Program for Strengthening Active Lay Ministry in the Southwestern Washington Synod- ELCA

A Handbook for PSALM Students and Mentors, Lay Ministers (LMS) and Synod Authorized Lay Ministers (SALMs)  
2018
# Program for Strengthening Active Lay Ministry
## Southwestern Washington Synod- ELCA

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALM PROGRAM

PSALM MISSION
The PSALM mission is to equip participants for lay ministry in service to congregations of the Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA in varying leadership roles, and as needed, to serve a leadership role in specific situations and times of needs as directed by the Synod Bishop. This program is designed to prepare gifted lay people for mission primarily in the places where they live, work and worship.

INITIAL STUDY PROGRAM
This unique study program seeks to equip lay people for ministry in their local setting. The goal is to provide a solid background in Biblical Studies, Lutheran Confessions, Church History, and Practical Theology. Courses for the program will be found online, at Retreats, and at area gatherings. Successful candidates will then apply what they have learned to the context of their own particular ministry.

WHO SHOULD APPLY?
The aim of the PSALM effort is to enhance the ministry of lay people who may already be serving or intending to serve in and through their congregation in faithful and effective ways. These are people who may have specific skills useful to the church and have strong commitment to Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not a program to train rostered professionals, but aims to be an in-depth vocational growth opportunity. Persons who participate in this program need to be flexible, curious, self-motivated, mission-minded, and willing to live with openness and change. For more clarification, please contact the Bishop’s Associate at 253-535-8300 or swwsynod@plu.edu.

THE PROCESS
The decision to seek admittance to PSALM is a mutual one, made by the congregation, the pastor, and the lay minister. This includes the completion of a Covenant of Support signed by leaders of the layperson’s congregation. The layperson’s pastor completes a Pastoral Endorsement form, and an Application form is filled out by the candidate. All three forms need to be submitted to the Southwestern Washington Synod office for consideration. The Bishop of the Synod will oversee the candidate selection process, along with representatives from the PSALM Committee. Application packets are available from the Synod Office 253-535-8300.

THE COST
The cost for registration, background checks, all coursework, and two retreats is $1000 per year. The supporting congregation is asked to help with or provide for this cost.
THE CURRICULUM
Those who enter this program will participate in an initial two-year course of study that includes core courses, retreats, quarterly meetings, and practical training. Core courses are offered in small group settings or online. Guiding this experience for each candidate are two Mentors. One is an active team member of the PSALM leadership, and the second is a clergy person chosen by the Bishop of the Southwestern Washington Synod. Core courses include: Introduction to the Old Testament, Introduction to the New Testament, Jesus & the Gospels, Lutheran Confessions, Church History, and Practical Theology. Other topics include spiritual development, vocation, prayer, sermon preparation, teaching skills, visitation and more. As possible, supervised work in a specific area of ministry that is appropriate to the candidate and congregation will be made available.

THE FRUITS
Upon completion of the two-year training program, participants who desire to be active in congregational ministry are encouraged to put their newly strengthened gifts and abilities to use in serving the ministries of their home congregation, with guidance offered by their pastor.

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY
Beyond the two year period of study that leads to an authorized ministry, Active Lay Ministers are encouraged to gather regularly for continuing education and mutual support. Person who participate in this program need to be flexible, curious, self-motivated, and mission-minded.

For more information about this program, contact the Southwestern Washington Synod Office at 253-535-8300 or swwsynod@plu.edu.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; minister, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12:4-8
II APPLICATION TO THE PSALM

Participants in the PSALM are active, confirmed, communing, and contributing members of SWWA Synod congregations. They are recognized as leaders by their congregations, uphold the highest standards of the Christian life, are faithful in their personal lives, and agree to live by the standards expressed in Vision and Expectations: Lay Ministers in the ELCA (Appendix C). They work closely with a mentoring ordained minister (normally the pastor of their home congregation) throughout the education process.

Applications to participate in the PSALM include:
- The completed application, including basic personal information
- A written or oral reference from their Pastor/Mentor
- A letter of reference from the applicant’s Congregation Council
- Required background checks (Appendix B).

Based on the completed application, the Southwestern Washington Synod determines whether an applicant may be admitted to the PSALM. A letter of welcome will be mailed to the applicant, if accepted.

Fees: Accepted applicants will be expected to remit, at least, their first year’s tuition in, at least, 4 quarterly installments of $250 beginning with the first quarter tuition paid upon acceptance into the PSALM. Unpaid program fees may result in suspension from the program.

III PSALM CURRICULUM & RETREATS

A. Academic Courses

Each quarter (after the retreat weekends), participants will have a Foundation Course to complete on their own. These courses are worked one at a time, with each course to be completed before the next retreat.

*(A detailed outline of each course can be found in the syllabus for the 2018/2020 PSALM academic years.)*

1. Required Coursework: Participants will be required to complete courses in four areas: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History and Lutheran Theology and are required to complete one course in each of these areas.

Old Testament
- Option 1 - Select Learning DVD: Introduction to the Old Testament
- Option 2 - Great Courses: Old Testament DVD/Audio CD/digital download
- Option 3 - Yale Divinity School Online
Streaming Course: The Old Testament

New Testament
● Option 1 - Select Learning DVD: Introduction to the New Testament
● Option 2 - Great Courses: New Testament DVD/Audio CD/digital download
● Option 3 - Yale Divinity School Open Online Streaming Course

Church History
● Option 1 - Reformation Roots (a Select Learning DVD)
  Option 2 - The American Protestant Religious Experience DVD
    (a Select Learning DVD)

Lutheran Theology
● Getting Down to Basics: Augsburg Confession & Small Catechism

2. Equivalency Education Curriculum

If a candidate has already taken a class equivalent to those offered here it may count toward the course requirements of this program. Please submit a transcript to the synod office or talk to the administrator of the PSALM if you have further questions.

3. Length of Courses

The curriculum is designed to be finished in 2 years. It begins in the Fall of each year and ends the second year prior to the last Retreat. In some cases participants may take longer than two years to complete. Candidates will be recognized at the appropriate Synod Assembly only after all the requirements have been met.

The typical order of required work:

  Year 1: Oct to Mar: Intro to Old Testament
  Year 1: Apr to Sep: Intro New Testament
  Year 2: Oct to Mar: History of Christianity
  Year 2: Apr to Sep: Intro to Lutheran Theology

_Special Note: Students are welcome to take classes in any order they choose as study materials become available. They may also complete classes sooner as time allows._
B. RETREATS

The value of retreats goes far beyond the practical and advertised learning that takes place while attending the session. Relationships are fostered by coming together and are as important as the education received. For this reason, a substitution for a missed retreat missed will rarely be granted. Retreats are required.

Below are the tentative dates for each retreat during the two-year period and the theme for each retreat. More information can be found in the 2018-2020 Syllabus.

- Fall, year 1: Prayer (Oct. 2018)
- Spring, year 1: Worship (Mar. 2019)
- Fall, year 2: Preaching (Oct. 2019)
- Spring, year 2: Pastoral Care (Mar. 2020)

IV MENTOR PASTORS

Mentoring pastors are a key partner in the education of students, assisting SWWA Synod and class instructors in participant education and supervision. Mentor Pastors make a commitment of time and expertise to support the equipping of PSALM students for ministry. Mentor Pastors provide individual attention to participants as they engage in theological education and ministry practice. They provide valuable feedback both to participants and the SWWA Synod about a participant’s development. Mentor Pastors invite and encourage participants to apply what they’ve learned in their own congregational setting through experiences of leadership and study.

A. A Mentor Pastor shall:

- Be an ordained minister on the roster of the Southwestern Washington Synod, ELCA.
- Be approved as a Mentor Pastor by the synod bishop.
- Clearly understand and be committed to the PSALM.
- Be an effective model for and guide to the PSALM participant.
- Maintain the Mentor Pastor relationship with the participant unless the relationship is terminated in consultation with the bishop.

B. Expectations and Responsibilities for Mentor Pastors

Mentor pastors are local ordained ELCA ministers who, in conjunction with the Bishop’s office, provide for the ongoing supervision and accountability of PSALM candidates.
A mentoring pastor is expected (as are all rostered leaders) to uphold the standards of “Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers” (Appendix E). A mentor who violates these standards and practices will be terminated by the bishop in his/her role as a mentor, and be subjected to further discipline according to the practices of the ELCA.

If a mentor is unable to fulfill his/her role as mentor, he/she is to alert the Synod/Bishop’s office as soon as possible to allow time to find a new mentoring pastor.

*(These guidelines may be adapted to meet the contextual needs of each PSALM candidate and congregation.)*

C. **General Guidelines for Mentor Pastors**

1. **Regular (at least monthly) meetings** with mentor

2. **Providing opportunity** to address questions that come up in the everyday context of serving a congregation, i.e.:
   a. worship planning for regular Sunday services and special services (including funerals)
   b. sermon preparation resources
   c. theological questions
   d. ministry of sacrament questions
   e. working with the church council
   f. visitation and care of parishioners
   g. challenges in congregational life
   h. personal spiritual practices
   i. personal boundaries with others

3. **Sharing resources**
   a. The mentoring pastor can be tremendously helpful by sharing resources from his or her own library or their church’s library and other resources.

4. **Planning Worship, meetings, classes. etc.**
   a. Invite the LM candidate to attend various meetings and classes at mentor’s church in order to learn and get exposure to various ideas and ways of teaching, planning, carrying out the work of the church.

5. **Introducing the LM** to clergy in area
   a. Facilitating the establishment of relationships with area-wide clergy helps give LMs a network of support, and an opening to work together with other congregations in ministering to the community.

6. **Inviting the LM to participate** in clergy activities.
a. Workshops, retreats, installations and ordinations, pastor's retreat, etc.

D. Guidelines in more Detail

Mentors will provide for learning in **four specific areas** during the PSALM course:

- Planning and leading bible study
- Preparation for preaching
- Visitation/prayer and care of the souls
- Teaching the catechism

*(The Synod office will provide progress forms to document these trainings.)*

V. SWWA SYNOD RESPONSIBILITIES

The PSALM program is administered by the Southwestern Washington Synod in cooperation with local Pastors and other Lay leaders. The responsibilities of the SWWA Synod include:

- **Application**: determining requirements for application to the PSALM in accordance with the guidelines established by the ELCA (*Appendix A*); creating application forms; making application forms readily available to applicants; reviewing, cataloging and securing all applicant files; and determining which applicants may be admitted.

- **Curriculum**: determining educational requirements for each of the LMs including pre-classroom work; recruiting instructors; giving guidance to instructors for class expectations; creating class schedules; and providing for classroom needs.

- **Evaluation**: creating guidelines for reviewing students’ progress; creating and reviewing evaluations forms for mentors/supervisors through quarterly written reports.

- **Examination**: reviewing and evaluating students’ files; determining and enforcing standards for eligibility for authorization; and establishing standards for evaluating applicants whose training/preparation has occurred outside the PSALM.

- **Authorization**: recommending suitable students to the bishop for authorization; establishing requirements for continued authorization of such lay leaders over time; establishing a protocol for permitting them to preside at the Eucharist.

- **Expectations**: creating a code of practice for authorized lay leaders and distributing it widely among leaders and congregations.

- **Ongoing supervision**: offering support and guidance after the initial training as well as monitoring and supervising the service of LMs and SALMs.
VI Requirements for a Certificate of Completion

Participants of the PSALM who have satisfied all requirements will receive a certificate of completion at programs end. Those participants will have:

● **Attended** all class sessions. If it is necessary that a participant miss a session an acceptable replacement may be negotiated with the Synod office or, participate in the missed class with the next PSALM class.
● **Completed** all assignments as required, both written and tasked in the home study/mentor portions.
● **Initiated** regular meetings with their Mentor Pastor. Participants are expected to meet with their mentor pastor prior to each retreat class to discuss resource materials and study preparations, and subsequent to each retreat class to reflect on the participants’ learning experience.
● **Completed** quarterly evaluations as requested for each home-study and mentor-guided education.

VII FROM LAY MINISTER (LM) TO SYNOD AUTHORIZED LAY MINISTER (SALM)

1. A Lay Ministers shall be a person who has successfully completed all educational requirements in the PSALM.
2. The Lay Minister can be recommended by a congregational council to become a Synodically Authorized Lay Minister for their congregation for a specified period of time.
3. The Lay Minister will become a Synodically Authorized Lay Minister (see below) when the Bishop authorizes the person to serve the congregation who requests them. Authorization shall last as long as the Bishop has granted for the particular Sundays or occasions requested.
4. The Synodically Authorized Lay Minister will once again become a Lay Minister after the specified authorization has expired.

A. Guidelines for the Authorizing of Lay Persons for Word and Sacrament Ministry in the Southwestern Washington Synod

In keeping with the ELCA constitutional provision 7.31.09 that the synod bishop may authorize lay persons for Word and Sacrament ministry and to preach in situations “where it is not possible to provide appropriate ordained pastoral leadership,” certification in the SWWA Synod will normally be done in settings where economic conditions, or geographical isolation makes it difficult for a congregation to obtain the services of an ordained pastor—either for Sunday supply or in cases of pastoral vacancy. In addition, authorization may be given for lay persons who serve together with an ordained pastor in providing Word and Sacrament.
B. Procedure for Authorization of a SALM

Upon the request of the congregation(s) to be served, authorization is given by the bishop. A request, by letter or by telephone, made either by the congregational president or by the pastor who has responsibility for the congregation, is to be directed to the bishop in advance of the Sundays or period of time for which authorization is sought. The bishop, in turn, will provide a letter of authorization to the congregational and/or pastor’s email address, with a copy to the authorized lay minister. The congregation or pastor recipient will be instructed to provide a copy for the congregation(s) president. If an email address is not available, hard copies will be mailed to the congregation and the authorized lay minister.

C. Persons Who May be Authorized as a Synodically Authorized Minister

1. Lay Ministers (LMs) who have successfully completed the Program for Synod Authorized Lay Ministry, (PSALM) or comparable programs in other ELCA synods.

2. Seminary interns serving in detached sites or multiple-point parishes where the intern is expected to provide leadership in Word and Sacrament when his/her supervising pastor cannot be present.

3. Rostered Deacons
   (1) Who have Word and Sacrament responsibilities in congregations which do not have a regularly-called ordained pastor or, (2) who serve in multiple-point parishes with a pastor, but where the pastor cannot be present for administration of the sacraments in each congregation on a given Sunday.

4. Congregation Members on some occasions where none of the aforementioned persons are available lay members of a congregation may be authorized for Word and Sacrament ministry and to preach.

D. Term of Authorization

In instances where the authorized lay minister is providing Sunday supply for a pastor on vacation, sabbatical, or where the pastor has been called away on account of an emergency, or where there is a pastoral vacancy, the authorization may be granted for the particular Sundays or occasions requested.

When the authorized minister is to provide Word and Sacrament ministry on a regular basis in a specific congregation or parish—as in the cases of seminary interns and Deacons outlined above, or in the instance of a SALM who serves alongside a pastor as part of a ministry team—authorization may be granted on an extended basis and may be renewed as needed. The request to the bishop for authorization of such persons will come from the congregational council and
from the supervising pastor. SALMs are asked to keep a record of those times when they preside at celebrations of Word and/or Sacrament ministry and to report this information annually to the bishop.

VII. REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUED LEADERSHIP AS A SYNOD AUTHORIZED LAY MINISTER AND LAY MINISTER

Once all requirements have been met and an individual has been recognized as an Lay Minister or a Synodically Authorized Lay Minister in the SWWA Synod, to remain active, certain annual requirements must be met:

1. 20 hours of Continuing education each year
2. Annual Report to the Bishop. (Sent by the Synod each Fall)
3. A typed manuscript of a preached sermon
4. Remain in good standing in an ELCA congregation.

A. Code of Practice for Synod Authorized Lay Ministers and Lay Ministers

Leading worship in an ELCA congregation does not, by itself, require authorization by the Bishop. However, SALMs and LMs may preside at the Eucharist only provided he/she receives the permission of the bishop for each specific occasion (See Appendix D). A request for permission to preside may be made in one of the following ways:

- A pastor, or congregational president if no pastor is available, may contact an SALM or LM to lead worship, preach, and preside at their congregation on a particular date. The requesting individual must request from the office of the bishop a letter of permission for the person to preside at the Eucharist for a specified place and time.

- The bishop may give written permission for a SALM or LM in special situations to lead worship, preach, and preside at a particular congregation for an extended period of time. A letter of permission, indicating the assignment, is sent from the office of the bishop to the SALM or LM and is copied to the requesting individual or congregation to be served.

The congregational bulletin will list that the SALM or LM is serving with authorization from the bishop.

B. Congregational Settings

SALMs and LMs will not be authorized to serve in congregations outside of the Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA. If asked to serve in a congregation of another denomination or synod, SALMs and LMs may only respond as individuals at
their own discretion but are not authorized by the bishop of the Southwestern Washington Synod to do so. SALMs and LMs are discouraged from preaching at congregations that have left the ELCA.

SALMs and LMs are not authorized to participate in worship leadership in local ecumenical services except under the permission and supervision of their home pastor.

SALMs may lead worship in union congregations with the permission of the office of the bishop under the supervision of the Lutheran pastor of the union congregation. When a union congregation is served by a non-Lutheran pastor, special arrangements are made through the office of the bishop.

C. Specific Expectations for Synod Authorized Lay Ministers

All SALMs shall:

- Represent the Lord and his Church, the ELCA and the SWWA Synod with the grace, dignity, respect, and responsibility required of the position.
- Report any difficulties and/or irregularities to the office of the bishop within 48 hours of their designated visit to a congregation.
- Use only this title (Synod Authorized Lay Minister) to identify themselves in person or in print. They shall not use the title Reverend, Pastor, Deacon, etc. in person or in print.
- Not wear a clerical collar or other attire which specifically identifies those individuals called to and ordained for the Office of Word and Sacrament.
- Follow the normal worship practices of the congregations in which they are serving.
- Be diligent in preparing to lead worship.
- Carry written authorization from the bishop when presiding at the Eucharist.
- Be entitled to compensation for their services at the supply rate set by the SWWA Synod, including reimbursement for mileage at the current IRS reimbursement rate.
- Wear a white alb when leading worship, and a cincture and/or cross if desired. Stoles of any kind and chasubles are inappropriate and shall not be worn. Street clothes are also fine where appropriate.
- Not baptize someone during a regular service of worship or in private except under the provisions of the church for emergency baptisms. (Any Christian may baptize in an emergency situation and report such a baptism to the pastor of the congregation.)
- Not officiate at a wedding, since they are not authorized to do so by the SWWA Synod or ELCA.
- Conduct funerals in the absence of a pastor and with proper authorization from the congregational council and bishop.
• Have a written statement of authorization by the bishop included in the worship bulletin of congregations in which SALMs are preaching or presiding at the Eucharist.

D. Continuing Education for Synod Authorized Lay Ministers

SALMs need opportunities for continued growth in competence and understanding as they utilize their gifts in ministry. Continuing education is how leaders enhance ministry abilities, acquire new skills, and experience personal growth for more effective ministry. It is the expectation of the SWW Synod that each SALM candidate will participate in, complete and submit:

• 20 hours of Continuing education each year
• Annual Report to the Bishop. (Sent by the Synod each Fall)
• A typed manuscript of a preached sermon
• Remain in good standing in an ELCA congregation.

Such experiences may include: formal classes or workshops, independent study, participation in study groups etc.. Continuing education experiences shall be included in the annual report to the bishop.

E. Synod Authorized Lay Ministers Discipline

SALMs hold a unique and important public position and responsibility in the SWWA Synod and the church at large. Failure to function appropriately as SALM shall result in immediate discipline through the office of the bishop and may include termination of authorization and removal from the role of SALM of this synod. Questionable or inappropriate behavior on the part of a SALM shall be reported to the office of the bishop immediately.
## 1. Synodically Authorized Ministries

### 7.31.09. Licensure and Synodically Authorized Ministry

When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not possible to provide appropriate pastoral leadership, 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 and licensed 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 synodal 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.

This synodically authorized ministry policy is intended to honor the God-given office of Word and Sacrament (Article V, The Augsburg Confession). Synodically authorized ministry is intended to assist this church to respond pastorally and effectively to emerging opportunities in Christ’s mission where it is not possible to provide a minister of Word and Sacrament. Principle 40 and related sections in “The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament,” which was adopted “for guidance and practice” by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly, also address this subject.

Synodically authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is normally limited to a specific congregation or other identified ministry where a pastor is not available for an extended period of time. Individuals authorized for such ministry within a synod are not rostered by the ELCA (unless already serving on a roster of this church) but are authorized to provide a ministry only within a particular setting for a designated period of time.

### A. Identification of need

The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry where pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time and where synodically authorized ministry may be appropriate. Because of the relationship of such authorized lay ministry to those serving in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastors 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. Invitation to service

Congregations and other ministries within each synod are expected to assist in making this ministry available and beneficial by commending to the bishop individuals who should be considered for possible service in synodically authorized ministry. Individuals who demonstrate potential for service as synodically authorized ministers are invited by the synod to enter a program of preparation.

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 synodically authorized minister.

### C. Qualifications

A person invited to prepare for a synodically authorized ministry must be an active member of an ELCA congregation, preferably for at least one year. In addition, prior to preparing to serve in synodically 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 synodically authorized ministry or provided satisfactory evidence of prior preparation toward the goals and standards of the program outlined in this policy;

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**Part Three: Non-roster Related Matters**

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4. submitted written responses to the questions on the candidacy Entrance Form; and
5. identified references within and outside the church for contact by the synod and authorized the synod to obtain an in-depth background check, as outlined in the Candidacy Manual.

D. 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. This committee should either be a subcommittee of the synod’s Candidacy Committee or be structured to work closely with the Candidacy Committee, even though the work of the two is distinct.
   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 synodically authorized ministry.

E. Program of preparation
   The synod defines the program of preparation for synodically authorized ministry consistent with this policy and with any guidelines developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, in consultation with an ELCA seminary. The program of preparation can be accomplished in a variety of ways including educational programs that utilize current rostered ministers within the synod, ELCA seminaries and continuing education centers, and other appropriate resources. 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, and outreach.

F. 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 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, unless terminated earlier.
   Individuals who serve in synodically authorized ministry are to meet the following criteria:
   1. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ;
   2. satisfactory participation in the synod program of preparation, including 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 “Vision and Expectations — Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”

G. 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.

H. Supervision and accountability
   Accountability for synodically authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council. Accountability for a synodically 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 synodically authorized minister is to be under the direct supervision of a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop.

Part Three: Non-roster Related Matters
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 synodically authorized minister.

I. Candidacy for rostered ministry

When, in the judgment of the authorizing bishop, a person whose service as a synodically authorized minister likely will be long-term in one ministry or in a succession of assigned ministries, that person normally shall enter the ELCA candidacy process for ordination and shall remain active in candidacy and theological preparation while serving in synodically authorized ministry.

It is preferable that a mission development is led by a pastor rather than a synodically authorized minister. When a synodically authorized minister is serving in that capacity, he or she normally shall have received a positive entrance decision for candidacy for ministry of Word and Sacrament before beginning that ministry and shall remain active in candidacy and theological preparation while serving in that mission development.

J. 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.

K. Marriage services

Where permitted by law, synodically 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.

L. Other matters

Individuals may serve in a synodically 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 synodically authorized ministers.

Synodically authorized ministers are not to offer therapy or counseling as a part of their ministries but may provide appropriate pastoral care.

M. Licensure

Synodically authorized ministry is not to be used to authorize an individual to provide for short-term, intermittent absences of a congregation’s called pastor. However, there is sometimes a need to provide for the celebration of the sacrament in circumstances when neither an ELCA nor a full communion ordained minister is available. Such situations highlight a tension between a bishop’s authority to provide for “appropriate pastoral leadership” (7.31.09.) and the limitation that such authorization is only to be used when the need for such leadership is “for an extended period of time” (Use of the Means of Grace, Principle 40). On rare occasions, this tension may require flexibility in interpreting “for an extended period of time” so that an individual is licensed by the synod bishop to provide Word and Sacrament ministry in congregations in a location or area where ordained leadership is chronically unavailable. Licensure under such circumstance could be for a term not to exceed one year and must be limited to a specific area. Such a licensed minister must be appropriately prepared and supervised to serve only at identified locations with the specific approval of the bishop during a transitional period while the synod seeks to make ordained ministers available to serve in that area. In such situations, and subject to such conditions, the bishop may license an individual to administer the sacraments.

Part Three: Non-roster Related Matters
This synod values the safety of its members and all those served by this church. It also values those who are leaders of this church. In order to help make congregations, as well as other ministry settings, safe places, it is common for religious organizations to make use of information now available through background checks as part of a comprehensive candidacy process. The Southwestern Washington Synod requires background checks on all PSALM participants, including leaders. Effective January 1, 2018, the Southwestern Washington Synod conducts background checks on all persons seeking to be lay ministers in this synod through our Program for Strengthening Active Lay Ministry.

- CONTEXT OF BACKGROUND CHECK -- The background checks are placed in the context of the entire PSALM process and become only one piece of information used in this process. Background checks are not infallible records of a person’s previous conduct or misconduct. The PSALM Committee uses all components of the program process to assess and discern a person’s potential for ministry.

- TYPES OF CHECKS -- Background checks cover at least a seven-year period. Areas covered in the check include, but are not limited to:
  - criminal history database search
  - county record criminal check
  - credit report check
  - social security trace
  - motor vehicle check

- ADDITIONAL CHECKS -- The PSALM Committee may add other types of checks if it is reasonable to do so. The committee is not bound to use exactly the same checks for all applicants for PSALM. If background checks other than those listed above, will be done, the applicant will be notified.

- WHO RECEIVES REPORTS -- Background check reports are sent directly to the Bishop’s designee, normally the staff person working with the candidacy process. Information is used for PSALM program purposes only. If there are questions or concerns about something in the report, the staff person may share details with the Chair of the PSALM Committee or the Chair’s designee. A summary of the report is given to the PSALM Committee members and, upon member request, the committee may view the entire report. The Release of Information Form in the candidate’s application permits the committee to share pertinent information with partners in the candidacy process. Reports are not shared with others unless written authorization is provided by the candidate.

- MAINTAINING RECORDS -- Reports for lay ministers that are approved are maintained by the Office of the Bishop and stored in the synod’s confidential files for a minimum of fifty years. Reports for those who are denied or who withdraw from the process are kept for ten years.

- NEGATIVE FINDINGS -- Depending on the kind of negative finding, the presence of a concern does not automatically result in denial of a person’s entrance into or continuation in the candidacy process. This is especially true if the person has voluntarily revealed this part of his or her history. Various factors are taken into consideration when evaluating and reviewing one’s background. Such factors may include:
  - The nature and seriousness of the offense
  - The circumstances under which the offense occurred
• The age of the person at the time of the offense, and how much time has passed since the offense occurred
• Societal conditions that may have contributed to the nature of the offense
• The probability that the person will repeat the offense
• The person’s commitment to rehabilitation, restitution, and reconciliation.

• NOTIFICATION OF NEGATIVE INFORMATION DISCOVERED – When information is received that, if accurate, could result in denial of a person’s entrance into candidacy, the information is shared with the person. If, after reviewing the report, the person believes the information is inaccurate, he or she will normally be put in contact with the company doing the background check to challenge the findings. The applicant will be given a reasonable amount of time to dispute the information in the report and have the records corrected.

• DELIBERATE FALSE REPORTING – Deliberately giving the PSALM Committee false or misleading information, or deliberately withholding information of an important nature, will, except in special circumstances, result in denial of entrance to or continuation in the candidacy process.

• COPY OF REPORT FOR APPLICANT – Upon request, the applicant for candidacy may obtain a copy of his or her background check report.

• TIME LIMIT ON AUTHORIZATION FOR BACKGROUND CHECK– Background checks may be done for PSALM purposes only, unless the candidate provides written direction otherwise. Information may be accessed any time during the PSALM process, until a candidate has accepted a position of synodically authorized lay ministry or until termination of their PSALM process.

For more information, please contact the Office of the Bishop, swwsynod@plu.edu or 253-535-8300.

Instructions for Background Checks

The Southwestern Washington Synod has made arrangements for Oxford Document Management Company to conduct background checks for us. This company was formed to provide religious organizations with independent and confidential administration of background investigation programs.

The background check is done online. To begin the background check, please go to the company’s website at www.oxforddoc.com. Click on the “Applicants” box to complete the online Authorization Form. You will be asked for the Client Number 401 and the Code 1. The form takes about ten minutes to complete. You will need to have your personal information, including your name, date of birth, social security number, driver’s license number, and places of residence for the past seven years ready when you log on. After you complete the form, you then electronically sign an authorization and release which permits Oxford to proceed with the background check. The check includes searches of motor vehicle records, as well as county court records and a federal offender database. When completed, Oxford reports its finding back to the Bishop’s office for its confidential use with the PSALM. The invoice for the background check will go directly to the synod.

January 2018
VISION
and
EXPECTATIONS

ASSOCIATES IN MINISTRY, DEACONESSES
AND DIACONAL MINISTERS IN THE
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is called and privileged to participate in God’s mission to the world, in proclamation and in service. We offer God’s salvation to the world through a ministry of word and sacrament. Worshipping in the Spirit, we baptize people in the name of the Triune God, proclaim the word of God as law and gospel, and nourish the baptized with Christ’s own body and blood partaken in holy communion. Repenting and confessing our sin, we receive God’s forgiveness. Thus, we live in the world as justified sinners who have been reconciled to God through Christ and who witness to the gospel of Christ through word and deed. The word leads us to service.

For the sake of this mission and the world that God dearly loves, the Holy Spirit sustains those who are called to ministries of Word and service so that they remain faithful to the One who calls the church into this work. “Vision and Expectations—Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” expresses the church’s vision for these commissioned and consecrated ministers and the high expectations it places on those who serve in this way. This document outlines the importance of the commissioned or consecrated minister’s faithfulness to the church’s confession, leadership through faithful service and holy living, and faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It expresses the ELCA’s expectation that its commissioned and consecrated ministers serve all people in the name of Christ, with a passion for the good news, ability to see the world’s needs and the will and capacity to respond. These capacities and this passion must be refined and developed through theological and contextual learning, giving attention to the nurture of personal character and integrity worthy of the calling. This document also makes clear that commissioned or consecrated ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church rather than
an individual right. Finally, it sets forth the marks of healthy leadership that are essential to being a vital church in mission in a pluralistic context.

“Vision and Expectations—Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” is offered to rostered leaders, candidates, seminaries, congregations and candidacy committees to inform their lives of service, their discernment and deliberation. With it we also offer our prayers and our promise to live and serve together in the peace and unity of Christ.

Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

*Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.*

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*
VISION AND EXPECTATIONS

Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

This church affirms the universal priesthood of all its baptized members. In its function and its structure this church commits itself to the equipping and supporting of all its members for their ministries in the world and in this church. It is within this context of ministry that this church calls some of its baptized members for specific ministries in this church.

This church shall maintain a lay roster of associates in ministry of those commissioned—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for such service within the life of this church in positions of Word and service on behalf of all God’s people. Associates in ministry are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to needs in a changing world as they serve in congregations and other ministry settings.

This church shall maintain a lay roster of the deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of those consecrated—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for such service within the life of this church in positions of Word and service on behalf of all God’s people. Deaconesses are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to needs in a changing world. They are to be theologically trained to serve in congregations and other ministry settings.

This church shall establish and maintain a lay roster of diaconal ministers of those consecrated—according to the standards, criteria, policies, and procedures of this church—for service on behalf of this church in positions of Word and service that exemplify the servant life and that seek to equip and motivate others to live it. Diaconal ministers are to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of

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1 The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its April 2010 meeting, adopted “Vision and Expectations: Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” as a statement of this church and authorized its distribution to the congregations, pastors, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, candidacy committees and seminaries of this church. This document replaces Vision and Expectations: Commissioned Associates in Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which was accepted by the Church Council in its December 1993 meeting.
In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, consecrated deaconesses, consecrated diaconal ministers and commissioned associates in ministry are called to public ministries of word and service. Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized. They work collegially with one another, with ordained ministers and with all the baptized for the sake of the church and the world. These commissioned and consecrated ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the word of God and the confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God and responsive to the needs of a changing world. They are called to give leadership and service in congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to facilitate and support the people of the church in their serving and to serve in the world on behalf of Christ’s church.

In this document the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to state its vision and expectations for commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church. This document should not be understood as a juridical standard. Nor is “Vision and Expectations” intended to suggest unrealistic or impossible expectations for those who serve on the rosters of commissioned and consecrated ministers. Instead, it seeks to express the high value and importance that public ministries of word and service have in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is offered for those who are already on the rosters of associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers of this church as a statement of expectations and hopes for the shape of commissioned and consecrated ministry as well as an invitation for reflection and consideration to those who seek to serve in these ministries of word and service in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The four questions that are addressed to candidates in the Rite of Consecration of Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers and the Rite of Commission-
I. THE CALL TO COMMISSIONED OR CONSECRATED MINISTRY

Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this assembly, I ask: Will you accept this ministry, believing that you are called by God to faithful service as an associate in ministry / as a diaconal minister / as a deaconess?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (Small Catechism, Article 3). It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In baptism God calls all people to serve the neighbor. Individuals are commissioned as associates in ministry or consecrated as deaconesses or diaconal ministers because they have been called by God to a public ministry of service for the sake of the service of all. This church believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church.

People experience the call to commissioned or consecrated ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God’s justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one’s life, and the response to that gospel, that lead some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include the example and encouragement of others, the personal assessment of an individual’s own interests and abilities, and response to the needs of the world. In whatever way the call may come to an individual, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by theological study, and finally confirmed in the church’s call to serve as an associate in ministry, diaconal minister or deaconess. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person’s gifts and abilities for this ministry.
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prepares and approves candidates for commissioned and consecrated ministry by setting standards, by providing for theological education through the seminaries of this church, and by evaluating a person’s qualifications for service through a synodical candidacy committee. Upon approval for consecration or commissioning, a person is eligible to receive a letter of call to serve in as an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America therefore understands the call to commissioned or consecrated ministry to mean that:

- Associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers, called by God through the church, are accountable to the word of God for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- These ministers are called by God through the church and are not self-chosen or self-appointed;
- These ministers are called by God through the church for a ministry of service and for leadership for the sake of Christ’s mission, and not for the exercise of domination or coercive power; and
- This ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church and is not a right of the individual.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects each of its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to understand and accept the call to serve in this church’s ministry as a call from God and to believe that the Spirit sustains and upholds those who are commissioned and consecrated so they may fulfill their callings to public ministry.

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself. To those who look upon the cross, grant your wisdom, healing, and eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer for Holy Cross Day, Evangelical Lutheran Worship

II. FAITHFULNESS TO THE CHURCH’S CONFESSION

The church in which you are to be commissioned / consecrated confesses that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and are the norm of its faith and life. We accept, teach and confess the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. We also acknowledge the Lutheran Confessions as
true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures. Will you therefore serve in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

It is essential for a commissioned or consecrated minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks that its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers assume responsibility for upholding this church’s doctrinal tradition through faithful understanding and service. All who have been commissioned to serve as associates in ministry or consecrated to serve as deaconesses or diaconal ministers in this church are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**Scripture, Creed and Confessions**

The scriptures reveal God’s redemptive actions, including the message of law and gospel, judgment and mercy, “beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ” (ELCA Constitution, 2.02.). Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the scriptures “as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of [this church’s] proclamation, faith, and life” (ELCA Constitution, 2.03.). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the holy scriptures.

In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers teach nothing “that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church” (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession).

**Doctrinal Tradition**

Christians enter into the catholic faith through baptism in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are called to continue in this catholic faith, bearing witness to it within the doctrinal tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal min-
isters express this tradition when they are:

*Evangelical*

The gospel is the good news that the decisive turning point in human history occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelical witness is that in Christ, God has acted to bring forgiveness to sinners, liberation for the oppressed, reconciliation for the estranged and the promise of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power of God to create and sustain the church for God’s mission in the world. Commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are expected to show forth in word and deed God’s saving gospel of justification by grace through faith and so equip the baptized for their ministry in daily life.

*Faithful*

The church’s scriptures, creeds and confessions identify the grounding and goals of the church’s hope: Jesus Christ. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to be committed to Jesus who is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the church.

*Reforming*

The church’s past is characterized not only by the faithful witness of the saints, but by sin, error and the betrayal of its mission. The gospel frees the church for genuine repentance and confession, for renewal and reform. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are expected to acknowledge the church’s past and present failures and to lead the church in its repentance and renewal.

*Diaconal*

Leadership in the church is to be shaped by Jesus’ own ministry of serving. This church, therefore, expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to resist the temptation to seek power over people, whether by force or manipulation, and, instead, to minister to God’s people and to lead them as servants. Such servant leadership is not one of weakness or timidity but of strength and boldness.

*Ecumenical*

The church is called to “maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to manifest the unity given to the people of God by leading the church in that common witness to the gospel that expresses the unity which the Spirit gives. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are encouraged to participate in ecumenical activities, including prayer and worship, and to witness to the “one Lord, one faith, one bap-
tism, one God and Father of us all” (Ephesians 4:5 and 6).

Ethical
The church witnesses to the gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to lead and teach through example by lives that give expression to the gospel. Commissioned and consecrated ministers are called to represent in their personal lives the new life that is given to all Christians in baptism and to be examples of a life that is consistent with the word of God.

Gracious God, as you have called workers to varied tasks in the world and in your church, so you have called [people] to this ministry. Grant [them] joy and a spirit of bold trust, that [their] work may stir up each of us to a life of fruitful service; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Installation of a Deaconess, Diaconal Minister or Associate in Ministry, Occasional Services for the Assembly

III. A LIFE IN THE FAITH AND IN THE CHURCH

Will you be diligent in your study of the holy scriptures and faithful in your use of the means of grace?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The commissioned or consecrated minister serves people in the church and the world and nurtures the faith of others. In order to do this, the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister needs to develop and nurture a sound knowledge of the scriptures, both intellectually and devotionally.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will seek regular opportunities for personal participation in the means of grace, including the renewal of baptismal grace in individual confession and absolution and sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion, thus receiving God’s renewing, sustaining, empowering Spirit both in his or her person and for the practice of ministry.

The commissioned or consecrated minister engages in daily prayer and encourages others in the practice of regular prayer.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister must be a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
There the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is an integral part of a community of faith in which mutual support is given and in which care, forgiveness and healing occur.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister supports and participates not only in the work of the congregation but also in the synodical and churchwide ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to work in a collegial relationship with one another and with ordained ministers and to share in mutual accountability with those in positions of leadership and oversight in this church. The commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church are to seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the public ministries of this church and strive to extend the reign of God in the community.

Public ministry in this church carries with it expectations and accountabilities that are determined by the whole church and not simply by a given congregation, synod, institution or agency served by the commissioned or consecrated minister.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has high expectations for those who serve within the commissioned and consecrated ministries of this church. It holds these expectations because it recognizes that when offense is given by an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened.

Yet sin and brokenness are realities in the lives of all persons, including those who serve as ministers. It is crucial for us all to remember that repentance and forgiveness are to be daily realities in the life of every baptized Christian. Neither perfection nor self-righteousness is asked of the commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church. When there is failure in the lives of those who serve in public ministry, this church seeks to provide counsel and understanding. When there are repentance and forgiveness, this church rejoices. Indeed, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that God not only calls but sustains those who are set apart for the commissioned and consecrated ministry of word and service. It is with this recognition that this church can affirm that those who are set apart for ministries of word and service are to seek to embody those characteristics that are consistent with their callings.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is concerned for the whole person. He or she welcomes and ministers to all. The minister
serves those troubled with spiritual or emotional problems. This church expects that its commissioned and consecrated ministers will respect information confidentially shared.

The commissioned or consecrated minister recognizes the importance of life-long growth in learning. Such growth is intended to renew, extend and deepen insight into the scriptures and the doctrinal teaching of the church and to enable one to respond to the insights and challenges of the world with greater awareness and a more faithful confession. In an increasingly complex and educated society, the development of an informed intellect and professional skills is crucial to competent commissioned or consecrated ministry. This church expects of its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers regular and disciplined time for personal study, study in the company of others, participation in programs of continuing education and periodic times for extended study. Congregations and other entities of this church are expected to provide the commissioned or consecrated minister the time and assistance with the financial resources needed for such study.

Because all are stewards of the lives God has given, the commissioned or consecrated minister needs to be an example of self-care, as well as caring for others. The significant demands of time and effort in a calling to commissioned or consecrated ministry can lead one to neglect proper nutrition, exercise and time for recreation. The congregation, agency or institution the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister serves should respect the need for the minister to have adequate time for self-care. Caring for self also includes seeking counseling and/or medical care when there is evidence of physical or mental illness, substance abuse, eating disorders or relational problems.

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer for Daily Renewal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship

IV. THE ASSOCIATE IN MINISTRY, DEACONESS OR DIACONAL MINISTER AS PERSON, EXAMPLE AND WITNESS

Will you witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed, pray for God’s people, and by your own example encourage them in faithful service and holy living?
I will, and I ask God to help me

The commissioned and consecrated minister is called with all Christians to “lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). It is Christ’s own self-giving on the cross that is the example for Christian life for all believers.

Associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers fulfill their callings in what they do and in who they are. By their words and in their persons they witness to the gospel of Christ. Diaconal identity is not one of moral or spiritual perfection. It is, instead, the living out of the good news that one is justified by God’s grace and thus called to live out that grace in daily service. The commissioned and consecrated minister is not simply a professional trained in skills to perform a task but is one sent by the church to lead the community of faith through the ministry of word and service. The commissioned and consecrated minister enables and equips others for their lives as Christians and for their ministry in the world by faithfully bearing witness to the Word of God, by serving effectively in their particular work and by example.

Deaconesses and diaconal ministers are intentionally shaped for a diaconal identity, following the historic and ecumenical traditions. These consecrated ministers will seek to cultivate in themselves and in one another that diaconal model of life and service. Associates in ministry are commissioned to a life of faithful service and will ground their ministry in the church’s baptismal commitment to serve the neighbor.

Holy Living
The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is to be an example of holy living so that the minister’s life does not become an impediment to the hearing of the gospel or a scandal to the community of faith. The qualities of such a life include the following:

Integrity and Trustworthiness
The commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to be honest and forthright in dealings with others while protecting privileged and confidential communications. The minister should strive to develop a public reputation for integrity and to nurture trustworthy personal relationships. Associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers must avoid conduct that is dishonest, deceptive, duplicitous or manipulative of others for personal benefit or gain.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to be fiscally responsible and is to be a faithful steward of time, talents and posses-
visions. The minister is to be an example to the community of generous giving.

Trustworthiness in Relationships
In all relationships, an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to honor his or her public promises, bear the burdens of others and seek to build up the body of Christ.

In public ministry as well as in private life, the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to develop and nurture appropriate relationships with others, acting in ways that build and sustain trust.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will respect and nurture friendships. Ministers will support friendships among others and will welcome and nurture friendships for themselves but will avoid compromising their ministerial callings in such relationships.

The commissioned or consecrated minister will strive to serve others and nurture trust by enhancing family life. Within the family, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and mutual care are to be expressed. Children, if any, will be regarded with love, respect and commitment. It is also expected that ministers maintain responsible relationships with their parents and other immediate relatives.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to respect and support single people, encouraging them in their appropriate and healthy relationships.

This church is committed to the sanctity of marriage. In public ministry as well as in private life, the commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to uphold an understanding of marriage that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this church. In so doing, the associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister will respect and support those who are married, recognizing this church’s strong continuing support for this holy estate. As the social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust declares: “Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10:6-9....” The public promises of marriage are to be honored, and trust is to be nurtured for the good of all.

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4 This “Vision and Expectations” document uses the terms “marriage,” “marry” and “married” to refer to marriage between a man and a woman.

5 Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009, p. 15.
This church acknowledges that members of this church hold various convictions about lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships. Nonetheless, this church has committed itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize and support lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and to hold the partners publicly accountable for the relationship. It has committed itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church. It also has committed itself to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in such relationships. The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to respect the people who hold these various convictions.

Trustworthiness in Beginning, Sustaining and Ending Marriages or Same-Gender Relationships

Should an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister seek to marry, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought, and the minister shall make the decision known among those he or she serves.

A commissioned or consecrated minister who is married is expected to keep his or her marriage inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for her or his spouse and to seek marital counseling when it is needed. It is recognized that due to human sin and brokenness, in some cases the marital relationship may have to be dissolved. Should a minister and spouse

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8 Action of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly – CA09.05.23, CA09.05.24, CA09.05.26, and CA09.05.27.

Because of these actions, this document includes this church’s vision and expectations for single people, married people, and people in “publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” The terms in the latter descriptive phrase are intended to have their common meanings. “Lifelong” means that the two parties intend the relationship to last as long as they both shall live. “Monogamous” means that the relationship is between two people only and excludes the possibility of other partners. “Same-gender” means that the relationship is between two men or two women of legal age. “Public accountability” means that the two parties to the relationship openly acknowledge the relationship, have a demonstrable commitment to the relationship as monogamous and lifelong and have a willingness to seek and accept the aid of individuals and community in sustaining the relationship and the well being of both parties and any dependents.

For a commissioned or consecrated minister, both church and community are part of the public within which he or she is accountable. Public accountability for a married associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister includes recognition and support of the marriage in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law marriage requirements. Public accountability for an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister in a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship includes recognition and support of the relationship in his or her ELCA congregation and compliance with state law recognizing such relationships if available in the state where he or she resides or, if unavailable, other means of documenting the status of the relationships and protecting the well-being of the partner and any dependents.
separate or seek to divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should a commissioned or consecrated minister decide to marry following a divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

Should an associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister seek to enter a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought, and the minister shall make the decision known among those he or she serves.

A commissioned or consecrated minister in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship is expected to keep that relationship inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for his or her same-gender partner and to seek counseling with the partner when it is needed. It is recognized that in some cases, due to human sin and brokenness, such a relationship may have to be dissolved. Should a minister and partner separate or seek to end their relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should a commissioned or consecrated minister, following the ending of a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, decide to enter another such relationship, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

**Trustworthiness in Sexual Conduct**

The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift and trust from God. These ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift and trust.

The associate in ministry, deaconess or diaconal minister is expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification and all attempts at sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others.

This church’s social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* states: “Sexual intimacy, together with promises of fidelity and public accountability, nurtures bonds that allow people to thrive and provides a rich context for the care and support of children.” It also states: “It is in marriage that the highest degrees of physical intimacy are matched with and protected by the highest levels of binding commitment, including legal protection. It is in marriage that public promises of lifetime commitment can create the foundation for trust, intimacy, and safety.”

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A single commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to live a chaste life, holy in body and spirit, honoring the single life and working for the good of all.

A married commissioned or consecrated minister is expected to live in fidelity to his or her spouse, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste and faithful.

An commissioned or consecrated minister who is in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship is expected to live in fidelity to his or her partner, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a publicly accountable relationship that is mutual, chaste and faithful.

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer for Daily Renewal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Faithfulness in Witness in the World
The charge to witness to the world is given to the church today as it was to the apostles of the early church. The content of that witness is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ: God’s creative self-disclosure as the Word made flesh; Jesus Christ victorious over death for the salvation of God’s people; and the promise of everlasting life. The testimony of these acts of God’s grace and forgiveness is expressed in both word and deed by commissioned and consecrated ministers through compassion, hospitality, patience and forgiveness; through seeking peace and justice for all people; through care for God’s creation; and through sharing one’s faith through teaching, conversation and personal witness. This witness is characterized by:

Evangelism
The apostolic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the church’s mission. It is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation with God. This gospel is proclaimed through word and sacraments. Through its commissioned and consecrated ministers of word and service, this church affirms the critically important task of communicating this evangelical word to the world.

Compassion
Christians are called by God to participate in compassionate care for those in need. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to follow the example of Jesus and to lead the church in
compassionate care of the suffering and to speak to the church on behalf of the needs of the world.

Confession
Commissioned and consecrated ministers are expected to enter into the church’s act of confessing the Christian faith in our world. The church is called to such a confession because its present existence lies between the advent of God’s reign in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and the promised certain consummation of the eschatological kingdom. This confession places this church and its ministers in the struggle against sin, death and the devil.

Hospitality
Just as Jesus received sinners and ate with them, the church is called to welcome the stranger and to open its life to those who are outside the church or alienated from it. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to be models of appropriate hospitality in their personal lives, to practice their ministry of service with welcome to all who have needs, and to lead the church in its witness to divine hospitality.

Peacemaking
The culmination of God’s eschatological salvation will be the overcoming of every enmity and the reconciliation of the whole creation. Yet even in the present time, God’s peace is a reality. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to be witnesses to and instruments of God’s peace and reconciliation for the world.

Justice
The church is to witness to God’s call for justice in every aspect of life, including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to be committed to justice in the life of the church, in society and in the world. The ordained minister is expected to oppose all forms of harassment and assault.

Stewardship of the Earth
The people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. This includes the need to speak on behalf of this earth, its environment and natural resources and its inhabitants. This church expects its commissioned and consecrated ministers to be exemplary stewards of the earth’s resources and to lead and serve this church in the stewardship of God’s creation.
Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayer for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, Evangelical Lutheran Worship

CONCLUSION

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that “the Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world” (ELCA Constitution, 4.01.).

This church expects its associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers to honor and equip the baptized for their ministry in the world. Such a ministry involves giving leadership in the church’s witness to the world, exhibiting awareness of the global challenges of a multicultural, diverse society and assisting the members of this church to live their daily vocations in faithfulness.

At the same time the commissioned and consecrated ministers of this church can know that they themselves are regarded as servants of Christ and messengers of the good news of God’s salvation in Christ. As such they are honored for the ministry they bring to this church and to the world. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prays for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who serve this church as associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

O God, through the ages you have called women and men to the diaconate and to particular ministries in the church. Let your blessing rest now on all who answer that call. Grant them understanding of the gospel, sincerity of purpose, diligence in ministry, and the beauty of life in Christ, that many people will be served and your name be glorified; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the Day from the Rites for Installation of Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers, and Associates in Ministry, Occasional Services for the Assembly