



Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Guidance for Synod Authorized Ministry SAM in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA

Historical Context

The congregations of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod have a long practice of inviting the service of lay leaders into roles that, in our many predecessor bodies throughout our history as Lutherans in North America, had previously been reserved for ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. Some of this practice was driven by context – the reality of remotely located parishes coupled with the unavailability of seminary-trained pastors. Some of the emergence of lay leadership was encouraged by convictions formed within expressions of our faith which emphasized the spiritual leadership of the laity, at times over-against and against older understandings of the office of ministry (Lutheran Pietism). The intention of this guidance is to capture the most promising aspects of both the practical and the spiritual impetus behind the increasing emergence of lay word and sacrament ministers while honoring “the God-given office of Word and Sacrament” (Article V, The Augsburg Confession). Synod-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.” (From the Manual for the Management of ELCA Rosters)

What is at Stake?

Our unique expression of the Gospel is at stake. As “Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,” we are duty bound to ensure the transmission of our Christ-centered, grace-filled witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must balance the need to ensure that there are ministers present to share the gifts of the gospel – with the need to ensure that the gospel that is shared is faithful to the biblical, confessional and theological traditions of our church.

Who is Involved?

As the Pastor of the Synod, the Bishop oversees the invitation to service, the training and the management of the SAM program with the consent of the congregation or ministry receiving the SAM in consultation with the Synod Council. A Committee on Synod Authorized Ministry shall serve in collaboration with the Bishop and shall include a Synod Council Liaison, a Candidacy committee Liaison and up to eight additional members with a mix of clergy and lay members of which at least two members shall be SAMs.