

Women in Ministry Conversation with Deacons—January 14, 2019

What does it mean to be in a role of public leadership in the church?

It means that people look to you to provide a path for action.

A path for action and a way for other folks to participate in ministry with you. Aligning folks.

We lead by example. If we are to be in this accompanying model, if we lead this way—building up young people as leaders, learn that everything's about relationship together. We lead by example. Sometimes that means not keeping your mouth shut.

One of the things I was able to discern was I wanted to be a diaconal minister because that's what makes a level playing field (i.e. everyone looks up to the pastor). The Deacon role is more of an accompaniment model.

Leadership is defined by your role in the church.

I look at it as being a whitewater rafting guide. Just helping people get down the river. It's about getting in the boat and managing the rocks. Hopefully not bounce off the rocks! It's important to know the strengths of the boat and the folks in the boat.

Church leadership is so different than the corporate world. It's kind of a prophet view of wondering where is God calling people? How can I help you see where God is calling you?

I feel like deacons who move to become pastors have to sort of trade their diaconal heart for relationship. ... Diaconal ministry brought different eyes to the table.

What do you understand the difference to be between the two rosters?

I really think the ELCA has a lot of work to do with the lay roster. I became an Associate in Ministry for a reason...because ministry was in the title. I do enjoy weddings and funerals and preaching. I feel a call to ordained ministry sometimes but I also am saying, sometimes I think I don't want to do it because I feel a little resentful. Ordained ministers sometimes bully us. They say, "Don't you want to be ordained?" It's not helpful. I'm really sad about it. My call is a real call. Even the word is a problem: 'deacon' is a male-centered word. Baptists in this part of the world give me a sideways look. (Deacons are old white dudes with no education.)

I'm serving on an ecumenical board and the Episcopalians and Catholics understand 'deacon.' I say I'm a deacon but then they see what I do and they call me pastor. So many things that don't have anything to do with sacraments that aren't allowed because I'm not Word & Sacrament. For instance, none of the pastors in my conference wanted to serve as dean. I said I'd really enjoy that work; be happy to do it. But, when we called the synod office, they just said no. What does being a dean have to do with the sacraments?

It's the collar. The identifier is the collar. And it feels like we are less-than.

"I'm going to have to ask you to stop wearing the collar because we've had some complaints."

When we talk about deacon roles, I like this analogy: the church is a rural road off the interstate with the pastor. The deacons are the off ramp, we make the connections to the interstate, where we really start to move places, make connections and get moving through these connections to be the body of Christ. You can still get places on the rural roads but we really get moving once we are able to make the connection to the interstate. The ministry of a deacon is so critical. I've had people say to me, "You didn't finish seminary, is that why you're a deacon?" Also, "You're going to be the whipping boy of the church." Well, I refuse to be the whipping boy. I've have pastors use me as their scapegoat.

I don't personally want to wear a collar. But I do think it would be helpful if there was at times a way to be publicly acknowledged.

If I ever wanted to wear a collar, it would be in a hospital or a school.

I really feel like deacons don't get to share their voice with the wider church. Don't think for a minute I won't share my opinion with those kids. 2019 is the year of the deacons! It's time for the church to stand up and say, 'you matter.' Just as we've given attention to racial issues, LGBTQIA issues, and women's issues, we need to give attention to deacons. When it's hard for someone to go talk to someone in a collar, they come and talk to me.

If ordination becomes the rite for deacons, how will that change things?

It will give us the acknowledgement we need.

What does that collar mean? Initially, in my call to the work of the synod, the bishop indicated there was no reason I shouldn't wear the collar as I am representing the ministry of the church in the world, but he wanted to ask the wider church for input. ELCA Director for Worship, Kevin Strickland, actually responded that it "wasn't wrong to wear it; liturgically, it's never been a symbol of office." He suggested it might be a way to open a conversation about the role of the deacon apart from the role of the pastor, in order to help reduce confusion. He did say that whether it's encouraged is often dependent upon the context of one's ministry: a hospital chaplain is certainly an appropriate place for a deacon to wear a collar; but for a teacher, probably not. So, after the bishop said I could wear it, the Conference of Bishops' listserv started coming out loud and strong against the practice specifically because, it will cause confusion for "the people" – they don't understand the difference between a pastor and a deacon.

When I had a chance to meet with Kevin Strickland, I asked what efforts were being undertaken to help explain the office of Deacon and its status in ministry, and specifically what is being done to educate the entire church that the collar has no liturgical significance? When he said they really hadn't discussed the matter, I asked him to bring it up and discuss it in depth. He asked, "Why is it so important to you to be able to wear it?" My response was, "Because when I'm standing on the street with the disenfranchised, I stand there as Christ's presence in the church's prophetic voice for the Gospel."

We need to be **in** the church **with** the church having this conversation about deacons.

We are 'othered' as women and we are 'othered' as deacons. There's an intersectionality of otherness. The sum is greater than the parts. I can't but help but wonder if female pastors get that same feeling.

I serve on an ecumenical committee and the Episcopal and Catholic folks know what a deacon is. Other churches, though, look at the ministry I do and they call me 'pastor.' They get who I am by my ministry.

What would you want to say to a group of colleagues/or the bishop's staff.

My senior pastor is very understanding about the whole idea of the roster. Sometimes he's old-school and he just doesn't remember. Sometimes he introduces me as "Assistant Minister." There's some hesitation to use the 'pastor' word.

They will support us in that role but will not fight for us in that role. As someone who did six funerals in a month while our interim was 6 days a week. I've been at the same rate of pay for 5 years (except for 2% raise due to Portico).

Negotiate for deacons under call.

I was one of two people advocating in a room of 12 to put together a committee to study rostered leader pay. Really? Does this need to be studied? What if the person were a pastor? Or a man? I felt like I should not have to advocate for equal pay for someone on a staff just because that someone is a deacon.

Pastor bullying from male clergy. I got bullied on Facebook and my pastor said, "Oh it's just harmless old men." Finally, his wife saw it and addressed it... Why did it take a female stepping in to help me?

My husband is a pastor which some days really sucks. Folks say, "Why don't you just learn to follow your husband?" (in a call).

I hate being called a little girl. (tears) Someone said to me, "If you keep making this a woman's issue, I'll blacklist you from the synod."

I saw two of them from the video; two of them bullied me.

The wound is so deep. In conversations like this, the wounds come back...like ripping off a bandaid.

In the 10 years that I was doing my seminary work, I got one grant from my home congregation for \$1000. I know that they sent male seminarians \$2500 each year. Later on in the summer, there was going to be a period of six weeks where there was no pastor to preach. The senior pastor said, don't worry we've got those six weeks covered by all our seminaries. "When is my Sunday?" Oh, you're not a real seminarian.

Raise your hand if you were in a congregation that promised to support you and you didn't get support. 6 out of 8.

I had the freedom to choose the diaconal ministry track. We're in the same classes, the same debt. We were a small handful. Within a year or two most folks switched over to ordained track.

I don't think that the bishop's staff intentionally leaves us out. I think it happens naturally. And it's harder to be intentional.

Do you ever feel like you have to hold back? (Everybody raised their hand.) Yes!

What does that look like?

"It's a shame you have to work on Fridays when you have so many other days off."

It's not very easy to get calls. Pastors have a lot of synodical support for a call, but for us it's more like you go hunt for something.

We get it (pushback) from our male colleagues and from parishioners. Anything for which we want parity, we get pushback, from pastors (male and female), and parishioners.

These people aren't your friends, they're your colleagues. We get labeled as people who don't want to play together but that doesn't seem fair.

I would like to think we could educate congregations about the role of deacon. I would love to be able to tell my youth group and people who are discerning a call to ministry about being a deacon; to recommend being a deacon as a way to serve. But, sometimes that's hard to do knowing that the road may not be as easy for them as if they'd chosen ordained ministry. Just as much as we need more pastors, the church also needs more deacons.

I was at a church recently where the committee was so educated. After I'd answered one woman's question 14 times, the pastor answered it the same way I had and finally she was satisfied. Was it because he was a pastor giving the answer? Was it because he was male?

We are both ministers (pastors and deacons). Your pastor is called to be in the chancel blessing the sacraments. I'm called to be at the back door leading folks out into the world.

We do leading from the back of the room and we're not the presence that's in the front. Sometimes that takes away some of our authority. Sometimes people see you as less-than because you're not in a robe and a stole.

If I were a pastor or if I were wearing a collar, would you be treating me the same?

Sometimes people lump deacons in with college students/Lutheridge counselors.

The internship for deacons is so different. You make it yourself. You don't have anybody from the seminary that comes to visit. It doesn't seem to have the same value.

We discount youth and family ministry, we discount children, so therefore we discount the folks who work with them.

There are opportunities for revision of theological education.

I feel like Tammy is discounted in her role on staff. She sort of serves like a bishop for the Y&F staff. Tammy's our person but now she's been taken away as our person. It's easier for Tammy to understand our language.

Tammy helped me find my internship! I called and said, "Help!" Within less than an hour, she got me set up.

When I talked about doing an internship focusing on visitation to fill a need, the pastor I asked said, "I don't understand why you want to do this. Y'all (i.e. deacons) don't have to do that." I replied to the pastor, "Aren't you glad that wherever you did your internship, the pastor didn't feel that way."

We know that the synod doesn't help us find calls. The letters are written so differently for ordination candidates and for diaconal candidates. Deacons are totally left on their own to make their way. I hear congregations that are seeking pastoral care pastors. That would be an awesome role for deacons to fill.

Showing notices of congregations, they're now showing call postings as "Word & Sacrament/Word & Service." At first it felt like a win until I realized that it's really not that. It feels more like a throwaway, in other words, "as long as you have a pulse, we want you."

Diane Ryan is to be commended. She includes us. She probably was just needing preachers, but she is one person who looks to us as preachers. Our synod is light years better than other synods. I'm thankful that we're having this conversation. I'm thankful for the intentionality of these conversations. We can preach the gospel, we can have prophetic voice, we can have people listen to us. Our call coordinator is not on either roster, she's expected to figure it all out. Yet, Tammy is still our advocate.

Because my husband's a pastor, I sometimes see call papers. Sometimes they're so blatantly 'deacon.' They say: youth, family, education, etc. He said, "Why is the synod office sending me call papers for you?"

Once there was a call that just seemed like me. One of the assistant to the bishops said it had my DNA all over it. Nothing ever came of it. When I asked later, I was told that "it was decided that you didn't have the qualifications for this."

Is it because we're Word & Service? Or because we're women? It's hard to know.

Is it like when your senior pastor is your supervisor? And you feel like you're on internship?

Associates who are women, women of color, we are all experiencing the white, male-centered systems. We have such a hard time leaning into the uncomfortable. How do we combat privilege?

Education is a big part of it. I've been asked in some interviews, "Do you plan to be at worship every Sunday?" (Of course! This is my job to be there, just like a clergy person!)

Also, educating about clergy couples and that the woman doesn't always follow the man.

I was wearing a pink blouse and my robe. Once a man said, "Oooh, you're looking nice!" Another parishioner, "I love how you color-coordinated with the Advent decorations."