

# Lay Ministry Institute of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA A HANDBOOK

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Lay Ministry Institute (LMI)
2	A Brief History
3	Authorized Lay Leaders and other Lay Leaders
4	Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors Responsibilities
4	Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors ( <i>as of October 2008</i> )
5	LMI Lay Leader Programs
5	Application to the Lay Ministry Institute
6	Lay Ministry Institute Curriculum
6	Expectations for Mentor Pastors of Lay Leaders in Training
7	Requirements for a Certificate of Completion
7	Requirements for Authorization as Lay Leader
8	Requirements for Continued Authorization as a Lay Leader
8	Expectations for Mentor Pastors of Authorized Lay Leaders
9	Code of Practice for Authorized Lay Leaders
9	Mentor Relationship
9	Permission for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders
10	Permission for Other Authorized Lay Leaders
10	Congregational Settings
10	Expectations for Authorized Lay Leaders
11	Continuing Education for Authorized Lay Leaders
11	Discipline
12	Appendix A: “The Ministry that is the Church’s” (Bishop Robert Driesen)
14	Appendix B: “Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” (ELCA Church Council)
16	Appendix C: “A Statement of Understanding Concerning Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament” (ELCA Conference of Bishops)
17	Appendix D: “Applying for a Background Check”
19	Appendix E: “Model Covenant: Authorized Lay Worship Leader” and “Model Covenant: Mentor Pastor”
21	Appendix F: “Sample Permission Letter for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders to Preside”
22	Appendix G: “Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers” (ELCA Church Council)
29	Appendix H: “Statement of Commitment—Authorized Lay Leaders”
30	Appendix I: “ELCA Standards Questionnaire—Authorized Lay Leaders”
32	Appendix J: “Normative Ethical Practices for Ordained Ministers of the Upper Susquehanna Synod”
36	Appendix K: “Application for Lay Leader Program of the Lay Ministry Institute”

## **Lay Ministry Institute (LMI)**

The mission of the Lay Ministry Institute (LMI) is to educate and equip lay people for theologically sound ministry. Programs of the Lay Ministry Institute are administered by a Board of Directors (membership recommended by the LMI Board of Directors and appointed by the Synod Council) and a coordinator (appointed by the Board of Directors). The Lay Ministry Institute is under the office of the bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod (U.S.S.) which provides oversight and accountability to its programs, and which authorizes lay leaders for ministry in U.S.S. congregations.

## **A Brief History**

In the 1980s, the Central Pennsylvania Synod (Lutheran Church in America) developed a training program—the “Lay Assistant Program”—to teach lay persons to preach and lead worship to assist their own congregations. The congregations and territory of the Central Penn Synod were divided into three different synods—one being the Upper Susquehanna Synod—with the birth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

In 1995, the ELCA Church Council produced a document that allowed for the development of Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries (CC95.04.47t). This new document renewed conversations within the Upper Susquehanna Synod about the growing need to train more lay persons in leading congregational worship. U.S.S. Bishop A. Donald Main asked Pastor Glenn Heasley, assistant to the bishop, to form a committee to explore what this could look like on the territory of the synod.

Around this same time, the Upper Susquehanna Synod was encouraging all congregations to move toward weekly communion. This effort influenced the training program’s focus to include both preaching and presiding at the sacrament when authorized by the bishop. The Authorized Lay Worship Leader training program was created to cover the appropriate issues of homiletics, worship, theology, Church history, and some practical hands-on experiences. The training was extensive and addressed some people’s concerns about lay persons being adequately prepared for this service. While many lay persons had been trained by their pastors over the years to lead worship during the pastor’s vacations, the Lay Worship Leader training program was an effort to standardize the training and bring the use of those so trained under the office of the bishop. In 1999, six U.S.S. members who were trained in the former Central Pennsylvania Synod’s “Lay Assistant Program” were inducted as the Upper Susquehanna Synod’s first Authorized Lay Worship Leaders.

The initial U.S.S. worship leader’s training program consisted of two years of sessions. The Authorized Lay Worship Committee then evaluated and revised the program and process based on comments from seminary professors, mentor pastors, and the students themselves. In 2000, having completed the first training program, twenty-three more U.S.S. members were inducted as Authorized Lay Worship Leaders. Concerns were addressed, admission and continuance standards described and applied, and the joys of persons serving in this role were celebrated!

In 2004, the Authorized Lay Worship Committee expanded into areas of ministry other than worship. The Lay Ministry Institute was formed, allowing for the future development of lay catechists,

evangelists, steward leaders, youth workers, and others. The initial programs of the Lay Ministry Institute in 2007-2009 featured training for Lay Catechists, Lay Evangelists, and Lay Worship Leaders.

In March 2005, the ELCA Conference of Bishops adopted “A Statement of Understanding Concerning Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament” [CB05.03.01] (**Appendix B**). In April of both 2005 and 2006 the ELCA Church Council adopted amendments to the 1995 “Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” (CC95.04.47t) (**Appendix C**). In 2007, the Board of the Lay Ministry Institute discerned the need to create a handbook to better interpret their program for the synod, to provide guidance for participants in the program, to revise and update the program for current synodical needs, and to bring it into compliance with the revised standards of the ELCA.

In 2008, U.S.S. Bishop Robert L. Driesen developed a theological foundation regarding the church’s use of authorized lay persons to preside at the Eucharist. This foundation (**Appendix A**) was used by the Board to further refine the synod’s protocol for using authorized lay worship leaders. The new protocols will take effect in 2009. Having been approved by the LMI Board and the Synod Council, this newly developed Handbook is being shared across the Upper Susquehanna Synod in late 2008.

### **Authorized Lay Leaders and other Lay Leaders**

The term “authorized” in regard to the LMI lay leader programs carries a distinct meaning, and does not automatically apply to all LMI program participants. Most participants in LMI programs do so for the purpose of making their skills and gifts available as resources to the congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. At program’s end, these participants may receive the authorization of the bishop in addition to a certificate of completion. Authorization by the bishop assures congregations that such resource people have been adequately prepared, continue to develop their skills, and are accountable to the larger church.

Some who apply for and complete a program of the Lay Ministry Institute may do so with the sole intent of assisting their own congregations in ministry. Such participants are welcome in the program, receiving the same education and support as other program participants, and a certificate of completion at program’s end. Except for Lay Worship Leaders (for reasons stated below), such participants in lay leader programs do not need authorization from the bishop to serve in their own congregations.

The Board of the Lay Ministry Institute trains, examines, and recommends lay leaders to the bishop for authorization. In consultation with the Synod Council, the bishop approves, installs, and authorizes lay leaders for service in congregations. Authorized lay leaders are mentored by an ordained minister in a covenantal relationship, and comply with the authorized lay leaders’ code of practice. The bishop’s authorization of a lay leader is revisited annually upon the leader’s completion of requirements for continued authorization.

All participants in the Lay Worship Leaders program are required to receive the authorization of the bishop. Participants in other programs of the LMI, such as Lay Catechists and Lay Evangelists, may seek such authorization if they choose to make themselves available to other congregations as resources. If they choose to offer themselves as resources only in their own congregation, they do not need the bishop’s authorization to do so.

It is because of our Lutheran theological understanding of ministry and in compliance with the “Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” of the ELCA (CC95.04.47t) (**Appendix B**) that the Upper Susquehanna Synod requires any lay person who would preside at the Eucharist be authorized by the bishop to do so. The Authorized Lay Worship Leader program of the LMI equips the baptized well for this ministry.

### **Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors Responsibilities**

The programs of the Lay Ministry Institute are administered by the LMI Board of Directors and LMI Coordinator. The responsibilities of the Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors include the following:

- **Application:** determining requirements for application to LMI programs in accordance with the guidelines established by the ELCA (**Appendix B**); creating application forms (**Appendix K**); making application forms readily available to applicants; reviewing, cataloging and securing all applicant files; and determining which applicants may be admitted.
- **Curriculum:** determining educational requirements for each of the lay ministry programs including pre-classroom work; recruiting instructors; giving guidance to instructors for class expectations; creating class schedules; and providing for classroom needs.
- **Evaluation:** creating guidelines for reviewing students’ progress; creating and reviewing evaluations forms for mentors/supervisors both at the midpoint and end of the program.
- **Examination:** reviewing and evaluating students’ files; determining and enforcing standards for eligibility for authorization; and establishing standards for evaluating applicants whose training/preparation has occurred outside the Lay Ministry Institute programs.
- **Authorization:** recommending suitable students to the bishop for authorization; establishing requirements for continued authorization of such lay leaders over time; establishing a protocol for permitting Authorized Lay Worship Leaders to preside at the Eucharist.
- **Installation:** providing for a rite of passage for those who will become authorized lay leaders.
- **Expectations:** creating a code of practice for authorized lay leaders and distributing it widely among leaders and congregations.

### **Lay Ministry Institute Board of Directors** *(as of October 2008)*

The Rev. Wayne Muthler, Chair  
The Rev. Melody Sell, Coordinator  
Mr. Harry Deitz  
Ms. Virginia Frantz, Associate in Ministry  
Mr. Mark Giesen  
The Rev. Charles Hershberger  
The Rev. Gretchen Johanson

The Rev. John Koons  
The Rev. Daniel May  
The Rev. David Pennebaker  
The Rev. Gary Roth  
The Rev. Beth Ann L. Stone  
Ms. Christy Zeigler  
Bishop Robert L. Driesen

## LMI Lay Leader Programs

Students completing the following LMI programs may be authorized by the bishop to assist congregations other than their own in the leader's area of training.

- **Lay Worship Leaders** are trained to lead worship, preach, and preside in congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. With the bishop's written permission an Authorized Lay Worship Leader may preside at the Eucharist of a particular congregation on a specific date. This is the only LMI program in which all applicants must seek the bishop's authorization at program's end.
- **Lay Evangelists** are trained to tell the story of the Gospel in various ways, and to encourage and train others to do the same.
- **Lay Catechists** are trained to assist in a congregation's catechetical (Christian education) ministries.

Future lay leader training programs may include the following:

- **Lay Mission Advocates** would be trained to assist a congregation in envisioning, developing, and implementing the congregation's mission.
- **Lay Stewards** would be trained to share with a congregation their understanding of and commitment to the church's and the world's resources.
- **Lay Youth Leaders** would be trained to encourage intentionally a congregation's care and concern for its younger members.

## Application to The Lay Ministry Institute

Participants in the programs of the LMI are active, confirmed, communing, and contributing members of Upper Susquehanna Synod congregations. They are recognized as leaders by their congregations, uphold the highest standards of the Christian life, are faithful in their personal lives, and agree to live by the standards expressed in *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA* (**Appendix G**). They work closely with a mentoring ordained minister (usually the pastor of their home congregation) throughout the training process.

Applications to participate in a lay leader program of the LMI include the following (**Appendix K**):

- Completed application form, including basic personal information, prior church leadership experience, and answers to questions about the applicant's spiritual formation.
- Contact information for three personal references (other than the applicant's pastor).
- An autobiographical essay reflecting the applicant's process of discerning this call to service.
- A completed and signed statement from the applicant's pastor, including a letter of reference.
- A letter of reference from the applicant's Congregation Council.
- A personal interview with a member of the LMI Board.

Applications for authorization by the bishop at program's end also include the following:

- Original reports from required background checks (**Appendix D**). No report shall be more than one year old at the time of application. Originals will be returned after a synod staff person makes copies for the applicant's file.

- Agreement and signature to a Statement of Commitment for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix H**).
- Completion of and signature to an ELCA Standards Questionnaire for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix I**).

Based on their complete application, the LMI Board determines whether an applicant may be admitted to a LMI program. Accepted applicants are expected to remit tuition in a timely manner, making arrangements with the coordinator if an installment plan is desired. Upon acceptance into the program, students are asked to complete *The Lutheran Course* and *Bible Tutor* (or other similar courses required by the LMI Board) prior to the Orientation session.

### **Lay Ministry Institute Curriculum**

All lay leader programs of the Lay Ministry Institute use the same core curriculum with additional sessions on material particular to each program's area of ministry. The core curriculum includes instruction in the following: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, American Lutheranism and Other Denominations, Lutheran Theology, Christology and the Sacraments, the Catechism. In addition, all students attend an Orientation session and Final Gathering session.

### **Expectations for Mentor Pastors of Lay Leaders in Training**

Mentoring pastors are a key partner in the training of lay leaders through programs of the Lay Ministry Institute, assisting the LMI Board and class instructors in a participant's education and supervision. Mentor Pastors make a commitment of their time and expertise to support the equipping of lay leaders for ministry. Mentor Pastors provide individual attention and support to participants as they engage in theological education and ministry practice. They provide valuable feedback both to participants and the LMI Board about a participant's development. Mentor Pastors invite and encourage participants to apply what they've learned in the own congregational setting through experiences of leadership in the participant's area of study.

A Mentor Pastor shall:

- Be an ordained minister on the roll of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA.
- Be approved as a Mentor Pastor by the bishop.
- Clearly understand and be committed without reservation to the programs of the Lay Ministry Institute.
- Be an effective model for and guide to the LMI participant in their area of study.
- Maintain the Mentor Pastor relationship with the participant unless the relationship is terminated in consultation with the bishop.

The responsibilities of the Mentor Pastor are as follows:

- Participate in Mentor Pastor training.
- Willingly be available to meet and share with the participant throughout his/her training process:
  - Prior to each scheduled training session to offer resource materials and study

- suggestions.
  - Soon after each scheduled training session to reflect on the participant's learning experience and/or work.
  - These two responsibilities may be combined in one meeting.
- Provide appropriate leadership opportunities within the congregational setting for the participant.
  - Lay Worship Leaders in training are asked to lead worship quarterly beginning in October of their first year of training.
  - Lay Worship Leaders are asked to preach three times in the first year, and two times in the second year of training prior to April 1.
  - Lay Worship Leaders are asked to assist with Communion quarterly, including setting the table.
  - Other Lay Leaders in training are asked to take on specific leadership roles on occasion in their area of training.
- Provide thorough evaluations as requested by the LMI Board and the bishop on or before dates due. Evaluations include the initial letter of reference for the applicant, midpoint evaluations, and final evaluations.

### **Requirements for a Certificate of Completion**

Participants in programs of the Lay Ministry Institute who have satisfied all requirements of their program receive a certificate of completion at program's end. Those participants will have:

- Completed *The Lutheran Course* and *Bible Tutor* (or other similar courses required by the LMI Board) prior to the Orientation session.
- Attended all class sessions, or for sessions missed, supplied a written excuse approved by the LMI Coordinator prior to the class meeting. (Such approved excuses shall be recorded in the participant's file.)
- Completed all assignments as required by their program, both written and tasked in the congregation.
- Initiated regular meetings with their Mentor Pastor. Participants are expected to meet with their Mentor Pastor prior to each session to discuss resource materials and study preparations, and subsequent to each session to reflect on the participants' learning experience.
- Completed midpoint and final evaluations as requested.

### **Requirements for Authorization as Lay Leader**

To receive a positive recommendation by the LMI Board for a lay leader to be authorized by the bishop, participants in a program of the Lay Ministry Institute must:

- Read, complete, sign and submit the "Statement of Commitment" for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix H**)
- Read, complete, sign and submit the "ELCA Standards Questionnaire" for authorized lay leaders (**Appendix I**)
- Submit original copies of required background checks to the synod office for their file (**Appendix D**).

- Satisfy all requirements to receive a Certificate of Completion for an LMI program.
- Complete an interview with the LMI Board.
- Create a covenant with a Mentor Pastor on a plan for remaining accountable to the larger church as an authorized lay leader (**Appendix E**). Copies of both the lay leader's and mentor's covenants must be sent to the synod office for the lay leader's file.

The bishop determines whether a lay leader who is recommended by the LMI Board is approved for authorization. Those so approved participate in a joint service of installation marking their authorized status.

### **Requirements for Continued Authorization as a Lay Leader**

The continued authorization of an authorized lay leader shall be reviewed annually by the office of the bishop. Authorized lay leaders shall be required annually to submit to the office of the bishop an updated covenant agreement, signed by the leader and their Mentor Pastor, outlining their mutual expectations for the leader's ministry for the coming year (**Appendix E**). The covenant shall outline the leader's plans for a continuing education experience, and the leader/mentor's plans to meet periodically to review the leader's ministry. A newly updated and signed "Statement of Commitment" must also be submitted annually for the leader's authorization to be continued (**Appendix H**).

A notice of their continued authorization will be sent to each authorized lay leader following the bishop's review of their file. An updated roll of Authorized Lay Worship Leaders will be kept at the office of the bishop, and only those whose authorization has been continued may receive referrals for Sunday supply or permission to preside at the Eucharist.

"Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical bishop, who need not specify the reason." ("Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries" of the ELCA--CC95.04.47t) (**Appendix B**).

### **Expectations for Mentor Pastors of Authorized Lay Leaders**

Mentoring pastors are a key partner in the continued authorization of lay leaders by the bishop. It is a local, mentoring ordained minister who provides for the ongoing supervision and accountability of an authorized lay leader through a mutually-established, annually-renewed covenant.

The authorized lay leader is responsible for initiating a mentor relationship with an ordained minister of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Ideally, but not necessarily, the mentor may be the lay leader's own pastor. Together, the authorized lay leader and their mentor complete a covenant which outlines their mutual expectations (**Appendix E**). The authorized lay leader provides a copy of the covenant, signed by both partners, to the synod office when applying for initial or continued authorization. Both partners are responsible for fulfilling the expectations of the covenant.

A mentoring pastor is expected (as are all rostered leaders) to uphold the standards of "Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers" (**Appendix G**) at all times, and the "Normative Ethical Practices for Ordained Ministers of the Upper Susquehanna Synod" (**Appendix J**). A mentor who violates these

standards and practices may be terminated by the bishop in his/her role as a mentor, and be subjected to further discipline according to the practices of the ELCA.

If a mentor is unable to keep a covenant, he/she is to alert the authorized lay leader as soon as possible to allow them time to find a new mentoring partner—a requirement for the leader’s continued authorization.

## **Code Of Practice for Authorized Lay Leaders**

### ***Mentor Relationship***

Authorized lay leaders are mentored by an ordained minister of the U.S.S. with whom they have made a covenantal agreement outlining their mutual expectations. A model for such a covenant is provided in this handbook (**Appendix E**). The mentor need not be the same Mentor Pastor with whom the authorized lay leader completed their training, nor need he/she be the authorized lay leader’s own pastor. If a leader’s mentor is unable to keep their covenant, the leader is required to seek a new mentor and covenant agreement in order to continue to be authorized by the bishop (see following section for “Expectations of Mentor Pastors for Authorized Lay Leaders”).

### ***Permission for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders***

An Authorized Lay Worship Leader (ALWL) may lead worship and preach at a Service of the Word (non-communion service) without seeking the permission of the bishop.

An Authorized Lay Worship Leader may preside at the Eucharist provided he/she receives the permission of the bishop for each specific occasion (**Appendix F**). A request for permission for an ALWL to preside may be made in one of the following ways:

- A pastor may contact an Authorized Lay Worship Leader to ask that person to lead worship, preach, and preside at their congregation on a particular date. The requesting pastor then asks the office of the bishop for a written letter of permission for the person to preside at the Eucharist at a specified place and time.
- The pastor of an Authorized Lay Worship Leader may request from the Bishop a single and enduring letter of permission for that Authorized Lay Worship Leader to preside at the Eucharist in their congregation(s) when called upon by the pastor, provided that the leader’s authorization is current with the Bishop’s office. This enduring letter is no longer in effect upon the resignation of the pastor.
- The Synod Supply Coordinator makes worship leadership assignments for congregations without a called pastor, and may assign an Authorized Lay Worship Leader to supply at one of these congregations. Such assignments are made in consultation with the office of the bishop which issues the required letter of permission.
- The bishop may give written permission for an Authorized Lay Worship Leader in special situations to lead worship, preach, and preside at a particular congregation for an extended period of time. A letter of permission, indicating their assignment, is sent from the office of the bishop to the Authorized Lay Worship Leader and is copied to the congregation to be served.

### ***Permission for Other Authorized Lay Leaders***

An authorized lay leader (other than a worship leader) may accept a request to assist a congregation of the Upper Susquehanna Synod at the leader's own discretion. Such leaders are expected at all times to uphold the code of practice for all authorized lay leaders, but are not further required to seek the permission of the bishop or to inform his/her office before assisting congregations.

### ***Congregational Settings***

Authorized lay leaders are not authorized to serve in congregations outside of the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. If asked to serve in a congregation of another denomination or synod, authorized lay leaders may only respond as individuals at their own discretion but are not authorized by the bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod to do so.

Authorized Lay Worship Leaders may lead worship in union congregations with the permission of the office of the bishop under the supervision of the Lutheran pastor of the union congregation. When a union congregation is served by a non-Lutheran pastor, special arrangements are made through the office of the bishop.

Authorized Lay Worship Leaders are not authorized to participate in worship leadership in local ecumenical services except under the permission and supervision of their home pastor.

### ***Expectations for Authorized Lay Leaders***

All authorized lay leaders shall:

- Represent the Lord and his Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod with the grace, dignity, respect, and responsibility required of their position.
- Report any difficulties and/or irregularities to the office of the bishop within 48 hours of their designated visit to a congregation.
- Use only this title (Authorized Lay \_\_\_\_\_) to identify themselves in person or in print. They shall never use the title Reverend, Pastor, Deacon, etc. in person or in print.
- Never wear a clerical collar or other attire which specifically identifies those individuals called to and ordained for the Office of Word and Sacrament.

Authorized Lay Worship Leaders shall also:

- Follow the normal worship practices of the congregations in which they are serving.
- Be diligent in preparing to lead worship.
- Carry written authorization from the bishop when presiding at the Eucharist.
- Be entitled to compensation for their services at the supply rate set by the U.S.S. Assembly, including reimbursement for mileage at the current IRS reimbursement rate.
- Wear a white alb when leading worship, and a cincture and/or cross, if desired. Stoles of any kind and chasubles are inappropriate and shall not be worn.
- Normally NOT baptize someone during a regular service of worship or in private except under the provisions of the church for emergency baptisms. (Any Christian may baptize in an emergency situation and report such a baptism to the pastor of the congregation.)
- NOT officiate at a wedding, since they are not authorized to do so by the Upper Susquehanna Synod or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- Normally NOT conduct a funeral service.

### ***Continuing Education for Authorized Lay Leaders***

Authorized lay leaders need opportunities for continued growth in competence and understanding as they utilize their gifts in ministry. Continuing education is how leaders enhance ministry abilities, acquire new skills, and experience personal growth for more effective ministry. It is the expectation of the Upper Susquehanna Synod that each authorized lay leader participates in at least one continuing education experience annually, for a total of no less than four contact hours. Such experiences may include: formal classes or workshops, independent study, participation in pericope study groups, and the like. The leader's plan for their continuing education experience shall be included in their annual covenant with their mentor.

### ***Discipline***

Authorized lay leaders hold a unique and important public position and responsibility in the Upper Susquehanna Synod and the church at large. This position should never be taken lightly. Failure to function appropriately as an authorized lay leader shall result in immediate discipline through the office of the bishop and may include termination of authorization and removal from the roll of authorized lay leaders of this synod. Questionable or inappropriate behavior on the part of an authorized lay leader shall be reported to the office of the bishop immediately.

## **“The Ministry that is the Church’s”**

For the sake of the world that God loves, God has entrusted to his church the Gospel and given the church the task of proclaiming the Gospel to all, believers and unbelievers. This "ministry" (*diakonia*) is, in itself, an act in God’s ongoing activity to reconcile the world to himself through the saving work of his Son.

All the baptized have been entrusted with the church’s ministry—to proclaim the Gospel through word and deed—and are rightly called “ministers of the Gospel.” Hence, the church’s ministry has a universal character. The church’s priesthood is of all believers. Nonetheless, God calls some among the baptized to particular ministry within the church, including the divinely instituted Office of Word and Sacrament, also for the sake of the Gospel.

Those called to the Office of Word and Sacrament have the twofold task of proclaiming the Gospel to the world--evangelizing, witnessing, serving--and of building up in Christ those who already believe--teaching, exhorting, reproving, and sanctifying, by Word and Sacrament. For this twofold work, the Spirit endows the ordained ministry with varieties of gifts, and thus helps the church to meet new situations in its pilgrimage. Through proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, this ordained ministry serves the whole church for its ministry.

The ordained ministry stands with the people of God under Christ but also speaks in the name of Christ to his people. On the one hand, the ordained ministry as part of the church's ministry stands under the Word and the Spirit, under judgment as well as under grace. But it also has a special role within the ministry of the people of God, proclaiming God's Word, administering the Sacraments, exhorting and reproving.

Only those called by God through the church--only those ordained--proclaim the Word within the gathered assembly of believers and preside at the Eucharist. This, too, is for the sake of the Gospel. *Pure* preaching and the *right* administration of the Sacraments (*Augsburg Confession* V, VII, XIV) are essential for the life of the church and the ministry of all the baptized. Therefore, well-trained, duly-called clergy are entrusted by God and this church with this responsibility.

## **Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA are committed to ordained ministry as the primary means for fulfilling the needs of the church through the Office of Word and Sacrament, but at this place and time in the church’s pilgrimage, the inability to provide congregations with full-time ordained pastoral ministry presents a challenge. The Upper Susquehanna Synod is an area within this church where ordained ministers are chronically unavailable to meet all of our needs for Word and Sacrament ministry. On any given Sunday, several congregations have needs that cannot be met by ordained ministers in this or full-communion partner churches. Therefore, because it is my responsibility as bishop to meet the Word and Sacrament needs of the congregations in this Synod, synodically authorized lay worship leaders have been and will continue to be trained to meet this need.

It is important, however, to emphasize the exceptional nature of this response, as well as to insist that this response is not the creation of a new office of ministry. It is a duly-called, ordained ministry that is God’s will for the sake of the church, precisely because it is God’s will that the Word *be preached* (albeit, purely) and the Sacraments *be administered* (albeit, rightly). When a sufficient

number of ordained ministers are unavailable, God's people will either go without the Word and the Sacraments and thereby cease to be the church, or the church will respond to their need. Clearly, in synods with an abundance of ordained clergy, synodically authorized lay worship leaders are not necessary. Just so, if we in the Upper Susquehanna Synod were ever to have such an abundance, synodically authorized lay worship leaders would no longer be necessary. On such an occasion, we would give thanks to God for their service and for hearing our prayers to raise up an abundance of ordained ministers.

A tension exists between the church's need for the Gospel and the church's need of an ordained ministry to proclaim the Gospel through Word and Sacrament. In the face of a shortage of ordained ministers, the solution of synodically authorized worship leaders does not eliminate this tension but only intensifies it. Thus, the solution is a temporary one, authorized by the church as one response to the emergent need. Other responses include praying to the Lord of Harvest to send forth sufficient laborers, and to encourage persons to hear the Lord's call to the pastoral office.

Let us be clear that the efficaciousness of the Word and Sacraments are not at stake by this response. As the Latin version of the Augsburg Confession says: "Both the Sacraments and the Word are efficacious because of the ordinance and command of Christ, even when offered by evil people" (AC 8). It was evil *ordained ministers* the Confessions had in mind, of course, and certainly not authorized lay worship leaders; but the point remains. It is Christ and his gracious promises that make the Word and Sacraments efficacious, and it is Christ alone.

Synodically authorized ministers serve under the office of the bishop, and under the bishop's call by the church to tend the church's need for Word and Sacrament. They do not constitute a new office of ministry within this church. Theirs is a critical ministry but one that serves a need in want of another solution. In the meantime, it is the bishop's responsibility to see that gifted laypersons be sufficiently trained, that they serve under the bishop's office with the regular guidance of a pastor-mentor, and that they be supervised for the sake of the Gospel and its right proclamation and pure administration.

On behalf of the church, I am grateful for the commitment of those who have been authorized to serve this church as lay worship leaders. They dedicate themselves to a ministry that emanates from their baptism and which serves God's people and the world. They are persons of immense faith and remarkable generosity who willingly attend two years of instruction and undergo the scrutiny of the church for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel through Word and Sacrament. They are my co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord. Surely, it is the Spirit who has called forth this ministry that those who thirst for the Word and hunger for the Sacraments may be fed. Thankfully, the Spirit is always seeking new and creative solutions to meet the needs of God's people and their mission in and to the world.

O God, may their service be pleasing to you!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Robert L. Driesen  
Bishop,  
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA

August 12, 2008

**“Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries”  
(CC95.04.47t)**

These guidelines relate to bylaw 7.61.01. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* that addresses the issue of providing Word and Sacrament ministry through the use of synodically authorized ministry, where it is not possible to provide appropriate ordained pastoral leadership. Those who are authorized for such ministry within a synod are not rostered by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (unless already serving on a roster of this church) but are authorized to provide a specific ministry within a particular setting for a designated period of time.

Principle 40 and related sections in “The Use of the Means of Grace—A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament,” which was adopted “for guidance and practice” by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, also addresses this issue.

**A. Identification of Need:** The synod identifies a congregation or other ministry where ordained pastoral leadership is not available for an extended period of time and where synodically authorized ministry may be appropriate. Because of the relationship of an authorized lay ministry to those serving in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastors serving congregations within the area where this ministry need is located normally will be consulted in this determination.

**B. Invitation to Service:** An individual who demonstrates the potential for service is invited by the synod to enter a program of preparation. An individual who has been removed from rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by reason of misconduct, or has been denied continuance in candidacy by reason of misconduct is precluded from serving in a synodically authorized ministry of this church.

**C. Qualifications:** A person invited to prepare for a synodically authorized ministry should be an active member of an ELCA congregation for at least one year. Prior to preparing to serve in synodically authorized ministry an individual must have:

1. Been recommended by the individual’s pastor and congregation council;
2. Consulted with synodical staff and/or the synodical committee responsible for the synod’s program of preparation; and
3. Demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in a program of preparation leading to possible service in a synodically authorized ministry.

In making its determination concerning an individual’s eligibility to serve in a synodically authorized ministry, the synod will interview the applicant and will obtain written responses to the “Entrance Information Questions” in the “Candidacy Manual.” The synod will also obtain a background check, as outlined in the “Candidacy Manual,” on each individual being considered for authorization in the synod.

**D. Synodical Committee for Authorized Ministry:** An appropriate synodical board or committee may be appointed by the Synod Council to provide the synodical bishop with recommendations concerning the authorization of and accountability for authorized ministries within the synod. This committee may be a sub-committee of the synodical Candidacy Committee. When it is a separate committee, it should be closely related to the synod Candidacy Committee. In either case, the work of the two is distinct. The synodical committee or synod staff determines the educational program within the synod for persons considered for service in an authorized ministry; determines the eligibility for individuals to enter this program of preparation; and advises the bishop on the suitability of an individual for service in a synodically authorized ministry.

**E. Program of Preparation:** The synod defines the program of preparation for an authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament, consistent with guidelines developed by the Division for Ministry, and in consultation with an ELCA seminary. Such programs shall prepare persons to have knowledge and abilities in the following areas:

1. Bible;
2. Lutheran theology, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confession of Faith and polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
3. Worship;
4. Spiritual discernment and faith development;
5. Leadership expectations and identity;
6. Contextual understanding; and
7. Pastoral skills including preaching, catechetics, worship leadership, visitation, pastoral care, and outreach.

The program of preparation can be accomplished in a variety of ways including educational programs that utilize current rostered leaders within the synod, ELCA seminaries and continuing education centers, the ELCA *SELECT* curriculum, and other appropriate resources.

The synod determines when an individual is prepared for service within the synod. There is no guarantee of service within the synod and participation in a program of preparation does not mean that authorization for service will follow.

**F. Authorization for Service:** When the synod has determined that a specific need exists, and with the consent of the congregation to be served, an individual may be authorized for service within the synod by the synodical bishop, in consultation with the Synod Council. Such service shall fulfill assigned responsibilities, and authorization shall be for a specific period of time not to exceed one year, unless terminated earlier. Persons who serve in synodically authorized ministry are to meet the following criteria:

1. evidence of mature Christian faith and commitment to Christ;
2. satisfactory participation in the synodical program of preparation, including demonstration of appropriate ministry skills;
3. knowledge and acceptance of the Confession of Faith of this church; and
4. willingness to meet this church's expectations concerning the personal conduct and behavior of persons serving in public ministry as described in "Vision and Expectations – Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

A person authorized by the synodical bishop is then installed in such service.

**G. Supervision and Accountability:** Accountability for synodically authorized ministry in a congregational setting is the direct responsibility of the Congregation Council. Accountability for a synodically authorized ministry in a non-congregational setting within a synod is the direct responsibility of the governing body of the entity that conducts that ministry, or if there is no such entity, the Synod Council. In all cases, a synodically authorized minister is to be under the direct supervision of an ordained minister appointed by the synodical bishop. The supervising ordained minister shall report to the governing body and seek the advice and counsel of the synodical bishop or appropriate synodical staff person in relationship to the synodically authorized minister.

**H. Renewal and Revocation:** Renewal of authorization after one year may be given when a demonstrated need exists for its continuation. This need is determined by the synodical bishop at the request and with the consent of the congregation or other ministry within the synod being served, consultation with the supervising ordained minister, and a review of both the ministry setting and the service of the authorized minister. Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synodical bishop, who need not specify the reason.

**I. Letter of Authorization:** The authorization may be evidenced by an appropriate letter describing the terms and conditions of the authorization or license. The description also may limit activities authorized to be conducted.

**J. Marriage Services.** Where permitted by law, synodically authorized ministers may officiate at marriage services for members of the congregation in which they are authorized to serve, with the concurrence of the congregation and the approval of the synodical bishop.

**K. Other Matters:** Persons may serve in a synodically authorized ministry only within the synod that has authorized that ministry. A synod may consider for authorization an individual trained and authorized by another synod, based on the individual's qualifications and ability to meet the new synod's criteria for authorized ministry. Persons authorized for such ministries are not to wear clerical stoles, and should not wear clerical collars unless authorized by the synodical bishop. The title "Pastor" is reserved for ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament and is not to be used by synodically authorized ministers. Synodically authorized ministers are not to offer therapy or counseling as a part of their ministries, but may provide appropriate pastoral care.

*Adopted by the Church Council as policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, April 1995 [CC95.04.47t] and amended April 2005, and April 2006*

## **“A Statement of Understanding Concerning Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament”**

The Conference of Bishops has reviewed the recommended approval of a revised “Policy and Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized Ministries of Word and Sacrament” document and offers the following statement of understanding related to that policy and guidelines.

- A. To affirm the policies and guidelines of this church on synodically authorized ministries as stated in the bylaws, in “Policy and Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized Ministries of Word and Sacrament” as revised, and in *Use of the Means of Grace*, and to encourage and support one another in applying and interpreting these policies.
- B. To affirm that synodically authorized ministry policies are intended to honor the God-given office of Word and Sacrament (Article V, The Augsburg Confession) and this church’s commitment to ordained ministry as the primary means for fulfilling this office. Synodically 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 an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament.
- C. To affirm that when addressing the need for Word and Sacrament ministry in a congregation or other ministry where an ordained minister of this church is not available, that synods will seek the utilization of an ordained minister of a full-communion partner church, under the guidelines related to the orderly exchange of ordained ministers.
- D. To affirm that synodically authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is normally intended for a specific congregation or other ministry where appropriate ordained ministry is not available for an extended period of time.
- E. To agree that, in keeping with the policies of this church, synodically authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is not intended for and should not be used to authorize an individual to provide for short-term, intermittent absences of a specific congregation’s called pastor. However, we acknowledge that there is often need to provide for the celebration of the sacrament for such circumstances, and we acknowledge that in some areas and at some times neither an ELCA nor a full-communion partner church ordained minister is available to meet such a need. Such situations highlight a tension between a bishop’s authority to provide for “appropriate ordained pastoral leadership” (7.61.01.) and the guideline that authorization is only to be used when the need for such leadership is “for an extended period of time” (*Use of the Means of Grace*, Principle 40).  
We agree that for congregations in such areas, the inability to provide “appropriate ordained pastoral leadership” may require flexibility in interpreting “for an extended period of time.” This flexibility may be accomplished for a transitional period by the authorization of a person or persons to be available to provide Word and Sacrament ministry in congregations in the area where ordained leadership is chronically unavailable. Authorization would be for a renewable term not to exceed one year and for the specific area. Like all synodically authorized ministers, such persons would be appropriately prepared and supervised. Though authorized for an area and for a term, such persons would only serve in specific ministry settings with the approval of the bishop. The synod should continue to seek ways to make available ordained ministers to serve in that area.
- F. To affirm that this church’s policies and commitments name four clear aspects in synodically authorized ministry: *an invitation to service, the preparation of persons to serve, supervision and accountability, and authorization for specific service*. All four aspects are vital to faithful use of synodically authorized ministries.
  - 1. We agree to hold one another accountable for the ongoing recruitment of candidates for the ordained and rostered lay ministries of this church.
  - 2. We encourage congregations and other ministries to enhance the mission-effectiveness of the policies and guidelines by commending to the bishop persons who should be prepared for possible service in synodically authorized ministry.
  - 3. We encourage bishops and synods to plan for the preparation of persons to meet anticipated and unanticipated mission opportunities of that synod.
  - 4. We commit ourselves to seek always to authorize for ministry only individuals who have been well prepared and who will serve under supervision.
  - 5. We will encourage congregations and other ministries to become aware of these guidelines and, in collaboration with the synod, to seek to anticipate their own mission needs and opportunities and to plan for them.

*Adopted by the Conference of Bishops as an agreed statement  
March 2005 [CB05.03.01].*

## **“Applying for a Background Check”**

All applicants seeking the authorization of the bishop to serve as authorized lay leaders of the Upper Susquehanna Synod are required to submit two different background checks: The *Pennsylvania State Criminal History Record* and *Child Abuse Report*. (Note that an application for the *Child Abuse Report* requires a copy of the *PA State Criminal History Record*.) Applicants who have resided in a state other than Pennsylvania as adults are also required to submit a *Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal History Report*.

Applicants are required to submit originals of criminal history reports dated no more than one year prior to their application. Applicants may follow the procedures below for obtaining the required reports, or submit originals from reports already in their possession. A copy of each report will be made and retained in the applicant’s file. Originals will be returned to the applicant.

### **Pennsylvania State Criminal History Record**

Fee: \$10.00 (certified check, money order, or credit card) payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
<http://www.psp.state.pa.us/psp/cwp/browse.asp?A=15&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&C=70427>

The Pennsylvania State Police has established a web-based computer application called “Pennsylvania Access to Criminal History” or PATCH. Eighty percent of the time, “No Record” certificates are returned immediately through the Internet to the requestor. The information provided by the requestor will be checked against the criminal history database maintained by the Pennsylvania State Police Central Repository. If the subject’s information does not hit on any information in the database, the requestor will receive the results instantly over the Internet and the requestor can print out the “No Record” certificate. If the subject’s information hits on something in the database, the requestor receives an immediate “Request Under Review” response. A “Request Under Review” response does not necessarily mean that the individual has a record. At this point the information is manually reviewed. After the review the status will be updated to “No Record” or “Record.” The requestor should check the PATCH website periodically for an updated status to their request. For all “No Record” responses, the certificate must be printed out at the requestor’s computer. All “Record” responses will be mailed to the requestor at the address provided by the requestor. It may take up to two weeks for the status to be updated from a “Request Under Review” to a “No Record” or “Record.”

Individuals are considered non-registered users. Non-registered users log onto <https://epatch.state.pa.us> and select “Submit a New Record Check” under credit card users.

Applicants may instead make their request by mail using Form SP-164, Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check. <http://www.psp.state.pa.us/psp/cwp/view.asp?A=4&Q=48275>

- 1) Applicant may secure Form SP-164 from the schools, Pennsylvania State Police Barracks or from the Pennsylvania State Police web site: [www.psp.state.pa.us](http://www.psp.state.pa.us).
- 2) Send the REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORD CHECK with payment to the following address: Pennsylvania State Police Central Repository-164, 1800 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9758

For status of the Criminal Record Check, call (717) 783-9144.

**Child Abuse Report**

Fee: \$10.00 (money order only) payable to Department of Public Welfare

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/ChildWelfare/003671038.htm>

Go to the Department of Public Welfare site at

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/ChildWelfare/003671038.htm>. Read the instructions before downloading the form:

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Pdf/FillInForms/DPWchildabuse.pdf>.

Note that a copy of your PROCESSED PA Criminal History Record (instructions on prior page) must be included with this application.

*Required of applicants who have lived outside of Pennsylvania as adults:*

**Federal (FBI) Criminal History Report**

Fee: \$18.00 (money order, certified check, or credit card) payable to Treasury of the United States

<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/faqs.html>

Go to the FBI Identification Record Request page at <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/fprequest.htm>.

Follow the detailed instructions for “How to Request a Copy of Record.” Note: The copy of record is sent directly to the requestor. The Upper Susquehanna Synod will accept the validity of a copy provided by an applicant (rather than requiring an intercessory agency, as some employers require by law).

**“Model Covenant: Authorized Lay Worship Leader”  
(required elements are in BOLD)**

*In order to share my God-given gifts as contributions to the mission of Christ’s church, to preserve good order, and to facilitate my accountability to the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA, I make this covenant with \_\_\_\_\_, my Mentor:*

**I have reviewed the authorized lay leaders’ Code of Practice (*Lay Ministry Institute Handbook*) and agree to abide by its expectations.**

**I am submitting to the bishop an original copy of my current background check information as required for continued authorization.**

**I commit to the following continuing education experience(s) in the next calendar year, totaling at least four contact hours: \_\_\_\_\_.**  
**I will meet with you shortly after the experience to discuss it.**

**We agree to meet \_\_\_\_\_ (monthly, quarterly, semi-annually) to review my ministry experiences, and to discuss my strengths and growing edges. I/you will initiate our meeting times.**

If requested by my pastor, I agree to provide worship leadership in my own congregation no less than \_\_\_\_\_ time(s) this year. If requested by other pastors, I agree to provide worship leadership in other congregations no less than \_\_\_\_\_ time(s) this year.

When preparing to preach at this or another congregation, I will spend adequate time in study of the day’s appointed lessons and the liturgical season’s themes, in order that my sermon may be true to the Gospel and Lutheran doctrine. When asked, I will provide you with a manuscript of each sermon for review either prior to or after its proclamation.

If I should be approached by a member of a congregation seeking pastoral care, I will gently remind them that I am not a pastor and encourage them to seek their pastor’s care.

I will not use my position as an authorized lay leader to seek or accept undue influence within a congregation, but will seek always to be a servant leader in the style of Jesus.

When I speak of you publicly or privately, I will interpret your actions in the most positive light, following Martin Luther’s interpretation of the Eighth Commandment in his catechisms. If I should disagree with you on a matter of significance, I will bring it to your attention following our Lord’s guidance in Matthew 18:15-17.

I understand that, should you alert me that you are unable to keep this covenant, it is my responsibility to initiate a new covenant with an ordained minister of the Upper Susquehanna Synod.

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Authorized Lay Worship Leader) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mentor) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**”Model Covenant: Mentor Pastor”  
(required elements are in BOLD)**

*In order to encourage the God-given gifts of this authorized lay leader as contributions to the mission of Christ’s church, to preserve good order, and to facilitate my accountability and his/hers to the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA, I make this covenant with you,*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*(name of authorized lay leader):*

**I have reviewed the *Lay Ministry Institute Handbook* and understand what is expected of you as an authorized lay leader and what is expected of me as your Mentor. I agree to abide by these expectations for serving as your Mentor.**

**We agree to meet \_\_\_\_\_ (monthly, quarterly, semi-annually) to review your ministry experiences, your continuing education experience(s), and to discuss your strengths and growing edges. I/you will initiate our meeting times.**

I commit to reviewing any sermon manuscripts that you provide, when possible in advance of their proclamation. I will ask you to provide at least \_\_\_\_\_ (number) sermon manuscript(s) in the next calendar year for review either prior to or after their proclamation.

When I speak of you publicly or privately, I will interpret your actions in the most positive light, following Martin Luther’s interpretation of the Eighth Commandment in his catechisms. If I should disagree with you on a matter of significance, I will bring it to your attention following our Lord’s guidance in Matthew 18:15-17.

Should I be unable to keep this covenant, I will alert you as soon as possible to allow you time to find a new Mentor.

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mentor) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Authorized Lay Leader) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Both mentoring partners should retain copies of these covenants. The authorized lay leader is to submit one copy of each to the Upper Susquehanna Synod, PO Box 36, Lewisburg, PA 17837.*

**“Sample Permission Letter for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders to Preside”**

Date

The Rev. Name  
Lutheran Church  
Church Address  
City, PA Zip code

Dear Pastor Name,

I hereby grant permission for [ALWL’s Name], Authorized Lay Worship Leader of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, to conduct the worship service, preach, and preside at the Eucharist of Name Lutheran Church, City, PA on Sunday, Date of Service, Year.

I ask that you place the enclosed announcement in your bulletin on that Sunday to familiarize the members of your congregation with the ministry of Authorized Lay Worship Leaders of the Upper Susquehanna Synod and my authorization for this leader to preside.

God’s blessings be with you always.

Yours in Christ,

Robert L. Driesen,  
Bishop

C: [ALWL’s Name]

Enclosure:

*“This morning we are led in worship by [ALWL’s Name], an Authorized Lay Worship Leader of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Authorized Lay Worship Leaders have received extensive training so as to provide worship leadership and preaching, and also have been authorized by the bishop of the synod to preside at the Eucharist in specific situations.*

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is committed to ordained ministry as the primary means for fulfilling the needs of this church for Word and Sacrament, but at this place and time in the church’s pilgrimage, the church’s inability to provide all congregations with full-time ordained pastoral ministry presents a challenge. On any given Sunday, congregations have needs that cannot be met by available ordained ministers. Therefore, because it is the bishop’s responsibility to meet the Word and Sacrament needs of the congregations in this Synod, synodically authorized lay worship leaders are trained to meet this need. On behalf of the whole church, Bishop Driesen is deeply gratified by the ministry of these servants of the Gospel.”*

## **“Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers”**

*"Vision and Expectations — Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" is a document which informs candidates for ordained ministry in this church, seminaries, congregations and candidacy committees regarding this church's vision for ordained ministry and the high expectations it places on those who serve in this way.*

*It should not be confused with "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline." The latter is a juridical document that describes the grounds on which ordained ministers may be subject to the disciplinary process of this church.*

*This church has been called into mission in challenging times. It is important as we carry out this mission, that we remain faithful to the one who calls us into this work. "Vision and Expectations" makes clear that ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church. It is not an individual right.*

*If this church is to reach out with the gospel to all people, leaders must have a passion for evangelism, pastoral skills that have been refined in seminary and contextual settings, and personal character and integrity worthy of the office. This document outlines the importance of the ordained minister's faithfulness to this church's confession, leadership through faithful service and holy living, and faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It sets forth the marks of healthy leadership which are essential to being a vital church in mission in a pluralistic context.*

Bishop Mark S. Hanson

*Within the people of God and for the sake of the Gospel ministry entrusted to all believers, God has instituted the office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. To carry out this ministry, this church calls and ordains qualified persons.*

*An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness of faith, aptness to preach, teach and witness, and whose educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of this church; who has been properly called and ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of this church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach. A minister shall comply with the constitution of this church.*

Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ordained ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized. Ordained ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to the needs of a changing world. They are called to give leadership to the congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In this document the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to state its vision and expectations for ordained ministers of this church. This document should not be understood as a juridical standard. Neither is it intended to suggest unrealistic or impossible expectations for those who serve on the roster of ordained ministers. Instead, it seeks to express the high value and importance that the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament has in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is offered for those who are already on the roster of ordained ministers of this church as a statement of expectations and hopes for the shape of ordained ministry, as well as an invitation for reflection and consideration to those who seek to serve in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The four questions that are addressed to candidates in the Rite of Ordination (Occasional Services, pp. 193-194) serve as the framework for this document. The liturgical rite itself is not the basis for this document, but the setting in which this church's understanding of its expectations for ordained ministers is described.

### **I. THE CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY**

*Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Will you assume this office, believing that the Church's call is God's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Small Catechism, Article III). It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This church confesses that the office of ordained ministry, "the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" (Augsburg Confession, Article V), has been instituted by God. Individuals are ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament because they have been called by God. This church believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church.

Persons experience the call to ordained ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God's justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one's life, and the response to that gospel, that lead some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include the example and encouragement of others, the personal assessment of an individual's own interests and abilities, and response to the needs of the world. In whatever way the call to seek ordination may come to an individual, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by theological study, and finally confirmed in the church's call to serve as a pastor. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person's gifts and abilities for ordained ministry.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prepares and approves candidates for the ordained ministry by setting standards, by providing for theological education through the seminaries of this church, and by evaluating a person's qualifications for service by a Candidacy Committee. Upon approval for ordination, a person is eligible to receive a letter of call to serve in the ordained ministry of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America therefore understands the call to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament to mean that:

- Ordained ministers, called by God through the church, are accountable to the Word of God for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- Ordained ministers are called by God through the church and are not self-chosen or self-appointed;
- Ordained ministers are called by God through the church for a ministry of servanthood, and not for the exercise of domination or coercive power; and
- Ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church and is not a right of the individual.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects each of its ordained ministers to understand and accept the call to serve the church's ministry of Word and Sacrament as a call from God, and to believe that the Spirit sustains and upholds those who are ordained so they may fulfill their calling to the ordained ministry.

*Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself; Grant that we who glory in his death for our salvation may also glory in his call to take up our cross and follow him; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*  
Prayer for Holy Cross Day, *Lutheran Book of Worship*

## **II. FAITHFULNESS TO THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION**

*The church in which you are to be ordained confesses that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and are the norm of its faith and life. We accept, teach, and confess the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. We also acknowledge that the Lutheran Confessions are true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures. Will you therefore preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

It is essential for an ordained minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks that its ordained ministers assume responsibility for upholding this church's doctrinal tradition through faithful preaching and teaching. All who have been

ordained and who serve as pastors in this church are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

### **Scripture, Creed and Confessions**

The Scriptures reveal God's redemptive actions, including the message of law and gospel, judgment and mercy, "beginning with the Word in Creation, continuing in the history of Israel and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ" (ELCA Constitution, 2.02). Ordained ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures "as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life" (ELCA Constitution, 2.03). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran Confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its ordained ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its ordained ministers teach nothing "that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church" (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession).

### **Doctrinal Tradition**

Christians enter into the catholic faith through baptism in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ordained ministers of this church are called to continue in this catholic faith, preaching and teaching it within the doctrinal tradition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Ordained ministers express this tradition when they are:

#### *Evangelical*

The gospel is the good news that the decisive turning point in human history occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelical witness is that in Christ, God has acted to bring forgiveness to sinners, liberation for the oppressed, reconciliation for the estranged, and the promise of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power of God to create and sustain the church for God's mission in the world. Ordained ministers of this church are expected to proclaim in word and deed God's saving gospel of justification by grace through faith, and so equip the baptized for their ministry in daily life.

#### *Faithful*

The church's Scriptures, creeds, and confessions identify the grounding and goals of the church's hope: Jesus Christ. The church expects its ordained ministers to be committed to Jesus who is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the Church.

#### *Reforming*

The church's past is characterized not only by the faithful witness of the saints, but by sin, error, and the betrayal of its mission. The gospel frees the church for genuine repentance and confession, for renewal and reform. Ordained ministers are expected to acknowledge the church's past and present failures and to lead the church in its repentance and renewal.

#### *Pastoral*

Leadership in the church is to be shaped by Jesus' own ministry of serving. This church, therefore, expects its ordained ministers to resist the temptation to seek power over people whether by force or manipulation and, instead, to lead God's people as servants. Such servant leadership is not one of weakness or timidity, but of strength and boldness.

#### *Ecumenical*

The church is called to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This church expects its ordained ministers to manifest the unity given to the people of God by leading the church in that common witness to the gospel that expresses the unity which the Spirit gives. Ordained ministers are encouraged to participate in ecumenical activities, including prayer and worship, and to witness to the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Ephesians 4:5 and 6).

#### *Ethical*

The church witnesses to the gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts. The church expects its ordained ministers to lead and teach the church through example by lives that give expression to the gospel. Ordained ministers are called to represent in their personal lives the new life that is given to all Christians in baptism, and to be examples of a life that is consistent with the gospel.

*Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. Inspire all pastors to proclaim your Word diligently and your people to receive it willingly, that finally we may receive the crown of eternal glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Installation of a Pastor, *Occasional Services*

### **III. THE ORDAINED MINISTER AS PERSON AND EXAMPLE**

*Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and in your use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God's people, nourish them with the Word and Holy Sacraments, and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The ordained minister is called with all Christians to "lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). It is Christ's own self-giving on the cross that is the example for Christian life for all believers.

Because ordained ministers are also recipients of God's gracious gift in Christ Jesus, they are called to use their gifts and abilities to enable others to understand themselves as recipients of that same grace and to live as God's people in the world. In their life and conduct ordained ministers are to witness to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Therefore, ordained ministers will seek to use their gifts in lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Ordained ministers fulfill the calling of the pastoral office not only by what they do in carrying out certain tasks, but also in who they are. They both officially proclaim and in their person witness to the gospel of Christ. Pastoral identity is not one of moral or spiritual perfection. It is, instead, the living out of the good news that one is justified by God's grace and thus called to live out that grace in daily life. The ordained minister is not simply a professional trained in skills to perform a task, but is one sent by the church to lead the community of faith through the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The ordained minister enables and equips others in their lives as Christians and for their ministry in the world by faithful preaching of the Word of God, through the administration of the sacraments, and by example.

Pastoral identity carries with it expectations and accountabilities that are determined by the whole church and not simply by a given congregation, synod, institution, or agency served by the ordained minister.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has high expectations for those who serve within the ordained ministry of this church. It does so because it recognizes that when offense is given by an ordained minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened.

Yet sin and brokenness is a reality in the lives of all persons, including those who serve as ordained ministers. It is crucial for us all to remember that repentance and forgiveness are to be daily realities in the life of every baptized Christian. Neither perfection nor self-righteousness is asked of the ordained ministers of this church. When there is failure in the lives of those who serve in this office, this church seeks to provide counsel and understanding. When there are repentance and forgiveness, this church rejoices. Indeed, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believes that God not only calls but sustains those who are set aside for the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is with this recognition that this church can affirm that those who are set apart to the office of Word and Sacrament are to seek to embody those characteristics which are consistent with the pastoral office.

The ordained minister is to nourish the people of God through the Word and sacraments. In order to do this, the ordained minister needs to develop and nurture a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, both intellectually and devotionally. The ordained minister will seek regular opportunities for personal participation in the means of grace, including the renewal of baptismal grace in individual confession and absolution, and to celebrate and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, thus receiving God's renewing, sustaining, empowering Spirit both personally and in the practice of ministry.

The ordained minister engages in daily prayer and encourages others in the practice of regular prayer.

The ordained minister must be a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As a member of such a community of faith, the ordained minister is an integral part of a community in which mutual support is given and in which care, forgiveness, and healing occur.

The ordained minister supports not only the work of the congregation, but also the synodical and churchwide ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This church expects its ordained ministers to work in a collegial relationship with one another and to share in mutual accountability with those in positions of leadership and oversight in this church. The ordained ministers of this church are to seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the gospel and strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community.

The ordained minister is concerned for the whole person and provides for the care of those troubled with spiritual or emotional problems. This church expects that its ordained ministers will honor and respect privileged communication, particularly within the context of individual confession and absolution, and will not disclose such communication except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others. The ordained minister recognizes the importance of life-long growth in learning. Such growth is intended to renew, extend, and deepen insight into the Scriptures and the doctrinal teaching of the church, and to enable one to respond to the insights and challenges of the world with greater awareness and a more faithful confession. In an increasingly complex and educated society, the development of an informed intellect and professional skills is crucial to competent ordained ministry. This church expects of its ordained ministers regular and disciplined time for personal study, study in the company of others, participation in programs of continuing education, and periodic times for extended study. Congregations and other entities of this church are expected to provide the ordained minister the time and assistance with the financial resources needed for such study.

The ordained minister needs to be an example of self-care, as well as caring for others. The significant demands of time and effort within the office of ordained ministry can lead one to neglect proper nutrition, exercise, and time for recreation. The congregation, or whatever agency or institution the ordained minister serves, should respect the need for the ordained minister to have adequate time for self-care. Caring for self also includes seeking counseling and/or medical care when there is evidence of physical or mental illness, substance abuse, eating disorders, or relational problems.

The ordained minister is expected to be fiscally responsible and is to be a faithful steward of time, talents, and possessions. The ordained minister is to be an example to the community of generous giving.

The ordained minister is to be an example of holy living, so that the ordained minister's life does not become an impediment to the hearing of the gospel or a scandal to the community of faith. The qualities of such a life include the following:

#### *Responsibility to family*

Ordained ministers, whether married or single, are expected to uphold an understanding of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this church. Spouse and children, if any, are to be regarded with love, respect, and commitment. Within the family, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and mutual care are to be expressed. It is also expected that ordained ministers maintain responsible relationships with their parents and other immediate relatives.

#### *Separation, Divorce and Remarriage*

Ordained ministers are expected to keep their marriage inviolate until death, to cultivate love and respect for their spouse, and to seek marital counseling when it is needed. It is recognized that due to human sin and brokenness, in some cases the marital relationship may have to be dissolved. Should an ordained minister and spouse seek to divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought. Similarly, should an ordained minister decide to marry following a divorce, the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop is to be sought.

#### *Sexual conduct*

The expectations of this church regarding the sexual conduct of its ordained ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift from God and that ordained ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift. Ordained ministers are expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification, and all attempts of sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others. Single ordained ministers are expected to live a chaste life. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.

*Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son,*

*Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
Prayer for Renewal, *Lutheran Book of Worship*

#### **IV. FAITHFUL WITNESS**

*Will you give faithful witness to the world, that God's love may be known in all that you do?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

The charge to witness to the world is given to the church today as it was to the apostles of the early church. The content of that witness is God's revelation in Jesus Christ: God's creative self-disclosure as the Word made flesh; Jesus Christ victorious over death for the salvation of God's people; and the promise of everlasting life. The testimony of these acts of God's grace and forgiveness is expressed in both word and deed by ordained ministers through compassion, hospitality, patience, and forgiveness; through seeking peace and justice for all people; through care for God's creation; and through sharing one's faith through preaching, teaching, and personal witness. This witness is characterized by:

##### *Evangelism*

The apostolic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the church's mission. It is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation with God. This gospel is proclaimed through preaching the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Through its ordained ministers, this church affirms the critically important task of communicating this evangelical word to the world.

##### *Compassion*

Christians are called by God to participate in compassionate care for those in need. This church expects its ordained ministers to follow the example of Jesus and to lead the church in compassionate care of the suffering.

##### *Confession*

Ordained ministers are expected to enter into the church's act of confessing the Christian faith in our world. The church is called to such a confession because its present existence lies between the advent of God's Kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and the promised certain consummation of the eschatological kingdom. This confession places this church and its ordained ministers in the struggle against sin, death, and the devil.

##### *Hospitality*

Just as Jesus received sinners and ate with them, the church is called to welcome the stranger and to open its life to those who are "outside" and alienated. This church expects its ordained ministers to be models of appropriate hospitality in their personal lives, to preside at the Eucharistic table where God welcomes sinners, and to lead the church in its witness to divine hospitality.

##### *Peacemaking*

The culmination of God's eschatological salvation will be the overcoming of every enmity and the reconciliation of the whole creation. Yet even in the present time, God's peace is a reality. This church expects its ordained ministers to be witnesses to and instruments of God's peace and reconciliation for the world.

##### *Justice*

The church is to witness to God's call for justice in every aspect of life, including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This church expects its ordained ministers to be committed to justice in the life of the church, in society, and in the world.

##### *Stewardship of the Earth*

The people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. In our time this includes the need to speak on behalf of this earth, its environment and natural resources, and its inhabitants. This church expects that its ordained ministers will be exemplary stewards of the earth's resources, and that they will lead this church in the stewardship of God's creation.

##### *Trustworthiness*

It is essential in the life of the ordained minister that one be trustworthy. It is a quality that allows the people of God to

entrust leadership within the community of faith and to commit to the ordained minister the responsibilities of faithful preaching, responsible teaching, and confidentiality in individual confession and counseling.

*Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Prayer for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, Lutheran Book of Worship*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that "the Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world" (ELCA Constitution, 4.01).

This church expects its ordained ministers to honor and equip the baptized for their ministry in the world. Such a ministry involves giving leadership in the church's witness to the world, exhibiting awareness of the global challenges of a multicultural, diverse society, and enabling the members of this church, through the faithful teaching and preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments, for their ministry in daily life.

At the same time the ordained ministers of this church can know that they are regarded as servants of Christ and messengers of the good news of God's salvation in Christ. As such they are honored for the ministry they bring to this church. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prays for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who serve this church in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

*Almighty and merciful God, you built your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and you instituted the office of holy ministry so that the apostolic and prophetic Word might be heard throughout the ages. Grant that those who are ordained may exercise their ministry faithfully in the power of your Spirit; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen*

*Service of Ordination, Occasional Services*

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its October 1990 meeting, adopted *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as a statement of this church and authorized its distribution to the congregations, ordained ministers, candidacy committees and seminaries of this church.

**“Statement of Commitment—Authorized Lay Leaders”**

The term “authorized” in regard to the Lay Ministry Institute lay leader programs carries a distinct meaning, and does not automatically apply to all LMI program participants. Most participants in the programs of the LMI do so for the purpose of making their skills and gifts available as resources to the congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. These participants seek, at program’s end, the authorization of the bishop in addition to a certificate of completion. Authorization by the bishop assures congregations that such resource people have been adequately prepared, continue to develop their skills, and are accountable to the larger church.

As a condition for application as an authorized leader or for continued authorization, please read, complete and sign the following Statement of Commitment for Authorized Lay Leaders:

*As an Authorized Lay Leader of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, I shall...*

- *Continue to live out my baptismal covenant as a disciple of Jesus Christ;*
- *Continue my participation as an active, communing, contributing member of \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA;*
- *Carry out my ministry in accord with the Holy Scriptures and Creeds of the Church;*
- *Accept and adhere to the Lutheran Confessions as true and faithful expositions of the Gospel;*
- *Willingly serve in response to the needs of the synod;*
- *Uphold my covenant with my Mentor, the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, as outlined in our covenant agreement (copy provided to synod);*
- *Lead an ethical and moral life in accordance with the standards described in “Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers” of the ELCA.*

*I promise to do these things, and I ask God to help me.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please include the following in addition to this signed document in an application for continued authorization:

\_\_\_\_\_ Covenant agreement signed by Authorized Lay Leader

\_\_\_\_\_ Covenant agreement signed by Mentor

Submit to:

The Lay Ministry Institute  
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA  
P.O. Box 36  
Lewisburg, PA 17837

**“ELCA Standards Questionnaire—Authorized Lay Leaders”**

*In accordance with the “Guidelines Related to Synodically Authorized or Licensed Ministries” (CC95.04.47t) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, all applicants for initial or continued authorization as a lay leader in the Upper Susquehanna Synod must answer the following questions.*

- No  Yes      1. Are you familiar with the document Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers?  
 No  Yes      Do you intend to live in accord with its standards of conduct as  
an Authorized Lay Leader?
- No  Yes      2. Do you have or have you had any health conditions (physical or psychological) that  
might interfere with your ability to serve as an Authorized Lay Leader?
- No  Yes      3. Are there issues in your marriage or family situation that could adversely affect  
your ability to serve as an Authorized Lay Leader?
- No  Yes      4. Do you now engage or have you ever engaged in any addictive behavior, including  
drug or alcohol abuse or sexual or pornographic addictions?
- No  Yes      5. Have you ever been terminated or resigned from any employment or volunteer  
activities due to accusations of misconduct, whether financial, sexual, ethical, or  
other improper behavior?
- No  Yes      6. Have you ever engaged in, been accused of, charged with, or convicted of a crime  
or illegal conduct, including conduct resulting in suspension or revocation of your  
driver’s license?
- No  Yes      7. Have you ever been engaged in, accused of, sued, or charged with sexual  
molestation, sexual harassment, child neglect or abuse, spousal neglect or abuse, or  
financial improprieties?
- No  Yes      8. Do you have any sexual attraction toward children or minors, or any history of  
sexually deviant behavior, including behavior with children or minors?
- No  Yes      9. Have you engaged in behavior or been involved in any situations that, if they  
became known by the church, might seriously damage your ability to continue as  
an Authorized Lay Leader?
- No  Yes      10. Are you prepared to accept a request for your assistance from this synod based on  
the needs of the church which might require service in a location different from  
where you now live?
- No  Yes      11. Is there additional information that would assist the synodical bishop and board of  
the Lay Ministry Institute in considering your application or that you believe they  
should know? (*see following page*)

Information related to:

Information related to:

Information related to:

Information related to:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Mail to: Lay Ministry Institute, Upper Susquehanna Synod, PO Box 36, Lewisburg, PA 17837.*

**“Normative Ethical Practices for Ordained Ministers  
of the Upper Susquehanna Synod”**

The Oath of Ordination requires a pastor to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior by a holy life and conversation that in all our words and deeds we may seek (God's) glory and the increase of (His) kingdom." The church requires of the pastors it has ordained integrity, compassion, belief in the dignity and worth of human beings through Christ's death and resurrection, a commitment to Christian service, and a dedication to the truth as known in Jesus Christ. Therefore, this document embodies certain common standards of ethical behavior in the conduct of ordained pastors of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and provides the basis for helping them make judgments about their actions before and after they occur. Ethical behavior in a given situation must satisfy more than the personal judgment of the ordained pastor; therefore, the pastor is expected to be guided by all the principles in this document that have a bearing upon any situation in which ethical judgment is to be exercised. The course of action chosen is expected to be consistent with the spirit as well as the letter of this document, and any exceptions should be for sound pastoral reasons.

As an ordained pastor:

- I. My primary obligation is to the Gospel, in the context to and in which I am called;
- II. I recognize there are times when I must give precedence to my pastoral responsibilities over my personal life;
- III. I hold myself responsible for my efforts towards the quality, effectiveness, and extent of my ministry;
- IV. I respect and support the position and call of my colleagues. I will express my concerns regarding their views or actions to them personally, and in serious cases, through established processes (Matthew 18: I 5- 17; The Upper Susquehanna Synod Constitution, Chapter 17 "Adjudication"; and the ELCA Constitution, Chapter 20, "Consultation, Discipline, Appeals, and Adjudication");
- V. I accept the responsibility to stand against false teachings, false practices, and unethical and immoral behaviors by individuals or organizations engaged in or claiming to engage in the public exercise of Christian ministry;
- VI. I distinguish clearly and openly between my statements and actions as an individual and as a representative of the church;
- VII. I accept the following standards of behavior in my ministry:

**A. BAPTISM**

1. It is expected that one of the persons exercising parental responsibility for a child to be baptized will be an active member of the Lutheran Church, and the sacrament will be administered in the congregation where that person holds membership, either full or associate.
2. The presiding minister will be the called or interim pastor of the congregation where the Baptism is being celebrated. Any other presider will have the prior approval of that congregation's pastor or the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod if the pastorate is vacant.
3. A presiding minister at the Baptism of a child whose parents belong to another congregation will have the approval of the home pastor and will send the necessary data for proper recording in the home congregation's Parish Register.

4. Baptismal instruction will precede every Baptism and will include the meaning of Baptism and the responsibilities for the Christian growth of the baptized. The presiding minister will be responsible for this instruction.
5. All sponsors will be baptized persons.
6. Baptism will be celebrated in the presence of the worshiping congregation; private Baptisms will be in emergency situations only.

## B. COMMUNION

1. Whenever Communion is to be celebrated, the whole congregation will be invited to participate, e.g. at weddings, funerals, etc.
2. The presiding minister at Communion will be the called or interim pastor of the congregation. Any other presider will have the prior approval of the congregation's pastor or the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod if the pastorate is vacant.
3. Communion will also be administered to those incapable of attending the congregation's worship; it is the responsibility of church members to advise the pastor when home Communion is desired.
4. The host congregation will inform the home congregation when visitors commune, provided such information is made available.
5. In order to celebrate Communion outside the congregation, permission from the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod will be required. ELCA Guidelines (1989) define such situations as those "in established centers of the church, e.g., seminaries, colleges, retreat centers, charitable institutions, and administrative centers." although "in institutions not formally associated with the church, e.g., hospitals, retirement homes, colleges/universities, military bases, where there is a called pastor or chaplain, authorization for the celebration of Holy Communion rests with the pastor in consultation with the calling-sending agency/board of the church"

## C. WEDDINGS

1. It is expected that either the bride or the groom will be a full or associate member of the congregation where the wedding is being celebrated and the presiding minister will be the called or interim pastor of that congregation. Any other presider or participating clergy will have prior approval of the congregation's pastor or the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod if the pastorate is vacant.
2. Pre-marital instruction will precede every wedding and will be the responsibility of the presiding minister. It will include an interpretation of the Christian understanding of marriage and instruction regarding the ELCA's statement on marriage.
3. The presiding minister will conform to the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania concerning the solemnizing of a marriage (copies are available from the office of the Upper Susquehanna Synod).

## D. FUNERALS

1. The funeral or memorial service for an active member is most appropriately held in the church in which that person was a full or associate member, and the presiding minister will be the called or interim pastor of that congregation. Any other presider or participating clergy will have the prior approval of the congregation's pastor or the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod if the pastorate is vacant.

2. Funeral services for members of another congregation shall not be conducted without prior approval of the called or interim pastor of that congregation. Information concerning the death shall be sent to that congregation for proper recording in the Parish Register
3. A distinction of both content and form shall mark the funeral services for non-church members without affecting pastoral care and concern for the bereaved (see *The Manual on the Liturgy*).
4. Pastors should provide educational opportunities for dealing with death and grief.
5. With the assistance of the pastor, members should be encouraged to prepare their own funeral service in accordance with the practice of the church.

#### E. PASTORAL VISITATION

1. A pastoral visit is any visit that an ordained pastor makes on the basis of his/her office.
2. Any pastoral visit made to a member of another congregation shall be at the request or with the consent of that member's pastor.

#### F. PASTORAL CARE/COUNSELING

1. The pastoral care/counseling ministry of the pastor will normally be to the members of his/her congregation.
2. The pastor will not advertise as a counselor unless accredited by a certifying body in that field and with the approval of his/her congregation's council.
3. Information which is shared with a pastor as part of pastoral care/counseling is considered private and shall remain confidential, insofar as confidentiality is in accordance with Pennsylvania law regarding privileged information (Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, Title 42, Chapter 59):
  1. Absolute privileged information is that which is shared in an appropriate confessional setting between priest and penitent; disclosure cannot be forced under any circumstance
  2. Privileged information is that shared with the pastor in his/ her official capacity but outside the confessional setting, e g., a counseling session. Disclosure is allowed with the written consent of the parties involved or with a court order.
  3. Confidential information includes all other pastoral conversations, and disclosure is required upon request by law enforcement and judicial agencies.
  4. Information concerning child abuse committed on church property or within a church-sponsored program, e.g., scouts and clubs, even though not on church property, is required to be reported to the appropriate agency.
  5. Pastors may seek advice from their congregation's legal counselor or the legal counsel of the Upper Susquehanna Synod (any fee is the responsibility of the congregation).

#### G. CONTINUING EDUCATION

The pastor will participate in continuing education in order to increase and strengthen his/her pastoral skills.

#### H. DUAL MEMBERSHIPS

1. Pastors sharing a congregation member through associate membership will also share with each other information concerning pastoral acts.
2. Associate membership status as described in the Model Constitution for Congregations is understood to mean persons holding membership some distance from the congregation to which they are applying for associate membership. Associate membership is not to be used as a way to avoid dealing with conflict with their home congregation or pastor.

## I. PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH FORMER CONGREGATIONS

1. A pastor who retires or accepts a call to a non-congregation ministry will normally transfer membership from the congregations he or she formerly served.
2. It is expected that a pastor will not return to a former congregation to conduct pastoral acts. e.g .. Baptisms. weddings. funerals.
3. The congregation's called or interim pastor, or the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod if the pastorate is vacant, may invite a former pastor to participate.

## J. REIMBURSEMENT FOR SERVICES

1. The Sacraments, marriages, funerals, pastoral visitations, and pastoral care/counseling are normal responsibilities of pastoral ministry to members of the congregation, who shall not be charged a fee for these services. Any fee charged to nonmembers is at the discretion of the pastor and the congregation's council.
2. An honorarium is not a fee but a gift, and its acceptance and use is at the discretion of the pastor.

Each pastor of the Upper Susquehanna Synod shall share these guidelines with his or her congregation so that members and councils may be aware of these ethical standards and thus be able to encourage and support their pastors in fulfilling these responsibilities.

*Adopted by the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly, 1996.*

**“Application for Lay Leaders Program of the Lay Ministry Institute”**

*See separate document.*