First-call Process
For Approved Candidates in the ELCA

INTRODUCTION

At the March 2020 Conference of Bishops, the decision was made to change the assignment process in the hopes of creating a process that would be more flexible and respond better to the changing dynamics of the church.

Following the endorsement of the Conference of Bishops, a subgroup consisting of one bishop from each of the nine regions crafted the following steps in order to enact the new way in which candidates will be made available to serve the church.

The following proposed first-call process recognizes shifts in responsibilities from past patterns. This change in workloads can be anticipated only to a limited degree. As the first year of this process unfolds, a clarification of responsibilities and workload will need to be assessed. This will require a cooperative spirit of engagement by synods, candidacy and leadership managers (CALMs), seminaries, churchwide organization personnel, candidacy committees, candidates and bishops.

Ultimately, the success of this first-call process is the responsibility of the synod bishops, working together in their regions in concert with the abovementioned people and offices.

For purposes of this document, "home synod" refers to synod of candidacy and "home region" refers to region of the synod of candidacy.

The following is an introduction to the first-call process. Details follow later in the document.

Phase 1: Preapproval Conversation With Candidate

Trusting that the Holy Spirit works through candidates as well as through synods and churchwide bodies, synod bishops and/or synod staff meet individually with each candidate a few months before approval. The purpose of this conversation is to share with candidates the number of first-call opportunities throughout the church and to listen for candidates’ needs and concerns regarding their first call so that bishops can enter the regional consultation knowing what can work for each candidate.

Phase 2: Preapproval — Regional Consultation

The purpose of the Preapproval Regional Consultations is to seek the workings of the Holy Spirit for the missional needs of the church along with the intersection of the availability of calls and the hopes of candidates. Bishops and/or designated synod staff members for candidacy and mobility and the CALM for the region will meet on a regular basis.
These regional consultations will help to clarify the pathway forward for each candidate. There will be three possible outcomes from these consultations:

a) The candidate would be open to serving in the wider church.
b) The candidate would remain available for call within the synods of their home region.
c) The candidate would remain available for call in their home synod.

Phase 3: Post-approval — Working the Plan
Upon approval by a synod candidacy committee and preferences being agreed upon by the regional consultation, all candidates (including Mission Development and TEEM candidates) will be available to begin call processes. The candidate cannot accept a call until the bishop has verified with the seminary the candidate’s successful completion of their studies.

All candidates will be connected to a region for their first-call process. Should a candidate be connected to a region other than their home region, the receiving region’s consultation should agree on a priority process for call interviews. Normally, first-call candidates can be in the process within only one region at a time.

Home-synod bishops are responsible for the care of each candidate of their home synod until their candidates are called and rostered in a synod. At that time, candidates join the roster of the of their call.

DETAILED FIRST-CALL PROCESS
What follows is how the process would typically work. Increasingly, “typical” is becoming less so as various seminaries develop alternative paths toward completion of a candidate’s education. In those cases, it will be necessary for the candidate, the CALM, the seminary and the home-synod bishop (or staff) to be in communication. Regardless of when the process unfolds, the following steps should be completed.

Phase One: Preapproval — Conversation With Candidate
1. Candidate completes a Rostered Ministry Profile (RMP) and a Form X (condensed Form ABC to be developed by the churchwide organization) prior to the conversation with their home-synod bishop/staff. The churchwide organization will store the candidates’ paperwork.
2. Seminaries send Form D to the home synod. Bishops or designated staff are encouraged to consult with appropriate seminary representatives to gain additional information about the candidate that may help this process.
3. Bishops receive most recent listing of first-call openings around the country. This listing will be provided by the churchwide organization and updated twice a year with the help and coordination of the regional CALMs.
4. Home-synod bishops or assigned staff have individual conversations with candidates to get further clarity on both the needs of the church and the hopes and gifts of the candidate. Additional notes may be added to Form X based on this conversation to help facilitate the regional consultation.
5. Where possible, candidates will be encouraged to consider openness to the Holy Spirit for service in areas that are currently underserved. No assumptions or promises regarding either approval or placement/call/location are to be made to any candidate during this
time frame. The role and authority of the candidacy committee regarding the approval decision are paramount.

**Phase Two: Preapproval — Regional Consultation**

The CALM, bishops and/or assigned staff meet for a regional consultation to review all candidates whose approval is forthcoming, utilizing RMPs and forms as necessary. The regions can determine the frequency of these meetings. Three to six months prior to approval of candidates, the preapproval regional consultations will happen.

There will be three possible outcomes from these consultations:

a) The candidate would be open to serving in the wider church.
b) The candidate would remain available for call within the synods of their home region.
c) The candidate would remain available for call in their home synod.

For candidates in category “a,” the regional consultation will review the number of first-call openings around the country and the needs and preferences of these candidates and will recommend a priority order of preferred region(s) in which these candidates could interview. Following the regional consultation but prior to approval, the CALM will communicate with the CALMs in those preferred region(s) and report back to the home-synod bishop.

If an adjustment needs to be made, the CALM and the home-synod bishop could prioritize a new region in which the candidate could interview. Such adjustments will be reported back to the home-region bishops by the CALM.

For candidates in category “b,” the bishops will determine in which synod within the region the candidates will first interview.

For candidates in category “c,” the home-synod bishop takes responsibility for the interview process.

Candidates remain under the care of their home synod and that bishop no matter where they are interviewing.

The regions are now responsible for setting these dates and communicating the dates of the regional consultations for the upcoming year to the assignment team at the churchwide organization. A calendar of these dates will be published by the assignment team and communicated to seminaries and candidates. The CALMS will gather these dates from the region and communicate them to the assignment team on a calendar-year basis.

Ultimately, the success of this regional consultation is the responsibility of the bishop of each synod in that region.
Phase 3: Post-approval — Working the Plan

1. The candidacy committee meets with the candidate for approval. If approval is denied, no first-call process takes place. Where approval is granted, the candidacy committee fills out and submits the Candidacy Approval Form, which is stored with the candidate documents at the churchwide organization.

2. The approved candidate is informed by the home-synod bishop of the synod that will provide their first interviews. The candidate may begin interviewing immediately but cannot accept a call until the seminary has verified the candidate’s successful completion of their studies.

3. The home-synod bishop/staff monitor the candidate’s progress in receiving interviews. The candidate shall keep the home-synod bishop/staff updated regularly.

4. If a candidate in this process fails to receive an interview or a call within three to nine months, the home-synod bishop should consult with the candidate and applicable CALM to determine which of the following actions should be taken next:
   a. Continue the current process.
   b. Bring the candidate paperwork back to a regional consultation with their home region.

Candidate paperwork can return to regional consultations as many times as needed.

PERTINENT INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Bishops are encouraged to be in communication with one another regarding candidates and call openings.

Home-synod bishops are expected to work with candidates to assist in placements for calls.

Candidates are not to reach out to any bishop other than their home-synod bishop or the bishop in the synod in which they are interviewing.

Candidates must have their approval decision renewed annually by their candidacy committee. Those who do not receive a call within three years of their approval must be reapproved by their home-synod candidacy committee as per the Candidacy Manual.

Clergy couples or people anticipating becoming part of a clergy couple shall engage in conversation about the first-call process with their respective home-synod bishops in order to facilitate a “best case scenario” for placement at the respective regional consultations.

Capstone Internship candidates will be a part of the regional consultations as well. Due to the somewhat altered timing of the conclusion of their internship responsibilities, it will be important that by six months prior to their completion of the internship, the RMP and Form X are completed and submitted. As with all approval decisions, Form D is completed and posted by the seminary.
EXAMPLES

a) Candidates open to serving beyond the region of their home synod.

Rebecca is a seminary graduate candidate. During the process leading up to approval, Rebecca and her bishop discussed her desire and sense of call to serve the wider church. As she completes her RMP and her Form X, Rebecca indicates several types of ministry in various regions of the ELCA. She is asked to prioritize those regions. During the regional consultation leading up to her approval, these are reviewed. As approval approaches, Rebecca and the CALM discuss her priorities. She has a first priority for the Western Rocky Appalachian Synod in Region 10. The candidacy manager connects with her/his counterpart in that region, who brings her RMP and Form X to the Region 10 consultation. Following her approval, Rebecca is in contact with the CALM of Region 10, who connects her with the appropriate synod for the call process. Rebecca remains under the care of her home synod until a call is issued.

Juanita is a seminary graduate candidate with Spanish language skills and cultural awareness that make her ideal for a call in a Latinx context. However, her home synod does not have a call opportunity for her and neither does her home synod’s region. Her gifts are in high demand across the ELCA. As she completes her RMP and Form X, she indicates a few regions where she is open to serving. At the regional consultation, the CALM is asked on behalf of the region to communicate with counterparts in the regions in which Juanita has indicated preferences. Juanita’s RMP is then given to regions based on a prioritization of her openness as well as the needs of the mission of the church. In the case where more than one region/synod needs someone with Juanita’s skills, the regional CALM convenes a Zoom meeting with the two bishops and Juanita. Once again, it is paramount that the gifts and needs match.

b) Candidates remaining available for call within the region of their home synod.

Theodore is a seminary graduate candidate. During the process leading up to the approval, Theodore’s gifts along with desires seem best utilized in another synod within the region of his home synod. During the regional consultation, an appropriate match for a possible call is determined. Following Theodore’s approval, he begins interviewing in that synod. Theodore continues the call process in another synod in the region. Should the initial call not come to fruition, the bishops would bring the RMP to the next regional consultation. Once he is called, he is then rostered in that synod. Throughout the process, the bishop of Theodore’s home synod of candidacy remains his bishop until a call is completed.
c) Candidates remaining available for call in their home synod.

Juan is a TEEM candidate in his home synod. He remains under the care of his home synod, which works with him and the congregation to complete the call process.

Julia is a seminary graduate candidate. She and her bishop have discussed call options within the synod and there is one available. At the regional consultation, Julia’s bishop has reviewed this with colleagues. Following approval, Julia remains under the care of her home synod and her bishop initiates the call process with the congregation.