

The Order of Deacon: Stepping stone to being ordained a pastor - 1

Episcopal Church: "You will serve as a deacon for at least 6 months before being ordained a priest."¹
The ELCA: "You will serve as a deacon for at least 6 months before being ordained a pastor."

Is this true? Not yet, but it will be before the Episcopal Church declares full communion with the ELCA.² As you may recall, the ELCA-Episcopal full communion agreement, *Called to Common Mission (CCM)*, is like a mortgage with a balloon payment. The ELCA did not need to have the full threefold Holy Orders in 1999. Rather, the ELCA was allowed to make gradually all the constitutional changes needed to conform to the threefold, sacramental episcopate of the Episcopal Church, as so it has:

- In 1999 the ELCA adopted *CCM*
- In 2016 the ELCA established the order of **deacon**, as *CCM* requires (§16).
- In 2019 the ELCA established **ordination** as the entry rite for deacons, as *CCM* requires (§16).
- In 2022 will the ELCA establish the **transitional diaconate**, implicit in *CCM* §16?

The ELCA **must have transitional deacons** before the Episcopal Church declares full communion has been achieved. Maybe this will happen in 2022. Or 2025.

Is ELCA **Bishop Michael Rinehart** (Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod) deceptive or naïve? He writes:

"Other traditions have two kinds of deacons. Permanent deacons are those who feel permanently called to a vocation of proclaiming the Word to the world and leading the church in service to the world. Transitional deacons are those who are preparing for ordination as priests. They will serve as deacons for a temporary time of preparation. **In our tradition, we do not see the diaconate as a stepping stone to Word and Sacrament ministry.**"³



Bp Michael Rinehart

To be sure, to make the office of deacon a stepping stone to being ordained a pastor is **an absolute contradiction** to Lutheran theology. Nevertheless, the ELCA will do ministry the Episcopal way. It's required by *CCM*.

For Lutherans: "God instituted the office of ministry, that is, **provided the gospel and the sacraments**. Through these, as through **means**, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the gospel."⁴ For the sake of good order the church calls certain individuals to serve in this public office. This calling is the essence of ordination, not some touch by a sacred hand which bestows special grace. To be sure, some Lutheran churches have deacons as a separate office but not as a pre-stage or stepping stone to being ordained a pastor.

In contrast, for Episcopalians, the Order of Deacon is a **required stepping stone** to being ordained a priest. All priests must first be ordained a deacon. While Episcopalians accept a wide spectrum of belief, they **require** the threefold historic episcopate, done according to the "Catholic tradition." For both Episcopalians and Catholics this structure is **sacramental and required**.⁵

By adopting *CCM* the ELCA agreed to do ministry the Episcopal way. **The ELCA has to do this**. The ELCA has to require that those seeking to be ordained as pastors **must first be ordained as deacons**. The ELCA will do this, just as surely as in 2016 the ELCA adopted the order of deacon, and in 2019 established "ordination" as the entry rite for deacons. Episcopalians not only require ordained deacons, they require transitional ordained deacons. The ELCA will do this.

What about Bishop Michael Rinehart? Is he one of the ELCA leaders who is knowingly misleading the church, or is he naïve and being used by others to mislead the church?

And what about bishops for life? The Episcopal Church requires the ELCA to adopt bishops for life. This, too, is implicit in *CCM* ¶16.

Coming soon: *The Living Lutheran*, March 2020, offers more misdirection on ordained deacons.



From *The Living Lutheran*, March 2020

¹ The Canons of the Episcopal Church, III.8.6.a, and 7.1 “**III.8. Of the Ordination of Priests. Sec 6. Ordination to the Diaconate for those called to the Priesthood** (a) “A Candidate must first be ordained Deacon before being ordained Priest; **Sec. 7 Ordination to the Priesthood** (a) A person may be ordained Priest: (1) after at least six months since ordination as a Deacon under this Canon and eighteen months from the time of acceptance of nomination by the Nominee as provided in III.8.2(b).” Bolding in original texts.

² “For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the characteristics of the goal of full communion—defined in its 1991 policy statement, ‘Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’—will be realized at this time [2001]. **For the Episcopal Church, full communion, although begun at the same time, will not be fully realized until both churches determine that in the context of a common life and mission there is a shared ministry of bishops in the historic episcopate**” (*CCM* ¶14). Bolding added here and below for emphasis.

“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**, which has been a constant requirement in Anglican polity since the Ordinal of 1662, **is precisely in order to secure the future implementation of the ordinals’ same principle in the sharing of ordained ministries.**” (*CCM* ¶16).

³ Bishop Michael Rinehart, “Ordination of Deacons,” *Connections* 10/31/2018. Available online.

⁴ Augsburg Confession, Article 5. *Book of Concord* (Tappert, 31; Kolb/Wengert 40, 41).

⁵ “Both traditions agree that **a sacramental rite** is a visible sign through which the grace of God is given by the Holy Spirit in the Church. **The rite of ordination is one of these rites.** Those who are ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands receive their ministry from Christ though those designated in the Church to hand it on; together with the office **they are given the grace needed for its fulfilment** (cf. *Ministry and Ordination* para. 14) Since New Testament times the Church has required such recognition and authorization for those who are to exercise the principal functions of *episcopo* in the name of Christ. This is what both traditions mean by **the sacramental rite of ordination.**”

“Both traditions affirm the re-eminence of baptism and the eucharist as sacraments ‘necessary to salvation.’ This does not diminish their understanding of **the sacramental nature of ordination, as to which there is no significant disagreement between them,**” *Elucidation* (1979). *Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission* 1979, adopted by Lambeth in 1988 and the ECUSA General Convention in 1988. *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level II.* Eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 86.