



## **6261 MINISTRY COMMUNITIES**

### **WITH ELCA FULL-COMMUNION ECUMENICAL PARTNERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

6261 Ministry Communities are an initiative of the Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). 6261 Ministry Communities were developed as a model for congregations within the NEPA Synod to collaborate and share in the ministry of the Gospel at a deep level within similar geographic communities. The model also seeks to address current challenges and church realities such as fewer congregations able to afford full-time clergy, fewer clergy available, and a high concentration of ELCA congregations in the small demographic area of Northeastern Pennsylvania. 6261 is a model that provides a flexible framework based on the strengths and gifts each leader, member, and congregation has to contribute. For additional and more detailed information on 6261 Ministry Communities, please refer to NEPA Synod 6261 Ministry Communities Overview document.

From its inception, 6261 was imagined to be inclusive of our ecumenical partners, recognizing that many of our ELCA congregations have long-standing histories and shared ministries with Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, Moravian, and Methodist congregations. The NEPA Synod wishes to invite our siblings in Christ to consider sharing in a 6261 Ministry Community. The goal would be to create 6261 Ministry Communities which foster collaboration, communication, and evangelism – and which also honor our unique traditions, polity, and theological gifts.

For this reason, in collaboration with each judicatory body, the following general guidelines for partnership in a 6261 Ministry Community are outlined below.

#### **INDEX**

The Episcopal Church .....	Page 2
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## **THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

This has been discussed and approved by Episcopal Bishop Kevin Nichols, (Episcopal Bishop Audrey Scanlan) and ELCA Bishop Christopher deForest, dated March 6, 2025.

### **Clergy: Priests/Pastors and Deacons**

In the ELCA, rostered clergy include pastors and deacons. In the Episcopal Church licensed clergy include priests and deacons. Episcopal deacons – who are considered “vocational deacons” and not “transitional deacons” – are eligible for compensation within a 6261 Ministry Community, pending approval of the Bishop of the Diocese of Susquehanna (formerly the Diocese of Bethlehem).

All rostered clergy would remain rostered or licensed within their corresponding denomination and would be subject to the guidelines, orders, and polity of each. They would also follow the compensation, health, pension, and other benefits guidelines/plans for their local denominational judicatory and ordaining body’s judicatory (i.e. the Synod, Diocese, and national church bodies). For example, Episcopal clergy would remain under Church Insurance and ELCA clergy remain under Portico Benefits Service.

Rostered clergy would be employed via three options, as agreed upon by the rostered clergy person, their corresponding Bishop, and the 6261 Ministry Community:

1. Employed through the 6261 Ministry Community – as its own 501c3.
2. Employed through one of the congregations of the 6261 Ministry Community – the congregation serving as “fiscal agent” for the entire 6261 Ministry Community.
3. Employed through their local judicatory (Diocese or Synod).

If either option 1 or 2 above is selected, it is highly recommended that the 6261 Ministry Community or fiscal agent use a payroll company to ensure all payments, withholdings, and taxes are completed accurately and in compliance with local, state, and federal laws.

All calls for rostered and licensed clergy would be the responsibility of their ordaining body, with approval by the corresponding Bishop for service within the 6261 Ministry Community.

Rostered clergy and licensed priests of either denomination are welcome in the congregations of the other denomination of the 6261 Ministry Community as a part of the ELCA – Episcopal Call to Common Mission and its recognition of both pulpit fellowship and Sacramental privileges. The Call to Common Mission allows ELCA and Episcopal deacons to preach in churches of either denomination, as well as for Episcopal priests and ELCA pastors to preach and preside in churches of either denomination.

### **Call Process for Clergy**

Within the ELCA, 6261 Ministry Communities follow an adapted version of the traditional ELCA Call Process so as to allow for individual congregation/parish data as well as a collective sense of the ministry of the 6261 Ministry Community, without creating a cumbersome, burdensome process.

Additional adaptations for Episcopal – ELCA 6261 Ministry Communities would include the following:

1. There are not two (2) sets of onsite interviews. The “initial” onsite interview serves as the only onsite interview. The Joint Call Committee may hold as many phone and Zoom interviews prior to the onsite interview as they so choose. \*
2. Following the onsite interview, each ELCA Congregational Council and Episcopal Parish Vestry meet, discuss, and vote on the candidate. The Episcopal vestries are voting on whether or not to call the candidate. The ELCA councils are voting on whether to recommend the candidate to their congregation for full congregational approval. A simple majority of vestry members present (assuming a quorum has been met) is needed for Episcopal vestries to approve the candidate. A two-thirds (2/3) vote is needed for ELCA councils to approve the candidate for recommendation. Should any vestry or council vote **not** to call or recommend the candidate, the candidate is eliminated and the Joint Call Committee resumes the call process with new candidates.
3. Once a candidate has received approval from each vestry and approval from each council (to go before the full congregation), a “meet and greet” and joint worship service are scheduled.
4. All members are invited to the “meet and greet.”
5. All members are additionally invited to the joint worship service, which will be held at a neutral site and **not** at any congregation/parish of the 6261 Ministry Community. Immediately following the joint worship service, **only** the ELCA councils stay and hold their congregational votes, individually but back-to-back. A two-thirds (2/3) vote is required by each ELCA congregation to approve the candidate for call to the 6261 Ministry Community. If any congregation does **not** approve the candidate, the Joint Call Committee resumes the call process with new candidates.
6. If the candidate is Episcopalian, the Episcopal Bishop is notified of the selection and the Episcopal Bishop extends the call. If the candidate is ELCA, the ELCA Bishop is notified of the selection and works with the candidate and the 6261 Ministry Community to determine who will issue the call (either the NEPA Synod or one of the ELCA congregations of the 6261 Ministry Community).
7. ELCA candidates are given thirty (30) days to accept the call in writing. If an ELCA candidate does not accept the call, then the Joint Call Committee resumes the call process with new candidates. Contracts for ELCA candidates are coordinated between the ELCA NEPA Synod, Joint Call Committee, and the clergy candidate. In some cases, especially if relocation is necessitated, Episcopal candidates may receive an interim Memorandum of Understanding (start date and compensation package information only), which is signed by the Senior Warden and the clergy candidate. The signing of the interim Memorandum of Understanding constitutes official acceptance of the call and allows for the public announcement of such acceptance. In all cases, Episcopal candidates receive a Letter of Agreement, which is executed between the Senior Warden, Episcopal Bishop, and the clergy candidate. (If the Episcopal Candidate has received an interim Memorandum of Understanding, the Letter of Agreement will follow). Please note that an Episcopal priest can begin ministry service prior to the Episcopal Bishop’s signature on the Letter of Agreement.

Throughout the call process, the Joint Call Committee and Engagement Team will make every effort to help the congregations and parishes understand the theological background, training, and experience of the candidate, especially how much the candidate knows about “being Lutheran” or “being Episcopalian.” After any call has been approved and issued, the Engagement Team will continue to help the candidate and the congregations/parishes have the grace, space, and understanding that the other may not know how to be as “ELCA” or “Episcopalian” as they do.

\* The background check process remains the same during the joint call process and remains the responsibility of the ordaining body of the potential candidate. The timing of background checks differs slightly between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA but under no circumstances, would any rostered or licensed clergy be offered a call or employment to a 6261 Ministry Community without satisfactorily passing all background checks, Safe Church training, boundaries training, and racial justice trainings.

### **Licensed Lay Ministers/Worship Leaders**

Licensed Lay Ministers (LLMs) – known as “Worship Leaders” in the Episcopal Church – will similarly be trained, licensed, and authorized from within their own denominational body. They will report to the Bishop of their denominational body, while being supervised by the pastors and deacon of their 6261 Ministry Community. Licensed Lay Ministers are to seek re-authorization from their judicatory per the requirements of their denominational judicatory.

ELCA Licensed Lay Ministers follow the NEPA Synod LLM Formation Path and are licensed by the NEPA Synod Bishop. Episcopal Licensed Lay Ministers (Worship Leaders) are trained via the Stephenson School for Ministry, of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. For more information on the NEPA Synod LLM Formation Path please visit: [www.nepsynod.org/llm](http://www.nepsynod.org/llm). For more information on the Stephenson School for Ministry Episcopal, please visit: <https://diocesecpa.org/stevensonschoolforministry>. Both formation paths and training programs take approximately two (2) years to complete and include several theology courses.

Both ELCA and Episcopal LLMs who are licensed by their Bishop to do so, are permitted to lead worship (including preaching) at any congregation, whether the congregation is Episcopal or ELCA, within the 6261 Ministry Community. Ideally, per the model of 6261, however, each LLM would primarily serve their “home” congregation, that is, the congregation where they are a member and who lifted them up for lay leadership. For specifics on LLMs and Holy Communion, please see the “Sacraments” section below.

### **ELCA Congregational Councils/Episcopal Parish Vestries**

Each ELCA congregation retains its own Congregational Council per its Constitution for the regular, ongoing business and ministry of the congregation. Each Episcopal parish retains its own Vestry per the applicable Canons for the regular, ongoing business and ministry of the congregation.

An Engagement Team is formed for the joint ministry of the 6261 Ministry Community. The Engagement Team consists of two (2) members from each congregation/parish along with one (1) alternate so that two (2) representatives are always present from each congregation/parish.

The Engagement Team is dedicated to the vision, collaboration, and ministry engagement of the 6261 Ministry Community. It could be thought of as a “joint council” but its focus is on engaging the congregations of the Ministry Community as well as engaging neighbors, visitors, and strangers in the community by sharing the love God through Jesus Christ.

In summary, the Engagement Team is responsible for:

- Overseeing the Primary Ministry Project
- Overseeing 6261 Ministry Community budget and expenses, including the payment of the Pastors/Priests, Deacon, and Licensed Lay Ministers
- Preparing an annual budget for the 6261 Ministry Community
- Authorizing an audit of the 6261 Ministry Community
- Planning God’s Work Our Hands Sunday (annually in September)
- Praying regularly for one another, for each of the congregations/parishes of the 6261 Ministry Community, and their councils/vestries, and to listening to how each hears the Spirit calling the 6261 Ministry Community into shared ministry

Additionally, for the first two (2) years of any ELCA-Episcopal 6261 Ministry Community, a Council of Advice will be formed to support both the Engagement Team and the staff of the 6261 Ministry Community. The Council of Advice will consist of one (1) member from each congregation/parish of the 6261 Ministry Community. Somewhat similar to an ELCA Mutual Ministry Committee, the Council of Advice can provide insight into the traditions, practices, polity, history, and tolerance levels of each congregation/parish as the staff and Engagement Team grow in relationship with one another and their understanding of each other’s denomination. The Council of Advice can serve as a sounding board, a feedback group, ears on the ground, and a pressure gauge in order to keep open communication amongst all congregations/parishes and to alert staff and the Engagement Team to any potential challenges or grievances early on.

## **Sacraments**

Only ELCA pastors and Episcopal priests are permitted to preside at the Sacrament of the Altar. Both Episcopal and ELCA deacons are permitted to use the reserve Sacrament as part of the Deacon’s Mass at Episcopal parishes only – and must have the express permission of both the Episcopal and ELCA Bishop to do so. Deacons of neither denomination are permitted to consecrate the Elements.

Licensed Lay Ministers are **not** permitted to preside at the Sacrament of the Altar at any Episcopal parish which is a part of a 6261 Ministry Community. ELCA Licensed Lay Ministers may, however, if authorized and licensed by the ELCA Bishop of the NEPA Synod, preside at the Sacrament of the Altar for ELCA congregations within the 6261 Ministry Community.

While any baptized member of the body of Christ is authorized to preside at the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, especially in the case of an emergency, it is recognized as best order for pastors and priests to assume that duty.

In addition to these two Sacraments, the Episcopal Church recognizes the following sacramental rites:

1. Confirmation
2. Ordination
3. Holy Matrimony
4. Reconciliation of a Penitent
5. Unction

It is recognized that in the Episcopal Church, only the Bishop may perform the sacramental rites of Confirmation and Ordination. Priests may perform the sacramental rites of Holy Matrimony and Reconciliation of a Penitent, as well as pronounce blessings. The sacramental rite of Unction may be performed by anyone, assuming they do so following the rubrics as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer.

In a 6261 Ministry Community, some of these sacramental rites may be shared or celebrated together, depending on the ministry, makeup, and context of the individual 6261 Ministry Community. It is encouraged that congregations of different denominations will celebrate such important rites together and pray for one another. If sharing or celebrating a sacramental rite together, congregations will take care to respect the traditions and polity of one another's denomination. For example, while Confirmation may be taught jointly, the Episcopal Bishop will preside at the rite of Confirmation for all Episcopal Confirmands. Yet, it is possible for the ELCA pastor or the ELCA Bishop to preside for all ELCA Confirmands, and it is furthermore possible for there to be a shared worship service for the rite of Confirmation.

### **Buildings/Properties**

Buildings remain the property of the congregation/parish or of its judicatory body. It is recommended that in Episcopal-ELCA 6261 Ministry Communities, that a Joint Property Team is formed, comprised of a Warden from each Episcopal parish along with a representative of each ELCA congregation property committee. The Joint Property Team serves as the primary point of contact for all building and property related concerns. The Joint Property Team remains in close dialogue with the pastors/priests and deacon of the 6261 Ministry Community about all of the buildings/properties associated with the 6261 Ministry Community.

Notwithstanding the Canons of the Episcopal Church, which gives authority to priests in the care of buildings, in cases of non-emergency, the clergy should contact the corresponding person from the Joint Property Team, who then takes responsibility for resolving the issue as well as notifying additional personnel and the Joint Property Team. In cases of emergency where damage to property or persons is immediate, any clergy of the 6261 Ministry Community may take direct action to protect people and assets, regardless of whether the clergy is of the same denomination as the property on which s/he/they is taking action. The clergy should then immediately contact the corresponding person from the Joint Property Team.

In this way, the Joint Property Team may support one another and work together for the good of all the buildings/properties of the 6261 Ministry Community.

### **Shared Life & Ministry**

As a part of sharing life and ministry together in a 6261 Ministry Community, it is expected that each congregation/parish will make a commitment to learn and better understand each other's polity. In addition to including this commitment in the written 6261 Ministry Community Covenant, it is understood that staff will take time as a staff, will create time for the Engagement Team, and will prepare something for each council/vestry so that all leaders have an opportunity for deeper, shared learning.

Joint committees across the 6261 Ministry Community are also encouraged, although not required. A joint Stewardship/Generosity Committee and joint Finance Committee would be especially valuable. A joint Worship Committee – or at least a committee of musicians, staff, and representatives from each individual worship committee – is highly recommended not only for planning any potential joint worship services, but for understanding the collective worship resources and materials among the two denominations.

### **Additional 6261 Ministry Community Partners**

The Episcopal Church is open to its congregations (parishes) being in a 6261 Ministry Community with the other Ecumenical partners of the ELCA as listed in the “Introduction” section of this document.

### **Glossary of Terms**

ELCA pastor = Episcopal priest

ELCA congregation = Episcopal parish

ELCA congregational council = Episcopal vestry

ELCA parish = Episcopal consortium

ELCA Synod = Episcopal Diocese

ELCA – NEPA Mission District = Episcopal Convocation

ELCA Synod Council = Episcopal Diocesan Council/Standing Committee

ELCA Property Committee Chair = Episcopal Senior Warden

ELCA Constitution = Episcopal Canons (Bylaws)

ELCA Associate/Assistant to the Bishop = Episcopal Canon Missioner

ELCA Synod Assembly = Episcopal Convention