

ELCA Deacons January 2017

## **Welcome to our Deacons! Wait, what? What's a Deacon?**

By Carol Schickel, Deacon

God calls human beings to participate in a divine mission in the world. We each discover or are called to our own way of caring for the earth and its inhabitants. People of God are aware of the many needs of the world and may ask from time to time: "Is this how God is calling me to respond, to act, to speak or to serve?"

The church has created an order for affirming particular calls to serve in the interest of that divine mission. When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed in 1988 it established three rosters: pastors, deaconesses, and associates in ministry. In 1993 a roster of diaconal ministers was added, and the first were consecrated in 1995. These rostered leaders are called through the ELCA to serve congregations as well as through other officially called ministries. Some on each of the rosters of the ELCA are chaplains, therapists, musicians and cantors, seminary faculty and administrators, social workers and churchwide and synod leaders.

At the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly changes were made to the three rosters of lay leaders. As of January 1, 2017, those who have served on the lay rosters as associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and deaconesses are now part of one unified roster of 'Ministers of Word and Service,' and are called deacons. The other roster of the ELCA continues to be known as "Ministers of Word and Sacrament," called pastors.

The ministry of the diaconate, that is of deacons also called ministers of Word and Service is recognized by churches throughout history and around the world. The earliest deacon of the Bible was Stephen. The ELCA continues to seek to honor the significance of deacons serving at the intersection of church and world, bringing a sharper focus to the ways the church responds to the needs of people. Our new roster more closely aligns with the global church, providing clarity and empowerment to those the church calls to serve.

Congregations, synods, and other places where these deacons now serve are encouraged to recognize this significant transition and affirm their ministries. There is a welcoming rite to help recognize this transition on the ELCA website under worship We are all invited to welcome those called as deacons and to ask any questions we might have about how the church works to carry out its mission to the world. Come greet a Deacon! It's a new day for all of us in the church as we are sent out to serve.