neighbor. Individuals are commissioned as associates in ministry or consecrated as deaconesses or diaconal ministers because they have been called by God to a public ministry of service for the sake of the service of all. This church believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church.

People experience the call to commissioned or consecrated ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God's justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one's life, and the response to that gospel, that lead some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include the example and encouragement of others, the personal assessment of an individual's own interests and abilities, and response to the needs of the world. In whatever way the call may come to an individual, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by theological study, and finally confirmed in the church's call to serve as an associate in ministry, diaconal minister, or deaconess. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person's gifts and abilities for this ministry.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prepares and approves candidates for commissioned and consecrated ministry by setting standards, by providing for theological education through the seminaries of this church, and by evaluating a person's qualifications for service through a synodical candidacy committee. Upon approval for consecration or commissioning, a person is eligible to receive a letter of call to serve in as an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America therefore understands the call to commissioned or consecrated ministry to mean that:

- Associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers, called by God through the church, are accountable to the Word of God for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- These ministers are called by God through the church and are not self-chosen or self-appointed;
- These ministers are called by God through the church for a ministry of service and for leadership for the sake of Christ's mission, and not for the exercise of domination or coercive power; and
- This ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church and is not a right of the individual.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects each of its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to understand and accept the call to serve in this church's ministry as a call from God, and to believe that the Spirit sustains and upholds those who are commissioned and consecrated so they may fulfill their callings to public ministry.

*Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself. To those who look upon the cross, grant your wisdom, healing, and eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

*Prayer for Holy Cross Day, Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

## II. FAITHFULNESS TO THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION

*The church in which you are to be commissioned / consecrated confesses that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and are the norm of its faith and life. We accept, teach, and confess the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. We also acknowledge the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures. Will you therefore serve in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

It is essential for a commissioned or consecrated minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks that its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers assume responsibility for upholding this church's doctrinal tradition through faithful understanding and service. All who have been commissioned to serve as associates in ministry or consecrated to serve as deaconesses or diaconal ministers in this church are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

### **Scripture, Creed and Confessions**

The Scriptures reveal God's redemptive actions, including the message of law and gospel, judgment and mercy, "beginning with the Word in Creation, continuing in the history of Israel and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ" (ELCA Constitution, 2.02). Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures "as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of [this church's] proclamation, faith, and life" (ELCA Constitution, 2.03). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran Confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers teach nothing "that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church" (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession).

### **Doctrinal Tradition**

Christians enter into the catholic faith through baptism in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are called to continue in this catholic faith, bearing witness to it within the doctrinal tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers express this tradition when they are:

#### *Evangelical*

The gospel is the good news that the decisive turning point in human history occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelical witness is that in Christ, God has acted to

bring forgiveness to sinners, liberation for the oppressed, reconciliation for the estranged, and the promise of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power of God to create and sustain the church for God's mission in the world. Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are expected to show forth in word and deed God's saving gospel of justification by grace through faith, and so equip the baptized for their ministry in daily life.

### *Faithful*

The church's Scriptures, creeds, and confessions identify the grounding and goals of the church's hope: Jesus Christ. The church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to be committed to Jesus who is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the Church.

### *Reforming*

The church's past is characterized not only by the faithful witness of the saints, but by sin, error, and the betrayal of its mission. The gospel frees the church for genuine repentance and confession, for renewal and reform. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are expected to acknowledge the church's past and present failures and to lead the church in its repentance and renewal.

### *Diaconal*

Leadership in the church is to be shaped by Jesus' own ministry of serving. This church, therefore, expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to resist the temptation to seek power over people whether by force or manipulation and, instead, to minister to God's people and to lead them as servants. Such servant leadership is not one of weakness or timidity, but of strength and boldness.

### *Ecumenical*

The church is called to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to manifest the unity given to the people of God by leading the church in that common witness to the gospel that expresses the unity which the Spirit gives. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are encouraged to participate in ecumenical activities, including prayer and worship, and to witness to the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Ephesians 4:5 and 6).

### *Ethical*

The church witnesses to the gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts. The church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to lead and teach the church through example by lives that give expression to the gospel. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are called to represent in their personal lives the new life that is given to all Christians in baptism, and to be examples of a life that is consistent with the Word of God.

*Gracious God, as you have called workers to varied tasks in the world and in your church, so you have called [people] to this ministry. Grant [them] joy and a spirit of bold trust, that [their] work may stir up each of us to a life of fruitful service; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

Installation of a Deaconess, Diaconal Minister or Associate in Ministry,  
*Occasional Services for the Assembly*

### **III. A LIFE IN THE FAITH AND IN THE CHURCH**

*Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and faithful in your use of the means of grace?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The commissioned or consecrated minister serves people in the church and the world and nurtures the faith of others. In order to do this, the associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister needs to develop and nurture a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, both intellectually and devotionally.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will seek regular opportunities for personal participation in the means of grace, including the renewal of baptismal grace in individual confession and absolution and sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion, thus receiving God's renewing, sustaining, empowering Spirit both in his or her person and for the practice of ministry.

The commissioned or consecrated minister engages in daily prayer and encourages others in the practice of regular prayer.

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister must be a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is an integral part of a community of faith in which mutual support is given and in which care, forgiveness, and healing occur.

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister supports and participates not only in the work of the congregation but also in the synodical and churchwide ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to work in a collegial relationship with one another and with ordained ministers and to share in mutual accountability with those in positions of leadership and oversight in this church. The commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are to seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the public ministries of this church and strive to extend the reign of God in the community.

Public ministry in this church carries with it expectations and accountabilities that are determined by the whole church and not simply by a given congregation, synod, institution, or agency served by the commissioned or consecrated minister.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has high expectations for those who serve within the commissioned and consecrated ministries of this church. It holds these expectations because it recognizes that when offense is given by an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened.

Yet sin and brokenness are realities in the lives of all persons, including those who serve as ministers. It is crucial for us all to remember that repentance and forgiveness are to be daily realities in the life of every baptized Christian. Neither perfection nor self-righteousness is asked of the commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church. When there is failure in the lives of those who serve in public ministry, this church seeks to provide counsel and understanding. When there are repentance and forgiveness, this church rejoices. Indeed, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that God not only calls but sustains those who are set apart for the commissioned and consecrated ministry of Word and service. It is with this recognition that this church can affirm that those who are set apart for ministries of Word and service are to seek to embody those characteristics which are consistent with their callings.

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is concerned for the whole person. Her or she welcomes and ministers to all. The minister serves those troubled with spiritual or emotional problems. This church expects that its commissioned and consecrated ministers will respect information confidentially shared.

The commissioned or consecrated minister recognizes the importance of life-long growth in learning. Such growth is intended to renew, extend, and deepen insight into the Scriptures and the doctrinal teaching of the church, and to enable one to respond to the insights and challenges of the world with greater awareness and a more faithful confession. In an increasingly complex and educated society, the development of an informed intellect and professional skills is crucial to competent commissioned or consecrated ministry. This church expects of its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers regular and disciplined time for personal study, study in the company of others, participation in programs of continuing education, and periodic times for extended study. Congregations and other entities of this church are expected to provide the commissioned or consecrated minister the time and assistance with the financial resources needed for such study.

Because we are all stewards of the lives God has given us, the commissioned or consecrated minister needs to be an example of self-care, as well as caring for others. The significant demands of time and effort in a calling to commissioned or consecrated ministry can lead one to neglect proper nutrition, exercise, and time for recreation. The congregation, or whatever agency or institution the associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister serves, should respect the need for the minister to have adequate time for self-care. Caring for self also includes seeking counseling and/or medical care when there is evidence of physical or mental illness, substance abuse, eating disorders, or relational problems.

*Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Prayer for Daily Renewal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

#### **IV. THE ASSOCIATE IN MINISTRY, DEACONESS, OR DIACONAL MINISTER AS PERSON, EXAMPLE, AND WITNESS**

*Will you witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed, pray for God's people, and by your own example encourage them in faithful service and holy living?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me*

The commissioned and consecrated minister is called with all Christians to "lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). It is Christ's own self-giving on the cross that is the example for Christian life for all believers.

Associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers fulfill their callings in what they do and in who they are. By their words and in their persons they witness to the gospel of Christ. Diaconal identity is not one of moral or spiritual perfection. It is, instead, the living out of the good news that one is justified by God's grace and thus called to live out that grace in daily service. The commissioned and consecrated minister is not simply a professional trained in skills to perform a task, but is one sent by the church to lead the community of faith through the ministry of Word and service. The commissioned and consecrated minister enables and equips others for their lives as Christians and for their ministry in the world by faithfully bearing witness to the Word of God, by serving effectively in their particular work, and by example.

Deaconesses and diaconal ministers are intentionally shaped for a diaconal identity, following the historic and ecumenical traditions. These consecrated ministers will seek to cultivate in themselves and in one another that diaconal model of life and service. Associates in ministry are commissioned to a life of faithful service and will ground their ministry in the church's baptismal commitment to serve the neighbor.

#### **Holy Living**

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is to be an example of holy living so that the minister's life does not become an impediment to the hearing of the gospel or a scandal to the community of faith. The qualities of such a life include the following:

##### *Integrity and Trustworthiness*

The commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to be honest and forthright in dealings with others while protecting privileged and confidential communications. The minister should strive to develop a public reputation for integrity and to nurture trustworthy personal relationships. Associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers must avoid conduct that is dishonest, deceitful, deceptive, or manipulative of others for personal benefit or gain.

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is expected to be fiscally responsible and is to be a faithful steward of time, talents, and possessions. The minister is to be an example to the community of generous giving.

### *Trustworthiness in Relationships*

In all relationships, an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is expected to honor his or her public promises, bear the burdens of others, and seek to build up the body of Christ.

In public ministry as well as in private life, the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to develop and nurture appropriate relationships with others, acting in ways that build and sustain trust.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will respect and nurture friendships. Ministers will support friendships among others and will welcome and nurture friendships for themselves but will avoid compromising their ministerial callings in such relationships.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will strive to serve others and nurture trust by enhancing family life. Within the family, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and mutual care are to be expressed. Children, if any, will be regarded with love, respect, and commitment. It is also expected that ministers maintain responsible relationships with their parents and other immediate relatives.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to respect and support single people, encouraging them in their appropriate and healthy relationships.

This church is committed to the sanctity of marriage.<sup>4</sup> In public ministry as well as in private life, the commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to uphold an understanding of marriage that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this church. In so doing, the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister will respect and support those who are married, recognizing this church's strong continuing support for this holy estate. As the social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* declares: "Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10:6-9...."<sup>5</sup> The public promises of marriage are to be honored and trust is to be nurtured for the good of all.

This church acknowledges that members of this church hold various convictions about lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. Nonetheless, this church has committed itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize and support lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and to hold the partners publicly accountable for the relationship. It has committed itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church. It also has committed itself to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of

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<sup>4</sup> This "Vision and Expectations" document uses the terms "marriage," "marry," and "married" to refer to marriage between a man and a woman.

<sup>5</sup> *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009, p. 15

members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in such relationships.<sup>6</sup> The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is expected to respect the people who hold these various convictions.

*Trustworthiness in Beginning, Sustaining, and Ending Marriages and Same-Gender Relationships*

Should an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister seek to marry, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought and the minister shall make the decision known among those he or she serves.

A commissioned or consecrated minister who is married is expected to keep his or her marriage inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for her or his spouse, and to seek marital counseling when it is needed. It is recognized that due to human sin and brokenness, in some cases the marital relationship may have to be dissolved. Should a minister and spouse separate or seek to divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should a commissioned or consecrated minister decide to marry following a divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

Should an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister seek to enter a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought and the minister shall make the decision known among those he or she serves.

A commissioned or consecrated minister in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship is expected to keep that relationship inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for his or her same-gender partner, and to seek counseling with the partner when it is needed. It is recognized that in some cases, due to human sin and brokenness, such a relationship may have to be dissolved. Should a minister and partner separate or seek to end their relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should a commissioned or consecrated minister, following the ending of a publicly accountable, lifelong,

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<sup>6</sup> Action of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly – CA09.05.23, CA09.05.24, CA09.05.26, and CA09.05.27.

Because of these actions, this document includes this church's vision and expectations for single people, married people, and people in "publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships." The terms in the latter descriptive phrase are intended to have their common meanings. "Lifelong" means that the two parties intend the relationship to last as long as they both shall live. "Monogamous" means that the relationship is between two people only and excludes the possibility of other partners. "Same-gender" means that the relationship is between two men or two women of legal age. "Public accountability" means that the two parties to the relationship openly acknowledge the relationship, have a demonstrable commitment to the relationship as monogamous and lifelong, and have a willingness to seek and accept the aid of individuals and community in sustaining the relationship and the well being of both parties and any dependents.

For a commissioned or consecrated minister, both church and community are part of the public within which he or she is accountable. Public accountability for a married associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister includes recognition and support of the marriage in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law marriage requirements. Public accountability for an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister in a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship includes recognition and support of the relationship in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law recognizing such relationships if available in the state where he or she resides or, if unavailable, other means of documenting the status of the relationships and protecting the well-being of the partner and any dependents.

monogamous, same-gender relationship, decide to enter another such relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

### *Trustworthiness in Sexual Conduct*

The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift and trust from God. These ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift and trust.

The associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister is expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification, and all attempts of sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others.

This church's social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* states: "Sexual intimacy, together with promises of fidelity and public accountability, nurtures bonds that allow people to thrive and provides a rich context for the care and support of children."<sup>7</sup> It also states: "It is in marriage that the highest degrees of physical intimacy are matched with and protected by the highest levels of binding commitment, including legal protection. It is in marriage that public promises of lifetime commitment can create the foundation for trust, intimacy, and safety."<sup>8</sup>

A single commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to live a chaste life, holy in body and spirit, honoring the single life, and working for the good of all.

A married commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to live in fidelity to his or her spouse, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful.

An commissioned or consecrated minister who is in a publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship is expected to live in fidelity to his or her partner, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a publicly accountable relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful.

*Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Prayer for Daily Renewal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

### **Faithfulness in Witness in the World**

The charge to witness to the world is given to the church today as it was to the apostles of the early church. The content of that witness is God's revelation in Jesus Christ: God's creative self-disclosure as the Word made flesh; Jesus Christ victorious over death for the salvation of God's people; and the promise of everlasting life. The testimony of these acts of God's grace and forgiveness is expressed in both word and deed by commissioned and consecrated ministers through compassion, hospitality, patience, and forgiveness; through seeking peace and justice for

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<sup>7</sup> *Human Sexuality*, p. 15

<sup>8</sup> *Human Sexuality*, p. 17

all people; through care for God's creation; and through sharing one's faith through teaching, conversation, and personal witness. This witness is characterized by:

### *Evangelism*

The apostolic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the church's mission. It is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation with God. This gospel is proclaimed through Word and sacraments. Through its commissioned and consecrated ministers of Word and service, this church affirms the critically important task of communicating this evangelical word to the world.

### *Compassion*

Christians are called by God to participate in compassionate care for those in need. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to follow the example of Jesus and to lead the church in compassionate care of the suffering and to speak to the church on behalf of the needs of the world.

### *Confession*

Commissioned and consecrated ministers are expected to enter into the church's act of confessing the Christian faith in our world. The church is called to such a confession because its present existence lies between the advent of God's reign in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and the promised certain consummation of the eschatological kingdom. This confession places this church and its ministers in the struggle against sin, death, and the devil.

### *Hospitality*

Just as Jesus received sinners and ate with them, the church is called to welcome the stranger and to open its life to those who are outside the church or alienated from it. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to be models of appropriate hospitality in their personal lives, to practice their ministry of service with welcome to all who have needs, and to lead the church in its witness to divine hospitality.

### *Peacemaking*

The culmination of God's eschatological salvation will be the overcoming of every enmity and the reconciliation of the whole creation. Yet even in the present time, God's peace is a reality. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to be witnesses to and instruments of God's peace and reconciliation for the world.

### *Justice*

The church is to witness to God's call for justice in every aspect of life, including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to be committed to justice in the life of the church, in society, and in the world. The ordained minister is expected to oppose all forms of harassment and assault.

### *Stewardship of the Earth*

The people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. In our time this includes the need to speak on behalf of this earth, its environment and natural resources, and

its inhabitants. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to be exemplary stewards of the earth's resources and to lead and serve this church in the stewardship of God's creation.

*Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

Prayer for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

## CONCLUSION

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that "the Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world" (ELCA Constitution, 4.01).

This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers to honor and equip the baptized for their ministry in the world. Such a ministry involves giving leadership in the church's witness to the world, exhibiting awareness of the global challenges of a multicultural, diverse society, and assisting the members of this church to live their daily vocations in faithfulness.

At the same time the commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church can know that they themselves are regarded as servants of Christ and messengers of the good news of God's salvation in Christ. As such they are honored for the ministry they bring to this church and to the world. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prays for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who serve this church as associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers.

*O God, through the ages you have called women and men to the diaconate and to particular ministries in the church. Let your blessing rest now on all who answer that call. Grant them understanding of the gospel, sincerity of purpose, diligence in ministry, and the beauty of life in Christ, that many people will be served and your name be glorified; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

Prayers of the Day from the Rites for Installation of Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers, and Associates in Ministry, *Occasional Services for the Assembly*