

ELCA Candidacy Process

Information quoted from the ELCA Candidacy Manual 2016

Discernment (apply)

“God works in the life of every person. Every Christian has a baptismal call to ongoing discernment of God’s activity in the world, in the church and in one’s life. The primary purpose behind emphasizing a phase of discernment prior to candidacy – normally with a pastor or mentor – is to assist applicants in reflecting upon aspects of their lives that might confirm a call to rostered leadership.

Some aspects worthy of consideration include an understanding of baptismal vocation, spirituality and prayer life, critical life experiences, relationship with a community of faith, significant life influences, and family of origin.

Such preliminary discernment can help applicants clarify the interrelationship between internal and external dimensions of a call. It can also enable them to articulate some definite insights about what God is calling him or her to consider vocationally. The ultimate outcome of such discernment will be a decision on whether to apply for candidacy.

Even if the individual discerns God is calling him or her to another expression of baptismal vocation, this time of discernment will have been a valuable use of the church’s resources.”

Entrance (aware)

“The entrance process in candidacy is the first formal discernment by a Candidacy Committee and an applicant of his or her readiness for candidacy. A decision to grant entrance officially accepts an applicant into candidacy. Normally, a Candidacy Committee will grant entrance prior to an applicant’s beginning seminary studies. Entrance into candidacy begins a formal relationship in a community of discernment that includes the appropriate Candidacy Committee, the worshipping community of which a candidate is a part, the seminary of enrollment, and the candidacy team in the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit. As these relationships are formed and cultivated, a candidate continues his or her discernment of call. A key aspect of the ongoing discernment being fostered through candidacy is attendance at a seminary and gaining experience in contextual settings. It is very legitimate for a candidate to pursue such a course without having total clarity about what God is inviting him or her to consider in living out one’s Christian vocation.”

Endorsement (articulate)

“Endorsement – a second major point of discernment in the candidacy process – normally occurs after a candidate has completed a minimum of one third of the academic work required or its equivalent. Whereas entrance focuses on discernment of readiness for candidacy, at endorsement a Candidacy Committee and its seminary partners affirm:

- a candidate’s continued discernment of a call to and gifts and skills for a specific rostered ministry, and
- mutual discernment among a Candidacy Committee, seminary faculty and a candidate of his or her readiness to complete candidacy successfully.

At endorsement a Candidacy Committee acts on behalf of the whole church in affirming a candidate’s call and gifts for rostered leadership. Both the Candidacy Committee and seminary faculty express support and affirmation of a candidate’s continued progress in candidacy leading toward approval.”

Approval (apply and practice)

“The final step in the ELCA candidacy process is approval – a significant milestone in a candidate’s lifelong journey of discernment. At this stage a Candidacy Committee, the seminary of enrollment (or affiliation), and the candidate are discerning readiness to serve as a rostered leader after successful completion of all academic and candidacy requirements. Such discernment is the culmination of an extensive process that began prior to entrance as a period of preliminary discernment, continued at entrance with a mutual discernment of readiness for candidacy, became more focused at endorsement with a discernment of readiness to complete candidacy, and now reaches a point of mutual affirmation and celebration of readiness for service as a rostered leader.”

Assignment (call)

“Following approval, assignment to regions and synods occurs at churchwide assignment consultations arranged by the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit. The assignment of approved candidates is a complex process, dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, which seeks to integrate and correlate the needs of the church with the gifts and situations of candidates. Those who participate in the churchwide assignment consultation engage in prayer and thoughtful conversation when making assignment decisions.”