

Guidelines for New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

**Reviewed and Endorsed by the New Jersey District Board of Directors 6/29/2022.**

**New Jersey District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod**

**New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacon Guidelines**

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The Diaconate in the Holy Scriptures

The diaconate is a group of people committed to service in and for the Church, a group which has its roots in the New Testament [see Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6]. As the Church catholic has grown, so too, the diaconate has had a history of development and usage.

The diaconate has had a variety of definitions over time and has included a broad range of people, privileges, and responsibilities all dealing with sharing the Word of God and service in the Lord’s kingdom.

Purpose of the New Jersey District Congregational Lay Diaconate

New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons (hereafter NJDCL Deacons) are trained laity who are granted the opportunity to work under the Office of the Public Ministry in service to the local church, her members and to the world through works of mercy and witness as directed.

The purpose of the NJDCL Diaconate is to provide some basic and uniform standards for preparation, education, and accountability; to offer opportunities for continuing education, collegiality, and support; to encourage excellence in service; and to be a forum for mutual concerns and needs.

The NJDCL Diaconate is standardized and exists exclusively within the New Jersey District. There is no official transferability from the NJDCL Diaconate to any other LCMS judicatory or ministerial category.

Members of the New Jersey District Congregational Lay Diaconate

Members of the NJDCL Diaconate are men and women selected and nominated by the local congregation and its pastor and approved by the NJDCL Deacon Board to serve after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ by sharing the Word and doing acts of service.

Members of the NJDCL Diaconate are those individuals who apply for membership, meet the requirements as set by the New Jersey District, and subscribe to these guidelines for service and supervision. The title each member has is *“New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacon.”*

A NJDCL Deacon’s focus of work is in the local congregation and in the surrounding community through those congregations.

The Work of New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

At the heart of the work of NJDCL Deacons are works of mercy and witness that support our life together. The actual tasks undertaken by members of the NJDCL Diaconate will vary according to the gifts and skills of the NJDCL Deacon and the needs of his or her congregation in the surrounding community through those congregations. All aspects of NJDCL Diaconal work are under the supervision of the Supervising Pastor.

NJDCL Deacons may engage in various types of service, including but not limited to teaching within the congregation; catechesis of youth and adults; caregiving works of mercy like shut-in and hospital visitation, hospitality and integration of members, small group Bible study leadership, worship assistant, and various outreach and evangelism.

Care should be taken to prevent any confusion between an NJDCL Deacon and the Office of the Public Ministry.

Qualifications for New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

*Personal Considerations*

A NJDCL Deacon shall be a confirmed member in good standing of a congregation of the New Jersey District and be involved in parish life. Members of the NJDCL Diaconate shall have the support of his/her family. Members of the NJDCL Diaconate shall be of sound moral character and mature faith.

*Application and Letters of Support*

Part I of the NJDCL Deacon Application and a letter of support from the individual’s Pastor must be completed prior to admission to the NJDCL Diaconate Board.

To be certified as an NJDCL Deacon Intern, Part II of the NJDCL Deacon Application must be completed, a letter of nomination from the congregation, a letter from the Supervising Pastor, and two (2) letters attesting to the moral and spiritual character of the individual are required.

Those individuals not seeking application for the NJDCL Diaconate need not fulfill the requirements of Part II of the application.

*Training for New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons*

As a minimum, applicants for the NJDCL Diaconate shall have a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED Certificate). Other educational background or experience, including academic, business, etc., will be taken into consideration in relation to the applicant’s proposed areas of lay diaconal service.

The NJDCL Deacon shall have completed an approved two-year course of theological education of the NJDCL Diaconate Program, which includes:

1. Christian Doctrine

2. Old Testament

3. New Testament

4. Theology and Practice of Worship

5. Christian Service and Care

6. Interpreting Scripture

7. Teaching the Faith

8. Sharing the Faith

9. Evangelism

10. History of the Church

Course schedules will be available by contacting the District Office.

NJDCL Diaconal Training is offered in cooperation with the Atlantic District Lay Deacon Training Program (alternately, with prior approval training may be done through the Mission Training Center, Irvine CA or the Southeast District Lay Deacon Training Program).

*Service Hour Requirement*

In addition to the educational component offered through the NJDCL Training Program, there is a NJDCL Deacon Internship. The purpose of the internship is to enable the NJDCL Deacon Intern to experience the kind of service that may be expected of him/her as a member of the NJDCL Diaconate. The NJDCL Deacon Intern’s skills, interests, and commitment are used as a measure for acceptance to become a member of the NJDCL Diaconate and to help the candidate continue in training and formation under the Supervising Pastor.

The Supervising Pastor is the direct supervisor of the internship. The Supervising Pastor must certify in writing that all hours have been completed.

A total of one hundred (100) hours of practical training are required in the NJDCL Diaconate Program. Within the one hundred hours (100) of experience ten (10) hours must be completed in each of the following five areas:

* Visitation – nursing homes, hospitals, shut-ins, etc.
* Teaching – Bible studies, VBS, Sunday School, etc.
* Administration – organize a newly instituted program; be responsible for an area of service in a staff position.
* Evangelism – follow up on guests to church; teach an evangelism course.
* Liturgical Service – assist in Sunday worship, nursing home devotions, etc.

The Supervising Pastor and NJDCL Deacon Intern shall develop a plan for the one hundred (100) hours of practical experience. These hours may include any one of the above five areas or any other area of parish life.

The NJDCL Deacon Internship service hour requirement is to be completed no sooner than six (6) months after the candidate’s completion of NJDCL Diaconal coursework and no longer than eighteen (18) months after that date.

Internship Supervision

Each applicant’s internship supervisor will be a rostered Pastor of the New Jersey District who is directly connected to the ministry being undertaken during the internship period. This supervisor shall:

* assist the candidate in establishing goals and expectations for the internship;
* meet with the applicant no less than twice monthly to discuss specific assignments, development, progress and concerns; and
* certify that the New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacon Intern has successfully completed the required hours.

All applicants, upon completion of the internship, shall submit a written report of his/her service, describing the nature of and personal reflections on the experience. This shall be submitted to the New Jersey District Office prior to the final interview.

Participation in a Spiritual Direction Program.

(This portion of the program is yet to be developed and will be added when completed.)

Compensation and New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

Normally, an NJDCL Deacon receives no compensation for service. A NJDCL Deacon’s service is a gift to God and the Church.

It is expected that most members of the NJDCL Diaconate will continue to hold regular employment and therefore would be involved in NJDCL Diaconal service on a part-time, non-stipendiary basis. There may be instances, however, when a NJDCL Deacon will serve on staff and receive compensation.

Whenever possible, congregations and other agencies in which NJDCL Deacons are serving shall meet expenses incurred during such service. It is further encouraged that churches offer support for continuing education. In service to congregations outside of their own, such service shall be approved by the Supervising Pastor and the Pastor of the congregation where service is to be rendered in consultation with the NJDCL Diaconate Board. This shall be done prior to service. NJDCL Deacons shall normally receive honoraria for such service.

Interview Process and Acceptance for New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

Upon receipt of an application, the Deacon Board representative shall contact the individual in order to answer any questions on the part of the candidate and the Supervising Pastor.

An interview shall take place prior to the NJDCL Deacon Intern’s second year of study should he/she desire to be recognized as a NJDCL Deacon. The purpose of this interview is to best gauge the areas of strength and growth of the individual for NJDCL Diaconal service. It also develops a plan for the Supervising Pastor and other NJDCL Deacons to support the NJDCL Deacon Intern.

A final interview shall be conducted once the educational and practical components have been completed. This shall be conducted through a face-to-face meeting of the NJDCL Deacon Intern, Supervising Pastor and Board representative. The names of those candidates who successfully pass this interview are forwarded to the New Jersey District President, for final approval by the Praesidium. Only after said interview has been conducted may a date be set for the Blessing of the NJDCL Deacon Intern into service.

Approved applicants shall be received into membership in the NJDCL Diaconate along with their blessing for NJDCL Diaconal service by a liturgical rite which may consist of a service of prayer, as set forth in the New Jersey District’s Rite for the Blessing of a NJDCL Deacon.

Accountability of New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

The NJDCL Deacon is always under the supervision of an ordained Pastor, normally the Pastor of the NJDCL Deacon’s home congregation, and serves at that Pastor’s behest. The development of the goals and tasks for the NJDCL Deacon is a task done jointly by the NJDCL Deacon and the Supervising Pastor. The NJDCL Deacon and Pastor shall meet on a regular basis to discuss progress and assignments. The lay leadership of the congregation, when appropriate, may voice its perspective and vision for the NJDCL Deacon through the Pastor who is the NJDCL Deacon’s direct supervisor. The Pastor and NJDCL Deacon should work together to clarify and explain the NJDCL Deacon’s position in the congregation. In the absence of a Supervising Pastor, the New Jersey District President shall appoint a supervisor.

The NJDCL Deacon shall not normally serve in an elected position of a parish.

NJDCL Deacons shall also be accountable to the President of the New Jersey District, LCMS. The New Jersey District President normally exercises this oversight through the New Jersey District Praesidium and the NJDCL Deacon Board. This is recognizable chiefly through the recertification process and triennial review. Such accountability and review shall include a triennial report of the NJDCL Deacon’s work [Addendum III], filed with the congregation and the New Jersey District Office. The report is to be completed jointly by the Supervising Pastor and NJDCL Deacon.

The NJDCL Deacon shall comply with the requirements for continuing education.

Recertification Requirements

NJDCL Deacons are certified for a three-year period. They may be recertified on a three-year basis without limitation, congruent with the regular Conventions of the New Jersey District. Recertification is undertaken after the second year through application for continued service as received through the NJDCL Deacon’s congregation and Supervising Pastor. Such application shall include:

* attendance at the annual NJDCL Deacon spiritual retreat, unless excused by the Supervising Pastor for service or hardship reasons;
* participation in continuing education, a minimum of one completed opportunity per year (see below: *Continuing Education*), Lay Training Program courses, or other opportunities approved by the Supervising Pastor; and
* submission of a triennial report.

NJDCL Deacons who do not complete the steps for re-certification shall no longer be considered active. If concern relating to the service has been identified, the District President shall contact the NJDCL Deacon and the Supervising Pastor to ascertain the issues and work toward a solution. If a NJDCL Deacon becomes inactive and does not respond to these communications, a recommendation of removal from the NJDCL Diaconate shall be considered by the Praesidium. Lay Deacons may also be removed from the NJDCL Diaconate roster for three reasons: adherence to false doctrine, neglect of duties/incompetence, and/or an immoral lifestyle. Such removal will be done through the District Praesidium and District President following the Church’s usual order.

*Continuing Education Opportunities*

NJDCL Deacons shall attend a minimum of one continuing education course offered through the NJDCL Leadership Training Program on a yearly basis. Continuing education for the New Jersey District Congregational Lay Diaconate comprises the following:

* Auditing of a NJDCL training course.
* Seminars specific to the NJDCL Diaconate as offered by the New Jersey District
* Lay Bible Institute of one of our seminaries, completion of district approved online or in person workshop or Bible course. (such as CSL Lay Bible Institute and iTunes store, Kairos Network)
* Outside seminars approved by the Supervising Pastor as beneficial for the Lay Deacon’s particular service. Credit will be given upon a written report by the NJDCL Deacon approved by the Supervising Pastor.

New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons Transferring from One Congregation to Another

A NJDCL Deacon leaving the New Jersey District or transferring from one New Jersey District congregation to another must inform District President in a timely manner (30 days).

A NJDCL Deacon transferring to a congregation in another LCMS District or leaving the denomination is removed from the membership list of NJDCL Deacons. The New Jersey District bears no further ecclesiastical supervision responsibility.

Since NJDCL Deacons are attached to the congregation with which they hold membership, when a NJDCL Deacon transfers to another New Jersey District congregation, the NJDCL Deacon is placed on “transitional status” for no less than six months. “Transitional status,” which is a period of supervision by the new congregational pastor, remains for a maximum of three years. Each year the status must be renewed by a simple formal request to the District President. It is up to the congregation, local Pastor, and transitional status NJDCL Deacon to determine the role of the transferring NJDCL Deacon, if any.

If the congregation and Pastor desire the transitional status Lay Deacon to serve as a NJDCL Deacon, a letter of request by the NJDCL Deacon and a letter of support from the new Supervising Pastor and congregation must be submitted to the District President. Upon receipt of the letter of request, a determination will be made by the New Jersey District Praesidium.

Garb for New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

Liturgical attire for the NJDCL Diaconate follows the local custom of the congregation where the NJDCL Deacon serves. A diaconal cross from the New Jersey District may be worn as a distinctive item for NJDCL Deacons. NJDCL Deacons are not to wear clerical shirts or a deacon stole. When assisting in worship, the deacon may wear the diaconal cross and worship vestments according to the local custom. (alb, cassock and surplice, etc.)

Leadership of New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacons

The NJDCL Deacon Board under the supervision of the New Jersey District Praesidium provides oversight of the NJDCL Diaconate program. The New Jersey District Praesidium reports to the New Jersey District Board of Directors and the New Jersey District Convention.

The responsibilities of the NJDCL Deacon Board may include:

* gathering District-wide, as New Jersey District Congregational Advisory Council on a yearly basis;
* supervising the NJDCL Deacon Interns in matters pertaining to fulfilling the NJDCL Deacon guidelines;
* conducting interviews with potential NJDCL Deacons and NJDCL Deacon Interns as prescribed in other sections of this document;
* providing opportunity for Regular (monthly, quarterly) Bible study and fellowship; and,
* providing encouragement and counsel to Pastors and congregations concerning the role, limitation and expectations of an NJDCL Deacon in the parish.

Additional Items

The NJDCL Diaconate Guidelines cannot cover every issue or concern. Those issues not covered in this document will be handled in a Christ-like manner, calling upon the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for proper discernment. The Praesidium of the New Jersey District, as the supervisor of the NJDCL Deaconate program, will serve as the final arbiter of any issues not covered by this document. All changes to this document will proceed through the Praesidium, with final approval from the New Jersey District Board of Directors.

**Commitment of New Jersey District Congregational Lay Diaconate Applicant**

I have read and agree to follow the guidelines as presented in this document.

New Jersey District Congregational Lay Deacon Applicant Supervising Pastor