What is a Deacon in the ELCA?

Did you know that, in addition to the office of pastor, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has theologically educated leaders who are called to ministries of service? We are blessed to have Deacons who serve on the roster of “Word and Service” providing ministry exemplifying the life of Christ-like service to all persons and creation: nurturing, healing, leading, advocating dignity and justice, and equipping the whole people of God for their life of witness and service within and beyond the congregation for the sake of God's mission in the world.

This last responsibility of deacons, to empower and equip others, is a keystone for the emerging ministry of deacons of the ELCA. Deacons are deeply engaged in proclamation and service in a variety of roles, whether in a secular context or in a congregational ministry or in another church-related setting. Whatever their particular role or context, every deacon of the ELCA has a two-fold focus to serve the neighbor and to empower, equip, and encourage the people of God for their daily baptismal vocation of service to the neighbor and care of creation. This ministry is understood to be distinct from, alongside, and in mutual complementarity with the ministries of pastors of the ELCA.

The ministry of Word and Service has roots in the New Testament ministry of *diakonia*—servant ministry. The ministry personified by Jesus is diakonia. Servant ministry transforms leadership from power over others to empowerment of others. Although this ministry has taken different forms throughout the church's history, and many different names, its emphasis has always been: to give leadership to the church's mission, to serve people where they live, to create communities of mutuality and empowerment, to speak God's word to the world and in turn to speak the needs of the world to the church, to wash feet and work for change

The ministry of the diaconate, that is of deacons who serve as called ministers of Word and Service, have been recognized by churches throughout history and around the world. The earliest deacon of the Bible was Stephen. The ELCA continues to seek to honor the significance of deacons serving at the intersection of church and world, bringing a sharper focus to the ways the church responds to the needs of people. As of January 1, 2017, those who have served on the lay rosters as associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses are now part of one unified roster of ‘Ministers of Word and Service,’ and are called deacons. This new roster more closely aligns with the global church, providing clarity and empowerment to those the church calls to serve.