

ELCA Grace Gathering goes for Holy Hierarchy

The ELCA will take a big step towards sacramental bishops, priests, and deacons (as required by CCM¹) at its August 2016 Churchwide Assembly in New Orleans.

See proposed ELCA constitutional change ¶7.54.01: “Ministers of Word and Service shall be known as **deacons**.”²

As part of this change the ELCA is **deleting the word “lay”** to describe diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and associates in ministry who become deacons. Why? Because the new rank of deacon is **not “lay”!**

The ELCA is also **deleting the word “clergy”** to describe pastors. Why? Because bishops and pastors will **not** be the only “clergy” in the ELCA. Deacons will be a kind of **quasi-clergy**.

The ELCA will have three ranks of “ministers” –

1. Ministers with exclusive power to ordain and consecrate – Bishops
2. “Ministers of Word and Sacrament” – Pastors
3. “Ministers of Word and Service” – Deacons

And on the bottom “ministers” who pay and pray – laity. Everyone is a “minister” now.

For the time being deacons will be **“consecrated.”** What’s that? “Consecration” comes from the Latin **“to make holy.”** “Consecration” confers a hazy sacramental something.

The official “entrance rite” for deacons won’t be voted on until 2019, that is, after the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017!

Phew. Might be awkward if ELCA folk see their leaders as Episcopalians do: “I think they [ELCA leaders] see us [Episcopalians] as possibly helping them recover the ancient catholic tradition which they had prior to the Reformation.”³ Awkward!

Whatever the ELCA rite for deacons is eventually called, it will conform to what the Episcopal rite for “ordained” deacons requires, that is, the **bishop’s laying-on-of-hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit**. The conferring of Holy Orders.

So don’t get hung up on terms – “consecrated” or “ordained.” Doesn’t matter. Look at **what happens**. The rite **must include** the bishop’s laying-on-of-hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit.

¹ CCM ¶9: “The ordination of deacons, deaconesses, or diaconal ministers by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is not required by this Concordat.” **But** CCM ¶16: “To enable the full communion that is coming into being by means of this Concordat, The Episcopal Church pledges to continue the process for enacting a **temporary suspension**, in this case only, of the seventeenth-century restriction that “no persons are allowed to exercise the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon in this Church unless they are so ordained, or have already received such ordination with the **laying-on-of-hands by bishops who are themselves duly qualified to confer Holy Orders**” (Preface to the Ordination Rites,” *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 510) The purpose of **temporarily suspending** this restriction ... is **precisely** in order **to secure the future implementation of the ordinals’ same principle in the sharing of ordained ministries.**” Emphasis added.

² 2016 proposed constitutional changes available at ELCA website under “[Grace Gathering](#).” Emphasis added.

³The Rev. Canon J. Robert Wright, then Episcopal member of the CCM drafting committee and professor of church history at General Theological Seminary, quoted in *The Living Church*, February 23, 2001, p. 15.

As Martin Marty famously said: You don't have to believe it; you just have to do it.⁴

Trouble is the next generation will do it and believe it. Whatever. Because God is love and we're all in mission together, right?

⁴Martin Marty: "This draft could not make it more clear that Episcopalians do not expect Lutherans to be asked to come to believe in this." A public letter titled, *An Essay from The Reverend Dr. Martin E. Marty*, April 8, 1998, p. 3.