

Approval Essay

May 2016 – May 2018



Domestic Mission Unit
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Dear Candidate for Rostered Ministry:

The Approval Interview with your Candidacy Committee is the final step in the process of candidacy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The decision to approve a candidate who will provide leadership as a public minister is among the most significant this church makes as we seek to carry out God's mission in the world. Approval confirms the call that has led you in your spiritual formation and theological preparation. Assuring that qualified leaders serve on the rosters of the ELCA is essential for the people and congregations of our church.

Your Approval Interview provides an opportunity to review and inquire in depth into your readiness for rostered ministry as a rostered leader. Your Candidacy Committee will use your Approval Essay as an indication of your competence in certain vital areas of ministry, and as a tangible expression of your faith as it has developed throughout the candidacy process.

All approved candidates participate in the ELCA churchwide assignment process. Please remember that our rostered leaders serve the whole church - the needs are many for varieties of places and forms of ministry. More information on the churchwide assignment can be found in *the Assignment Process Guide* available from your seminary or candidacy committee. This guide, as well as your forms for the churchwide assignment, can be accessed at www.elca.org/resources/assignment-process

On behalf of the Domestic Mission Unit, we send blessings and appreciation to you for your faithful participation in the candidacy process. It is our hope that your preparation and formation have been challenging and fulfilling. May God's spirit be strong in your heart and mind as you prepare this essay, participate in the interview, and offer yourself in the service of the church for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Greg Villalon – Director for Candidacy
Ms. Sandra Mejia-Vega – Program Director for Candidacy Data and Resources
and your partners in the Domestic Mission Unit

APPROVAL ESSAY

There is a new paradigm emerging in the 21st century for how the Church envisions and engages with God's mission in the world. As a result, the ELCA is adopting a new lens for missional leadership in all aspects of ministry with the hope that our church is moving into a new chapter in which rostered leaders are: prepared for ministry in light of God's mission for the sake of the world, are encouraged to move away from "maintenance models" of ministry, and embrace partnerships between church members and community leaders. North American congregations today are a mission field. Christian public leaders sent into this mission field are formed by the Triune God's presence and activity in the world as a missionary God. Trinitarian theology is therefore a foundational framework for missional leadership.

Though others exist, the following six characteristics of missional leadership identified by the ELCA, which will be referenced in the Approval questions, are essentially Trinitarian in nature, i.e., they are guided by the historical interpretations and new leadership paradigms emerging from our understanding of the Trinity as a sending, relational God. The six characteristics of missional leaders identified are:

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, missional leaders are:

- 1. Rooted in the presence and activity of the Triune God.** Missional leaders nurture a vibrant relationship with the Triune God and lead Christian communities to do likewise as they participate in God's mission for the sake of the world.
- 2. Engage the way of the cross.** Missional leaders show people through word and deed the crucified Christ and enable them to envision what God is doing in their lives.
- 3. Relate theology with context and culture.** Missional leaders understand and interpret context and culture through the lens of Christian faith, and our confessional grounding which leads us to prayerfully discern opportunities in which the Gospel can be understood and shared by all people in their cultural contexts.
- 4. Evangelize.** Missional leaders actively believe and carry out Christ's command to go out and share the Gospel with neighbors.
- 5. Cultivate Christian community and discipleship.** Missional leaders effectively form and lead Christian communities which foster the growth of disciples of Jesus Christ.
- 6. Equip and send disciples into the world.** Missional leaders prepare disciples to live out their Christian faith in the world by sharing the Gospel in word and deed with neighbors for the care and redemption of all that God has made.

The overarching theme of this year's approval essay concerns the church's role in God's mission in and toward the world. This theme is motivated by a desire for a deep and rich conversation about the church and its participation in God's mission. Note the three components of the theme—Person in Ministry, Core Theological Commitments, and Proclamation and Context. These richly evocative components connect in a myriad of ways. In the work of these essays, candidates for rostered ministry are encouraged to explore the interrelation of these components conceptually and in the practice of ministry, with their responses rooted in the scriptures as well as in the distinctive accents of the Lutheran theological tradition. As candidates reflect on the Approval questions, they are encouraged to have conversations related to the topics with pastors and colleagues, remembering that the final essay submitted must be their own.

Candidacy for Ordained, Consecrated, and Commissioned Ministry

Instructions: Four topics are to be addressed in this essay: Scripture; Theological Reflection; Integration; Person in Ministry.

1. All roster tracks will answer each question.
2. Keep your audience in mind as you prepare your essay. It may be read by faculty at an ELCA seminary, as well as rostered leaders and lay people on your candidacy committee. While it is important to provide evidence of your academic study, it is also important that your essay be clear, interesting and that the directions be followed.
3. Prepare the essay double-spaced, 12 pt. type, on white paper so that clear, legible copies may be provided for your faculty panel/candidacy committee.
4. Your essay should be about 19-24 pages in length.
5. Type your name at the top right-hand corner of each page and number each page sequentially.
6. Type the question that you are answering in each section.
7. You are encouraged to be in conversation with theological partners, including cultural references, theologians, commentaries and contemporaries. The final writing is to be your own. Include bibliography and footnotes as appropriate.
8. Send a copy of the completed essay to your candidacy committee no later than the date requested. If applicable, please send a copy to your seminary as well.
9. Please bring a copy of your essay to your approval interview.

Essay Questions

1. PERSON IN MINISTRY (3-4 pages)

- A. What is your understanding of God's mission in the world? Describe your faith in the Triune God and how your Trinitarian faith has informed your understanding of God's mission?
- B. What community of faith helped shape your understanding of God's mission and your gifts for missional leadership? Identify missional leadership gifts that were developed and strengthened by your experiences in this formative faith community and provide a few examples.
- C. As an outgrowth of your personal gifts for missional leadership, envision how you will nurture and empower others to serve as missional leaders through their vocation and participation in the life of the church. Within your response integrate an expression of a Lutheran understanding of vocation.

2. CORE THEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS (5-6 pages)

- A. What key theological insights have been influential in your development as a missional leader in the Church as it participates in God's mission in world? Include distinctive biblical and Lutheran theological building blocks which you have used to construct a theology of mission that informs your current understanding.
- B. Describe how these key theological insights informed the missional leadership experience you described above in #1.
- C. What are the distinctive contributions of the Lutheran theological tradition for both (1) the

Church's discernment of and participation in God's mission in the world and (2) the formation of disciples for mission in a pluralistic society?

3. MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP (4-5 pages)

- Based on your responses to the previous two questions, especially your theological constructs above, how has your understanding of yourself as a missional leader been shaped by your personal faith in the Triune God and your key theological building blocks?
- Within your response integrate scriptural insights regarding:
 1. God's mission in the world
 2. missional leadership
- Include a reflection on the positive aspects of the life experiences you listed above and what you learned theologically and practically that will inform your future ministry as a missional leader.

4. PROCLAMATION AND CONTEXT (7-9 pages)

- *Candidates for Word and Sacrament ministries should respond to A (7-9 pages total including the sermon manuscript and reflection on the sermon).*
 - *Candidates for Word and Service ministries may respond to either A or B. (7-9 pages total)*
5. Select and submit a sermon you preached during this past year that highlights your role as a missional leader who participates in the formation of disciples.
- Include a brief description of the context in which the sermon was preached that had a direct effect on the crafting of this sermon.
 - Describe the core biblical claims in the text, the approach you used in exegesis of the text, and the theological convictions in your chosen context that informed the sermon.
 - In light of your exegetical engagement with the biblical text(s), what did you hope would happen to the hearers as a result of hearing this sermon? In what ways did the feedback you solicited and received match your hopes? How might you amend the sermon to equip the hearers' missional role?
 - Include a description of the Triune God's active role in the preparation and preaching of this sermon.
 - How does missional preaching impact how the hearers' live out the faith in daily life? What do you envision your role to be in that process? Include in your response specific ways you would carry out this role.

OR

B. Provide an example of a teaching or service project during this past year that highlights your role as a missional leader seeking to shape disciples.

- Include a brief description of the context in which this teaching or project was carried out that had a direct effect on the crafting of the teaching or project.

- Describe the core biblical claims undergirding the teaching or project and the theological convictions in this setting that informed the project.
- Include a description of the Triune God's active, missional role in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the teaching or project.
- In light of your exegetical engagement with the biblical text(s), what did you hope would happen to the participants as a result of being involved in this teaching or project? In what ways did the feedback you solicited and received match your hopes?
- How might you amend the teaching or project to equip the hearers' living out their faith in daily life? What do you envision your role to be in that process? Include specific ways you would carry out this role.