

DIFFERENT GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT



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

Different Gifts, One Spirit A Practical Resource on Working with Rostered Leaders & Seminarists Who Are Differentlyabled

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7

God created all of humankind in God's own image, giving each person special gifts and talents through which the Holy Spirit works. We, as humans, sometimes ignore what God has done because of the stereotypes and fears we create for ourselves. These stereotypes can cause a breakdown in communication that leaves both sides feeling hurt and confused. As Christians looking for leaders we are called by God to put aside our own fears and prejudices and see all people as instruments of God's work in the world.

ELCA pastor with a disability

To the Rostered Leader or the Prospective Rostered Leader

As a rostered leader or prospective rostered leader with a disability, the reality is, the Church may not always be receptive to your service. Through this guide, we hope to make your journey easier by providing you with suggestions for effectively working your way through the Call process.

- Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life!
- Share information regarding yourself and your disability with your synod office so they will be prepared to represent you appropriately. Being open about your needs and expectations will make the process smoother for all involved.
- Be open about your disability. Talking about your disability will create an easier atmosphere for communication. Understand that people may not be immediately comfortable with your disability. Encourage a few questions. This will help to clear up any misconceptions or misinformation about living with a disability.

- When meeting a Call committee, be prepared with information and questions about the ministry of the congregation. This will help to focus the discussion away from your disability during the interview.
- Find support, if possible, from another church worker who has been through this process before. It will be important for you to be able to express your fears and frustrations.
- Talk about your disability as a part of your work in the Church. Emphasize that it is a part of who you are.
- Plan ahead of time how you will answer questions about your disability. If you have an "invisible disability" such as a developmental disability or mental illness be prepared to share that information at the beginning of the Call process. Be ready to talk with the Call committee about any necessary accommodations you may need in either the church building or the parsonage.
- Be patient! The Call process takes time for anyone.

To the Synod Candidacy Committee

As a synod candidacy committee, you have the important responsibility of discerning who will be approved for rostered ministry in the ELCA. You will be the first ELCA committee that has the opportunity to model inclusive behavior toward candidates with disabilities. Here are some suggestions on things to do and not to do when meeting with a candidate who has a disability.

- Be open to the possibility that the work of God can be accomplished in many ways. All God's people are "differently abled" in some way.
- While you will want to ask some questions about the person's disability, do not make that the focus of all your questions. Ask the same type of discernment questions you would ask any candidate.
- Avoid making assumptions. No two people with disabilities are alike or deal with their disability in the same way.
- Encourage the candidate to talk about how their disability has shaped their life and their sense of Call.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere by making sure that the area for the meeting and any other space that is used is accessible to the needs of the candidate. Encourage the candidate to talk about any concerns he or she may have.

ELCA rostered leader with a disability

To the Call Committee

The call process is intimidating to anyone, but for someone with a disability, it can be even more difficult. Rostered leaders may fear they

have been turned down even before the interview takes place. The challenge for the Call committee is to conduct an interview which is equally fair to all candidates while still gathering the information they need. The challenge to the candidate is to talk about his or her style of ministry while still addressing the questions about his or her disability which will come up. Here are some suggestions for an interview process which will address both of these issues.

- Do not focus questions only on the disability but on the candidate as a person and as a church worker.
- Create a comfortable, accessible environment for the interview. Ask about any specific needs before the interview. Think about having a 2 day interview. This will allow time for you as a committee to interview the candidate, then debrief, and ask any new questions or clarifications the next day. It will also allow the candidate a time of refreshment and an opportunity to share additional information or ask clarifying questions on the second day.
- Try to limit the number of "how" questions (i.e. how will you give Communion? etc.). If these questions must be asked, try to ask them in a positive way. For instance, not "how will you...?" but "how can we assist you...?" Ask the same questions about style of ministry, theology, spiritual gifts, and passions as you would ask any other candidate.
- Be fair and realistic about the expectations you will place on the candidate.
- Clarify any necessary accommodations that will be needed by the candidate during the initial interview.
- When presenting the candidate to the congregation emphasize the gifts for ministry and not the disability. Be prepared to take a few minutes to answer any questions that may come up.

Positive and Negative Questions

Below are just a few examples of questions that can be asked regarding the candidate's disability. In general it is only fair to limit the number of these questions and concentrate instead on the skills for ministry that this candidate brings.

Negative — "How will you visit our members' homes since you're in a wheelchair?"

Positive — "What are your plans for visiting our members in their homes?"

Negative — "How will you serve Communion?"

Positive — "How can we assist you in serving Communion?"

Negative — "How will your disability limit your ministry?"

Positive — "How will your disability enhance your ministry?"

Looking to the future, the ELCA hopes that there be will many opportunities to include persons who are differently abled in the life of the Church. It is vitally important to use the many gifts and talents of people who are differently-abled to do the work God calls all people to.