

August 17, 2020



Dear friends:

We are all doing church differently now than in years past, both because of the COVID-19 pandemic and because of the ways we change as a congregation in response to God's call and the needs of our neighbors. With October being Clergy Appreciation Month, this is a good time for all of us to discover how the training of ministers is also being done differently and more creatively than in the past. As Lutherans we believe God's call to ministry comes from both inside us and from people around us, so this is also an excellent time to reflect on how each of us can be part of the process of encouraging and raising up new ministers to serve in and through the church.

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We're asking you to spend some time at your September council meeting reviewing the questions and resources below and deciding on how to best engage the rest of your congregation in discovering the various avenues to ministry that exist in the ELCA and making the commitment to encourage people who may be called to this vocation. Especially as we live into a continuing shortage of pastors, this is good work to do.

What is the ongoing need for ministers?

- Did you know that there are currently over 1,000 more open calls for full-time pastors than there are pastors to fill those calls?
- How many ministers (pastors, deacons, and parish ministry associates) has your congregation raised up? How did your congregation do this?
- How does your congregation currently invite people to consider professional ministry as their vocation?

What ministry leaders could serve congregations?

- **Parish Ministry Associate (PMA):** This is typically someone local who has another form of employment besides ministry. PMAs can serve on church staff or as the primary leader of a congregation when geographic, financial or other conditions don't allow for a pastor. PMAs are only certified to serve in Nebraska. <https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/resources/discernment/ministry/pma.html>
- **Deacon:** This is a seminary-trained minister who connects the church with the needs of the world, and may be a specialist in a particular area of ministry, such as faith formation, family and children's ministry, education, youth, business administration, music, discipleship and volunteer ministries. A deacon may preach but does not preside at sacraments. Deacons may be called to serve anywhere in the ELCA. <https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/resources/discernment/ministry/candidacy.html>
- **Pastor:** This is a seminary-trained minister who specializes in the internal life of a congregation, presides at sacraments, and leads worship. Pastors may have specialties, be trained for a wide variety of ministries, and be called to serve anywhere in the ELCA. <https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/resources/discernment/ministry/candidacy.html>

In what ways are ministers trained, and how long does this training take?

- **Parish Ministry Associates (PMA):**
 - Candidates take two to five years of self-paced, part-time study in Nebraska to get one-third of the education of a pastor. Candidates work with the Nebraska Synod's PMA Steering Committee for supervision and support through their studies.

- **Deacons (called to ministry of word & service):**
 - **Seminary-Traditional:** Candidates do at least two years of study at a seminary campus and one year of internship in some form of ministry context (congregational, social ministry, or otherwise).
 - **Seminary-Distance Learning:** Over a varying number of years, candidates do part- or full-time study from home with a few weeks per year on campus while keeping their “day jobs.”
 - **Seminary-Collaborative Learning:** Candidates simultaneously serve a ministry context half-time and are a distance-learning seminary student half-time. This is through Wartburg Seminary only.
 - **Internship:** Candidates for deacon spend nine to twelve months at a ministry site under the supervision of an ordained deacon or pastor.
- **Pastors (called to ministry of word & sacrament):**
 - **Seminary-Traditional:** Candidates do three years of study at a seminary campus and one year of internship.
 - **Seminary-Accelerated:** Candidates do 24 months of year-round classes and concurrent part-time congregational internships. This is done through Luther Seminary only.
 - **Seminary-Distance Learning:** Over a varying number of years, candidates do part- or full-time study from home with a few weeks per year on campus while keeping their “day jobs”.
 - **Seminary-TEEM:** Candidates already have ministry experience or gifts for a unique ministry situation. They serve the congregation about three-fourths time and do distance learning the rest of the time. The congregation must call the student as pastor at the end of studies.
 - **Seminary-Collaborative Learning:** Candidates simultaneously serve the congregation half-time and are a distance-learning seminary student half-time for four or more years. This is through Wartburg Seminary only.
 - **Internship:** Candidates for pastor spend nine to twelve months at a ministry site under the supervision of an ordained pastor.
- Pastor and Deacon Candidates work with the Nebraska Synod’s Candidacy Committee for supervision and support through their studies.

Where are candidates for ministry trained?

Nebraska Synod Parish Ministry Associate Program

<https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/resources/discernment/ministry/pma.html>

ELCA Seminaries (Pastors & Deacons)

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago	Chicago, IL	www.elcaseminaries.org lstc.edu
Luther Seminary	St. Paul ,MN	luthersem.edu
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary	Berkeley, CA	plts.edu
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary	Columbia, SC	lr.edu/ltss
Trinity Lutheran Seminary	Columbus, OH	capital.edu
United Lutheran Seminary	Gettysburg, PA	unitedlutheranseminary.edu
Wartburg Theological Seminary	Dubuque, IA	wartburgseminary.edu

If needed, could we call a part-time pastor?

The demand for part-time pastors is far larger than the supply of pastors who can serve part-time. Because of that, the easiest way to call a part-time pastor is to partner with one or more other congregations to offer a full-time call. Because the ELCA has full communion relationships with several other denominations, we can form partnerships with ministers and congregations of the Episcopal Church, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Reformed Church in America, and United Church of Christ.

Where can we learn more about sharing a pastor?

Resources, including videos and coaches, for forming a shared ministry are available at

<https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/resources/congregations/branches-of-the-same-vine-shared-ministry.html>.

Your assistant to the bishop would be happy to start this exploration with you.

What other things should we be thinking about related to ministry leaders in our setting?

- How long has your current pastor, deacon or parish ministry associate been with your congregation? How much longer do you think this minister is likely to serve?
- What are your congregation's trends in offerings, expenses, and attendance over the past 5 and 10 years?
- Given current trends in offering, expenses, and attendance, how many more years does it look likely that your congregation can maintain the current level of staffing by a minister?
- What questions does your council have about finding the congregation's next minister if you are anticipating a transition?
- Would you like to learn more about:
 - The traditional call process of a pastor or deacon?
 - Requesting a PMA?
 - Sharing ministry leadership with another ELCA congregation?
 - Sharing ministry leadership with a congregation from one of the ELCA's full communion partners?
 - Being the site of someone's study route for ordination?
- How is God calling you to be the church in your setting, and what leadership is needed to do that?

Your congregation's assistant to the bishop is a great place to start with any of these questions. If you are unsure who your assistant to the bishop is, please contact the Nebraska Synod office at 402-896-5311 or email office@nebraskasynod.org. If you would like to be contacted by someone with the Nebraska Synod's Sow the Seeds Initiative to talk about raising up the next generation of ministers, please contact Lisa Kramme at 402-669-6309 or lisa@nebraskasynod.org.

Thank you for your partnership in ministry. May God's Spirit guide you as you have these conversations.