

ELCA First-call Process Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the ELCA assignment process changing?
The previous assignment process was created for a different church in a different time, and the Conference of Bishops has decided it is time for a change. The goal is to have a system more flexible and responsive to the changing needs of candidates, congregations and the church at large.
2. When do these changes take effect?
On Jan. 31, 2021.
3. What will happen with candidates approved between now and then?
Candidates approved for ordination prior to Jan. 31, 2021, should contact the bishop of their synod of candidacy (home-synod bishop). The current process, known as “administrative assignments,” will continue during this transition.
4. Will all candidates for ministry now be assigned to their home synod?
The word “assignment” will no longer be used. Candidates will still be encouraged to be open to serving the wider church, but they will remain under the care of their home-synod bishop until they accept a first call. The home-synod bishop will work with other bishops and with the regional candidacy and leadership managers (CALMs) to help secure the right first call for their candidates.
5. When will these regional consultations take place?
Each region will determine when and how frequently they will hold consultations.
6. What about candidates open to serving wherever the church needs them?
Candidates open to serving wherever the church needs them will have that opportunity. They will, however, remain under the care of their home-synod bishop until they receive a first call.
7. What happens if a candidate doesn’t receive a call in the first synod in which they interview?
The home-synod bishop will monitor the progress of first calls and contact their approved candidates as well as the bishop of the synod where the candidate is interviewing. If no new call is forthcoming in the interviewing synod, the home-synod bishop will work with the candidate, the interviewing synod’s bishop and the CALM to determine whether the candidate’s name should go to another synod. In general, first-call candidates will not be available to interview in more than one synod at a time.
8. What is the “Pentecost Group” mentioned on page 4?
This refers to the manner in which bishops can share the paperwork of candidates in between the current assignment consultations. The use of this group may be altered or expanded in the first-call process.

9. Can a candidate call another bishop and ask to be interviewed in their synod?
No. First-call candidates are to work through their home-synod bishop and have contact only with that bishop and the bishop of the synod in which they are currently interviewing.

10. What is the role of the bishop in the new first-call process?
The home-synod bishop shepherds the first-call process. The home-synod bishop (or a synod staff member acting on behalf of the bishop) interviews the candidate about their preferences, explains to the candidate where openings are available and works with other bishops and CALMs to arrange for an appropriate synod where first-call interviews will take place.

What is the role of the Synod Candidacy Committee in the new first-call process?

The role of the Synod Candidacy Committee does not change in this process. The committee accompanies the candidate and approves them for ministry. No interviews can take place until after the candidate has been approved by the committee. The role and priority of the committee and the candidacy process remain paramount in this new system.

11. What is the role of the region in the new first-call process?
The bishops of each region (or their assigned staff members) will meet regularly in “regional consultations” to determine where a candidate might interview. There are three possible outcomes: (a) somewhere outside the region, (b) within the region but not in the home synod or (c) within the home synod. These consultations will also include updates on the status of candidates awaiting calls.

12. What is the role of the seminary in the new first-call process?
The seminary is invited to express its views of where the candidate might best serve through documentation submitted to the churchwide organization that is made available to the home-synod bishop. Where appropriate and approved by the candidate, the seminary may contact the home-synod bishop or the bishop may contact the seminary. The seminary may also contact the CALMs to discuss the needs and gifts of candidates.

13. What is the role of the candidacy and leadership manager in the new first-call process?
The CALM shares with other CALMs and bishops the first-call openings in their region and throughout the church. They provide information on the gifts and needs of the candidates to other CALMs and bishops. They provide counsel to bishops to enable them to make their best choices in deciding where a first-call candidate should have their first interview.

14. What is the role of the first-call candidate in the new first-call process?
Prior to Approval, the first-call candidate meets with the bishop of their home synod to discuss their openness to the greater church, to share their needs and/or the needs of their family, and to express their hopes for their first-call setting. Though this process will take place prior to Approval, no interviews are to be conducted until after Approval. The candidate is to focus on Approval and the candidacy process. After Approval, the candidate will learn in which synod they will first interview, and as soon as the candidate

is approved, interviews may take place. However, the candidate cannot accept a call until after their seminary has certified that they have met the graduate requirements for their degree.

15. Where do I, as an approved candidate, go if the new process isn't working?

Please contact your home-synod bishop and the CALM for your synod. We recognize that it will take time to work out the bugs, and we ask for your patience and your prayers as we resolve any problems. The Conference of Bishops will regularly review this process and make adjustments as needed.