

I. Synod-authorized Ministries

7.31.10. Synod-authorized Ministry. When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not feasible to provide rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament, the synod bishop—acting with the consent of the congregation or ministry, in consultation with the Synod Council, and in accord with standards and qualifications developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council—may authorize a person who is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to offer this ministry. Such an individual shall be supervised by a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop; such service shall be rendered during its duration under the sacramental authority of the bishop as the synod’s pastor. Such an individual will be trained to fulfill this ministry for a specified period of time and in a given location only. Authorization, remuneration, direct supervision, and accountability are to be determined by the appropriate synod leadership according to churchwide standards and qualifications for this type of ministry. Authorization for such service shall be reviewed annually and renewed only when a demonstrated need remains for its continuation.

Purpose

Synod-authorized ministry is intended to assist this church to respond pastorally and effectively to emerging opportunities in Christ’s mission, to equip the baptized to live out their vocations for the sake of the world. Synod-authorized ministry honors and respects the office of ministry of Word and Sacrament within this church as well as the ministry of the baptized to serve in their local settings to proclaim the gospel and equip the believers.

Synod-authorized ministry recognizes and honors the office of Word and Sacrament (Article V, The Augsburg Confession). While this church calls and ordains qualified persons to carry out the ministry of Word and Sacrament on behalf of the whole church, there may be times and contexts when qualified persons are called to carry out specific ministry only in their local settings for a designated period of time.

Synod-authorized ministry recognizes the need to be flexible and adapt to the ministry challenges and needs of smaller congregations and other ministry settings. And synod-authorized ministry recognizes that individuals may have the gifts and ability to serve this church through the proclamation of the gospel in a local context, but not the resources, ability or call to serve the whole church as ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. The purpose of synod-authorized ministry is to pair the gifts of individuals with the ministry needs of local communities in order to assist them to carry out their calling to be the church in the world.

A. Identification of need for ministry

The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry setting where synod-authorized ministry may be appropriate, such as smaller congregations that do not have the resources to call an ordained pastor, congregations that are geographically isolated making collaboration difficult, congregations that are part of multi-point parishes and in need of additional pastoral leadership, or ethnic-specific communities where a pastoral leader is already recognized.

Because of the relationship of such authorized lay ministry to those serving in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, ELCA pastors and pastors of our full communion partners serving congregations within the area where this ministry need is located normally will be consulted concerning this determination.

When determining the need for a pastor in a congregation or other identified ministry where a minister of Word and Sacrament of this church is not available, synods will first consider the utilization of an ordained minister from a full communion partner church, under the guidelines related to the orderly exchange of ordained ministers.

B. Qualifications

A person invited to prepare for a synod-authorized ministry must be an active member of an ELCA congregation, preferably for at least one year. (The synod bishop may approve an exception to this rule if the individual is a member of a full communion partner congregation or ordained in another tradition.) In addition, prior to preparing to serve in synod-authorized ministry, an individual must have:

1. been recommended by the individual’s pastor and Congregation Council;
2. met with and been interviewed by synod staff and/or the synod committee responsible for the synod’s program of preparation;
3. demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in a program of preparation leading to possible service in a synod-authorized ministry or provided satisfactory evidence of prior preparation toward the goals and standards of the program outlined in this policy;
4. submitted written responses to the questions similar to those on the candidacy Entrance Form; and
5. obtained an in-depth background check, as outlined in the Candidacy Manual.

Any individual who has resigned or been removed from rostered ministry in the ELCA in connection with alleged misconduct, or who has been denied continuance in candidacy by reason of misconduct allegations, is precluded from serving as a synod-authorized minister.

C. Synod committee for authorized ministry

A committee may be appointed by the Synod Council to provide the synod bishop with recommendations concerning the authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod.

The Synod Council or, if appointed, the synod committee determines the educational program within the synod for individuals preparing for service in an authorized ministry; determines eligibility of individuals to enter this program of preparation; and advises the bishop on the suitability of an individual for authorization and service in a synod-authorized ministry.

D. Program of preparation

The synod defines the program of preparation for synod-authorized ministry consistent with this policy. The program of preparation can be accomplished in a variety of ways including: Select Learning (an ELCA resource with online courses facilitated by ELCA seminary and college faculty), synod educational programs that utilize current rostered ministers and/or ELCA seminary and college faculty, seminaries and continuing education centers. Such programs shall prepare individuals to have knowledge and abilities in the following areas:

1. Bible;
2. Lutheran theology, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confession of Faith and polity of the ELCA;
3. worship;
4. spiritual discernment and faith development;
5. leadership expectations and identity;
6. contextual understanding; and
7. pastoral skills including preaching, catechetics, worship leadership, visitation, pastoral care, outreach, and administration.

E. Authorization for service

When the synod has determined that a specific need exists, and with the consent of the congregation to be served, an individual may be authorized for service within the synod by the synod bishop, in consultation with the Synod Council. The bishop will authorize for this ministry only those individuals who have been well prepared or are in the process of being prepared and who will serve under supervision. Completion of a program of preparation does not mean that authorization for service will follow. There is no guarantee of service within the synod. When authorized, such service shall fulfill assigned responsibilities, and authorization shall be for a specific period of time not to exceed one year. Authorization must be reviewed annually and may be renewed on an annual basis.

Individuals who serve in synod-authorized ministry are to meet the following criteria:

1. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ;
2. satisfactory participation in a synod program of preparation, and/or demonstration of appropriate ministry skills;
3. knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of this church; and
4. willingness to meet this church's expectations concerning the personal conduct and behavior of individuals serving in public ministry as described in "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers."

F. Letter of authorization

The bishop's authorization shall be evidenced by an appropriate letter describing the terms and conditions of the authorization. The description may limit the activities the person is authorized to perform.

G. Supervision and accountability

Accountability for synod-authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council. Accountability for a synod-authorized ministry in a non-congregational setting within a synod is the direct responsibility of the governing body of the entity that conducts that ministry, or if there is no such entity, the Synod Council. In all cases, a synod-authorized minister is to be under the direct supervision of a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop. The supervising minister of Word and Sacrament shall report to the governing body and seek the advice and counsel of the bishop or designated synod staff in relation to the synod-authorized minister.

H. Candidacy for rostered ministry

When, in the judgment of the authorizing bishop, synod-authorized ministers are well-suited and qualified for ordained ministry, they shall be encouraged to discern if they are being called into ordained ministry and consider entering the candidacy process. Individuals may remain active in candidacy and theological preparation while serving in a synod-authorized ministry. Individuals may discern that they are called and have the abilities to serve only in their local settings for specific periods of time. These individuals may be set apart for a different kind of ministry that still serves the needs of the faith community in a more limited and specific way that does not put them on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. A decision not to pursue candidacy does not preclude the need for ongoing faith formation and leadership development.

I. Renewal and revocation

Renewal of authorization after one year may be given when a demonstrated need exists for its continuation. This need is determined by the synod bishop at the request and with the consent of the congregation or other ministry being served, consultation with the supervising minister of Word and Sacrament, and a review of both the ministry setting and the service of the authorized minister.

Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synod bishop, who need not specify the reason.

J. Marriage services

Where permitted by law, synod-authorized ministers may officiate at marriage services for members of the congregation in which they are authorized to serve, with the concurrence of the congregation and the approval of the synod bishop.

K. Other matters

Individuals may serve in a synod-authorized ministry only within the synod that has authorized that ministry. A synod may consider for authorization an individual trained and authorized by another synod, based on the individual's qualifications and ability to meet the new synod's criteria for authorized ministry.

Individuals authorized for such ministries are not to wear clerical stoles and should not wear clerical collars unless authorized by the synod bishop. The title "Pastor" is reserved for ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synod-authorized ministers.