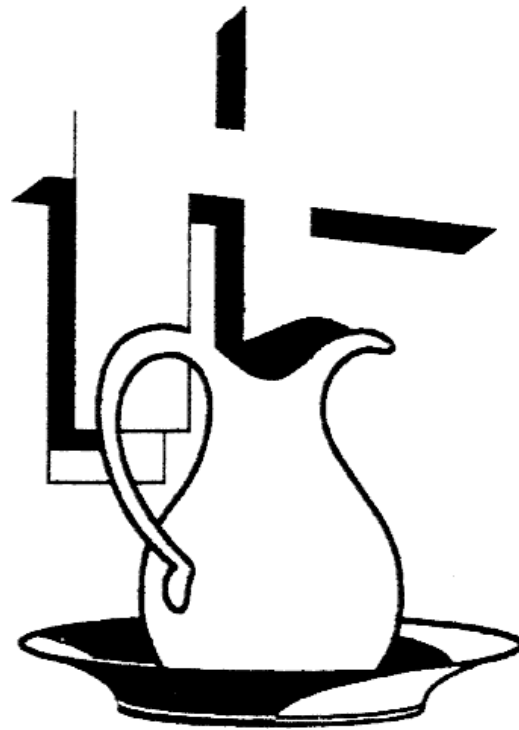


PMA STUDENT HANDBOOK



Parish Ministry Associate Program

Nebraska Synod, ELCA

July 2024

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1. 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.

PMA course work "is designed to challenge and take students into deeper and more adequate theological understanding and articulation. This may seem unsettling as you are asked to examine your conventional theology and consider new perspectives. Finally, this process is not about deconstructing faith but arriving at a more adequate theology that can measure up to the profound questions you will face in ministry situations...." (Dr. Craig Nesson; address to Wartburg Theological Seminary, September 2018).

2. INTRODUCTION

- A. Parish Ministry Associate is the Nebraska Synod name for Synod Authorized Ministers described by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and administered by the ELCA Conference of Bishops.
- B. The PMA Program will identify and equip persons for service in congregations.
- C. When willing, PMAs 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 an ordained pastor as supervisor. PMAs always serve in *partnership* with ordained pastors, not independent of ordained pastors.
- D. The PMA Program is administered by the Nebraska Synod of the ELCA.
- E. The PMA Steering Committee is involved in determining the process of application and program of preparation, in harmony with the guidelines established by the ELCA and its Conference of Bishops, which oversee synod-authorized ministries. The PMA Steering Committee also has general oversight of the program, with accountability to the Bishop of the Nebraska Synod.
- F. While the PMA Program is authorized to grant credentials only to ELCA members, members of denominations in Full Communion with the ELCA are welcome to study through the program for their own enrichment or as part of a plan to seek certification in their own denomination.
- G. 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. Current Full Communion partners are the: United Methodist Church; Episcopal Church USA; Presbyterian Church USA; United Church of Christ; Reformed Church in America; and the Moravian Church in America.

3. RECRUITMENT OF CANDIDATES

- A. Pastors, deacons, and congregations should identify and encourage people to consider this opportunity for service to Christ's church.
- B. Individuals may also indicate their interest to their pastor, deacon, or congregation council.
- C. Great care must be exercised by the pastor, deacon, and congregation council to evaluate a potential student's sense of call, spiritual maturity, leadership skills, commitment to the ELCA, and willingness to learn and serve.

4. REQUIREMENTS OF PMA STUDENTS

- A. Applicants must be active members of an ELCA congregation for at least one year and remain active ELCA members to maintain PMA Student status.
- B. The application packet is found at www.nebraskasynod.org and is to be filled out by the applicant, by his or her congregation council, and all required references. All completed application materials and the non-refundable application fee are sent to the Nebraska Synod PMA Office. Admission to the Program is decided by the PMA Steering Committee.
- C. The participant is expected to demonstrate spiritual maturity and a willingness to learn, serve, and grow.
- D. Per ELCA Church Council guidelines, as a candidate for ministry, all PMA Students are expected to abide by *Definition and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers*. The document is available at www.elca.org.
- E. PMA certification is an educational program of part-time studies over two to five years, with the pace determined by the student.
- F. Participants must successfully complete the required courses and training specified in section 6.
- G. Each PMA Student must select an ordained ELCA pastor as their mentor--usually their home pastor--for guidance, wisdom, and support who will “walk through” the program with him/her. The name and contact information for your mentor must be reported to the PMA Office and kept up to date.
- H. Before being able to do pulpit supply as a recognized PMA Student, the following courses must be successfully completed: How Lutherans Interpret the Bible; Old Testament; New Testament; Systematic Theology; Lutheran Theology/Confessional Writings; and Foundations of Biblical Preaching.
- I. Upon completion of the program requirements, participants will be interviewed by members of the PMA Steering Committee. The synod council may then certify the student who has satisfactorily completed the program and has been recommended by the PMA Steering Committee.
- J. Certified PMAs and PMA Students may retain their membership in their home congregation even if asked to serve elsewhere in Nebraska.

5. EVALUATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS DURING PREPARATION

- A. Persons who are considered for ministry through the Parish Ministry Associate Program must meet the criteria for public ministry with a congregation or other ministry of this church:
 - 1. Evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ.
 - 2. Satisfactory completion of the synod program of preparation including demonstration of appropriate ministry skills, payment of all fees, and all required paperwork.
 - 3. Knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

4. A willingness to meet the ELCA’s expectations concerning personal conduct and behavior of persons serving in public ministry. (Please refer to the *Definition and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers*, available at www.elca.org).

B. Assessment of each participant’s progress will include:

1. The Facilitator’s Course Report regarding course work and attendance is to be sent by each facilitator to the PMA Office for each course completed by class participants. Online courses are also available and are evaluated by Select Learning’s facilitators. All fees for online courses are paid directly to Select Learning by the student.
 - a. All Select Learning courses require an evaluation by a Select Learning representative, of a ten-page reflection paper showing acceptable course completion. See the Select Learning website for details.
 - b. Select Learning certificates of successful completion of a course must be forwarded to the PMA Office for credit to be granted.

C. Annual evaluations for PMA Students are due according to this chart:

CHART OF SUPERVISION AND REPORTS DUE

PMA Type	Has a Mentor	Has a Supervisor	Annual Report from Mentor	Annual Report from Supervisor	Annual Report from Council	Deadline for Reports
Student ¹	X		X			July 1
Unassigned	X		X			July 1
On Staff		X ²		X	X	July 1
Assigned ²		X		X	X	July 1
Authorization Renewal					Sent in by Council Chairperson	July 1

¹ A student serving on a congregation’s staff will follow the On Staff reporting pattern.

² When the PMA is on staff, the supervisor is the ordained pastor who is head of staff.

1. The PMA Student may be asked to go through a psychological evaluation.
2. The bishop or the PMA Steering Committee has the right to terminate the student from the program at any time.
3. PMA Students working toward their certification may function in approved ways as identified by the congregation, synod and if they have the bishop’s approval.

6. COURSES

A. The course of study requires 30 credits for core courses, four credits for elective courses, and attend at least two PMA Convocations to be eligible for certification as a PMA. Mentors and supervisors are also welcome to attend the convocations.

1. **The first course any student takes must be the required prerequisite, *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible*.** The PMA Office provides this DVD course at no charge and students watch and process this material *with their mentor*. The

mentor submits a short evaluation of the students processing of the material. The student is NOT required to write a paper, and no credit is granted.

2. All required courses use material from Select Learning, the distance education service of our ELCA. Classes and resources for PMA Students are found under the Synod Authorized Ministry Program tab at www.selectlearning.org.

3. Courses may be taken online or in a facilitator-led group. When this is not possible, courses may be taken as independent study with the advance approval of the PMA Office.

4. Courses for the Spiritual Discernment and Faith Development requirements not offered by Nebraska Synod or another ELCA Synod, require advance approval by the PMA Office.

B. **Facilitator-led courses** use Select Learning materials in group/classroom settings with a facilitator approved by the PMA Office. Zoom is a tool that may be utilized as an option for the class as well.

1. Meeting places in Nebraska and schedules will vary according to the location of the students and facilitators.

2. The PMA Administrator encourages students to find geographically central locations for the classes as well as the facilitator.

3. Students and facilitators decide dates and times of classes. Payment of the tuition for that class is required prior to the first-class session. Checks are payable to Nebraska Synod and sent to the PMA Office.

4. Select Learning course material for the facilitator will be ordered and paid for by the PMA Program and shipped directly to the facilitator. Course study resources should remain with the facilitator for the duration of the course. Students are responsible for the purchase of their own books from any source they find convenient. The facilitator should have no expense in providing their own or student course study materials.

C. When ten-page final papers are required for a course, they must be sent to Select Learning by the PMA Student within two weeks of completing the course. Students are strongly encouraged to have their mentor go over their paper **before** submitting the paper for evaluation.

D. The following are the only approved core courses, and must be taken through SelectLearning:

1. **Biblical Studies**

a. Introduction to the Old Testament (3 credits) *

b. Introduction to the New Testament (3 credits) *

2. **Lutheran Theology/Confessional Writings**

a. Getting Down to Basics: Augsburg Confession & Small Catechism (3 cr.) *

3. **Systematic Theology**

a. Systematic Theology: Fundamentals of Christian Theology (3 credits) *

4. **Ministry Practice** (one 10-page paper combined for courses 4b & 4c)
 - a. Foundations of Biblical Preaching (*online only*) (3 credits)
 - b. Good God Questions, Volumes 1 & 2 (2 credits)*
 - c. Let's Talk About Death (1 credit)*
 - d. Leadership Course. (4-page reflection paper) (1 credit)
5. **Church History** (one 10-page paper combined for courses 5b & 5c)
 - a. From Jesus to Luther (3 credits) *
 - b. Reformation Roots (2 credits) *
 - c. We Must Plant the Church (1 credit)*
6. **Christian Ethics**
 - a. Ethics in Lutheran Perspective (3 credits) *
7. **Spiritual Practices and Faith Development** (2 credits)

Two separate educational experiences in spiritual practices or faith development are required. Each experience must include at least five hours of educational time plus one, four-page paper submitted to the PMA Office. ***One credit will be granted for each experience.*** Students who have completed spiritual director training through Seeking the Spirit Within will be given 2 credits for this and may ask for all four elective credits to be covered by this training. Students who have completed “Drink from the Well” and a four-page paper submitted to the PMA Office will be given 2 credits in this area.

(* denotes one 10-page paper due)

- E. **Electives** (4 credits) are Select Learning courses and other learning events pre-approved by the PMA Office. Per curriculum guidelines from our ELCA Conference of Bishops, we recommend your electives include the following topics: worship (leadership and planning); outreach; and leadership (expectations and identity).
- F. “Boundaries & Inclusion Training” must be completed prior to the certification interview with PMA Steering Committee. Students are strongly encouraged to take this training early in their studies. Credit toward PMA Program requirements is not granted for boundaries training while a PMA Student.

7. COURSE CREDITS

- A. Each course has corresponding credit(s) assigned. Credit guidelines for electives involve contact hours plus a required reflection paper that shows integration of the material into the ministry objective 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.
- B. Select Learning courses and other courses pre-approved by the PMA Office may be used as electives. Reflection papers for electives are to be read, approved, and signed by the facilitator and/or mentor and sent to the PMA Office.

No credit will be given for the following: Synod Assembly; regular ministerial association or cluster meetings; pericope/text study groups; boundaries training; ELCA Youth Gathering event.

- C. Evidence of prior preparation that has achieved the goals and standards of the Nebraska Synod PMA Program will be evaluated by the PMA Office for possible granting of credit toward certification. Course and credit equivalency will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8. SCHOLARSHIPS AND COSTS

- A. Congregations are encouraged to share the financial responsibilities with the PMA Student. Financial responsibilities may also be shared by the synod, clusters, and other ministries.
- B. Need-based scholarships may be available from the PMA Program. Please inquire with the PMA Office.
- C. See the “Fees and Cost” document on the Nebraska Synod website for an estimate of costs for completing training.

9. Handbook Acknowledgement

- A. Please verify that you have read through the Handbook with your Mentor/Supervisor. This is located on the Google form for [PMA Mentor/Supervisor -New Student Handbook](#)

