

Roster of Associates in Ministry: Its origins and development within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) declared at the 2007 Churchwide Assembly:

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 of 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 the needs in a changing world as they serve in congregations and other ministry settings.¹

Brief but complex

The history of that particular roster of the ELCA is a comparatively brief but complex one. The category, associates in ministry, was in fact the creation of the framers of the ELCA. Upon the ELCA’s constituting on April 30, 1987, this church’s governing documents were adopted. Included was a provision for the roster category of associates in ministry.²

Provision 10.41. in the initial *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the*

¹Bylaw 7.51.03., as amended, in the 2007 edition of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, p. 40.

²ELCA 87.30.6., *Minutes of the Constituting Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, April 30-May 3, 1987, (hereinafter *Minutes*, 1987), pp. 18-19.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America specified:

There shall appear on the rosters of this church the names of those associates in ministry who qualify as such according to the continuing resolutions adopted by the Churchwide Assembly from time to time.³

Initial roster

A 1987 continuing resolution indicated that the roster of associates in ministry was to be composed of:

- a. *those presented on the rosters of the three uniting churches in the following categories (to which there will be no additions after December 31, 1987) who choose to be certified as associates in ministry under the provisions of this church: Commissioned church staff (ALC) Deaconesses (AELC)*⁴

³Provision 10.41. in the 1987 edition of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 226.

⁴These deaconesses had been trained at the Lutheran Deaconess Association at Valparaiso, Indiana, an independent auxiliary organized in 1919 and affiliated primarily with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. For LCMS-related deaconesses, the Lutheran Deaconess Association had been the sole training program until the LCMS established in 1979 its own synodical deaconess training program at Concordia University, River Forest, Ill. The AELC deaconesses were recognized by the AELC upon the establishment of that separate church body in 1976.

*Deaconesses (ALC)*⁵
*Deaconesses (LCA)*⁶
Deacons (AELC)
Lay professional leaders (LCA)
Commissioned teachers (AELC)
 b. *those who are certified as associates in ministry in this church after January 1, 1988.*⁷

Possible inconsistencies, yet an omnibus term

The service of *all* associates in ministry was to be carried out “under criteria recommended by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.”⁸ The language of the bylaws in 1987, however, contained possible inconsistencies. Experience in the early years of the ELCA confirmed that problem—one that persisted until the results of the Study on Ministry were embraced by the ELCA’s 1993 Churchwide Assembly.

The inconsistency concerned what the predecessor categories of ministry meant for service within the ELCA.

On the one hand, bylaw 10.42.11. declared that:

Persons certified [*meaning in the ELCA after January 1, 1988*] and continued [*meaning inherited from the rosters of predecessor churches at the end of 1987*] as associates in ministry of this church shall meet and maintain the following:

- a. commitment to Christ;
- b. acceptance of and adherence to the Confession of Faith of this church;
- c. willingness and ability to serve in response to the needs of this church;
- d. academic and practical qualifications for the position;
- e. life consistent with the Gospel and personal qualifications including leadership abilities and competence in interpersonal relationships;
- f. receipt and acceptance of a letter of appointment; and
- g. membership in a congregation of this church.⁹

On the other hand, bylaw 10.42.17. specified in 1987 that “all persons who were serving in any specially recognized status of ministry in one of the predecessor church bodies at the time of the formation of this church shall be continued on a similar roster of this church....”¹⁰ Did this requirement point to one roster or multiple rosters? What did “similar roster” mean since the service was to be exercised according to the standards and policies of the ELCA?

One roster with several parts

The immediate practical effect of bylaw 10.42.17. was the need for the Office of the Secretary of the ELCA to maintain separate roster designations for each roster category received from a predecessor church body and a roster category for ELCA-certified associates in

⁵At the time of the formation of The American Lutheran Church of 1960, the ALC decided that deaconesses would not be a separate category on a lay roster. Several of the motherhouses of the ALC’s predecessors, the earliest dating from 1885, had not been actively training deaconesses for several years. The deaconesses who were still in active service, however, were continued on the ALC’s lay roster. At the outset of the ELCA, the women who continued to be on the ALC’s deaconess list included those who were trained and consecrated at motherhouses in Brooklyn, N.Y., Brush, Colo., Chicago, Ill., and Milwaukee, Wis.

⁶The women who came into the ELCA from the Lutheran Church in America’s Deaconess Community represented several strands of training organizations in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Axtell and Omaha, Neb. The motherhouses in those locations were from LCA predecessor church bodies. The earliest of those motherhouses had been established in 1884. Training had continued in both Philadelphia and Baltimore for a time, but then shifted from the motherhouses to the Lutheran seminaries in Philadelphia and Chicago.

⁷Continuing resolution 10.41.A87., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 226.

⁸Bylaw 10.42.15., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 227.

⁹Bylaw 10.41.11., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, pp. 226-227.

¹⁰Bylaw 10.42.17., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 227.

ministry—all of which were maintained within a single roster under the omnibus designation, “associates in ministry.”

Anyone on a predecessor roster, however, could seek to become an ELCA-certified associate in ministry and, thereby, would shift from the specific predecessor designation to the roster of ELCA-certified associates in ministry, even though the individual already had been under the omnibus term, associates in ministry. Confusing? Yes. Therefore, the results of the Study of Ministry reported to the 1993 Churchwide Assembly were anticipated in the hope of greater clarity.

Initial pattern of roster discipline

The issue of discipline also represented an initial continuing difference for sections of the roster of associates in ministry. Associates in ministry certified within the ELCA initially were subject to the discipline process provided for members of congregations. That is, the matter of discipline, if necessary, was to be handled by a Congregation Council.¹¹

By contrast, the persons received from the predecessor listings of consecrated deacons and deaconesses, commissioned teachers, and certified or commissioned lay professionals were “subject to the discipline policies pertinent to their roster status in the predecessor church” until the Study of Ministry was completed and its recommendations adopted.¹²

Letters of Appointment

From 1988 through the 1993 Churchwide Assembly, those on the roster of associates in ministry, including the inherited categories, served under letters of appointment.¹³ The source of such letters was either (1) a congregation, for service within that

congregation, (2) a Synod Council for synodical ministry or service within an institution or agency in the synod, or (3) the Church Council for churchwide ministry. Initially, such letters could be issued also by churchwide boards,¹⁴ but that pattern changed early in the ELCA’s life for consistency in the three sources of such letters—congregations, Synod Councils, and the Church Council.¹⁵

Planning for formation of ELCA

The framers of the ELCA—specifically, the 70 members of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC)—wrestled at great length on issues of ministry. Both of the large churches, The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), had similar patterns and definitions for categories of lay rostered or professional church service. The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), which had been formed in 1976 in a separation from The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, brought some distinctive definitions.

The differing patterns of the predecessor churches led to extended discussions in the mid-1980s. While biblical passages were cited occasionally in such deliberations on lay ministry, the primary question was how such ministry would be ordered within the life of the ELCA. The matter remained unresolved for some time amid ongoing debates.

Extensive work by a CNLC-appointed seven-member Ad Hoc Committee on Ministry yielded a report that outlined understandings of pastoral ministry but also addressed practices related to rostered lay ministry. The committee noted that the ALC and LCA had “limited the

¹¹Continuing resolution 10.44.B87., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 229.

¹²Continuing resolution 10.44.A87., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 229.

¹³Bylaw 10.42.15., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, p. 227.

¹⁴Continuing Resolution 10.42.A87., *Minutes*, 1987, Exhibit C, pp. 228-229.

¹⁵Continuing Resolutions 7.52.A91., *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (1991 edition), pp. 38-39. By action of the 1991 Churchwide Assembly, the chapter on “Ministry” was shifted from Chapter 10 to Chapter 7 for a more logical ordering of the chapters in the constitution.

exercise of the office of ordained ministry to pastors,” but “had forms of lay service officially recognized, certified, commissioned, or consecrated.” By contrast, the AELC had “chosen to recognize, in addition to the ordained pastoral ministry, two other forms of the office of the ministry: teaching ministry and diaconal ministry.”¹⁶

At one point in the process, a report suggested that the new Lutheran church “recognize four public ministries” from the predecessor churches, including: (1) ordained pastors, (2) commissioned day-school teachers, (3) consecrated deaconesses and deacons, and (4) certified and commissioned lay professionals.¹⁷ That idea of four public ministries was not embraced. Instead, a compromise “grandparented” all the various rosters into the ELCA, but left the resolution of several ministry questions, including the eventual definition of those inherited rosters, to decisions in the “new church.”

Decision to receive but study

Therefore, brought to the CNLC’s September 1985 meeting by the Ad Hoc Committee on Ministry was this plan: To recommend that the ELCA (1) “receive all in any specially recognized status of ministry in the uniting churches and retain them in that status on the church’s roster with all the privileges and responsibilities they have had” and (2) “maintain a roster of lay workers who have been on such rosters in the uniting churches and develop those rosters according to such categories, standards, and expectations as the new church may decide.”¹⁸

¹⁶*Agenda of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*, Exhibit F, September 23-27, 1985, p. 10.

¹⁷“Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Ministry,” *Agenda of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*, Exhibit F, September 23-27, 1985, p. 1. The report noted that the existence of those various public ministries reflected “the different theological views about ministry held in the [uniting] churches.”

¹⁸CNLC 85.09.1028, *Minutes of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*, September 23-27, 1985, p. 451.

In that same action, the CNLC placed the Study of Ministry on the agenda of the ELCA. Specifically, the CNLC recommended that “the new church engage in an intensive churchwide study of the nature of ministry resulting in decisions regarding appropriate forms that will enable the church to fulfill its mission.” A part of that study was to address “the appropriate forms of lay ministries to be officially recognized and certified by the church including criteria for certification such as Christian faith, preparation and education, vocational commitment and accountability.”¹⁹

Appearance of “associates in ministry”

The designation, “associates in ministry,” was a very late addition to the ELCA’s governing documents. At the CNLC’s February 1986 meeting, the term was not in the draft of the constitution.²⁰ The agenda of the CNLC’s final meeting on June 23-25, 1986, however, included a proposal for a chapter in the constitution that would have a section on ordained ministry and a separate section on associates in ministry.²¹ The proposal was embraced by the CNLC. That text was approved by the uniting churches in August 1986 and adopted upon the ELCA’s constituting in April 1987.²²

The term, “associates in ministry,” first appears in the minutes of the January 7, 1986, meeting of the Work Group on Standards, Sources of Call, and Rosters. That group had been appointed by the churchwide Transition Team at its meeting on November 21-22, 1985. Chair of the group was the Rev. Norman Eitheim, then bishop of the ALC’s South Dakota District and subsequently bishop of the ELCA’s South Dakota Synod. Members of the

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 452.

²⁰*Progress Report #7*, Commission for a New Lutheran Church, February 1986, p. 63.

²¹*Agenda of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*, June 23-25, 1986, p. 24.

²²CNLC 86.06.1613, *Minutes of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*, June 23-25, 1986, pp.748-749.

group were: the Rev. Edwin L. Bersagel, then executive of the ALC's Office of Support to Ministries; the Rev. George E. Keck, then a staff member of the LCA's Division for Professional Leadership; the Rev. John H. Tietjen, then president of Christ Seminary–Seminex, who represented the AELC; the Rev. Lloyd E. Sheneman, then executive of the LCA's Division for Professional Leadership; the Rev. Harold S. Weiss, then bishop of the LCA's Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and subsequently bishop of the ELCA's Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod; and the Rev. Walter R. Wietzke, then executive of the ALC's Division for Theological Education and Ministry.

The work group understood, according to the minutes, that the CNLC had determined the rosters of the predecessor church bodies would be “grandparented” into the ELCA. The minutes of that meeting also indicate that a decision was made to test the term, “associates in ministry,” with the bishops of the uniting churches. Those bishops were scheduled to gather in Phoenix, Ariz., January 22-25, 1986.²³

Decision on “associates in ministry”

Following that Phoenix meeting, the work group reported to the February 1986 meeting of the Transition Team that “associates in ministry” was emerging as the likely proposal. Thus, it was no surprise that, when the work group met in March 1986, the formal decision was made:

...to recommend “associates in ministry” as the label under which all rostered persons in the three uniting churches who are not ordained ministers together with those persons so certified in the ELCA should be referred to in the

²³*Minutes*, Work Group on Standards, Sources of Call, and Roster, January 7, 1986, p. 3.

documents of the ELCA.²⁴

The recommendation of the work group was transmitted to the CNLC.²⁵ As a result, at the final meeting of the CNLC in June 1986, the term, “associates in ministry,” was incorporated into the proposed governing documents for the ELCA, as described above.²⁶ The term applied to both those on the inherited rosters as well as newly certified candidates for the roster. The various predecessor rosters or categories, however, were “frozen” as of December 31, 1987, and there could be no additions after that point. The future would be determined by the Study on Ministry.²⁷

Therefore, after December 31, 1987, the “frozen” categories were (1) commissioned church staff (ALC), (2) deaconesses (AELC), (3) deaconesses (ALC), (4) deaconesses (LCA), (5) deacons (AELC), (6) lay professional leaders (LCA), and commissioned teachers (AELC), as specified in continuing resolution 10.41.A87., which was quoted earlier.²⁸ After the Study of Ministry, as will be shown, only the listing of LCA deaconesses would be “unfrozen” for additions. All the other predecessor categories remained closed but were encompassed by the continuing roster of associates in ministry.

While the ELCA retained the “frozen” categories, individuals were approved during the period of 1988-1993 as ELCA-certified

²⁴*Minutes*, Work Group on Standards, Sources of Call, and Roster, March 26-27, 1986, p. 2. This March 1986 meeting confirmed what the Work Group on Standards, Sources of Call, and Rosters had determined in a conference call held on February 7, 1986, and reported to the February 1986 meeting of the churchwide Transition Team (Transition Team Agenda, February 11-12, 1986, Exhibit I-1, p. 3).

²⁵*Minutes*, Transition Team, June 6-7, 1986, p. 25. The work group's report informed the work of the CNLC's Planning Committee, which met on May 27-28, 1986, and conveyed the term “associates in ministry” for the ELCA's proposed constitution and bylaws.

²⁶*Agenda*, Commission for a New Lutheran Church, June 23-25, 1986, Exhibit K, Appendix 1, pp. 15-20.

²⁷*Minutes*, Transition Team, May 20-21, 1987, Exhibit E, p. 4.

²⁸See pp. 1-2 of this narrative.

associates in ministry and added to what became the continuing roster of associates in ministry.

Action of the Study of Ministry

As a result of the Study of Ministry, the 1993 Churchwide Assembly agreed to “retain as associates in ministry of this church (except for removals in accord with the governing documents, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church)” those received from the predecessor churches

...as commissioned church staff (The American Lutheran Church), deaconesses (The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches), deaconesses (The American Lutheran Church), deacons (The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches), lay professional leaders (the Lutheran Church in America), and commissioned teachers (The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches)....²⁹

Accountability for service by all associates in ministry—both those inherited and those newly certified in the ELCA—was to be carried out according to the policies and procedures of this church.³⁰

Seen as an apt ordering

This pattern for the ministry of Word and service of associates in ministry was not viewed as the fulfillment of biblical mandates but rather represented what was seen as an apt ordering of the internal life of this church in the care of God’s people. The constitutional provision related to lay rostered ministry reflected that sense of ordering: “This church may establish rosters of laypersons on which the names may

²⁹CA93.07.33, *Minutes*, Adoption of Bylaw 7.51.02., Third Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Kansas City, Mo., August 25-September 1, 1993 (hereinafter, *Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly), p. 415.

³⁰Ibid.

be listed of those who qualify for such according to the bylaws and continuing resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”³¹

Three official lay rosters

The 1993 Churchwide Assembly determined that associates in ministry—along with deaconesses of the ELCA³² and diaconal ministers, who would form a new roster—would constitute the official lay rosters of the ELCA.³³ Thus, in addition to revised bylaws related to associates in ministry, bylaw amendments were adopted by the 1993 assembly defining the roster categories of deaconess of the ELCA and diaconal minister of the ELCA.³⁴

The Study of Ministry reported that the term “associates in ministry” had become “very significant” during the first five years of the ELCA’s history. The study acknowledged, however, unhappiness among some:

³¹Provision 7.51. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), p. 40.

³²This community had been received from the Lutheran Church in America but the 1993 Churchwide Assembly—upon the recommendation of the Study of Ministry—voted to “end the frozen status of the ELCA roster of the Lutheran Deaconess Community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and authorize the setting apart and rostering of qualified persons for service as deaconesses...” (*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, p. 299).

³³A proposal that candidates for the roster of diaconal ministers be ordained was rejected (*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, pp. 269-270, footnote 12.a). The 1995 Churchwide Assembly determined that the entry rite for both deaconesses of the ELCA and diaconal ministers would be consecration (CA95.07.60, *Minutes*, Fourth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis, Minn., August 16-22, 1995, pp. 623-629). The vote on the bylaw that established the entry rite of consecration for diaconal ministers and deaconesses was 641-297 or 68.3 percent. A two-thirds vote required for passage. The amendment on consecration was approved by a margin of 15 votes. Various voices had urged that the entry rite should be commissioning, as was the case for associates in ministry, because all three rosters were defined as officially recognized lay ministries.

³⁴CA93.07.33, *Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, pp. 414-421.

Not all of those on inherited rosters embrace the term, but many do. Although intended as an interim category, it has become a significant name.³⁵

The report declared:

For the sake of ministry, it is important that associates in ministry be recognized, named, supported, and included in continuing educational events, regional gatherings, mailing lists for resources, and the like. All of these things enhance their ministries.³⁶

Shift from “Appointment” to “Call”

In response to a recommendation of the Study of Ministry, the 1993 Churchwide Assembly voted to shift from the terminology of “appointment” to “letter of call” for those on the lay rosters.³⁷

Commissioning was retained as the entry rite for newly approved associates in ministry.³⁸

A continuing resolution in the ELCA’s churchwide governing documents specified the sources of call for various types of service:

(1) within a congregation, from the congregation;

(2) within the territory of a synod for synodical work or service in synodically-related agencies and institutions, the Synod Council; and

(3) for churchwide service, the Church Council.

Bylaw 7.52.21. outlines the calling process

³⁵*Together for Ministry: Final Report and Actions of the Study of Ministry*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1988-1993), p. 21.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, p. 298. See amended bylaw 7.52.11.f. and 7.52.21. as adopted by the assembly (*Minutes*, 1993, pp. 416-417).

³⁸*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, p. 298. The amended bylaws adopted by the same assembly reflected the decision regarding the entry rite for associates in ministry (see bylaw 7.51.03., *Minutes*, 1993, p. 415).

for those on the lay rosters throughout the ELCA:

An associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister of this church shall serve under a letter of call properly extended by a congregation, synod, or the churchwide organization.

- a. A call may be extended either for indefinite or stated periods of time by the appropriate calling body for service in a congregation, synod, or churchwide unit, in an institution or agency of this church, or in another setting in a category of work as provided by continuing resolution 7.52.A05. [i.e., list of types of calls].
- b. Regular, valid calls in this church shall be in accord with criteria, policies, and procedures recommended by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.
- c. An associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister serving under call to a congregation shall be a member of that congregation. In a parish of multiple congregations, an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister shall be a member of one of the congregations being served³⁹

Regarding call from congregation

Provision †S14.31. in the *Constitution for Synods* addresses especially the circumstances of the call of a congregation:

The provisions in the churchwide documents and such provisions as may

³⁹Bylaw 7.52.21., *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), pp. 45-46.

be developed by the appropriate churchwide unit governing associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers of this church shall apply in this synod.

- a. When a congregation of this synod desires to call an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister or a candidate for these official rosters of laypersons of this church:
 - 1) Such a congregation of this synod shall consult the synodical bishop before taking any steps leading to extending such a call.
 - 2) Issuance of such a letter of call shall be in accord with criteria, policies, and procedures developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - 3) When the congregation has voted to issue a call to an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister, the letter of call shall be submitted to the bishop of this synod for the bishop's signature.
- b. An associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister shall confer with the bishop of this synod before accepting a call within this synod.
- c. The call of a congregation, when accepted by an associate in ministry, deaconess, or diaconal minister, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment which, except in the case of the death of the individual, shall be terminated only following consultation with the synodical bishop in accordance with policy developed by the appropriate

churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America....⁴⁰

Ending a call to an associate in ministry

Although extending a Letter of Call to an associate in ministry serving in a congregation requires action of the congregation in an officially called meeting, the process for termination of such a call involves the specific responsibility of the Congregation Council for lay staff.⁴¹ As specified in the *Model Constitution for Congregation*, an ELCA congregation is obligated to "call or terminate the call of associates in ministry...in conformity with the applicable policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."⁴²

In regard to terminating a call of an associate in ministry, the applicable policy declares:

In the case of alleged local difficulties which imperil the effective functioning of the congregation, following appropriate consultation involving all parties, the synodical bishop will recommend a course of action to the pastor, the associate in ministry...serving under call, and the congregation. If they agree to carry out such recommendations, no further action shall be taken by the synod. If any party fails to assent, the Congregation Council, after meeting and full consultation with the synodical

⁴⁰Provision †S14.31., *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), p. 206.

⁴¹Provision C12.08. in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, as printed in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), p. 233.

⁴²Provision *C5.03.c., *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), p. 220.

bishop, may dismiss the associate in ministry...by a two-thirds majority vote of the voting members present at a duly called meeting.⁴³

When this policy was being developed, the Conference of Bishops advised that any decision on termination of a congregation call to an associate in ministry must rest with the Congregation Council. This pattern differs by design from the requirement of †S14.13.d. in the *Constitution for Synods* in regard to the termination of a call to the pastor of a congregation. Such a decision for a pastor rests within a meeting of the congregation after a required process of consultation.

Why the difference? The reason relates to the nature of the respective calls and their responsibilities. The pastor has authority and obligations for the general oversight of the entire life of the congregation. By contrast, an associate in ministry is to fulfill duties for a specific ministry of Word and service within the congregation. Moreover, the Conference of Bishops advised that if termination required a special meeting of the congregation in the case of persons on the official lay rosters, congregations might be hesitant to issue calls to those on the lay rosters.

False expectation

Some unintended consequences resulted in the shift in terminology from “appointment” to “call.” A few associates in ministry serving under call in congregations thought that change meant that they were entitled to voice and vote on the Congregation Council, as was the case for the pastor. Perhaps that problem was the result of (1) a misunderstanding of the specific nature of their call as an associate in ministry, (2) lack of appreciation of the role of oversight and broad responsibility of the pastor for the

entire life of the congregation, or (3) failure to comprehend the Congregation Council’s duty of governance, including obligations related to the congregation’s staff.

The ELCA’s *Model Constitution for Congregations* assigns to the council the responsibility for the “supervision of the salaried lay workers of this congregation.”⁴⁴ That includes any associate in ministry serving on the staff of the congregation. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for an employee of the congregation to serve on the congregation’s governing council or board. (The pastor’s role is distinct in its scope of oversight and, therefore, most congregations follow the *Model Constitution for Congregation* under which the pastor serves as a voting member of the Congregation Council. In some cases, the pastor also is president of the congregation.)

“Call” not new

Use of the word “call” for those on a lay roster was not entirely new. For instance, the ALC’s commissioned church workers were “called” to their various positions. Likewise, AELC teachers were “called.” Why did some in the ELCA read the change to “call” as having far more expansive implications than what was outlined in the ELCA’s bylaws and policy documents?

Maybe that problem had been avoided in the ALC by the language on the accountability of commissioned church workers in congregations. The ALC’s policy document was very blunt: Within congregations, the reporting relationship of a commissioned lay worker was to the pastor.⁴⁵ The ALC’s policy statement also said, “The ministry functions of the ‘lay church worker’ differ from, but are complementary to those of the pastoral

⁴³“Call and Termination of Associates in Ministry...,” *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters*, Part Two, p. 19.

⁴⁴Provision C12.08., *Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

⁴⁵*1970 Reports and Actions*, Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex., October 21-27, 1970, p. 291.

ministry. Both grow out of the perceived need of the whole people of God to carry on the ministry of the Gospel effectively.”⁴⁶

A similar tone of service is underscored in the ELCA’s policy document on the basic standards for such rostered lay service:

Associates in ministry are ELCA members called to specific programmatic ministry which provide leadership and support the ministries of the whole people of God. Associates in ministry work in partnership with laity, pastors and bishops, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses to serve the mission and ministry needs of this church as they carry out responsibilities in congregations, agencies, or institutions of or related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.⁴⁷

In situations of misunderstanding by a few associates in ministry of the nature of the “call” to specific service in a congregation, most problems that emerged eventually were resolved following consultation with the synodical bishop or a member of the synod staff.

Other changes in 1993

VOTING PRIVILEGES AT SYNOD ASSEMBLIES: Provision was made by the 1993 Churchwide Assembly to ensure that all associates in ministry serving under call would have voting privileges in synodical assemblies. That also was true for those on the other two lay rosters, deaconesses and diaconal ministers who were serving under call.⁴⁸

PROCESS FOR DISCIPLINE ON LAY

⁴⁶*1976 Reports and Actions*, Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C., October 6-12, 1976, p. 1072.

⁴⁷“Basic Standards for Associates in Ministry...,” *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters*, Part Two, p. 11.

⁴⁸*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, p. 297; see also the 1993 amendment of bylaw 10.41.01.b, p. 419.

ROSTERS: As a result of the Study of Ministry and action by the 1993 Churchwide Assembly on the study’s recommendations, disciplinary standards and procedures were established for the three lay roster categories. The bases for such discipline included: (1) confessing and teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by this church; (2) conduct incompatible with the standards for the rostered ministries of this church; (3) willfully disregarding or violating the functions and standards established by this church for the lay rosters; and (4) willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church.

Actions that could be imposed were: (1) private censure and admonition by the bishop of the synod; (2) suspension from the role and functions of the lay roster category; or (3) removal from the roster.⁴⁹

From predecessor churches

A look at history may be interesting in reflecting on the development of categories of officially rostered or recognized lay church service. Biblical mandates generally were not assumed to require such lay ministry, in contrast to ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. The needs of the church and appropriate service for members, however, were prominent in the development of various categories of recognized service.

At the time of the formation of the ELCA, about 1,300 persons were officially recognized by the three predecessor church bodies in ministry categories other than ordained. In the ALC and LCA, they were identified in lay categories. For the AELC, however, persons “serving as called teachers and as consecrated deacons were not regarded as lay persons but as special expressions of the ministry of the

⁴⁹*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, bylaws 20.22.01. and 20.23.02., pp. 419-420.

Gospel.”⁵⁰ That particular claim had been carried by the AELC from its roots in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.⁵¹ In addition to commissioned teachers and consecrated deacons, the AELC had a listing of deaconesses.

“Special expression” not embraced

The AELC’s understanding of certain categories being designated as “special expressions of the ministry” was not embraced by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Instead, the inherited rosters from the three predecessor churches as well as ELCA-certified associates in ministry were designated by the one category, associates in ministry. All the associates in ministry, including those inherited from the AELC, were identified as part of “an officially recognized lay roster category” in the ELCA.⁵²

⁵⁰Footnote 99, *Together for Ministry: Final Report and Actions of the Study of Ministry*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1988-1993), p. 34.

⁵¹An element in that designation was an understanding that such individuals served as “ministers of religion” and could be considered “self-employed for Social Security payments and could receive a housing allowance, like clergy.” A letter dated July 30, 1987, was prepared by Mr. Elwyn Ewald, then executive secretary of the AELC, and sent to the Rev. Lowell G. Almen, then the secretary of the ELCA. In that letter, Mr. Ewald wrote: “Enclosed you will find a copy of the special ruling from the IRS related to granting ‘minister of religion’ status to our ‘called teachers.’ I send this to you...so that you can assure the transfer of this letter ruling from the AELC to the ELCA for the six-year period during which the ministry study will be continued. All of our people in that special status realize that no new people will be added following the end of this year and that the status will terminate at the end of the six-year study if that is the desire of the study recommendations and the church” [*emphasis added*]. The designation of the inherited rosters as part of the lay rosters of the ELCA precluded continuation of the AELC’s FICA and income tax practices related to “called teachers.” The decisions of the 1993 Churchwide Assembly meant that the churchwide organization as an employer, for instance, could not consider any person on the official lay rosters of this church as being self-employed for FICA purposes or entitled to housing allowance provisions under IRS regulations. Therefore, the employer was required to withhold from the salary of an associate in ministry federal and state taxes as well as the employee portion of FICA. In addition, the employer was required to pay the employer’s portion of FICA for those on inherited rosters under the umbrella of associates in ministry as well as for newly certified associates in ministry.

⁵²*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, p. 298.

The sole exception among the inherited rosters to the “umbrella” term of associates in ministry was the Deaconess Community from the LCA, which was maintained as a separate ELCA roster with additions permitted following the 1993 decisions on the recommendations of the Study of Ministry.

How did the ELCA get to the point of the 1993 decisions? Past developments in the ALC and LCA provide some clues.

Development in the ALC

Within the predecessor American Lutheran Church of 1960, a Committee on Certification of Church Staff Workers was appointed in October 1962. A registry of such church staff workers was to be maintained in what was then the ALC’s Board of College Education. In a statement of qualifications, such staff workers were to (1) demonstrate commitment to Christ, (2) be enthusiastic about the mission of the church, (3) possess practical experience and skills to carry out conscientiously their assigned responsibilities, and (4) function “as a servant of the congregation” while accepting “the leadership of the pastor as the Shepherd of the congregation.”⁵³

The ALC certification committee determined that “present workers who are employed full time as of September 1, 1962, will be accepted with the idea to ‘umbrella in’ as much as possible those workers [in the registration], even though they have not met all of the specific requirements.” Examples of church staff workers were (1) administrative assistant, (2) Christian day school teacher, (3) church business administrator, (4) church musician, (5) parish education director, (6) parish secretary, (7) parish worker, and (8) youth worker.⁵⁴

⁵³These qualifications were listed in an undated document from the Committee on Certification of Church Staff Workers in the early 1960s, “Registration for Non-Ordained Church Staff Workers in The American Lutheran Church.”

⁵⁴*Ibid*.

In 1969, “commissioned church worker” was identified as the proposed title for those certified for a roster of persons serving under call in or for congregations in various salaried positions.⁵⁵ The suggestion was not affirmed at that time. Instead, a year later, the ALC Church Council used the term, “lay church worker,” in a proposed policy document, but the process for certification envisioned in the earlier document was maintained.⁵⁶

The ALC’s 1970 general convention approved the policy statement, “Lay Church Worker.”⁵⁷ Six years later, however, the 1970 statement was superseded by a new policy statement that reflected the commissioning language of the 1969 draft and the service was identified as “Commissioned Church Staff Ministries.”⁵⁸

That policy was amended further in 1978 by the ALC’s Church Council to use the term, “Lay Roster,” and to define the Lay Roster as: “A list of lay persons who have been certified and commissioned by this Church for ministry, and who are employed by this Church or one of its congregations, agencies, or institutions.”⁵⁹ The definition was maintained in the *Handbook of The American Lutheran Church* through 1987 when the ALC was dissolved into the ELCA,

effective January 1, 1988.⁶⁰ The designation, “Commissioned Church Staff,” was contained in the ALC’s policy document but was not listed in the ALC’s constitution and bylaws. The reference in the bylaws was to maintenance of the “Lay Roster.”⁶¹ The requirement of certification, however, was noted in the ALC bylaws.⁶²

When the ELCA was formed, the ALC provided a listing of its commissioned church staff as well as ALC deaconesses. (Following the Study of Ministry, the deaconesses received from both the ALC and AELC were listed as associates in ministry, not as deaconesses.)

Emergence in the LCA

Within the Lutheran Church in America, the *Yearbook* annually listed the deaconesses of the LCA. In the 1970 *Yearbook*, however, a new section appeared under the title, “Certified Personnel.” The listing included parish educators, directors of Christian education, youth workers, church organists and choirmasters, directors of church music, church business administrators, directors of youth ministry, and parish workers. The preface to that listing indicated that those individuals had “met the minimum qualification for that occupation adopted by the Board of College Education and Church Vocations upon recommendation of the Coordinating Committee on Church Vocations.”⁶³ By 1975, the title was changed to “Certified Lay Professionals.” Responsibility for the certification then resided with the LCA Division for Professional Leadership.⁶⁴

The LCA designation of certified lay professionals evolved further in the next

⁵⁵*Minutes*, Executive Committee of the Church Council, The American Lutheran Church, May 22, 1969, Exhibit C-1, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁶Action number C70.6.189 and Exhibit J, *Minutes*, Church Council of The American Lutheran Church, June 26, 1970, pp. 90-91. The text of the “Report of the Coordinating Committee on Church Occupations,” as adopted by the Church Council, was provided for that year’s convention (*1970 Reports and Actions*, Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex., October 21-27, 1970, pp. 288-291).

⁵⁷Action number GC70.27.235, *1970 Reports and Actions*, Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex., October 21-27, 1970, p. 264.

⁵⁸Action Number GC76.11.95, *1976 Reports and Actions*, Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Washington, D.C., October 6-12, 1976, p. 979. The full text of the revised policy, as recommended by the ALC’s Church Council and amended by the convention, was printed in the *1976 Reports and Actions*, pp. 1071-1094.

⁵⁹*1978 Reports and Actions*, Ninth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Moorhead, Minn., October 18-24, 1978, p. 806.

⁶⁰*Handbook of The American Lutheran Church* (1983 edition), p. 12.

⁶¹Bylaw 9.36.11., *Handbook of The American Lutheran Church* (1983 edition), p. 78.

⁶²Bylaw 10.49.12., *Handbook of The American Lutheran Church* (1983 edition), p. 84.

⁶³*Yearbook*, 1970, Lutheran Church in America, pp. 185-186.

⁶⁴*Yearbook*, 1975, Lutheran Church in America, pp. 195-199.

decade. In 1985, the listing was defined in this way:

A Lay Professional Leader in the Lutheran Church in America is a confirmed, communing, and contributing member of one of its congregations. Lay professional leaders are certified by synodical professional leadership committees according to requisite educational, professional, and other standards for certification established by the Division for Professional Leadership.⁶⁵

The development of the lay professional category in the LCA grew out of a long process of study. The Division for Professional Leadership had delivered an extensive report to the 1976 LCA convention. According to the report, the term “lay professionals” referred to members of the Lutheran Church in America who were not ordained but who:

(1) had fulfilled suitable academic or training requirements and had the skills to function on the staff of a congregation or church-related organization,

(2) had registered with and accepted accountability to a synod according to churchwide standards, and

(3) were employed at least 20 hours a week in duties of a staff position with an LCA congregation, synod, churchwide unit, or recognized church institution or agency.⁶⁶

Throughout the LCA’s twenty-five year history, a separate listing was maintained of the members of the Deaconess Community of the LCA. That listing, as previously noted, was received into the ELCA and officially became the Deaconess Community of the ELCA by

action of the 1993 Churchwide Assembly.⁶⁷

Significantly enhanced understanding

Clearly, the recommendations of the Study of Ministry and the actions of the 1993 Churchwide Assembly significantly enhanced the definition and recognition of the lay roster of associates in ministry.

The basic standards established upon the constituting of the ELCA for associates in ministry were maintained but slightly revised. Currently, bylaw 7.52.11. lists those basic standards as:

- (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 the position, 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 of faithful service and holy living;
- (6) receipt and acceptance of a letter of call; and
- (7) membership in a congregation of this church.⁶⁸

In order to be approved for commissioning as associates in ministry, candidates must demonstrate:

- (1) knowledge of and ability to articulate and integrate in the

⁶⁵*Yearbook*, 1985, Lutheran Church in America, p. 215.

⁶⁶*Minutes*, Eighth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America, Boston, Mass., July 21-28, 1976, p. 588.

⁶⁷*Minutes*, 1993 Churchwide Assembly, pp. 298-299. See also amendment of bylaw 7.51.04. (*Minutes*, 1993, p. 416).

⁶⁸Bylaw 7.52.11.a., *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (2007 edition), pp. 41-42.

- ministry setting [the following]—biblical study and interpretation, church history, the history and confessional teachings of the Lutheran church, and the organization and operating principles of the ELCA;
- (2) ability to articulate one’s sense of calling as a baptized Christian and as an associate in ministry;
 - (3) commitment to living in accordance with the [policy document,] “Vision and Expectations for Associates in Ministry in the ELCA”;
 - (4) competence in the area or areas of one’s field of specialization; and
 - (5) at least one year of satisfactory relationship with the appropriate Candidacy Committee.⁶⁹

When approved, a candidate becomes available for a possible call. Upon receipt and acceptance of a properly issued Letter of Call for service in a ministry setting of or related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a candidate is commissioned, according to the rite of this church. The candidate’s name then is added to the official lay roster of the ELCA as an associate in ministry.

The candidate joins a particular line of servants of the church, recognized by various designations over the centuries, but now identified as associates in ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For that service, the candidate prepared. In that service, the associate in ministry can flourish as an individual called to particular ministry through this church for the sake of the Gospel.

⁶⁹“Basic Standards for Associates in Ministry...,” *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters*, Part Two, p. 12