

**Parish Ministry Associate Program  
Central States Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.*

(1 Corinthians 4:1)

The Parish Ministry Associate program seeks to equip people for their own ministry as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Additionally, the program seeks to help identify and nurture the gifts God has given God's people for public ministry, so that that good news can be shared among all people. As servants we are obedient to Christ. As stewards of God's mysteries, we are responsible to care for and use the gifts given to us and to the church.

### **Education Opportunities and Classes**

The Lutheran tradition has long recognized the value of theological education. One of Martin Luther's many contributions to the church was translating the Bible into the language of the people so that people could read, study, and wrestle with Scripture themselves. Confessions were written, debated, and disseminated as believers were invited in a dialog about the who God was, how God operated, what was the purpose and meaning of the church, and so forth. For the church to continue to be both faithful and relevant, we need both theological trained and educated rostered ministers but also lay members who take seriously their role as the priesthood of all believers.

The Central States Synod provides educational opportunities and classes for lay members of the synod to deepen their understanding of Scripture, Lutheran theology, worship and preaching, mission and outreach. These classes will not only help individuals grow in faith, but also assist congregations and other ministries of the church to grow in their mission.

Classes and educational opportunities offered through the Parish Ministry Associate Program are open to all and are described further on the next few pages. Individuals may take as few or many as they desire. Reasons for participating in this educational process include:

- For personal growth
- To strengthen one's understanding of the church and Bible to better serve in one's own congregation
- To serve the larger church in an official capacity by becoming a Parish Ministry Associate (see below).

### **Parish Ministry Associates**

While the education opportunities offered within the synod are open to all laypeople, some may choose to put that education to work toward certification as a Parish Ministry Associate (PMA) in the Central States Synod. Certified PMAs can be commissioned to:

1. Serve within their own congregation in a volunteer capacity or on staff. (If they are requested to provide pulpit supply, they still need authorization from the Bishop to preside at communion.)

2. Provide pulpit supply as needed for congregations in the synod (worship leadership to preach and administer the sacraments as authorized by the Bishop)
3. Serve as Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs) upon the request and approval of the Bishop, entering into a covenant relationship to serve a congregation or parish. See Appendix A for more information about SAMs

### **Education Requirements**

The full program of study for the Parish Ministry Associate Program takes place over three to six years, including seven core courses and two elective course requirements. All nine courses must be completed within a six year period in order to receive a certificate of completion. If courses were completed more than six years prior, they will need to be retaken for credit and the student will need to work with the Director of Lay Ministry to develop an individual plan for completion of requirements. Individual classes are open to all members of the synod regardless of whether an individual plans to become a Parish Ministry Associate. The Director of Lay Ministry will work with students to identify appropriate education plans.

7 Core courses are required in the following areas:

- Lutheran Worship
- Lutheran Confessions/Theology
- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Ethics from a Lutheran Perspective
- Preaching
- Christian care-giving/Pastoral Care

2 Elective courses are required, one of which must cover some aspect of Church History, and the other may be selected from an area of interest to the student, such as:

- Faith Formation
- Youth and Family Ministry
- further study into one of the core areas

There are a number of ways in which courses are offered. Current educational offerings will be sent out through the synod's communication system and posted on the synod website.

- **Group in person and on-line classes are offered through Bethany House of Studies** (in Lindsborg, KS) and **Lutheran School of Theology** (St. Louis, MO) to fulfill educational requirements. Location, times, and duration of these classes are determined by the instructors. For more information on class offerings, please see the Central States Synod website at <https://css-elca.org/pma>, or contact Pastor Dick Monson (BHS) at [monsonrb@gmail.com](mailto:monsonrb@gmail.com) or Dennis Kemper (LSTStL) at [cdkemper50@gmail.com](mailto:cdkemper50@gmail.com).
- **Bishop Kemper School of Ministry** is a venture of the Episcopal Church, working collaboratively with the ELCA, to educate people for church leadership. Group classes take place either online or in-person at Topeka, KS over an intensive weekend, Saturday and Sunday. Class fees include all handouts, meals, and applicable overnight accommodations, based upon room availability. You can find out more information by going to [www.bishopkemperschool.org](http://www.bishopkemperschool.org)

- **On line courses/independent study:** Students may take on line courses through *Select Learning*. Information and registration can be found on the website [www.selectlearning.org](http://www.selectlearning.org). Students may also purchase the required text book and DVD through *Select Learning*. After reading and watching sessions, the student writes a 10 page reflection paper. Confirmation regarding the completion of the class can be provided by Select.
- **For questions about any of the above,** contact Pastor Adam Wutka, CSS Director of Lay Ministry at [pastoradamtlbwy@gmail.com](mailto:pastoradamtlbwy@gmail.com)

### Costs and Scholarships

- The cost of the courses will vary (approximately \$150-\$350) if the class is being taken for credit.
- Congregations are encouraged to share the financial responsibilities with participants.
- Students enrolled and accepted in the PMA Program (see Application and Certification Process below) may apply for a scholarship upon successful completion of each course. Students enrolled but not yet accepted into the PMA Program may also apply, and such approved scholarships will be awarded retroactively upon acceptance into the program. Scholarships, typically totaling one-half of the course fee, will be awarded as a reimbursement once certificates of completion have been received by the synod office. Please contact the Director of Lay Ministry with your questions or visit the synod website to download the form and apply.

### Application and Certification Process

- An individual interested in becoming a PMA submits an enrollment application, found on the synod website, which includes recommendations from their pastor and congregation, as well as a brief description of the applicant's spiritual journey. The application fee is \$100, which covers the cost of background checks and administrative expenses related to the program.
- Prior to the approval of their enrollment application, each student must complete the Safe Gatherings online course and background check. Contact the Director of Lay Ministry for more information.
- The enrolling applicant participates in an entrance interview with the Parish Ministry Associate Team. These interviews are typically conducted twice per year. If the applicant's enrollment is accepted by the PMA Team, pending the results of their background check and Safe Gatherings course, the applicant is officially designated as a "student" in the PMA program.
- As noted in the previous section, all coursework must be completed within six years of a student's enrollment within the PMA Program. This reasonable time frame exists, in part, as a measure of accountability from those who desire to be commissioned as PMAs in the synod. Additionally, if a student has not completed any program courses within the last three years, their enrollment expires and they must reapply to the program and participate in an additional entrance interview with the PMA Team. The six year time frame for courses already completed still applies.

- Following (or just prior to) the completion of their course work, students will fill out an additional questionnaire and meet for a final interview with the PMA Team to be approved for certification and commissioning as a PMA.

### **Accountability for PMAs**

Parish Ministry Associates are commissioned to do ministry and exercise leadership on behalf of the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In order to remain on the active list of PMAs, they agree to:

- **Communicate regularly with a supervising rostered minister**
  - All PMAs must have a supervising rostered minister. If the PMA is serving in their own congregation, their supervising minister will be the pastor of that congregation. If they are serving in a covenant relationship as the primary pastoral leader of another congregation, a supervising minister will be assigned to them.
  - Annual reports from PMA must be discussed and signed by the supervising minister and then submitted to the synod office.
- **Participate in 6 hours of continuing education annually**
  - The annual PMA Conference and the Fall Theological Conference are preferred events for continuing education and may be counted for up to six hours each.
  - Continuing education may also be earned by attending other education events, participating in a mission trip, doing an independent study if approved by the Director of Lay Ministry.
- **Actively maintain PMA status with the synod:**
  - All PMAs must submit an annual report to the Central States Synod Director of Lay Ministry. The form can be found on the synod website and includes information about the work and ministry of the PMA, their continuing education and matters of joy and/or concern over the past year.
  - Failure to maintain communication with the synod and fulfill annual requirements may result in an “inactive” suspension of the individual’s Parish Ministry Associate status, up to and including removal from the synod’s pulpit supply list, ineligibility to serve in synod authorized ministry, or permanent revocation of the individual’s PMA certification
  - Such inactive PMAs who wish to continue in the PMA Program will be required to interview with the PMA Team in order to reactivate their status.
- **Only commissioned PMAs can be on the synod’s pulpit supply list and available to preach in congregations throughout the synod:**
  - If presiding at communion, PMAs must receive authorization from the Bishop for the date and location of the congregation at which they are leading worship. A letter of authorization will be sent to both the congregation and the PMA.

- **If invited by the Bishop’s office to serve as a Synod Authorized Minister (either as part of team with a rostered minister or as the solo pastoral leader) a PMA must follow the guidelines set forth in Appendix A – Synod Authorized Ministers.**
- While Parish Ministry Associates have fulfilled additional educational courses and been commissioned by the synod to serve within their congregations and the synod and may be authorized to serve a congregation in worship or as the pastoral leader, they have not been through the candidacy process to be rostered members of the ELCA. Therefore, they are not to wear clerical collars or stoles in worship, which are symbols of ordination, or use the title “reverend.” For the sake of forming a partnership for the ministry of the whole church, lay and rostered ministers must recognize and respect their different callings even as they work together.
- An individual who has been removed from the ELCA roster because of misconduct or has been denied continuance in candidacy because of misconduct is precluded from serving as a Parish Ministry Associate.
- PMAs are expected to abide by the document *Definition and Guidelines for Discipline for Rostered Ministers* which is found on the ELCA website.
- When permitted by law (as is the case in Missouri and Kansas) PMAs 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.
- Authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the bishop, who need not specify a reason.
- Just like rostered ministers, PMAs are not to offer therapy or counseling as part of their ministries.
- PMAs may serve only within the Central States Synod. Since they are not ordained clergy, they are not recognized by the IRS for the housing allowance benefit on their federal tax returns.

### **Role of Rostered Supervisors**

- Supervisors will be appointed by the Bishop.
- Meet (either by phone or in person) on a regular basis with their PMAs in order to build a relationship of trust and accountability. The suggested frequency is once a month. The supervisor and PMA are mutually responsible to make sure this regular contact takes place.
- Be aware of the PMA’s activities and ministries.
- Be a resource and counsel for challenges, struggles, and joys; and offer additional help and support as needed by the PMAs.

The expectation is that in this established relationship, the PMA may contact the supervising pastor with any issues or questions that arise in the course of their ministry. If a PMA or their supervisor has any concerns about the ministry of the PMA or the supervisory relationship, they should contact the synod office.

### **Guidelines for Congregations**

- Pastors and congregations may identify and encourage individuals to consider entering the PMA program. Those who apply must be endorsed by their home congregation. In considering whether to endorse an individual, the congregation council should take great care in evaluating the individual's spiritual maturity, leadership potential, and willingness to learn and serve. Congregational endorsement is accomplished by a vote of the council.
- Congregations are also encouraged to provide financial assistance for individuals in the program to fulfill their educational requirements. Annual reports from the PMA are also shared with the congregation.

### **Role of the Director of Lay Ministry**

- Provides oversight for and administration of the Central States Synod PMA program.
- Maintains the lay ministry database with the up-to-date status of all students, PMAs, and SAMs within the synod.
- Coordinates the education program for PMA students in consultation with the PMA Team and educational ministries across the synod, and creates schedules for upcoming classes
- Convenes meetings of the PMA Team throughout the year for purposes of:
  - Conducting entrance interviews and approving new applicants to the PMA program, reviewing applications, recommendations, and background checks, etc.
  - Conducting final interviews with candidates for PMA certification at Synod Assembly.
  - Updating the PMA Handbook and other program documents.
  - Planning and conducting an annual PMA Conference.
- Promotes the PMA program across the Central States Synod and the wider church.

### **Contact Information**

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## Appendix A

### Synod Authorized Ministers – Central States Synod

In the document *The Use of the Means of Grace*, it states that “a pastor presides at holy communion.” This witnesses to the understanding that the sacrament is a celebration of the church, serving its unity and therefore it is an ordained minister who presides in the service of holy communion and proclaims the Great Thanksgiving. When it is not possible to provide ordained pastoral leadership, the synod bishop may authorize properly trained lay persons to preside for a specified period of time and in a given location only.

That provision is outlined in the constitution of the ELCA under Licensure and Synod Authorized Ministers (ELCA Constitution 7.31.09). *When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not possible to provide appropriate pastoral leaders, the synod bishop – acting with the consent of the congregation or ministry, in consultation with the Synod Council, and in accord with the standards and qualifications developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council – may authorize a person who is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American to offer this ministry. Such a minister shall be supervised by a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop; such service shall be rendered during its duration under the sacramental authority of the bishop as the synod’s pastor. Such an individual will be trained and licensed to fulfill this ministry for a specified period of time and in a given location only. Authorization, remuneration, direct supervision, and accountability are to be determined by the appropriate synod leadership according to churchwide standards and qualifications for this type of ministry. Authorization for such service shall be reviewed annual and renewed only when a demonstrated need remains for its continuation.*

#### Synod Authorized Ministers

- This would be the designation for anyone who is not on the rostered of ordained ministers of the ELCA or a full communion partner who is serving **under covenant** as the primary lay pastoral leader which may include:
  - PMAs
  - TEEM candidates
  - Seminary interns serving with off-site supervisors
  - Individuals who have seminary education in other denominations, are members of the congregation, and willing to take additional classes (through the PMA program) in Lutheran Confessions and Lutheran Worship
- Requirements
  - Must be a member of an ELCA congregation (or full communion partner congregation)
  - Recommended by the individual’s pastor and/or congregation council
  - Met with and been interviewed by synod staff or PMA Team
  - Submitted written responses to questions on Candidacy Entrance Form

- Received a back-ground check
- Yearly authorization from the Bishop to preside at communion may be given once a signed covenant is received.
- Covenants must be reviewed and signed each year by the council and SAM and attested by the Bishop
  - The council should do an annual review of the SAM and their ministry
  - Goals and expectations should be articulated as well as financial compensation
- Regular contact, at least once a quarter, with their supervising pastor, who is appointed by the bishop (see job description below)
- Must submit an annual report, done in consultation with their supervising pastor, to the Bishop
- Able to be voting members at synod assembly (amend the continuing resolution S7.24.A18 to refer to SAMs rather than PMAs.)
- Agree to be follow the Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Synod for Rostered Ministers as well as the ELCA document Definition and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers
- Understand that the authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synod bishop, with or without cause.
- Clerical collars and stoles should not be worn as these are signs of an ordained pastor. Exceptions may be granted for those individuals who are in candidacy and serving a congregation through the TEEM or as a seminary student to wear a clerical collar. But until ordained, these individuals may not wear stoles while presiding at worship.

While Synod Authorized Ministers are not ordained and on the roster of the ELCA, they do function as the lay pastoral leader for congregations of the synod. They should exercise this responsibility mindful of those duties outlined in the congregation's constitution (\*C9.03.) They should also participate as much as possible in the synod assembly as well as meetings of the conference to which the congregation belongs. (S14.25). However, as stated above, the authorization to provide ministry within the synod may be revoked at any time by the synod bishop without going through the process outlined for pastors who are on the roster and called by their congregations. (\*C9.05).

### **Role of Rostered Supervisors**

- Supervisors will be appointed by the Bishop.
- Meet (either by phone or in person) on a regular basis with their SAM in order to build a relationship of trust and accountability, a minimum of once a quarter. The supervisor and SAM are mutually responsible to make sure this regular contact takes place.
- Be a resource and counsel for challenges, struggles, and joys; and offer additional help and support as needed by the SAM.
- Consult with the SAM in the preparation of their annual report to the synod office.

The expectation is that in this established relationship, the SAM may contact the supervising pastor with any issues or questions that arise in the course of their ministry. If a SAM or their supervisor has any concerns about the ministry of the SAM or the supervisory relationship, they should contact the synod office.