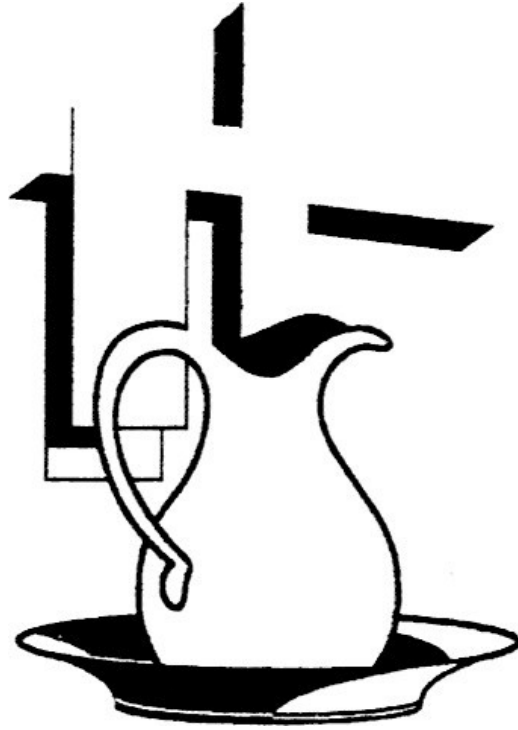


# **CERTIFIED PMA HANDBOOK**



## **Parish Ministry Associate Program Nebraska Synod, ELCA**

March 2023

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## VISION STATEMENT

The Parish Ministry Associate (PMA) Program of the Nebraska Synod seeks to help identify the gifts God has given God’s people and to help equip those people for the ministry of sharing the Good News among all people.

## INTRODUCTION

The Parish Ministry Associate Program will identify and equip persons for service in congregations and synod-related ministries. Parish Ministry Associates may be assigned by the Nebraska Synod Bishop and authorized for certain leadership functions in specific synod-related locations for a specified length of time where they will work with a local ordained pastor as supervisor. PMAs always serve in partnership with ordained pastors, not independent of ordained pastors.

The Parish Ministry Associate Program is administered by the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in harmony with the guidelines established by the ELCA and its Conference of Bishops. The PMA Steering Committee is involved in determining the process of application and program of preparation, and has general oversight of the program, with accountability to the Bishop of the Nebraska Synod.

### CHART OF SUPERVISION AND REPORTS DUE

<b>PMA Type</b>	<b>Has a Mentor</b>	<b>Has a Supervisor</b>	<b>Annual Report from Mentor</b>	<b>Annual Report from Supervisor</b>	<b>Annual Report from Council</b>	<b>Deadline for Reports</b>
Student <sup>1</sup>	X		X			May 1
Unassigned	X		X			May 1
On Staff		X <sub>2</sub>		X	X	May 1
Assigned <sup>2</sup>		X		X	X	May 1
Authorization Renewal					Sent in by Congregational Council	May 1

<sup>1</sup> A student serving on a congregation’s staff will follow the On Staff reporting pattern

<sup>2</sup> The supervisor is the ordained pastor who is head of staff where the PMA serves on staff.

## I. CERTIFICATION & INSTALLATION

- A. PMA Students who satisfactorily complete the PMA Program requirements may be certified for ministry by the Nebraska Synod upon successful completion of the certification interview with the PMA Steering Committee and approval of the Synod Council.
  - 1. Those who have been certified as PMAs will have a Recognition of Certification rite at the Nebraska Synod Assembly or another synod event.
  - 2. Recognition of Certification may also take place in the participant’s congregation.
- B. Parish Ministry Associates may be installed by the Bishop or his/her designee for authorized ministries in the congregation or setting in which their ministry is taking place.

## 2. ON-GOING SERVICE

- A. The PMA Steering Committee will provide the Bishop with recommendations concerning authorization, suitability, and accountability for service within the synod.
- B. A PMA Program participant may be asked to go through a psychological evaluation at any time.

## 3. RENEWAL OF CERTIFICATION

- A. The Application for Renewal of Certification must be submitted annually by any PMA wanting to renew their certification as a Parish Ministry Associate in the Nebraska Synod. Applications for renewal are due **May 1**. Certification is for July 1 through June 30 of the following year.

Late applications will be accepted until July 1, with a \$25 late fee required. Action on these requests will be taken by July 31, with certification valid through June 30 of the following year. Applications received after July 1 will not be considered and certification revoked. However, you may apply for reinstatement of certification; applications are due May 1.

- B. Consideration for renewal of certification will be granted or denied based on fulfillment of the continuing education requirements and abiding by PMA Program expectations. All PMAs are expected to participate in boundaries training once every three years. Nebraska Synod offers *Essential Boundaries for Wise Leaders* courses; approval of other boundaries training programs is given through our synod's boundaries training coordinator. Continuing education credit is granted for participation in boundaries training. The PMA Steering Committee may request an interview as part of the re-certification process.
- C. Per ELCA Church Council policy, all PMAs are expected to abide by *Definition and Guidelines for the Discipline of Rostered Ministers*. The document is available at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).

## 4. ACCOUNTABILITY AND REVOCATION

- A. Because PMAs are accountable to the whole church through the office of the synodical Bishop, authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical Bishop who need not specify the reason.
- B. The PMA Steering Committee provides the synodical Bishop with recommendations concerning authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod.
- C. Certification will be revoked if and/or when a PMA leaves or is removed from Nebraska Synod membership for any reason.

## 5. MENTORS AND SUPERVISORS

- A. **Unassigned PMAs** are required to have an ordained ELCA pastor as their mentor.
  - 1. When an ordained ELCA pastor is not available, the PMA may request approval from the Bishop to name an ordained pastor from a Full Communion denomination as their mentor until an ELCA pastor is available.

2. Mentors will conduct an annual evaluation with their unassigned PMAs, usually just before the annual Mentor/Supervisor/Council Annual Report is submitted. This report is due on **May 1**.
- B. **Assigned PMAs** are required to have an ordained ELCA pastor as their supervisor.
    1. When an ordained ELCA pastor is not available, the PMA may request approval from the Bishop to name an ordained pastor from a Full Communion denomination as their mentor until an ELCA pastor is available.
    2. Supervisors of assigned PMAs will meet monthly with the Assigned PMA and will annually submit the Mentor/Supervisor/Council Annual Report to the PMA Office. This report is due on **May 1**.
  - C. Specific duties of mentors and supervisors are described in the PMA Mentor and Supervisor Handbook.
  - D. Mentors and supervisors are welcome to attend PMA Convocations.
  - E. When a PMA serves on a church staff, the supervisor is the ordained pastor who is head of staff.
  - F. The name and contact information for your mentor or supervisor must be reported to the PMA Office and kept up to date.

## 6. TITLES AND CLERICAL ATTIRE

- A. PMAs will not wear clerical attire - e.g. clerical collars, clerical or diaconal stoles.
- B. PMAs are not to use the titles Pastor or Deacon because these are used only for ministers on the national roster of the ELCA. Neither is the title Vicar to be used, as Vicar refers to interns for pastoral ministry.

## 7. CONTINUING EDUCATION

- A. Twelve hours of continuing education per year is required. One hour of learning time equals one contact hour of continuing education. At a group event snack, break, and mealtimes do not count for learning time. **When planning your continuing education, choose at least 1 interactive activity (i.e., face-to-face) rather than all passive activities, (i.e., book studies).**
- B. Nebraska Synod's PMA Convocation, Fall Leadership Event, Assembly, and boundaries training are preferred events for continuing education.
- C. Up to six hours can be earned through participation in:
  1. Educational events offered by another ELCA synod.
  2. **If approved in advance by the PMA Office**, educational events offered by a Full Communion partner of the ELCA.
  3. **If approved in advance by the PMA Office**, educational events offered by colleges, professional associations, community organizations, et cetera.
  4. When not provided through ELCA or its Full Communion partners, pre-approval by the PMA Office is strongly encouraged for education experiences with a focus on spiritual formation and faith development.

- D. Three or six hours can be earned through participation in a Nebraska Synod vision, mission, or field trip:
1. For three to five-day trips, 3 hours will be granted upon completion of a three-page reflection and integration paper and processing the experience with the mentor or supervisor.
  2. For trips of five days or more, 6 hours will be granted upon completion of a six-page reflection and integration paper and processing the experience with the mentor or supervisor.
- E. Up to nine hours can be earned by:
1. Successful participation in Nebraska Synod’s “Drink from the Well” program.
  2. Use of online and video learning resources from sources such as Select Learning, The Great Courses, and distance learning sites of seminaries, colleges, and universities, **if approved in advance by the PMA Office**. Credit guidelines are the same as for elective credits for PMA Students. Reflection papers must show integration of the subject matter into the ministry of the participant.
    1. 1 credit – 4-9 contact hours plus a four-page paper.
    2. 2 credits – 10-18 contact hours plus a six-page paper.
    3. 3 credits – 19-26 contact hours plus a ten-page paper.
- F. Up to twelve hours can be earned by successful participation in *Seeking the Spirit Within* spiritual direction training program or *Stephen Ministry* training.
- G. Continuing education credits can be earned for reports on books read for the enhancement of ministry. The report should focus on new insights gained and how the new learning will be applied in the PMA’s ministry. **Reflection papers should be reviewed by Supervisor/Mentor and then sent to the PMA office and should include at a minimum: 1) What was the book about? 2) What did you learn? and 3) How will this be used in your ministry?** Credits are awarded as follows:
- Less than 200 pages in book = **plus report for 2 credits**
  - Between 200-400 pages in book = **plus report for 3 credits**
  - More than 400 pages in book = **plus report for 4 credits**
- H. To receive continuing education credit, PMAs must send a completed Continuing Education Report to the PMA Office.

## 8. ANNUAL REPORTS

- A. All PMAs are required to send completed annual evaluation forms to the PMA Office. It is the PMA’s responsibility to remind mentors, congregation councils, and supervisors of the annual evaluation requirement and deadlines. The PMA will provide the evaluation forms to their mentor, congregation council, and/or supervisor.
- B. When an Assigned PMA serves a multi-point parish, the parish council will complete the annual report on behalf of all congregation councils in the parish. The report from the parish council and supervisor will be shared with the Bishop.
- C. See page 3 for a chart of required annual reports and their due dates.

## 9. SACRAMENTS

- A. PMAs are not authorized for sacraments for individual days or services. When the pastor of a church with a PMA on staff will be absent for a few regularly scheduled sacraments, the congregation is asked to adjust their sacrament schedule to match their pastor's availability.
- B. When the pastor of a church with a PMA on staff will be absent for an extended period of time, the church council should endeavor to secure the services of a pastor from the synod pulpit supply list or a pastor from one of our Full Communion partner churches (United Methodist, Episcopal Church USA, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, Moravian Church) in order to maintain the sacramental life of the congregation. If none of these options work out, please contact the PMA office to discuss other possibilities.

## 10. FUNERALS

- A. Whether unassigned or assigned, serving in a ministry related to or not related to the synod, no PMA may conduct a funeral or memorial service independently at any location without having been approved to conduct funerals independently according to the steps outlined in Certified PMA Handbook section 10.E.
- B. When a PMA is asked to lead a funeral or memorial service, the PMA will first ascertain where the deceased held church membership, and then contact the pastor of that church. The PMA will not conduct the funeral or memorial service without the consent of the deceased's pastor.
- C. When a PMA who is not approved to conduct funerals independently is serving as a transitional (interim) minister and their supervising pastor is not available to help conduct the funeral, the PMA may contact another ordained ELCA or, if one is not available, a pastor from a Full Communion partner church to assist.
- D. If no ordained pastor is available, the Bishop may allow the PMA (on a one-time basis) to conduct the funeral independently. The PMA must contact the Bishop's office for authorization before the funeral.
- E. A Certified or Assigned PMA seeking permission to conduct funerals independently in the future will: accompany an ELCA pastor when visiting at the hospital, funeral home or the home of the deceased before the funeral; assist the pastor and may deliver the homily at the funeral (under the supervision and guidance of an ELCA pastor); and accompany the ELCA pastor in the bereavement follow-up. **After a PMA has satisfactorily assisted at and delivered the homily at a minimum of three funerals**, under the supervision of an ELCA pastor, and upon receiving a written request from the PMA's supervising pastor stating the PMA, in that pastor's opinion, has met all the requirements and is ready to officiate at funerals independently, the PMA office will grant permission to officiate at funerals without the presence of an ordained ELCA pastor. **Permission applies only at the congregations to which the PMA is assigned or to their home congregation.**
- F. A PMA that has been approved to conduct funerals independently is to be in conversation with their supervising pastor as the funeral is planned.

- G. When a PMA serves on a congregation's staff alongside an ordained pastor, the pastor will determine who leads the ministry with the family of the deceased, the funeral, preaching, and the bereavement follow-up.
- H. When the pastor of the congregation where the PMA is on staff is unavailable and grants permission, the PMA may conduct a funeral once the conditions for independently conducting a funeral have been met.

## 11. WEDDINGS

- A. Online ordination is incompatible with the conduct expected of rostered and/or authorized ministers. A PMA who seeks ordination outside of the ELCA in order to preside at any wedding will have their certification revoked.
- B. A PMA may participate in a wedding, except for the exchange of vows and signing the official marriage certificate, with the approval of their mentor or supervisor. **This applies to unassigned PMAs, PMAs on a church staff, and assigned PMAs who have not been trained and approved to solemnize marriages.** If your mentor or supervisor is not available, another ordained ELCA pastor should be asked to perform the exchange of vows and sign the official marriage certificate. If none is available, an ordained pastor from a church in Full Communion with the ELCA should be asked next.
- C. Because it is an increasing challenge to provide ordained clergy to preside at weddings as well as at regular eucharistic worship services, the Bishop and PMA Steering Committee of this synod agree to permit **assigned PMAs** to solemnize marriages, subject to the following requirements being met:
  1. The right is reserved only to those PMAs currently authorized to serve in a pastoral leadership capacity (i.e., assigned by the Bishop to serve a congregation in place of a pastor for regular or transitional ministry) or in the role of pastoral staff in a multiple-point parish with multiple ministerial staff (i.e., not simply being on staff in a congregation, even if that involves worship leadership).
  2. The right is reserved (as clearly stated in the Bishops' Relational Agreement) exclusively to the congregation where the PMA is assigned, with the congregation's concurrence, only for members of that congregation.
  3. The right is reserved only to those PMAs who have received preparation and whose authorization from the Bishop specifically includes this right (as is the case with presiding at funerals).
  4. Preparation includes instruction in premarital preparation (Prepare/Enrich is the only curriculum approved by PMA Steering Committee), basic law regarding marriage and worship planning for weddings. The latter two items are to be covered by a post-Prepare/Enrich workshop with an ELCA pastor to walk through all aspects of premarital work, rehearsals, and wedding services. PMAs who've not yet led a wedding are strongly encouraged to shadow a nearby ELCA or Full Communion pastor before leading a wedding on their own. That same pastor can be invited to work an ELCA wedding with the PMA.
  5. The right is restricted to the period and location covered by the authorization (i.e., if the PMA's assignment and/or authorization ends, so does the right to preside at marriages).
  6. PMAs who violate the restrictions are liable not only to ecclesial discipline (which will likely include revocation of certification) but to civil prosecution and litigation.



7. For authorization to be considered, submit the completed Weddings Authorization Request form to the PMA Office as soon as both elements of training are completed.  
\*See website page for the forms and instructions.

## **12. COUNSELING**

- A. PMAs are not to offer any counseling as part of their ministries unless they hold the appropriate credentials.
- B. Only assigned PMAs who have been trained and approved per the requirements of Section 11 may provide pre-marital preparation.

## **13. ECUMENICAL SERVICE**

- A. The Full Communion agreements of the ELCA include the principle of reciprocity in recognizing each other's equivalent credentials for ministry. Certified PMAs may accept the invitation to serve in denominations that are in Full Communion with the ELCA, and PMA Students who have satisfactorily completed the required courses may accept invitations to provide pulpit supply in denominations that are in Full Communion with the ELCA: United Methodist Church; Episcopal Church USA; Presbyterian Church USA; United Church of Christ; Reformed Church in America; Moravian Church in America.
- B. PMAs serving long-term in a Full Communion partner denomination are subject to the polity requirements of that denomination, which may include the requirement of full membership in that denomination. Should full membership in that denomination be required, the ELCA policy prohibiting full membership in two denominations simultaneously comes into effect. There are two choices in this situation:
  1. Change to associate member status in your ELCA congregation, continue your involvement in your ELCA congregation, and keep your PMA status while also being recognized by the Full Communion partner.
  2. Resign your ELCA membership for the duration of your service in that denomination. When your service is completed and you return to ELCA membership, you may apply to the PMA Steering Committee for reinstatement of your PMA status.
- C. PMAs serving long-term in a Full Communion partner denomination shall have an ordained pastor of that denomination as their supervisor and, for the maintenance of ties to the Nebraska Synod, an ordained ELCA pastor, currently under call, as their mentor.

## **14. COMPENSATION**

- A. In on-going or transitional (interim) ministries where there is to be compensation, it will be determined in consultation with the PMA, the synod staff, and the congregation council and recorded in the Assigned PMA Service Agreement (*See PMA page on synod website*), the Letter of Agreement for Transitional Ministry, or the Pulpit Supply Agreement.

## **15. OTHER MATTERS**

- A. At those points where matters have not been addressed, the PMA Program will follow the ELCA's *Guidelines Related to Synod Authorized or Licensed Ministries* and *A Statement*

## 16. PMAs MAY BE ASSIGNED BY BISHOP

- A. Certified PMAs are eligible to be assigned to a congregation and authorized by the Bishop for sacraments for that congregation for a specified time where need exists as identified by the congregation, synod, and Bishop.
  - 1. The authorization will be evidenced by an appropriate letter describing the terms, conditions, and scope of the authorization.
  - 2. The ministry description may also limit or prohibit activities.
  - 3. Assigned PMAs will follow all guidelines in the “Supervision and Accountability” section of this handbook.
- B. Renewal of authorization for assigned PMAs is given annually by the Bishop when a demonstrated need for its continuation remains. Requests for renewal of authorization are due May 1. Authorization is for July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Authorization expires on June 30 regardless of the date the assignment began. Requests are emailed to [pma@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:pma@nebraskasynod.org) or mailed to the Bishop’s office.
- C. Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical Bishop who need not specify the reason.
- D. When, in the judgment of the synod Bishop, a PMA is providing long-term Word and Sacrament ministry, the PMA must consult with the authorizing Bishop concerning the ELCA expectation as stated in the *ELCA Guidelines Related to Synod Authorized or Licensed Ministries*, regarding candidacy and theological preparation while serving in synod authorized ministry.

## 17. AUTHORIZATION FOR WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY

- A. The Bishop will determine authorization for Word and Sacrament ministry, consistent with the policies of the ELCA. Authorization for sacraments and funerals applies only at the congregation(s) to which a PMA has been assigned by the Bishop. A Sample “*New Request for Sacrament Authorization*” is in the PMA section of our synod website. Requests are emailed to [pma@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:pma@nebraskasynod.org) or mailed to the Bishop’s office.
- B. Renewal of authorization may be given by the Bishop when a demonstrated need continues. Requests for renewal of authorization are due by May 1. Authorizations are for July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Authorization expires on June 30 of each year regardless of the starting date of assignment or authorization. A Sample Request for Renewal of Sacrament Authorization is at [www.nebraskasynod.org](http://www.nebraskasynod.org). Requests are emailed to [pma@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:pma@nebraskasynod.org).
- C. It is the PMA’s responsibility to remind the congregation council to submit a request for renewal of authorization for sacraments to the Bishop prior to each deadline.

## 18. SUPERVISION AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF ASSIGNED PMAs

- A. In all cases, an assigned PMA shall be under the direct supervision of an ordained ELCA pastor approved by the Bishop. Exceptions require the specific approval of the Bishop.

- B. Local accountability and supervision for an assigned PMA in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the congregation council. At least once per year the Assigned PMA and council should set aside time to discuss: the professional and spiritual strengths of the PMA; the professional and spiritual growth areas of the PMA; how the ministry is going; where ministry could be improved.
- C. Local accountability and supervision for an assigned PMA in a non-congregational setting within the synod is the direct responsibility of the governing body that conducts that ministry, or if there is no such entity, the Synod Council.
- D. The responsibilities of the supervising pastor shall include:
  - 1. Monthly consultation with the PMA.
  - 2. Review of the PMA Program guidelines described in this handbook and the Mentors and Supervisors Handbook with the council and for the supervisor's own awareness.
  - 3. Signing and returning the acknowledgement page from the Certified PMA Handbook and Mentors and Supervisors Handbook.
- E. Like rostered leaders of the ELCA, PMAs will be subject to discipline by the Bishop.

## **19. PASTORAL ETHICS UPON RESIGNING OR RETIRING FROM AN ASSIGNMENT BY THE BISHOP OR A STAFF POSITION**

Since assigned PMAs serve in place of a pastor or function as deacons on larger congregational staffs, and parishioners view PMAs on a church staff as part of the pastoral team and a minister in that congregation, PMAs who leave their assignment or staff position commit to the same ethical boundaries as pastors and deacons. These ethical boundaries are included in the Pastoral Ethics documents that rostered ministers and congregations sign at the end of a call or time of transitional ministry.

It is important to allow the congregation you have served and loved, the freedom and opportunity to develop a new vision for ministry and a trusting, loving relationship with their next minister. The continuing presence of the just-resigned or -retired minister hinders this.

While pastors and deacons must absent themselves from activities and participation in their former congregation for not less than one year after the installation of the next rostered minister, we recognize assigned and staff PMAs are in a unique situation because they are often from the area they serve or have been serving their home congregation. Accordingly, expectations for PMAs differ in that they are to absent themselves from activities and participation in the congregation from which they just retired or resigned for one year from the last day of ministry. If economic, family, or other reasons make this a serious challenge, please consult with the Bishop before any firm decisions are made.

*Sign and date the Declaration and send it to the PMA Office.*

**Declaration of Acceptance of the Certified PMA Guidelines**  
set forth in this Certified PMA Handbook, revised **March 2023**

We have read the **March 2023** version of the Certified Parish Ministry Associate's Handbook and will abide by its guidelines while involved with the PMA Program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name (printed) of PMA*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name (printed) of Mentor or Supervisor*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of PMA*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Mentor or Supervisor*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date signed*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date signed*

After signing and dating this last page of your Certified PMA Handbook, send this page to the PMA Office to be placed in your personal file.

Send to:

PMA Administrator  
Nebraska Synod, ELCA  
6757 Newport Ave., Suite #200  
Omaha, NE 68152

OR

[pma@nebraskasynod.org](mailto:pma@nebraskasynod.org)