

Summary of Candidacy



[Holy Trinity Icon](#) by [Andrei Rublev](#) (15th Century Russian)

Commentary on the icon of the Holy Trinity (cover): Contemplation of the Holy Trinity as a relational, sending God is central to our faith and therefore guides the church in the discernment that is integral to the candidacy process. The Church invites all who engage in any aspect of the candidacy process – applicants, Candidacy Committee members, seminary faculty, congregations, campus ministries, candidates, and others – to center on God throughout the process and to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

<https://www.elca.org/Resources/Candidacy#StartHere>

Vocational Discernment and the ELCA Candidacy Process

As the Christian Church participates in God's mission in the world, there is a renewed awareness that God is making all things new. As both the Church and its contexts for ministry change, so do the leadership needs of the Church. New categories of leadership are already emerging and will likely continue to emerge for the foreseeable future.

The ELCA candidacy process is meant to be a welcoming and joyful opportunity for people to discern how to serve in and through the church. It is a formalized, yet personally and relationally focused, journey that assists people in discernment for church leadership. Discernment is a life-long process which continually assesses how God may be calling a person into ministry. It is a means for determining who might serve as a rostered leader, as well as who might serve in a variety of lay leadership roles in the church or in the world. The candidacy process is successful when a person graciously discovers, through the nurturance of mentors, congregations, and others how and where to serve according to the Spirit's leading.

ELCA seminaries are vital partners in the candidacy process. Some people enter the formal candidacy process prior to or alongside their enrollment in a seminary. Others may choose to attend seminary as a means of discerning whether a church occupation feels right to them. Some people may even participate in theological education as a means of merely enriching their current roles as lay leaders in the church. All such explorations are appropriate and beneficial for the Church and God's mission in the world.

Through congregational involvement, mentoring, working with a Candidacy Committee, and engaging in theological education, a person arrives at a sense of the kind of leader God is calling her or him to be. The following summary of the ELCA candidacy process can serve as a step by step guide through the process. A more complete document, *The ELCA Candidacy Manual*, serves as a resource for seminaries and Candidacy Committees as they work with and accompany people in discernment through the candidacy process.

Summary of the ELCA Candidacy Process

Pre-Entrance

Pre-entrance is a period of discernment preceding Entrance into the candidacy process. It can assist people in reflecting on aspects of their lives that might confirm a call to rostered (that is, Word and Sacrament or Word and Service) ministry or other kinds of leadership in the ELCA.

Some aspects worthy of consideration are

- an understanding of vocation,
- spirituality and prayer life,
- formative life experiences,
- relationship with a community of faith,
- significant life influences, including family of origin,

- the ability to articulate what God is calling a person to pursue vocationally, and
- openness to the call of the church wherever it has a need.

A call to leadership can come in many ways and lead in many directions. Pre-entrance is an informal pathway - not a step in candidacy *per se* - that leads toward a clearer understanding of the path God may be calling a person to pursue, whether that might be Word and Sacrament or Word and Service ministry or some other form of church leadership.

Entrance

Entrance is the step in candidacy when a person begins to work with a synodical Candidacy Committee. Granting Entrance means that a Candidacy Committee is welcoming and accepting an applicant into candidacy. As an applicant assesses his or her own sense of call, the committee also assesses an applicant's readiness for various kinds of leadership. An Entrance decision normally assumes an applicant is considering some type of rostered leadership.

In preparation for candidacy, a number of the steps involved can further assist an applicant's discernment.

Components relating to the Entrance process:

- The applicant's home congregation completes a Congregational Registration Form based on active ELCA membership for a minimum of one year.
- The applicant completes a Candidacy Application Form and writes an Entrance Essay.
- The applicant participates in a psychological evaluation.
- The Candidacy Committee requests a background check for each applicant.
- The Candidacy Committee conducts an Entrance interview with the applicant.
- The applicant completes a Personal Health Assessment.
- The applicant prepares a financial worksheet.
- The Candidacy Committee receives copies of all post-secondary education transcripts and continuing education certificates.

Normally, once a Candidacy Committee grants an applicant Entrance, he or she will select a seminary and apply for admission. In some cases, an applicant may apply for Entrance after being enrolled in a seminary. For candidates attending non-ELCA seminaries, affiliation with an ELCA seminary will normally occur soon after Entrance.

Following Entrance, candidates, in consultation with the appropriate ELCA seminary and the Candidacy Committee, develop a Candidate Accompaniment Plan for the rest of the candidacy process.

The primary benefit of a Candidate Accompaniment Plan is to strengthen partnership among a candidate, a seminary, and a Candidacy Committee by establishing mutually determined timelines and a guide for the remainder of a candidate's discernment and preparation for rostered leadership. The plan is revisited at every step of candidacy.

Endorsement

Endorsement is a second major point of discernment for both a candidate and a Candidacy Committee. Endorsement focuses on the type of rostered leadership for which a candidate is best suited and a candidate's readiness to complete candidacy successfully. In this phase of the process, collaboration and communication between a Candidacy Committee and the appropriate seminary faculty are critical. When a Candidacy Committee grants Endorsement, it means the Candidacy Committee recognizes and affirms a candidate's readiness to complete the candidacy process. Endorsement also affirms a candidate's demonstration of appropriate gifts and characteristics for a specific roster in the ELCA.

Components relating to Endorsement:

- A candidate prepares an Endorsement Essay in preparation for an interview with Candidacy Committee members and seminary faculty.
- A candidate submits a CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) evaluation to the Candidacy Committee.
- The appropriate seminary provides a transcript to the Candidacy Committee.

Approval

The final step in the candidacy process is Approval. A Candidacy Committee, the seminary of enrollment (or affiliation), and a candidate discern together a readiness for service as a rostered leader in the ELCA following the successful completion of all academic and candidacy requirements.

Components related to Approval:

- A candidate submits an Approval Essay to the appropriate seminary faculty and to the Candidacy Committee.
- The seminary faculty prepares a recommendation for Approval (form D) and submits it to the Candidacy Committee.
- The Candidacy Committee receives an internship evaluation report (for those seeking ordination) or an evaluation of supervised field experience (for Word and Service candidates).
- The seminary provides the Candidacy Committee with transcripts for the candidate.

When a Candidacy Committee grants Approval, it is acknowledging that a candidate is qualified and competent to serve under call in a specific rostered ministry.

The bishop or designated staff person of each synod in the region and the Candidacy and Leadership Manager of the region will meet at a scheduled regional consultation to discuss the candidate and determine a post-approval First Call plan for the candidate, including helping to determine in which region or synod the candidate will be available to interview for first call. Relevant information about the process is available on the ELCA website at <https://elca.org/Resources/Candidacy#FirstCall>.

Four Basic Principles with Competencies for Leaders

I. We are Church

The ELCA is a church centered around worship of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) which proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament.

Competencies

- a. ***Rooted in the presence and activity of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).*** A rostered leader
 - Engages in theological and spiritual discernment that manifests a faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 - articulates and lives out a clear Christian identity, and
 - interprets the Scriptures as the norm for mission.
- b. ***Actively participating in God's mission through the church.*** A rostered leader
 - cultivates a compelling vision for ministry,
 - equips people to share faith stories,
 - skills in hospitality that invite people to a life of discipleship, and
 - awareness of the interconnectedness of the church beyond the local congregation.
- c. ***Cultivating vision and purpose.*** A rostered leader
 - uses spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, biblical and theological reflection, and spiritual direction),
 - acquires knowledge of societal and cultural trends that can inform a congregation's vision and sense of purpose,
 - develops skills for leading congregations and other groups in discernment of God's mission in the world (including the incorporation of input from a diversity of sources and people), and
 - has courage to lead God's people into that mission as discerned.
- d. ***Leadership Skills. An effective rostered leader demonstrates the following:***
 - Adaptive leadership skills that are sensitive to context,
 - skills for leading a community of faith through change while addressing conflicts that might emerge,,
 - a capacity to engage people and lead them towards active participation in God's mission in the world,
 - a facility for encouraging collegial decision-making processes in a congregation,
 - personal holistic stewardship and skill in equipping others, and
 - a grasp of how administrative structures and procedures can serve mission in congregational life..

II. We are Lutheran

Lutherans proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ through a focus on God's grace received through faith along with discipleship that is a lived response to grace.

Competencies

a. Engaging the way of the cross. A rostered leader demonstrates

- a willingness to confront and engage suffering in the lives of others and in one's own life;
- qualities of servant leadership;
- a willingness to serve, risk, and sacrifice for the sake of God's mission, and
- the ability to see crises as opportunities.

b. Proclaiming the faith. A rostered leader;

- preaches the word as Law and Gospel,
- uses Lutheran hermeneutical principles,
- shares the faith with others,
- provides Christian education,
- articulates theological wisdom, and
- lives a disciplined spiritual life.

c. Leading worship and administering the Sacraments. A Word and Sacrament rostered leader demonstrates the ability

- to plan worship, preach, and administer the Sacraments;
- to adapt the Lutheran liturgical tradition, and
- to invoke in worship a sense of the holy and a welcoming spirit.

III. We are Church together

The ELCA recognizes the interdependence of all expressions of the church – congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, seminaries, social ministry agencies, campus ministries, church camps and conference centers, and other affiliated agencies. This church also values the ecumenical interdependence we share with our full communion partners both locally and globally.

Competencies

a. Cultivating Christian community, discipleship, leadership formation, and the practice of reconciliation of differences. A rostered leader develops

- gifts for forming partnerships and networks,
- the practice of reconciliation and mutual empowerment between diverse groups,
- teams for mission, and
- a sense of stewardship.

b. Providing for a Ministry of care. A rostered leader will include both congregational and community care through

- visitation,
- counseling,
- equipping the baptized to provide ministries of care,
- knowledge of community resources, and
- sensitivity to people in transitions.

c. Practicing wellness in one's personal life. A rostered leader demonstrates

- faith hardiness and resiliency;
- a balance between work, play, and self-care;
- maintenance of healthy boundaries; and
- attention to diet, exercise, and mental/physical health.

IV. We are Church for the sake of the world

As baptized people of God, we believe we are freed in Christ to love and serve our neighbor. A rostered leader participates in partnerships for justice and peace locally and globally.

Competencies

a. Evangelizing. A rostered leader demonstrates

- a passion and imagination for sharing the Gospel,
- a sensitivity and skill for welcoming the stranger into community,
- implementation of creative ways to share the Gospel with people outside the church, and
- the ability to listen to people's stories and assist them to interpret their experience in light of the Gospel,

b. Relating theology with history, context and culture. A rostered leader demonstrates

- an ability to engage culture and context theologically, critically, and creatively;
- a sensitivity to historical factors;
- an ability to analyze congregational and community demographics and trends;
- engagement with complex social and religious issues as a practical theologian; and
- sensitivity to cross cultural, intra-cultural, and counter-cultural dynamics.

c. Equipping and sending disciples into the world. A rostered leader demonstrates

- a capacity to mobilize people of faith,
- a personal embodiment of Christian faith,
- a theological sensitivity to God's presence,
- a recognition of the public vocation of the Christian community in the world, and an ability to interpret