

DISCERNMENT + VOCATION

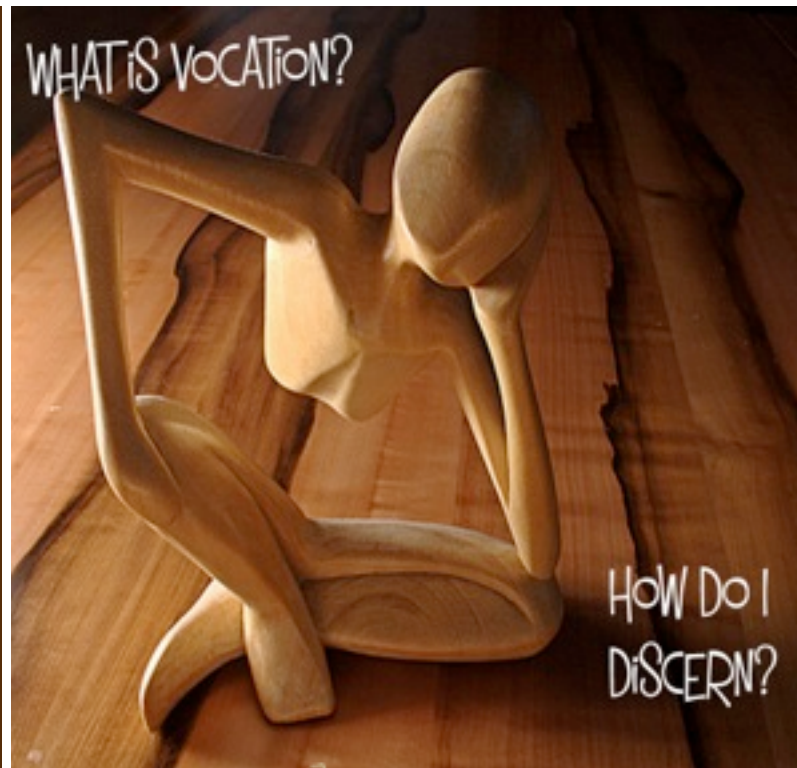
Candidacy eGuide



A GUIDE FOR CANDIDATES AND CONGREGATIONS

Candidacy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the process of preparation and formation leading to approval for public ministry in God's world through this church. It is a partnership of candidate, congregation, synod, and seminary. Candidacy involves three steps: entrance, endorsement, and approval.

The purpose of this booklet is to give a basic overview of the candidacy process. Congregations will benefit from knowing what the process is as they shepherd potential candidates toward rostered leadership. Candidates will have a quick "go to" guide for the important parts of candidacy. For a more detailed description, please go to: www.elca.org/candidacy.



NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

944 24 1/4 Street Chetek, WI 54728 _Tel: 715-859-6810 _Fax: 715-859-6812

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin:
Walking together + for the sake of
mission + in God's world.





“THE PLACE GOD
CALLS YOU TO IS THE
PLACE WHERE YOUR
DEEP GLADNESS AND
THE WORLD’S DEEP
HUNGER MEET”

Frederick Buechner

A PROCESS OF VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Candidacy is a process of vocational discernment. How is *that* for fancy church talk?

The question to the child *What do you want to be when you grow up?* becomes *Who and what is God calling you to be and to do on behalf of the neighbor?* Maybe this process begins with the still, small voice from within. Maybe it begins with a comment from an observant adult. Maybe it begins in the middle of a successful career that just isn’t satisfying, or in a classroom, or on a street corner. However the process begins, it is rooted in our baptismal identity and it bears fruit best in relationship—in prayer with God and in

conversation with trusted friends, colleagues, and mentors, we can discover what God has in mind for us.

Figuring out what one wants to do for a living can be thought of as being a good steward of the gifts that God has given. How can one best serve God and neighbor with the gifts that God has given them? Or as Frederick Buechner put it, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (*Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, page 119).

We who look to Martin Luther for wisdom and insight, talk about this as a process of vocational discernment.

Every human being has a vocation. Part of the abundant life that Jesus desires for us is knowing and living that vocation, that call. And that requires discernment.

Discernment begins in conversation with those trusted friends and mentors who see in a fellow child of God some spark, some quality of leadership, some passion for mission, who then encourage that person to explore it.

It continues with a pastor who intentionally explores sense of call with a potential candidate. An essential resource to guide this discussion is the short book, *What Shall I Say?* Many pastors already have a copy on hand, or it can be ordered from Augsburg Fortress.

Along the way, you may discern that it is time to take the next step: to enter the

formal candidacy process of the ELCA. This process is designed to be a time where many who are committed to the vibrant life of the church walk with people like you who sense that they may have a vocation on one of the four rosters of the ELCA: pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses.

Your Synod Candidacy Committee will walk with you every step of the way. Their ultimate goal is to help you come to a clear understanding of God’s calling for you.

This booklet will cover a few of the basics as you begin this journey. It will be a great adventure. God bless you on your way!



FIRST STEPS

There are some initial steps in the formal candidacy process.

1. The candidate contacts the Synod Office in Chetek (715.859.6810) for an initial interview to begin the relationship with the Synod Candidacy Committee.
2. Both candidate and home congregation explore the ELCA candidacy website: www.elca.org/candidacy.
3. The candidate submits an [Application for Entrance to Candidacy](#) (be sure to follow the instructions on the bottom of page six) and **entrance information form**.
4. The candidate's congregation fills out the [Congregational Registration Form](#).
5. Either the candidate or the congregation submits the \$900 candidacy fee, payable to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, for the candidate to receive the "Welcome to Candidacy" letter.

6. The candidate follows the instructions in the welcome letter to complete a background check and psychological evaluation.
7. The candidate may contact one or more seminaries to discuss admission. To maximize opportunities for scholarships, the candidate should receive a positive entrance decision from the Synod Candidacy Committee before they are admitted to an ELCA seminary.
8. The candidate is assigned a contact person on the Synod Candidacy Committee.

IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF THE JOURNEY

ENTRANCE

The first official interview with the Synod Candidacy Committee sets the tone for the

years ahead. Supportive and encouraging, honest and forthright, the committee will learn the candidate's call story, inquire about areas of strength and areas in need of growth, and wade into the deeper waters of vocational discernment.

The committee needs four key things to prepare for this interview: (1) entrance essay (described on page five of the [Application for Entrance to Candidacy](#), (2) psychological profile, (3) background check, and (4) entrance information form. When the Synod Office receives these items the entrance interview with the candidate is scheduled.

After this 60 minute interview, a decision to approve, postpone, or deny entrance is made by the entire committee.

Candidates for ordained ministry and some lay roster tracks are required to complete Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) for vocational formation and practical pastoral

care experience *after their first year at seminary*. This can be difficult to schedule so it is essential to begin the application process early. Work with your seminary in a timely manner to identify sites and learn about application procedures. Failing to attend to this important aspect of formation can delay a candidate's endorsement and, potentially, their graduation and approval as well.

ENDORSEMENT

The main goal of the endorsement interview is to determine readiness for service in a congregation with significant responsibilities and expectations. A positive endorsement means that the seminary can assign the candidate to an internship site or field experience.

The source material that the Candidacy Committee has before them is your growing file which now includes transcripts of grades, CPE

(Continues on next page.)

reports, and [the endorsement essay](#). The interview is held at the candidate's seminary and includes members of the Synod Candidacy Committee and the candidate's seminary advisor. Strengths and growth areas are examined more deeply than at the entrance interview.

APPROVAL

Approval is the final step in the candidacy process where a candidate is approved to serve under call in a designated rostered ministry of the ELCA.

The candidate's transcripts, internship evaluations, and [approval essay](#) are read not only by the Synod Candidacy Committee but also by faculty at the candidate's seminary. Two interviews follow, one with seminary faculty and one with the Synod Candidacy Committee.

On behalf of the whole church, and with key partners like seminary faculty, the

Synod Candidacy Committee discerns with the candidate who God is calling to be ordained, consecrated, or commissioned.

ASSIGNMENT

At least twice a year, approved candidates are assigned to a region and synod. Candidates may express their preference and any restrictions or limitations in their availability to serve, but candidates are reminded that they are called to serve the whole church, not only certain geographic areas. Spiritually, availability to the whole Church demonstrates a deep trust in the providence of God. Practically, availability to the whole Church better ensures that the whole people of God are served.

Candidates are under the care of the Synod Candidacy Committee until they accept a call.

CHOOSING THE BEST SEMINARY FOR YOU

The ELCA has a rich diversity in theological education through their eight seminaries and two extension centers. Each seminary offers a variety of programs and candidates are encouraged to visit and

discern which seminary would be best for them. You can learn more about [each seminary here](#).

Candidates may also attend a non-ELCA seminary but must complete a "Lutheran Year" at an ELCA seminary and must be affiliated with an ELCA seminary prior to endorsement.





ROSTERED LEADERSHIP IS MORE THAN JUST PASTORS

DIACONAL MINISTRY

Those who feel God's call to Word and Service rather than Word and Sacrament enter the diaconal ministry track. The candidate seeks out a Master of Arts program appropriate to their interests and gifts. Unique in the journey to consecration to Diaconal Ministry is that once the candidate receives a positive entrance decision from the Synod Candidacy Committee, the candidate participates in

the Diaconal Ministry Formation Event, usually held at Gettysburg Seminary. The candidate must complete this requirement before asking for an endorsement interview from the Synod Candidacy Committee. After endorsement, the candidate begins their field experience. Also, diaconal ministry candidates must complete 40 hours of spiritual direction, of which 10 hours must be direct contact hours with a spiritual advisor. The approval interview is scheduled after the field experience is complete and may occur during the final year of the educational program. Click [diaconal ministry](#) for more information.

DEACONESS

A woman seeking to join the Deaconess Community of the ELCA participates in the normal entrance and approval steps with the Synod Candidacy Committee. Endorsement is replaced by investiture into the community and the investiture decision is made by the Deaconess Community. [Click here](#) for more about this unique roster of the ELCA.

ASSOCIATES IN MINISTRY

Associates in Ministry (AiMs) are called to provide lay leadership and support in the church. They participate in all stages of the candidacy process, beginning as early as their senior year of college. Associates in Ministry are only required to have a Bachelor Degree. For more information on AiMs, [click here](#).

FLEXIBLE PROGRAMS FOR ORDINATION

DISTRIBUTED LEARNING

Some seminaries have special distributed learning programs that allow candidates to take most of their courses online. Most of these programs require special application and permission from the Synod Candidacy Committee.

TEEM

Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) is a path to ordination in the ELCA to supply pastors to indigenous or remote rural sites of ministry within a synod. Special requirements apply, such as age and prior experience. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Wartburg Seminary both have TEEM programs.

Discernment + Vocation

Candidacy—discovering your place and your call in God's world.



"Afterwards—that is, after you have learned to believe in God's grace—think of nothing else except doing to your neighbor as Christ has done to you, and let all your works and your whole life be directed to your neighbor. Search out the poor, the sick, and every sort of needy person; help them; let the whole practice of your life consist in being helpful to them, to whoever needs you, as much as you are able, with body, goods, and honor."

—MARTIN LUTHER

"The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word."

—ISAIAH 50.4