

Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries

These guidelines relate to bylaw 7.61.01. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* that addresses the issue of providing Word and Sacrament ministry through the use of synodically authorized ministry, where it is not possible to provide appropriate ordained pastoral leadership. Those who are authorized for such ministry within a synod are not rostered by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (unless already serving on a roster of this church) but are authorized to provide a specific ministry within a particular setting for a designated period of time.

Principle 40 and related sections in “The Use of the Means of Grace—A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament,” which was adopted “for guidance and practice” by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, also addresses this issue.

A. **Identification of Need:** The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry where ordained pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time and where synodically authorized ministry may be appropriate. Because of the relationship of an authorized lay ministry to those serving in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastors serving congregations within the area where this ministry need is located normally will be consulted in this determination.

B. **Invitation to Service:** An individual who demonstrates the potential for service is invited by the synod to enter a program of preparation.

An individual who has been removed from rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by reason of misconduct, or has been denied continuance in candidacy by reason of misconduct is precluded from serving in a synodically authorized ministry of this church.

C. **Qualifications:** A person invited to prepare for a synodically authorized ministry should be an active member of an ELCA congregation for at least one year. Prior to preparing to serve in synodically authorized ministry an individual must have:

1. Been recommended by the individual’s pastor and congregation council;
2. Consulted with synodical staff and/or the synodical committee responsible for the synod’s program of preparation; and
3. Demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in a program of preparation leading to possible service in a synodically authorized ministry.

In making its determination concerning an individual’s eligibility to serve in a synodically authorized ministry, the synod will interview the applicant and will obtain written responses to the “Entrance Information Questions” in the “Candidacy Manual.” The synod will also obtain a background check, as outlined in the “Candidacy Manual,” on each individual being considered for authorization in the synod.

D. **Synodical Committee for Authorized Ministry:** An appropriate synodical board or committee may be appointed by the Synod Council to provide the synodical bishop with recommendations concerning the authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod.

This committee may be a sub-committee of the synodical Candidacy Committee. When it is a separate committee, it should be closely related to the synod Candidacy Committee. In either case, the work of the two is distinct.

The synodical committee or synod staff determines the educational program within the synod for persons considered for service in an authorized ministry; determines the eligibility for individuals to enter this program of preparation; and advises the bishop on the suitability of an individual for service in a synodically authorized ministry.

E. **Program of Preparation:** The synod defines the program of preparation for an authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament, consistent with guidelines developed by the Division for Ministry, and in consultation with an ELCA seminary. Such programs shall prepare persons to have knowledge and abilities in the following areas:

1. Bible;
2. Lutheran theology, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confession of Faith and polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
3. Worship;
4. Spiritual discernment and faith development;
5. Leadership expectations and identity;
6. Contextual understanding; and
7. Pastoral skills including preaching, catechetics, worship leadership, visitation, pastoral care, and outreach.

The program of preparation can be accomplished in a variety of ways including educational programs that utilize current rostered leaders within the synod, ELCA seminaries and continuing education centers, the ELCA *SELECT* curriculum, and other appropriate resources.

The synod determines when an individual is prepared for service within the synod. There is no guarantee of service within the synod and participation in a program of preparation does not mean that authorization for service will follow.

F. **Authorization for Service:** When the synod has determined that a specific need exists, and with the consent of the congregation to be served, an individual may be authorized for service within the synod by the synodical bishop, in consultation with the Synod Council. Such service shall fulfill assigned responsibilities, and author-

ization shall be for a specific period of time not to exceed one year, unless terminated earlier.

Persons who serve in synodically authorized ministry are to meet the following criteria:

1. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ;
2. satisfactory participation in the synodical program of preparation, including demonstration of appropriate ministry skills;
3. knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of this church; and
4. willingness to meet this church's expectations concerning the personal conduct and behavior of persons serving in public ministry as described in "Vision and Expectations – Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

A person authorized by the synodical bishop is then installed in such service.

- G. **Supervision and Accountability:** Accountability for synodically authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council. Accountability for a synodically authorized ministry in a non-congregational setting within a synod is the direct responsibility of the governing body of the entity that conducts that ministry, or if there is no such entity, the Synod Council. In all cases, a synodically authorized minister is to be under the direct supervision of an ordained minister appointed by the synodical bishop.

The supervising ordained minister shall report to the governing body and seek the advice and counsel of the synodical bishop or appropriate synodical staff person in relationship to the synodically authorized minister.

- H. **Renewal and Revocation:** Renewal of authorization after one year may be given when a demonstrated need exists for its continuation. This need is determined by the synodical bishop at the request and with the consent of the congrega-

tion or other ministry within the synod being served, consultation with the supervising ordained minister, and a review of both the ministry setting and the service of the authorized minister.

Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical bishop, who need not specify the reason.

- I. **Letter of Authorization:** The authorization may be evidenced by an appropriate letter describing the terms and conditions of the authorization or license. The description also may limit activities authorized to be conducted.
- J. **Marriage Services.** Where permitted by law, synodically authorized ministers may officiate at marriage services for members of the congregation in which they are authorized to serve, with the concurrence of the congregation and the approval of the synodical bishop.
- K. **Other Matters:** Persons may serve in a synodically authorized ministry only within the synod that has authorized that ministry. A synod may consider for authorization an individual trained and authorized by another synod, based on the individual's qualifications and ability to meet the new synod's criteria for authorized ministry.

Persons authorized for such ministries are not to wear clerical stoles, and should not wear clerical collars unless authorized by the synodical bishop. The title "Pastor" is reserved for ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synodically authorized ministers.

Synodically authorized ministers are not to offer therapy or counseling as a part of their ministries, but may provide appropriate pastoral care.

*Adopted by the Church Council
as policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
April 1995 [CC95.04.47t] and amended April 2005, and April 2006*

Revised page issued April 11, 2006