

“The following response was written and shared with the membership of NAME, who were asked whether they wished to sign the statement. The intent was that should a significant percentage of NAME members (set at two-thirds by the executive committee) sign the statement, it would then be sent to the convention floor committee and District presidents. Although a majority of NAME members supported the statement, due to a large number of abstentions and ministries also preparing their own statements and not wanting to pen their names to two or more statements, the two-thirds majority was not achieved. Therefore, the executive committee did not feel that we could in good conscience submit it as a statement representing the views of NAME.” -- The Executive Committee of NAME, Winter 2015

N.A.M.E. Response to the Report & Recommendations of Task Force 4-06A (Licensed Lay Deacons)

Two-Page Document with Expanded Commentary

The Purpose of N.A.M.E. (North American Mission Endeavor): *To vigorously make disciples through a movement that multiplies new starts in the LC-MS.*

NAME is the only LC-MS network of LC-MS District Mission Executives and leaders of other organizations partnering with districts to multiply new starts in the LC-MS. NAME met Sept 24-25th with two representatives of the Task Force (TF) 4-06A (Revs. Vogel and Sommerfeld) to discuss the report and its recommendations. NAME appreciates the work and thoughtful approach portrayed by the task force, and we thank them for their service.

The report of TF 4-06A recommends, in brief:

- All trained, ecclesiastically supervised Licensed Lay Deacon (LLD) ministry be phased out by January 2018.
- Deacons older than 55 be ordained through a regional colloquy process.
- Deacons younger than 55 apply and enter the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) training at seminary.
- Congregations served by LLDs a) become multi-point ministries served by one pastor, b) be served by inactive and retired pastors, c) be assisted by Synod to cover the cost for SMP training for any deacons needing financial assistance, d) utilize technology such as “live-streamed sermons or services.”
- A potential role of “Evangelist,” an “outreach” role not allowed to administer sacraments or preach.

NAME believes this issue falls primarily within the area of ministry practice: We have great freedom in the Gospel to accomplish mission and ministry within our existing structures and congregational polity (as illustrated in the 1981 CTCR document, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature*). NAME respectfully disagrees with TF 4-06A’s recommendations that press all deacons into tracks to ordination. Certainly, some LLDs have felt called by God to enter the Office of the Public Ministry. Developing a simpler, less difficult, path to that goal is of great need. However, eliminating LLDs, a crucial auxiliary function that extends the Office of the Public Ministry, is not in keeping with LC-MS ministry practice. Eliminating LLD’s also inhibits the law of love. That is, many in need of God’s grace and mercy will be denied that opportunity as a result of these recommendations. Information gathered from the districts and contexts in which NAME leaders serve indicates that the removal of trained, ecclesiastically supervised LLD ministry would eliminate or severely reduce Word and Sacrament ministry, particularly among small, poor, aging, remote, or new congregations. Given the trends within and without the LC-MS, NAME is especially concerned that eliminating LLD ministry will restrict the ability of districts and congregations to multiply new starts*.

Why Licensed Lay Deacon Ministry Is Necessary

- The “shrinking middle” -- increasing numbers of smaller churches on both ends of the life spectrum (birth and death) unable to support full-time workers.
- Secularization -- Antagonism and ambivalence to Christianity, bivocational workers have credibility.
- Generation gaps -- (Barna’s “Five Trends Among the Unchurched 2015” is a recommended overview).
- Scope of the mission task -- population of the USA will go from 321 million to 400 million by 2051.
- Data from 26 years of LLD ministry supports the role in extending mission and supporting the Office of the Public Ministry:
 - Congregations served by LLD’s have been brought back from “death” to the point of calling a full-time pastor,
 - New starts served by LLD’s gained viability over time and called a full time pastor, and
 - Many LLD’s have continued on to seminary and ordination.
- Emerging Use of LLD’s as Church Planters under Supervision – as we move from servicing existing congregations to mission outreach, we have multiple accounts of LLD’s helping plant new congregations, and then aiding as part of a team ministry in bringing them to maturity.
- Hundreds of Aging and “Baby” Churches in Emergency Situations

* NAME may in the future provide a document that includes data, trends, and other evidence at our disposal used to arrive at this decision as executives of mission and mission partners.

- Churches are entering late-stages of the life-cycle as the Boomer generation ages. Additional financial burden placed on these aging or newly born churches to send a worker to SMP is akin to pushing them out of the hospital to fend for themselves before they are able.
- The Financial Burden for Ministry Training -- The SMP program, though beneficial as part of the spectrum of training in the LC-MS, is minimum 32K, but often closer to 50K. This cost for ministry cannot be carried by most bivocational leaders, small starts, and congregations dealing with transition issues.
- The “cost” for a full-time pastor continues to rise -- Cost for typical church worker full time with benefits fresh out of seminary is *(fill in the blank for your district)*. This is for the “cheapest” version of a full time church worker.
- An Effective “Farm System” for Leaders -- The LLD programs across the districts function as a type of “farm system” that, if removed as recommended by TF 4-06A, would immediately and severely limit the growth of identifying and recruiting high level leaders.
- A Crucial Perception by Licensed Lay Deacons, Themselves, of the Function of their Role -- LLD’s *do not want to be a pastor and perceive correctly that the supervising pastor role carries with it greater responsibility*. They see their role as extending the office of the ministry under supervision of a pastor (who bears the ultimate responsibility for the ministry) for a time (annually re-licensed). Those who want to be a pastor take steps to become one through the usual channels.
- A Robust Vetting Process -- The vetting process that occurs in congregations (no deacon “self identifies”) to identify LLD’s is robust and takes time, training, district, circuit, and congregational oversight.
- Strong Accountability in Districts -- Protocols developed for LLD’s in districts include not only training, interviews, supervision, but also annual continuing education as a required component.
- LC-MS theologians have divergent readings of AC 14 and the theology of The Office of the Public Ministry. Many see LC-MS heritage, the Lutheran confessions, and scriptures supporting LLD as an extending function or auxiliary office under the Office of the Public Ministry. In other words, this is more of an issue regarding practice (*adiaphron*) than theology.
 - One NAME exec put it this way: "In my contemplation and reading of the TF 4-06A's recommendations, I believe they may undermine the historic Lutheran understanding of the Office of the Holy Ministry. TF 4-06A's recommendations fortify an existing culture of the 'ordination mill' by producing pastors with lesser training, education, and over-sight and creating different stripes of a superior/inferior 'pastoral office' within the LC-MS."
 - Another NAME exec put it this way: “The clergy-as-sole-provider framework for ministry no longer matches the secular society in which we live. Our situation is more closely aligned with the 1st Century. TF 4-06A only provides solutions that allow the pastor to remain as the only direct provider of word and sacrament, rather than the chief servant on a team of leaders who, under his supervision and the umbrella of The Office of the Ministry, provide word and sacrament in a responsible way. The explanation by TF 4-06A of their new suggested role of ‘Evangelist,’ is especially concerning for its reliance on an ‘outreach’ concept (bring them to the church building and the pastor who will teach them rightly) that is no longer relevant to, nor able to reach, the vast majority of people in the world.”

TF 4-06A Did Not Mention the Following Crucial Issues As Recommendations (NAME wants to know why)

- We Need More Time
 - Due to the nature of the topic,
 - The diversity of perspectives and interpretations regarding The Office of the Public Ministry and its application within this era, and,
 - The magnitude of impact on congregations using LLD’s,
 - *It is highly appropriate to take extra time on this issue.*
- Voting does Not Achieve Consensus -- Voting as a Synod on this issue may not be the most appropriate method to achieve consensus.
- District Oversight Could Be Considered Transparochial -- Districts that use LLD’s could meet to refine a common protocol for identification, training, and supervision (as already outlined by the protocol developed by the Council of Presidents).
- Supervisors -- Regular training/continuing education for supervisors of deacons as well as deacons.
- “Emergency” Situations -- should be broadly defined (rather than restricted) to match the context of our secular, often anti-Christian culture, and the status of our small, poor, aging, remote, or new congregations.
- Use of the Concordia University system (both on-campus and via online classrooms) as a unified regional training format for LLD ministry, with further potential to also de-centralize the training for the SMP program. Training could be done for approximately \$350 per course in this format.
- Continue to encourage LLD’s to consider existing routes to ordination when it is feasible for both the man and the congregation he is serving.