

There still seems to be a great deal of confusion about the name change from Lay Speaking Ministries to Lay Servant Ministries. Change is always difficult and this situation has been compounded because we have a new ministry within Lay Servant Ministries that has an old name – Lay Speaker.

Recently I was asked to speak prior to the opening worship service for a district training event. Most of the lay servants in attendance were concerned about what they needed to do to continue to be Lay Speakers. I asked the question, “How many of you have been called by either your district director or the district superintendent in the past 3 years to fill the pulpit for several weeks in a church that is not your own?” One lady raised her hand. When I queried her she had misunderstood the question and said she been asked by her pastor to speak in her own church on several occasions.

With the exception of the name – nothing has changed for those who are now called Lay Servants. Most attendees were surprised that as Lay Servants they were still free to do almost anything they had previously done as Lay Speakers, including fill the pulpit if asked by their own pastor, the pastor of another church, or in a nursing home or retirement center. And requirements for continuing certification had not changed. Lay Speaker, under the *2012 Book of Discipline* (BOD) is a ministry within Lay Servant Ministries and it is for those individuals who feel gifted to preach and desire to be “sent” by their district, either the director or the superintendent, to fill a pulpit for a short period of time without compensation. The term used in the BOD is “pulpit supply.”

To me, this is very much like the idea of being a Stephen Minister. Perhaps you take a course in congregational care, discover you have a gift in this area and commit to an additional 50 hours of training, followed by continuous training, in order to function as a Stephen Minister. The difference here is that you must continue to be a Certified Lay Servant in order to be a Lay Speaker. This new process assures the district superintendent that whomever she/he is sending out to preach has an understanding of scripture, centered in Methodist tradition, heritage and polity, and that their messages will not lead a congregation away from Methodist doctrine.

Most of the people I talk to are surprised to learn that based on my current position I do not feel the need to pursue the Lay Speaker qualification at this time. I have many more opportunities to speak, both inside and outside of the pulpit, than I can possibly meet. As a Certified Lay Servant I am empowered to speak to groups about our ministry, teach classes, participate in congregational care activities, and work with various other ministries in my church, district, and conference. For these reasons being a Lay Speaker is not a ministry that I am currently pursuing. If I change my mind in the future I will take the few courses I have yet to complete, have one of my speaking engagements evaluated in accordance with the directives of the conference and become a Lay Speaker. Presently I do not see that this will enhance the ministries God has called me to.

I would like to leave you with the wisdom of the Apostle Peter from his first letter: “<sup>10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4: 10-11)

In Christ’s service,  
Johnnie Draughon  
Director, Lay Speaking Ministries  
Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church.